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Why Acceleration is a Controversial Debate Among Educators?

Nadire Gulcin Yildiz¹

¹ Medipol University

Abstract

The concept of “acceleration” continues to pay subject to a number of controversial debates in education. Much of the controversy around the concept can be associated with the beliefs and attitudes of educators, which have little or no grounds in research (Vialle, Ashton, Carlon, & Rankin, 2001). While acceleration takes on many forms, educators often correlate the concept with radical acceleration or multiple grade skipping. Teachers oppose acceleration because they believe that students’ social and emotional needs come before their academic ones (Vialle, Ashton, Carlon, & Rankin, 2001). On the other hand, research on acceleration consistently indicates positive academic attainments for those who are accelerated (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015; Benbow, 1992; Gross, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1991, 1992; Rogers, 2015; Swiatek, 1993). This paper aims to examine the reasons for the continuous gap between the effectiveness of research on acceleration and educators’ attitudes toward it; thus, I will be analyzing the factors that are believed to influence practitioners’ resistance toward using acceleration as an intervention strategy with gifted and talented students.

Keywords: Acceleration, Educators, Gifted Education, Gifted Students

1. Introduction

Steering in the complex educational arenas with ongoing transitions and shifts in educational policies is challenging for the gifted students and educators. As a low-cost and effective intervention strategy, acceleration provides opportunities to challenge and engage gifted students in their learning process. Existing research has examined types of acceleration practices and related issues. Many of the acceleration practices are reported for their effectiveness and cost-efficiency (Southern & Jones, 2015).

A Nation Empowered (2015) arose as a ten-year follow-up document to *A Nation Deceived* (2004), which combined current research, policy and practice regarding acceleration. Behind the conception of *A Nation Empowered*, there is an assertion to provide stakeholders (i.e., educators, school board members, and legislators) the evidence about the effectiveness of academic acceleration as a valid means of intervention for highly talented students. While *A Nation Deceived* was published in 2004, the impact of the federal authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Student Education Act (named No Child Left Behind) was not identified. While *A Nation Deceived* (2004) paved the way for the acceptance of academic acceleration, recently emerged research has provided foundation to *A Nation Empowered* (Rogers, 2015).

Despite decades of advocacy, gifted learners are being overlooked. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute published *High-Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB* in 2008, which revealed that the academic achievements of gifted students suffered over the course of the prior decade (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015). Contrary to considerable research, which has shown that acceleration is an effective intervention strategy influencing gifted students both academically and emotionally, the concept remains controversial.

Various meta-analyses indicate that as an intervention strategy academic acceleration produces observable academic progresses regardless of its type. The social-emotional gains of academic acceleration appear to range around small-to-moderate level for gifted students. The social and emotional effects are not as strong as the cognitive effects. Results of acceleration on psychological adjustment such as one's feelings about self are positive but small (Cross, Andersen, & Mammadov, 2015). Another study examined twenty types of acceleration practices, with the results revealing only few issues due to poor planning (Southern & Jones, 2015). Grade-based acceleration is cost efficient and has social benefits that allow gifted students to complete their education and enter the work force earlier (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2015). In one study, researchers noted that a sample of students who had participated in whole-grade acceleration were not different in their perceived interpersonal competence (including interacting with others and their ability to form friendships) when compared to a control group of students. Findings indicated that the academically gifted students had higher academic self-concepts, which may have positively influenced their overall self-concepts than their peers (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Thomson, 2012).

A Nation Deceived (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004) analyzed 50 years of gifted education research, disproving a number of myths about acceleration. The conclusions of *A Nation Deceived* include the idea that acceleration is a matter of equity, as all students have the right to learn, positing acceleration a successful and inexpensive intervention strategy. The work further proposes that accelerated students do well in the academic and social-emotional domains. While evidence from solid-based research has continuously and persistently proved that acceleration works, it is reasonable to ask why there is continuous resistance from educators toward the idea. Colangelo et al. listed four factors that are believed to contribute to this resistance: a) personal beliefs contradict with the research on the efficacy of acceleration; b) teachers are unaware of the research; c) educators do not receive training in the Colleges of Education; and d) there are concerns about the social-emotional development of accelerated gifted students more broadly.

1.1. Role of Beliefs and Misconceptions

Consistent and vigorous findings indicate that acceleration has positive academic and social effects (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). The acceleration of students is well-known to be an effective intervention technique as reported by numerous studies including: Benbow (1992); Brody & Benbow (1987); Clark (1992); Kulik & Kulik (1990, 1991, and 1992); Gross (1992); Proctor, Black & Feldhusen (1986); Van Tassel-Baska (1986); and Swiatek (1993). On the other hand, educators' beliefs and misconceptions toward acceleration influence their attitudes. While gifted children repeatedly report no harm from acceleration, educators do not seem to favor acceleration as a method of intervention in schools (Southern, Jones, & Fiscus, 1989). Personal experience with acceleration surfaced as a significant influence that shaped attitudes and beliefs toward the practice in Southern et al.'s study. It is believed that lack of training, knowledge, awareness, confidence, myths and anti-elitist beliefs about gifted children and gifted education is related to the negative teacher attitudes (Collins, 2001). Collins listed some of the misconceptions and stereotypes that affect attitudes toward gifted students which include: a) *tall poppies* need to be cut down to size; b) special curricular arrangement will lead to feelings of superiority and egocentric behaviors; c) gifted children could succeed without help; d) gifted children cause trouble; and e) they should be with their chronological peers. Whole grade acceleration and early entry seem to be the most controversial types of acceleration practices; however the concept takes many forms such as:

Early Admission to Kindergarten, 2) Early Admission to First Grade, 3) Grade-Skipping, 4) Continuous Progress, 5) Self-Paced Instruction, 6) Subject-Matter Acceleration/Partial Acceleration, 7) Combined Classes, 8) Curriculum Compacting, 9) Telescoping Curriculum, 10) Mentoring, 11) Extracurricular

Programs, 12) Correspondence Courses, 13) Early Graduation, 14) Concurrent/Dual Enrollment, 15) Advanced Placement, 16) Credit by Examination, 17) Acceleration in College, 18) Early Entrance into Middle School, High School, or College (Southern & Jones, 2004, p. 6).

While teachers accept that many high ability students need some form of intervention to promote academic challenges, they seem to be reluctant to place students when arrangements require grade-skipping and early entry to school. When their students considered for whole-grade acceleration, some teachers have even reported experiencing a sense of failure, as if they have been incapable of teaching them (Piper & Creps, 1991). Other misconceptions stem from perceptions that gifted children consistently exhibit good behavior (i.e., obedience to classroom rules) and show exceptional performance in all academic areas. However, gifted children may not always be the most popular students among their peers, have academically talented siblings, or come from homes with well-educated or professional parents (Dawson, 1997; Rohrer, 1995). Another common misconception is related to the belief that a student may not be able to handle the increased academic “pressure.” However, the findings prove the opposite; that students who have been accelerated are inclined to succeed academically (Gallagher, 2003). When accelerated students experience difficulty, teachers are more likely to blame the difficulties on acceleration practices rather than on normal developmental variation in behavioral changes (Jones & Southern, 1992). If a child experiences emotional difficulties, there may not be a causal relationship between acceleration practices and the child’s behavior. There may be other factors interfering with why a student might be experiencing emotional disturbances (Gallagher). Accelerated students tend to do better academically than gifted students, who not accelerated, possibly because of the new challenge these students gain from content that more adequately extends their abilities. If the child is physically mature and emotionally well-adjusted, no harm can be expected from a well-planned acceleration. Despite an extensive literature on the impact of educational acceleration, much information is decades old and requires reevaluation.

Further, early admission and grade skipping practices were viewed as identical (Southern, Jones, & Fiscus, 1989). Attitudes towards early entry appear to be largely based on false or subjective opinions rather than experimental data (Butterworth & Constable, 1982). This attitude contradicts the literature because early entrants are at least equally as well adjusted as their peers (Proctor, Black, & Feldhusen, 1986; Van Tassel-Baska, 1986). Early entry is successful if the selection process is careful and the teacher is sensitive to the needs of gifted children and supportive of the child’s placement (Mares & Byles, 1994). Schools and local educational institutions differ considerably (e.g., extremely supportive or opposing) on their view of whole-grade acceleration as well. Teachers are concerned about how students will cope with academic and social demands after whole grade acceleration (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscomb, & Forstadt, 2009; Southern et al., 1989). However, the focus should be the student’s benefit and for that reason, the team should examine the environment if whole-grade acceleration is being considered. Hence, team members can identify the resources for barriers that could obstruct the process. On the other hand, teachers more often recognize circumstances when a student’s academic needs are not being met, than they agree that intervention is needed (Assouline et al., 2009). Rogers and Kimpston (1992) disapproved two misconceptions about acceleration based on a meta-analysis of 19 major research syntheses: “(1) all forms can be reduced to grade skipping, and (2) acceleration may have negative social and emotional consequences for gifted learners” (p. 59). Each form of acceleration had very different academic, social, and psychological results; thus, when accelerating a gifted student, individual decisions must be based on matching the child to the types of acceleration that are compatible with his or her learning style, social, and psychological trait and needs.

1.2. When Teachers are Unaware of the Research

The main issue is not the lack of evidence that exists regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of acceleration, but the gap between the evidence and the educational practices and beliefs. As a continuation of the work initiated by *A Nation Deceived*, the Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration (IRPA) was established in 2006 mainly to: a) generate new research on acceleration; b) act as a clearinghouse for research and information on acceleration; c) develop instruments that will guide educators and parents to make effective decisions; d) provide consultation on acceleration policy and practices based on research evidence; and e) provide research grants to

stimulate worldwide research on acceleration (Colangelo & Assouline, 2009, p. 201). IRPA's work will be very well timed to reverse the attitudes and trends toward acceleration. It is believed that eventually educators will accept the effectiveness of acceleration as an integral part of gifted education because "Acceleration practices are elegant in their simplicity and effectiveness" (Colangelo & Assouline, 2009, p. 202). Acceleration is a dynamic topic and much more work needs to be done.

While many studies examine teachers' attitudes toward gifted students and gifted education, it is still unclear what teachers' attitudes are toward gifted students and gifted education (McCoach & Siegle, 2007). Additionally, most of these studies have design flaws (e.g., sampling issues related to not using a random or a good representative group of teachers), thus rendering their results ungeneralizable vis-à-vis the general population of the gifted teachers. Overall, the results of previous research do not provide a clear picture about teachers' attitudes toward gifted students (McCoach & Siegle). McCoach and Siegle's study hoped to understand teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward the gifted by examining some questions such as, "How do regular education teachers currently feel about providing specialized services for gifted students? Are teachers who have training or experience in gifted education more supportive of gifted students and gifted education?" (2007, p. 248).

It was hypothesized that teachers with training and experience would have a more positive attitude toward gifted education programs and gifted students since teachers' self-perceptions would be positively correlated with their attitudes of gifted students. The survey packet was mailed to a national random sample of 1,500 teachers, with 262 teachers joining this survey. McCoach and Siegle's study used Gagné and Nadeau's (1991) *Opinions About the Gifted and Their Education* instrument to assess teachers' attitudes toward the gifted and gifted education. Some of the factors examined include training and experience in gifted education, training and experience in special education, and self-perception as gifted predicted teachers' attitudes toward the gifted and gifted education. However, the relationship between training in gifted education and attitudes toward the gifted was not found to be significant and related to differences in attitudes toward gifted education and viewed as troubling (McCoach & Siegle). Future studies should examine how training received on gifted education impacts attitudes toward gifted students. It may be helpful assessing the effect of training by looking before and after so that future training strategies may be designed to improve practitioners' attitudes toward the gifted.

It is astounding that what predicts teachers' attitudes toward the gifted remains unclear. McCoach and Siegle's findings indicate that future research should focus on exploring the components of effective gifted educator training programs, which train gifted educators are supportive of gifted education while nurturing the potential of gifted students. I believe much exploratory research is needed to get a clear understanding to know how to fight with controversies against acceleration. Much of the controversy around acceleration might be associated to beliefs and attitudes of the teachers with limited or no support in research (Vialle et al., 2001). Thus, studies on gifted students should be replicated, exploring a number of issues. Once educators take a more deliberate look at the evidence, it will become clearer the need to use acceleration (Colangelo & Assouline, 2009).

1.3. Educators do not Receive Training in the Colleges of Education

Teachers do not often receive formal training in how to assist their gifted and talented students. While research on acceleration has been known for many years, Colleges of Education programs do not include acceleration as a curricular intervention strategy in teacher training. The University of Iowa College of Education Dean, Sandra Domico, asserts: "The fact that the research on acceleration is not readily part of the training of teachers and administrators," which "is a strike against the mission of Colleges of Education" (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 50). Regular education teachers with concern for their gifted students devote significant amounts of time and resources for developing their knowledge and proficiency to meet the needs of such students.

Teachers face more difficulties in identifying gifted and talented students than those with specific knowledge and training. This limitation later leads to a lack of understanding on acceleration, yet as Stanley simply puts it: "The chief reason for identifying intellectually talented children is . . . to help them get a better education than they probably would otherwise" (1984, p. 178). Teachers with lack of training in how to nurture their gifted

students do not know how to use the research to shape their practice. Fear of elitism causes many educators to view gifted education as exclusive, accusing it of providing special benefits for the “already advantaged.” Meanwhile, the pendulum swings between the search for excellence and the call for equity, the *No Child Left Behind* era heightens concerns about “raising the academic bar.” How this *No Child Left Behind* era’s zeitgeist affects regular classroom teachers’ attitudes toward the gifted is unknown (McCoach & Siegle, 2007, p. 246).

On a positive note, research has demonstrated that professional development changes teacher attitudes, enhances a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy (i.e., that is to say the belief in the capability to organize and enact appropriate activities), promotes greater proficiency and enhances better understanding and application of relevant competencies (Ropp, 1999; Shore & Kaizer, 1989). The National Association for Gifted Children has stated, “Gifted learners are entitled to be served by professionals who have specialized preparation in gifted education, expertise in appropriate differentiated content and instructional methods, involvement in ongoing professional development, and who possess exemplary personal and professional traits” (1998). Teachers with limited to no training in gifted education tend to articulate beliefs and attitudes that are contradictory to proper identification criteria as articulated in these comments: “A truly gifted kid is not really bored” and “He’s probably gifted, but he’s a first-class jerk” (Peterson & Margolin, 1997, p. 87). The teacher nominations indicated that instructors were likely to spot high achieving and emotionally stable students who showed good attitudes, while overlooking other numerous identification criteria (Schack & Starko, 1990).

A lesson learned: limited teacher training on gifted education affects all aspects of gifted students’ lives starting from the identification to acceleration stage. Starko (1990) investigated what factors influence the establishment, operation, effects and elimination of an elementary enrichment and acceleration program, which existed between 1958 and 1969. As part of the study, program documents were examined, teachers and administrators were interviewed, and former participants were surveyed to investigate the program’s life sequence and effects on students. In these schools, teachers were selected by the school administration to administer enriched and accelerated classes. These teachers came from the elementary school that housed the program and none who were interviewed knew how or why they had been selected. They then stated their lack of formal preparation and training in gifted and talented education (Starko). General education teachers often do not feel successful in identifying high-ability children. It was found that using extremely conservative identification criteria approved to be wrong in the life of the gifted programs (e.g., students had to score above 125 or 130 on an individual IQ test, in addition to scoring very highly on achievement tests in all subjects, while maintaining emotional stability, and a positive attitude toward school) (Starko).

1.4. Social and Emotional Concerns

Furthermore, teachers neglect the fact that the social and emotional well-being of students is inextricably related to meeting their cognitive needs (Gross, 1993). However, despite research that constantly supports positive changes in academic achievement and a lack of negative impact on social and emotional growth, educators are unwilling to implement acceleration practices (Southern, Jones, & Fiscus, 1989). A landmark study on acceleration was conducted by Southern et al. that aimed to delineate why practitioners objected to acceleration two decades ago. Interestingly, the findings appear to be consistent with recent literature and resonate throughout research in the field. Southern et al. surveyed a number of gifted program coordinators, school psychologists, principals, and teachers, receiving 554 responses out of 1,263 mailed surveys to examine the origin of practitioners’ objections. The feedback revealed a major concern over acceleration as a risky approach because of the social and emotional concerns surrounded the status of gifted children. Daurio (1979) described the same concern two decades ago regarding the importance of the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Daurio (1979) and Southern et al. (1989) both present a clear controversy among practitioners’ views toward acceleration that revolves around social-emotional concerns. Contrary to the arguments made by practitioners regarding the social and emotional benefits of acceleration, such perspectives are not grounded thoroughly (Rogers, & Kimpston, 1992). Studies do not reveal that some forms of acceleration demonstrate more risk to adaptation or attainment compared to others (Southern & Jones, 2015). Regarding the effect of grade skipping among highly gifted students, it was found that students who had not skipped grades were less well-adjusted

than that who had (Gross, 1994). Similarly, accelerants experience satisfaction in social relationships (Brody, Muratori & Stanley, 2004; Gross, 2003), positive self-esteem, self-concept, or self-confidence (Olenchak, 1995; Rogers, 1992); high level of satisfaction about their being accelerated (Gross, 2003; Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, & Benbow, 2001); and superior educational ambitions (Lubinski, 2004; Lubinski et al., 2001).

The results from the dissertation study by Witham (1992) compared acceleration, curriculum integration, and critical thinking skills in self-contained gifted public and private schools. Witham examined 24 school programs using director interview surveys, teacher surveys, document analysis, and observation. The results from the private schools were consistent with previous studies conducted regarding practitioners' resistance toward acceleration practices. Research conducted in Australia repeatedly confirmed resistance to acceleration by practitioners (Vialle et al., 2001), while a study in Germany found a similar parallel patterns (Heinboket, 1997). Rankin and Vialle (1996) surveyed school principals in Australia to investigate their attitudes regarding the early entry of gifted pre-school students. The survey was sent to 63 elementary school principals and 27 questionnaires were returned and 23 of the 27 respondents stated children were rejected for early entry because of the social and emotional development concerns. This was consistent with Southern et al. (1989)'s findings concerning practitioners' assumptions on the social and emotional adjustment of early entrants.

While numerous studies find that acceleration results in neither short nor long-term damage, few studies report positive socio-affective outcomes for gifted students (Neihart, 2007). Using Slavin's (1986, 1987) *best-evidence synthesis* technique, Rogers (1992) reviewed 81 studies, which was thoroughly selected 314 studies in between 1912-1988 that examined the social or emotional effect of acceleration among 12 acceleration practices.: (1) Early Entrance to School (EE); (2) Grade Skipping (GS); (3) Nongraded Classrooms (NG); (4) Curriculum Compaction (CC); (5) Grade Telescoping (GT); (6) Concurrent Enrollment (CE); (7) Subject Acceleration (SA); (8) Advanced Placement (AP); (9) Mentorship (ME); (10) Credit by Examination (EX); (11) Early Admission to College (EA); and (12) Combined Accelerative Options (CE).

The results revealed positive effects in both the social (Mean effect size = 0.46) and emotional (Mean effect size = 0.12) domains. Social effects were examined by using social maturity scores, teacher ratings of social skills, involvement in extracurricular activities, and leadership skills. Emotional effects were examined by using measures of self-concept or teacher/parent ratings of risk taking, independence, and creativity. Rogers found significant emotional effects (Mean effect size = .58) for subject-based acceleration and differential effects on self-esteem for different grouping arrangements, which showed that accelerated students responded positively to the acceleration practices in social and emotional domains. Further, Grade Skipping and Mentorship were viewed to be socially effective acceleration practices; Concurrent Enrollment and Mentorship were viewed to be psychologically effective acceleration practices. Rogers' study proved that: (1) acceleration is just grade skipping; and (2) acceleration does produce negative social and emotional effects for gifted students. The study offered educational decision-makers wide range of acceleration options well supported by research to promote gifted students' academic achievement. If educators are still concerned about gifted students' social and psychological adjustment when these accelerative options are used, perhaps school counselors could provide support individually or in a group setting (Rogers).

According to Winner (2000) gifted children are precocious, self-motivated, and approach problems rising in their particular domain of special talent in an innovative way. Thus, current knowledge on the gifted should focus on its origins, gifted children's motivation, and how the social, emotional, and cognitive relate to exceptional performance. Contrary to some of the finding concerning creative individuals, gifted children are inclined to be well adjusted and supported by their families (Winner).

In a meta-analysis of 700 studies on a broad range of school-based programs aimed at developing students' social and emotional skills funded by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Weissberg (2007) identified 207 studies that involved students ages 5–18 and used a control group and collected data on one of six specific outcome areas related to students' (1) social and emotional skills, (2) attitudes toward self, others, and school, (3) positive social behaviors, (4) conduct problems, (5) emotional distress, and (6)

academic performance (p. 2). It was found that after the intervention, the experimental groups behaved better, were more positive, and were less anxious than their control-group peers. Moreover, students in the control group they scored 11 percentile points higher than the comparison-group students. Weissberg reported that social and emotional learning influences students' success.

Things are Changing, but Not Fast

Seligman stated (1988) the common belief hold that: "Gifted children take care of themselves" is not only incorrect, but also presents a trap that many gifted children can fall into, pushing them to the sidelines unhappy and frustrated. *A Nation Deceived* revisited the notion and reiterated the benefit of acceleration practices as an intervention in school to meet the needs of gifted students roughly out two decades after Seligman assertion. Intellectual giftedness comes in many ways and if neglected "squanders a precious, irreplaceable national resource under the banner of anti-elitism" (Seligman, p. 1). Seligman asserts that "Psychology must take up their cause again" (1988, p. 1) and for this purpose, the American Psychological Association, led by Camilla Benbow and Nancy Robinson, developed two proposals: 1) to create the foundations a Virtual University for gifted teenagers, and 2) to study truly extraordinary people (Seligman). Every student is special; if some students have the desire, aptitude, and ability to be challenged, helping them should not be viewed as incompatible with equity.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved the new Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted Education that were developed by NAGC and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) over the past three years. The NCATE stated that gifted educators "... possess a repertoire of evidence-based curriculum and instructional strategies to differentiate for individuals with gifts and talents. They select, adapt, and use these strategies to promote challenging learning opportunities in general and special curricula and to modify learning environments to enhance self-awareness and self-efficacy for individuals with gifts and talents" (2006, p.59). However, the Council of State Directors of Programs' the Gifted and Talented Education Report (1999) indicated, 3 of 43 states suggest that classroom teachers received more than 3 contact hours (i.e., either pre-service or in-service training) in gifted education while 30 states mandate the identification of gifted students and 19 states do not require any training in gifted education for teachers who work with gifted students (Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted, 1999). Case studies on acceleration have revealed that acceleration was seen as a temporary solution to addressing the needs of gifted students (Gross, 1992; Kulik & Kulik, 1992). Acceleration will not satisfy the gifted student if it is not paired with a challenging curriculum for the student and if it is not supported by teachers who are knowledgeable about their needs (Gross; Kulik & Kulik). In such cases, acceleration becomes a placement decision rather than being a program decision (Vialle et al., 2001). Lubinski and Benbow (2000) reviewed the literature concerning children with exceptional intellectual abilities and examined issues how to nurture, counsel and teach children with extraordinary high ability. The authors indicated that one-third of the total ability ranges within the top 1%. A child with an IQ of 200 is quite unique compared to gifted children with an IQ of 140. Neglecting the potentials of such exceptional children would be a terrible loss to society as the authors commented. Perhaps acceleration practices could intervene to meet some of the challenges that the gifted students experience in school.

Conclusion

Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, and Benbow (2001) conducted a 10-year follow up study with profoundly gifted accelerated high-ability students. The results indicated that 71% of the students were pleased with their experience and only a small number of the participants stated that they were unsatisfied. Gifted and talented students from accelerated classes do better (i.e., by almost one full year on achievement tests) than their regular non-accelerated counterparts of the same chronological age and IQ level (Kulik, 1992). Gifted and talented students from enriched classes do better on grade equivalent scales (i.e., by 4-5 months) than their counterparts in conventional classes (Kulik, 1992). Compared to their age peers, students who were allowed to begin elementary school were typically six months advanced in achievement in the same year. Furthermore, accelerated students showed better progress both personally and socially in comparison to slight difficulties faced by advanced students who were not in accelerated programs (Rogers, 2002). In a longitudinal study, the

Academic Talent Search program found that after five years of their participation in the accelerated program, students viewed the experience as very positive. These students also recognized improved self-esteem and self-control (Thomas, 1980).

Acceleration is definitely not new but it still generates more controversy as an educational intervention (Colangelo & Assouline, 2009). The main issue is not the lack of evidence that exists regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of acceleration, but the gap between the evidence and educational practices and beliefs. Acceleration should be considered pivotal for gifted students because of the compelling evidence of its academic and social benefits. For gifted students, acceleration often constitutes a strong and powerful intervention – and one very simple to apply. Over the course of the next decade, acceleration will see greater implementation in many countries, naturally leading to the development of greater practices and a broader understanding by professionals regarding the essential role that assessment plays in decision-making around it (Colangelo & Assouline). The founders of the positive psychology movement constitute some of the foremost to promote acceleration, with psychological studies involving individuals' social and emotional well-being proving that attention should be as focused on an individual's strengths as much as their weaknesses; the field is as interested in constructing positivity in life as equally as in repairing the worst, as concerned with making lives fulfilling and nurturing talent as a healing pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Due to psychology's undue focus on pathology, the fulfilled individual and the thriving community appear to be neglected, whereas genius and high talent have become a dirty words that dissuade researchers from greater examination (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This, in turn, has influenced educational practices. To overcome the myths that have led to the disregard of acceleration, one must begin by correcting the belief systems that influence practitioners' attitudes toward gifted education.

What it means to teach gifted learners "is actually simple in theory" according to Carol Ann Tomlinson as quoted in her frequently referenced 1997 paper. Tomlinson (1997) continued *Good Instruction for Gifted Learners* implementing teaching principles where immersed students in a higher "degree of difficulty" than that typical of peers from their own age. A greater degree of difficulty requires more refined skills in talent areas in terms of the content, processes and products involved in developing and implementing a particular skill set. What it takes to teach gifted learners well is actually not that complicated - a little common sense, which begins with the premise that each child should come to school to stretch and grow daily (Tomlinson).

Having an educational policy involving gifted learners is important, since it draws attention to the needs of special needs' students and increases awareness about their needs. Using academic acceleration as a form of intervention to aid gifted students is the most effective strategy for nurturing highly talented learners, who can tolerate quicker-than-usual pace. Furthermore, when there is a policy that increases not only awareness but also acknowledges the validity of the acceleration practices as an intervention, it helps with the implementation of best practices related to acceleration practices. In summary, a principled and researched guidelines for developing an academic acceleration policy assists in guiding policy makers, school administrators, and educators (Lupkowski-Scholik, Behrens, & Assouline, 2018).

It should be remembered that each student is unique with exceptional familial and social characteristics. Some students will benefit from enrichment, while others will benefit from acceleration or both (Rogers, 2002). While the research on the effects of acceleration is overwhelmingly positive, decisions made for each student must comprise additional information (Rogers, 2015). In conclusion, as asserted by The National Association Gifted Children: "Educational acceleration is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with more research supporting this intervention than any other in the literature on gifted individuals" (NAGC, 2004).

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