THE LONG TERM SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GRADE ACCELERATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett)

ABSTRACT

Acceleration for the highly gifted students has been a topic of much debate. Research studies addressing the issue of acceleration in its many forms have been conducted for decades and the findings supporting this format for addressing the academic needs of the highly intelligent, yet under-challenged, have been overwhelmingly positive. The emotional and social implications of grade acceleration (as well as other forms of acceleration) have not been examined as extensively, however. This study takes a critical look at the trends and research that have helped shape the attitudes towards acceleration in the United Stated over the past 50+ years and looks at the patterns of acceptance (or non-acceptance) of this practice in education past and present. It examines the experiences, attitudes, and feelings that affected eight college students over the course of elementary, middle, high school, and college. The impact grade acceleration had socially and emotionally on the experiences is analyzed, compared, and reviewed.

INDEX WORDS: Academically gifted, acceleration, adjustment, elementary school, emotional, gifted, grade acceleration, grade skipping, intervention, misconceptions, student attitudes, student experience, social.

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DEDICATION

- For my mom who stood beside me and encouraged me through the application into the doctoral program and now watches and guides me from above.
- For my dad who has always made me feel capable and strong.
- For my husband, Jeff, who has convinced me that determination and persistence are powerful tools, but support and love can carry one through.
- For my kids, Cole and Spencer, who have cheerfully waited and encouraged me and my stepkids, Lindsey and Keenan, who have added yet two more reasons to keep learning and growing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

LIST OF TABLES ix

CHAPTER

1 NATURE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM 1

Purpose of the Study and Related Research Questions 2

Significance of the Study 3

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE 4

Definitions of Acceleration 4

Acceleration and Gifted Education: An Historical Perspective…….. 10

Considerations for Acceleration…….. 27

Acceleration: Findings and Implications in the U.S. and Abroad……... 29

Unsubstantiated Viewpoints…… 31

Summary of Findings of Socio-Emotional Effects of Grade Acceleration……. 35

3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY 37

Participants 37

Interview Process 38

Selection of Participants 39

Data Collection 39

Data Coding and Analysis 40

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Usefulness 41

Description of the Case Study 42

4 RESULTS 45

Overview 45

Participant #1: Megan 45

Participant #2: Brian 49

Participant #3: Suri 52

Participant #4: Kim 56

Participant #5: Kellie 58

Participant #6: Andrew 62

Participant #7: Pierce 64

Participant #8: Anna 67

Synthesis of Findings 69

5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 74

Dynamics of Family and Home 75

Peer Relations 75

Adjustment Issues in Regard to Grade Accelerations 75

Impact of Academic Rigor 76

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities 77

Overview of Effect of Grade Acceleration 77

Summary 79

REFERENCES 82

APPENDICES 89

A Letter to Potential Participant 89

B Participation Agreement 91

C Participants' Interview #1 93

D Participants' Interview #2 96

E Participants' Interview #3 98

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1: Overview of Participants' Characteristics and Experiences.....101

CHAPTER I

NATURE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the last century, the topic of grade acceleration has spurred debate. While countless studies have touted acceleration's benefits for students whose educational needs are underchallenged in a traditional classroom, opponents (often educators and administrators) have voiced concerns about potential negative social and emotional effects of moving students out of classes with same-age peers to classes with intellectual peers. The social and emotional, as well as academic, concerns for these children of remaining frustrated and not receiving the necessary challenge to stay academically engaged are often dismissed (Rawlins, 2004; Rimm & Lovance, 1992; Silverman, 1993; Swiatek & Benbow, 1991).

Acceleration for gifted and talented youth has been extensively researched over the last five decades. A vast majority of the research findings provide strong evidence that acceleration as an intervention for carefully selected, highly intellectually gifted youth, is beneficial both academically and socially (Charlton & Marolf, 1994; Colangelo & Assouline, 2005; Rimm & Lovance, 1992; Rogers, 1992; Swiatek, 1993). Despite the overwhelming research-based support for such intervention, school administrators and teachers in the United States and abroad remain reluctant to recommend this practice. Professor James H. Borland (1989, as cited in A Nation Deceived, p. 29) stated:

> Acceleration is one of the most curious phenomena in the field of education. I can think of no other issue in which there is such a gulf between what research has revealed and what most practitioners believe. The research on

acceleration is so uniformly positive, the benefits of appropriate acceleration so unequivocal, that it is difficult to see how an educator could oppose it.

Purpose of the Study and Related Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to take a critical look at the trends and research that have helped shape the attitudes toward grade acceleration for gifted and talented students in the United Stated over the past 50 years and look at acceptance of this practice. The current study examined eight college students who attended typical public elementary schools in the southeastern United States and were grade accelerated in early elementary school. The participants proceeded through the public school system ahead of their same-age peers and entered college earlier. This study sheds light on their perspectives on the social and emotional impacts of grade acceleration on gifted students' school experiences and the effects such experiences had on these individuals as young adults. The major research questions for this study were:

1. What are the current attitudes and feelings regarding grade acceleration of highly gifted young adults who were grade accelerated during early elementary school? Do these attitudes and feelings differ from their recollection of attitudes and feelings from their early elementary school years?
2. How do highly gifted students who were grade accelerated in early elementary school describe themselves as young adults? How do they describe themselves throughout their school years?
3. What were the significant emotional and social adjustment issues that arose during the school years that persist into adulthood in highly gifted young adults who were grade accelerated in early elementary school that may be directly correlated to the acceleration?

Significance of the Study

Education for the gifted has received increasing amounts of attention over the past several decades (Charlton & Marolf, 1994; Colangelo et al., 2004; Kulik, 1993; Ma, 2003; Rogers, 1991; Stanley & Benbow, 1971). Nationally and internationally attention has been given a subgroup of youth defined as gifted and talented. This is especially true as educators work to appropriately meet the needs of *all* learners in our education system. The federal No Child Left Behind Act defines gifted and talented students as "Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities [Title IX, Part A, Definition 22. (2002)]." Research has asserted that if American children are to compete in a global economy that our nation's brightest should be challenged and nurtured with the same fervor often relegated only to the subgroup of youth who receive services for special needs that are connected with developmental delays (http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html). Further, we have a moral obligation to provide a nurturing and rewarding environment for all of our youth including those who are academically successful.

This study examines individuals' experiences throughout childhood, adolescence and young adulthood and the social and emotional effects of these experiences that may be related to elementary school grade acceleration. It reflects on family, friends, academics, and extracurricular events and the short and long term impact being younger than ones' peers plays on social and emotional development.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Grade acceleration is one form of intervention utilized for highly gifted, underchallenged youth. Although studies have been conducted on this intervention and the results are generally very positive, dialogue continues to be overwhelming skewed against this intervention and interest in considering the use of such an intervention in the general education public has waned. In this chapter, acceleration in its various forms will be defined and the history of acceleration will be examined and outlined spanning the course of approximately two centuries. The trends and issues of education and the relevant studies which have shaped the course of gifted education today in relation to grade acceleration will be examined.

Definitions of Acceleration

There are generally two interventions which are utilized with gifted students; enrichment and acceleration. The National Association for Gifted Children defines enrichment as activities which go beyond the existing curriculum. Acceleration is defined by Pressley (as cited in Southern, Jones & Stanley, 1993) as "progress through an educational program at rates faster, or at ages younger than conventional (p. 387)." Generally, acceleration can be divided into two types; grade skipping or double promotion, and curriculum compacting. Grade skipping or double promotion allows the student to bypass an entire grade and be accelerated to the next. Curriculum compacting allows the student to complete the normal amount of work in less than the normal amount of time (http://www.misd.net/gifted/terms.htm).

Others in the field of gifted education suggest other terms for grade acceleration such as early entrance to school, non-graded classroom, dual enrollment, grade telescoping, concurrent enrollment, subject acceleration, advanced placement, mentorship, credit by examination, early entrance to college, and year-round matriculation, but most of these strategies fall into the two major categories of enrichment and acceleration. Early entrance to school, early entrance to college, and credit by examination are forms of grade-skipping and the non-graded classroom, year round matriculation, mentorship, and advanced placement may be seen as forms of curriculum compacting. Non-graded classroom, grade telescoping, dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and subject acceleration are examples of both forms of intervention.

Grade Skipping

Grade skipping (Colangelo & Assouline, 2005) refers to being double-promoted to bypass one or more grade levels. The student who skips a grade usually becomes the youngest student in the class. At times, profoundly gifted students may be grade advanced two or three (or more) grades throughout an elementary and secondary school career in order to provide the academic challenge appropriate with his/her intellectual capabilities; this practice is radical acceleration (Gross, 1989). Grade skipping is the most controversial and resisted intervention for gifted and talented students. Yet, there are few adjustments to make in implementing the strategy and it has been utilized for decades although its use is not widespread and pervasive and the topic stirs up more controversy than most other forms of intervention for students at all ends of the educational spectrum. Gifted education has become an integral part of most educational systems as the need to address all individuals' educational needs has become recognized yet acceleration is rarely considered. A Nation Deceived, volume 2 (2004) reports:

> Grade-skipping is economical. It means a new desk, at most, or having a desk from second grade moved to the third grade. There is no need to hire new teachers or find new tutors. There is a cost issue for the taxpayer. Having some kids move through school faster saves taxpayers money. "When it comes to acceleration, the major cost is attitude," explains Dr. Nicholas Colangelo of The University of Iowa. (p. 56)

Early entrance to elementary school for a gifted student who shows readiness for the academic rigors and structure of school, allows the child who is ready to begin school a year before his/her same age peers. Such practice provides an allowance for the exceptional child to receive challenging and rewarding instruction early and form a sense of scholarship early on in his or her formal schooling. Drawbacks to this intervention include the structure of the school day which may be too physically tiring for younger children and the fine and gross motor tasks required of those in their first formal years of schooling which are problematic because of potentially lagging physical development. In addition, most public school systems currently have policies in place which mandate a student be a particular age before being allowed to enter kindergarten or first grade (http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/askdoe.aspx?PageReq=ASKNewcomer). Colasanti (2007) reported:

- In 1975, of 30 states that established a cutoff date, nine required students to have turned 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (30%).
- By 1990, 42 states established a cutoff date and of those, 28 required that students must turn 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (67%).
- By 2005, 45 states established a cutoff date, and 33 of those required that students must turn 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (77%).

Testing data and permission to bypass these birthday cut-off regulations are often expensive, time-consuming and difficult. Cramond (1990) related an experience of frustration and disbelief common to parents of precocious children who do not meet the cut-off date for kindergarten or first grade. Often the effort and time involved to prove a child is ready for the academic rigor of a school environment earlier than typical, negates the possibility of entering early because by the time the permission is granted, the child has reached the imposed birthday cut-off date.

Early entrance to college allows a student to enter college as a full-time student without completing high school. This practice provides the benefits of the student completing schooling at a relatively young age, leaving more time for career and professional development. Social interaction with college age peers may provide challenges in terms of social maturity level, however. At the November 1993 annual meeting of the National Association of Gifted Children in Atlanta, two participants in radical acceleration programs who began college early, shared their college and general school experiences. The speakers were “convinced that rapid progress through school grades all the way to the Ph.D. degree is the nearly optimal way for persons like themselves to enrich their education and prepare for adulthood (Charlton, Marolf, & Stanley, 1994).” Credit by examination involves the exemption of certain college courses based on prior knowledge. Home schooled students or students with extensive knowledge of areas of interest may find this option suitable. An example of this exemption or test-out option is the Advanced Placement examination. Advanced Placement courses are advanced or accelerated content which students take in order to earn credit for completion of college level coursework. Qualifying scores on post-course examinations provide credit for basic college coursework at colleges or universities.

Curriculum Compacting

The second type of acceleration is curriculum compacting, as described by Renzulli and Reis (1985) is:

> modifying or "streamlining' the regular curriculum in order to eliminate repetition of previously mastered material, upgrade the challenge level of the regular curriculum, and provide for appropriate enrichment and/or acceleration activities while ensuring mastery of basic skills (p. 222).

When properly employed, curriculum compacting involves defining goals and outcomes, identifying candidates for compacting, and providing acceleration and enrichment options. Students who already possess a firm understanding of the subject matter are provided opportunities to progress more rapidly and beyond the scope of the curriculum provided to their classmates. This method involves challenges for planning and implementation for the teacher but has benefits in motivation and achievement gains by exceptional students (Chapman, 2008).

The non-graded classroom is a form of acceleration which is occasionally employed by entire schools or school systems (Diniz, 2002). With this approach the students are not bound to a particular grade and no differentiation by grade level is made. Pace and progress through the curricula is governed by individual student ability and motivational factors allowing students to circumvent the pressure of staying consistent with peers and providing the challenge and acceleration in areas where appropriate. The method is difficult to employ however because it takes extensive training of faculty and complete cooperation and support from administration and the entire faculty in a school. Year round matriculation includes summer and/or Saturday classes which move at a faster pace to increase opportunities for advanced content learning. Students of

advanced abilities work together and form social bonds while feeding a thirst for knowledge. Grade telescoping allows students' progress to be reorganized through junior high or high school to shorten the time by one year. Teachers cover the same amount of material or activities in less time, thereby allowing more time for enrichment activities and projects that better suit the interests, needs, and readiness levels of gifted students. Mentorships (Berger, 1990) involve pairing students with specific areas of interest with professionals in the field. Exposure to real world learning offers accelerated subject matter by hands-on interaction. Dual enrollment (http://www.ulm.edu/dualenrollment/) refers to the opportunity for students in high school to also attend and receive credit for college courses on college campuses. Students can get a "jump start" on college and experience an exciting new atmosphere and challenging curricula while maintaining friendships and extracurricular interests in high school. Concurrent enrollment most often refers to high school students taking college courses, often for college credit while remaining in high school. Dual enrollment is the provision of greater access to a wider range of rigorous academic and technical courses. Benefits include savings in time and money on a college degree, promoting efficiency of learning, and enhancing admission to and retention in college. Dual enrollment may also be used to refer to middle grade students taking high school courses and earning credit towards graduation. Subject acceleration (http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=565) allows a student to bypass the usual progression of skills and content mastery in one subject where great advancement or proficiency has been observed.

For the purposes of this study, the focus will be directed to the forms of acceleration which move a child (primarily elementary school age) to a class with intellectual peers of a different age level.

Acceleration and Gifted Education: An Historical Perspective

Practice in American classrooms and schools is reflective of the current state of our nation. To understand the development of educational procedures and more specifically those that apply to gifted students, one must consider the changes the nation has witnessed over the past two centuries. The days of small classes and schools are typically gone as educators progressed to more sophisticated policies, approaches, and materials with the goal of meeting the needs of our youth. There are lessons to be learned from the policies of the past.

Early 1800s

During the early nineteenth century, students' educational needs were addressed based on their progress. Students of varying ages, maturity levels, and academic levels were in a classroom together and the teacher attempted to meet each individual child's needs. When mastery was achieved, students were given more challenging material to match and stimulate their intellectual development. These children worked alongside students on varying levels and often socialized with students older or younger than themselves. The teacher targeted each child at his/her own level and each child progressed at his/her own pace. As the population grew and the efficiency of the industrial model gained popularity, this model of education changed (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 24).

Mid 1800s

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, in an effort to keep up with the rapidly changing structure and needs of the country, grade-level structures were introduced. This attempt to meet economic needs and bureaucratic guidelines was innovative and had many benefits. Such practice was considered progressive and desirable for the fundamental well-being of the child. Mandatory attendance concerns were prevalent, child labor laws were in formation, and large

populations of immigrants were a concern for schools. In addition, cognitive psychology was of interest on a grander scale during this time period and the focus on a standard policy was necessary. Graded classrooms were introduced in Boston in 1848. This new innovation, advocated by Horace Mann, was a significant advancement at the time as the nation was becoming increasingly urban and the education system was forced to meet the demands of larger numbers of students. Schools which could support multiple rooms found this structure more practical with the added advantage of allowing teachers to concentrate on a smaller field of expertise. This structure remained virtually unchallenged until the 20th century and continues to be the most widespread format for public education in the United States today (Daniel & Cox, 1988).

Early 1900s

John Dewey's influence early in the 20th century, coupled with realization and dissatisfaction of the high rate of failure in the schools, prompted a reassessment of the rigid graded school system. The assumption that all children of the same age have the same learning ability was challenged and educators began to express growing concern about individual differences. Defenders of the graded school practice expressed praise for the social benefits of placing students among children of similar age (Daniel & Cox, 1988). Early studies of giftedness performed during the same time period focused mainly on mental inheritance and assessment instruments for identifying and targeting sub and super-normal children. These studies added fuel to the debate regarding the overall effectiveness of graded schools. It was during this period of our educational evolution that pioneers such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingsworth began the first widely published research studies on gifted children. Attention to this revolutionary

research sparked a movement toward the development of gifted education and action to meet the needs of the changing country.

Mid 1900s

Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori greatly influenced the perceptions of educators worldwide. Montessori's approach to education spawned a dedicated following with the tenet of her beliefs centered on a child experiences with "sensitive periods" where optimal learning was possible. Her work further gave credence to the need to challenge students and allow them to progress through learning endeavors at their optimal speed.

It wasn't until the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in the late 1950s, however that our brightest and our nation's best hope for economic and societal development received ample recognition to make a large impact. The realization that a foreign global power may develop their intellectual potential and surpass the United States was impetus for a closer examination of gifted education in our nation's school structure.

In the 1960s, extensive research and attention was paid to gifted education. Enrichment programs were implemented extensively and acceleration was examined, although the concept of acceleration received much less attention than the enrichment efforts. One such study (Arends & Ford, 1964) was a quantitative research study of 125 ninth grade students who were mainly academically talented with IQs of 120 or above. These researchers investigated the academic effects of acceleration programs and the impact of such programs on self-esteem. They included a control group for comparison. One notable finding in the study was that the classes remained intact and students did not have to be moved to join academic peers; the researchers simply changed the curricula and the approach for the entire class. Their findings suggested that academic acceleration prompted significant gains academically in all areas but mathematics. The

self-esteem of the participants and their attitude towards school were comparable to the control group and, at times, more positive. Although the acceleration of these students did not involve removing them from same-age peers, the acceleration of curricula indicated promising results socially and emotionally.

In 1967, California made its final report on a research project entitled Project Talent. It focused on 10 school districts in California involved in similar forms of acceleration. The study focused on enrichment activities and academically talented students who were accelerated. The acceleration portion of the report followed guidelines first presented in California in 1962. Academically talented students were promoted from second to fourth grade and fifth to seventh with a summer school tutorial session in between. The program had been in place in several school districts for more than a year. The study highlighted acceleration (other than grade skipping) as “safe” when followed with periods of tutoring and counseling. The researchers also found that potential enrollment in acceleration programs could possibly be raised for between 2-10% of the student population, with a typical researcher indicating approximately 5%. Among the other findings from Project Talent research were: the accelerated student could be “expected to equal or excel his grade placement peers, his mental age peers, and his unaccelerated chronological and mental age peers in achievement”; there was an “unwillingness on the part of educators to recommend more than two years of acceleration prior to college”; “follow-up enrichment and tutoring services in the advanced grades, periodic counseling for pupils and parents, and opportunity for advanced placement at the high school and college levels” were recommended (p. 63).

Late 1900s

The United States continued to make strides in the 1970s as programming options were expanded and the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act provided grant monies for research and programming. Comprehensive studies such as *A Nation at Risk* in 1983; *National Excellence: A Case For Developing America's Talent* in 1993; and *A Nation Deceived* in 2004 brought the topic of gifted education to the forefront over the next three decades further focusing the attention of educational leaders and policy makers on the need to not overlook the best links to our country's potential for greatness.

The resistance to acceleration programs was evident in the 1970s as studies such as Jackson et al's (1977) of highly intelligent youth were published. Jackson et al examined 24 cases of student age 3 to 11 ranging in IQ from 108 to 160+ with the median IQ of 138. They looked at the students' current educational placement, the services in place, the attitudes and achievement of the students, the recommendations made after counseling and testing, and the subsequent services offered and provided to the gifted youth. Their findings indicated provisions which were non-existent to moderate in degree being made for the acceleration of students despite strong recommendations for such practices by professionals in the field.

Another important study relating to acceleration was begun in 1971 by Stanley and Benbow at Johns Hopkins University. Stanley formed the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) with the purpose of devising ways of identifying and facilitating education in highly gifted youth. This study became a cornerstone for research into the long term effects of acceleration. The fact that Stanley & Benbow were able to procure a five year grant to plan and implement a large scale study on the subject made it clear that gifted education was being taken seriously. Through their study of adolescents who experienced various forms of acceleration in

their education, the positive effects of acceleration were brought to the forefront. The large scale, longitudinal nature of their study gave credence to their data. Countless reports and updates on the students were written well into the participants' young adult years and future groups were assessed, accelerated and studied.

The Florida State Board of Education paid serious attention to the benefits of acceleration academically, socially, emotionally, and financially and documented these benefits in an annual report to the Florida legislature. Florida's early focus on the academic benefits of acceleration was in part due to the changing dynamics of their state and greater demands which were being placed on their educational resources. The financial benefits were of interest to them as well as concerns regarding motivation, boredom, time, and individualization. In addition, the possibility of year-round matriculation to accelerate the education of students in an effort to best utilize the educational resources was also examined. All of these possible advantages helped create an impetus for investigation. The results were promising. The extensive report supported more prevalent use of acceleration for appropriately targeted youth (Student Acceleration in Florida Public Education, 1975, 1976, 1977).

In 1983, a study was commissioned to examine all aspects of our education system in an effort to target the pitfalls and develop a plan to improve the educational system. *A Nation at Risk* generated a great deal of attention as it claimed that "the educational foundations of our society (were) being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that (threatened) our very future as a Nation and a people (Archives, p.1)." The realization that other foreign powers were matching and surpassing our educational attainments sparked a movement. One particular indicator of risk related to the plight of gifted education. According to the report in 1983, "over half the

population of gifted students (did) not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school (Archives, p. 3).” It stated:

> Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest. Attaining that goal requires that we expect and assist all students to work to the limits of their capabilities. We should expect schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones, and parents to support and encourage their children to make the most of their talents and abilities (Archives, p. 5).

The recommendations centered on the overall shifting of general expectations beyond the minimum with a focus on tailoring the nature of the curricular content to the needs of particular learners. Enriched and accelerated curriculum for gifted learners was included in the recommendations. In addition, one recommendation read “placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age (Recommendations, p. 4).” Although many leaders in the field of education applied this recommendation mainly to grade retention in cases of unsatisfactory progress, it may have been the intention of the committee that acceleration be included in this course of action as well. In 1983, the report gave some praise and words of encouragement to school systems nationwide. It stated, “More and more schools are also offering advanced placement programs and programs for gifted and talented students, and more and more students are enrolling in them (Recommendations, p. 6).” The push for educational reform was underway and gifted education was on the minds of important and influential educators. Yet progress in relation to acceleration was slow in coming.

In 1977, Julian Stanley of Johns Hopkins’ SMPY addressed the Second World Conference on Gifted and Talented Children at the University of San Francisco. His topic,

educational non-acceleration was based on SMPY, the only project of its kind in the country at the time, with the exception of some special work at the University of Washington, in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area, and in the State of Illinois – all three of which grew out of SMPY's early efforts. Dr. Stanley urged special, supplemental educational opportunities be provided for youths who reason exceptionally well mathematically. Supplemental agencies sprang from his efforts such as the Office of Talent Identification and Development (OTID), later called the Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY) in order to conduct talent searches and provide special classes. This was a positive step for acceleration on a grander scale.

In 1987, SMPY revisited the youth from a 1976 and 1978 study of over 400 mathematically precocious seventh and eighth graders and examined the academic achievements, extracurricular activities, goals and aspirations, and social and emotional adjustment. They found no discernible negative effects from the various accelerative strategies utilized. In fact, these students, when compared to other highly gifted students who did not accelerate, were often found to have done as at least as well as the others in academic accomplishments and performance on standardized tests and in high school coursework. In addition, they often showed a greater desire to earn higher degrees.

Chronological age cutoff dates for starting formal schools became a topic of interest. Countless studies attempted to look at the academic and social impacts of beginning kindergarten or first grade before age five (kindergarten) or six (first grade). Studies attempted to track the students through elementary school and reach generalizations or conclusions based on the data. Although many of the conclusions stated the need for tests to determine a child's academic and developmental level in order to make recommendations regarding early entry, the majority seemed to be adamant proponents for allowing students more time outside of formal schooling.

Ironically, some studies even excluded the possibly gifted pool of students in their studies in order to have a more uniform sample pool (see DiPasquale et al, 1980), apparently losing sight of the intended focal group for early entry. Rabinowitz (1989) stated that Elkind (1987) felt that it would be far more useful for gifted children to have more opportunities to explore and investigate rather than early formal instruction (p. 28). Although the studies were widely publicized, Jones and Southern (1987) examined many of the studies Rabinowitz cited in her research and others'. Their review "identified many serious methodological errors – enough to lead (them) to consider that the conclusions drawn by critics of early entrance (were) virtually without foundation (p. 5)." The errors they found included methodological issues such as experimenter bias; sampling errors such as procedural concerns, insufficient sample sizes, insufficient descriptions, restriction limitations (none of the students studied were selected because they were academically accelerated) and
statistical conclusion validity errors. Jones and Southern's (1987) expression "building mountainous conclusions out of data molehills (p.18)" summed up their interpretation of the researchers' conclusions. Jones and Southern's dismay at the persistent and perpetuating logistical errors present in the research and the consequential negative effect it had on gifted children was merited and shared at the time by other experts in the field. They stated that "when faced with the apparent finding that an educational program does not meet the needs of some subgroup, the response is to determine a way to make the subgroup more like everyone else instead of addressing the educational characteristics of the group in question (p. 25)." They called for new policies to meet the needs of this subgroup.

In 1984, a study by Kulik and Kulik on ability grouping attempted to shed light on the practice (although the study did not focus on acceleration specifically, acceleration is one form

of ability grouping and their findings may be transferable). They quantitatively examined 28 studies and found the achievement benefits for gifted and talented students were significant (.49 standard deviations on average) and the effects on self-concept were trivial. Their efforts to debunk the myths of negative social-emotional effects of ability grouping pointed to the potential difference in results between studies focused on elementary students and secondary education students and the potential for distorted conclusions drawn from the previously qualitative based studies conducted on the subject.

Daniel and Cox (1988) examined various examples of flexible pacing of instruction in elementary schools, secondary schools and across school and district boundaries. Their monograph highlighted the structure and format of several systems which allowed the students to progress through school at their own pace and the effects of such structures. Most of the programs in their study included flexible pacing structures based on individual participant strengths and weaknesses and the results, although preliminary at the time, were overwhelmingly positive, both academically and socially. The authors referred to flexible pacing as “any provision that (placed) students at an appropriate instructional level, creating the best possible match between students’ achievement and instruction, and (allowed) them to move forward in the curriculum as they achieve mastery of content and skills. For able learners, flexible pacing (would) generally result in some form of acceleration . . . (p. 7)”. Methods such as continuous progress, compacted courses, advanced level courses, grade skipping, early entrance, concurrent or dual enrollment, and credit by examination were included in the study. The authors suggested that “allowing students to move ahead on the basis of mastery may (have been) the most important means of providing adequate opportunity to all students. (They) called for flexible

pacing to accommodate differences in learning styles and learning rates among school children (p. 7)."

Daniel and Cox (1987) stated, "The graded school was an important development in American education, an improvement in efficiency necessitated by the industrial revolution and a shift in the distribution of our population. In recent decades the electronic revolution and corresponding demographic changes have made other adjustments in our educational system not only possibly but necessary. It is our hope that flexible pacing, in its various forms, will help us make use of expanding educational technology and our best understanding of current social needs to serve all students well (p. 16)."

Debate about ability grouping and funding for gifted education began to heat up in the 1990s. The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC G/T) attempted to address the critics and enlist support in an attempt to set the record straight in 1991 by placing advertisements in magazines. Rogers (1991) analysis of 13 research syntheses concluded that, "the research showed strong, consistent support for the academic effects of most forms of ability grouping for enrichment and acceleration, but the research (was) scant and weak concerning the socialization and psychological adjustment effects of these practices (p. 4)." She stated:

> many reformers (had) argued for the elimination of most forms of grouping by ability . . . They (had) also suggested that grouping be replaced by mixed-ability classrooms . . . In many cases this restructuring (had) included the elimination of the accelerated classes and enrichment for the gifted and talented in the name of reform (p.5).

Rogers argued that the research she examined:

> did not appear to have been searched comprehensively, but the oversight (was) also understandable. With a literature base of over 700 studies on ability grouping (Kulik & Kulik, 1982), it (was) highly unlikely that any researcher has had the resources or time to make an effective analysis of these literature bases (p. 19).

Rogers attempted to use a more quantifiable approach to analyze the studies and she found significant positive academic benefits for ability grouping in general. Regarding grouping for acceleration she analyzed Kulik & Kulik, 1984 and Rogers, 1991. Her conclusions were that grouping in many forms for the acceleration of curriculum for gifted students produces substantial academic gains and the forms of acceleration gifted learners may encounter do not appear to have a direct impact on self-esteem, either positively or negatively. She acknowledged that a host of other environmental, personal and academic variables are involved in self-esteem. Furthermore, among Rogers' recommendations for gifted and talented students, she included a variety of appropriate acceleration-based options offered as a group or on an individual basis.

This analysis and plea for attention to gifted programming illustrates the path gifted education was plodding down in the 1990s. In 1994, Secretary of Education Richard Riley called the plight of gifted students "a quiet crisis" as funding cuts were becoming more widespread. In 1994, The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth and the Center for Talented Youth followed up on the first youth they studied in the 1970s. The long term findings for this small, isolated population, who were accelerated significantly through school, were exciting. Three of the five participants were interviewed and they found that "the rapid progress through school grades all the way to the Ph.D. degree (was) the nearly optimal way for persons like themselves to enrich their education and prepare for adulthood (Charlton & Marolf, 1994, p. 145)."

In 1994, the ERIC Resource Center summarized their evaluation of research in answer to the question, “Is educational acceleration harmful to the child academically?” The center noted, “The majority of studies have shown that children who have been educationally accelerated do not suffer academically. Their grades are higher than those of their peers who chose not to accelerate, and they compare favorably with those of older students in their classes. Accelerated students also report heightened interest in and enthusiasm for school (p. 3).” They went on to address affective dimensions which seems to worry parents and educators most. In general, children who are well-adjusted and socially at ease before accelerating report having two groups of friends – they belong to a circle of older students, but they also retain friendships with children who are the same age. Children who are socially withdrawn or who have difficulty making friends may experience similar problems when placed with older children. On the other hand, there are cases in which a gifted child is more comfortable with older children than with age-mates. This may be true more often for girls than boys. The receiving classroom teacher in an accelerated setting can help the younger student find a niche among the older students (ERIC Digest E526, 1994, p. 3).”

This educational debate waged on through the 1990s and by 1999 researchers were calling for teachers to get more assertive in support of the research findings. Money and educational philosophies were the stem of the resistance. Toth (1999) cited studies of programs across the country (Westberg et al., 1995) where, despite research supporting gifted education, “little instructional or curricular differentiation for bright students was made in regular education classrooms (p. 4).” She noted the miniscule or nonexistent financial impact of acceleration and the ease of implementation as a positive reason for immediate action.

Early entrance to school is one form of acceleration. It provides an opportunity for a gifted child who shows readiness to enter kindergarten or first grade one or two years earlier than the usual beginning age. The benefits of this option include academic challenge when the child is ready. Studies have shown an increase in enthusiasm towards school when a child is challenged (Lynch, 1994). In addition, Guenther (1998) found that early admission to kindergarten "allows children to be accelerated without the disruption of social life and curriculum that later grade skipping might cause (p. 1)." For the parent of a precocious child, this often has proven to be a frustrating and difficult proposition. Once in elementary school, gifted students are frequently identified and services are provided through pull-out enrichment programs. The time in these classes often constitutes approximately one-fifth of their school time and the remainder is spent in the regular classroom with their same-age peers. The highly gifted child often knows the material that is being taught prior to introduction in school, and when new material is presented, he/she absorbs it quickly. The remainder of the time is spent waiting for his/her classmates to master the material.

Studies have shown this period of latency leads to boredom, poor study skills, lack of initiative and drive, weakened thirst for knowledge, negative feelings towards school, and mischievous conduct. Rimm and Lovance (1992) state that competition and failure are necessary for social development and acceleration gives highly gifted youth an opportunity to experience failure, perseverance, and healthy competition.

> If we don't provide a challenging environment, we are, in a defacto way, teaching our children to underachieve. If for years "being smart" is easy and fast, we can't expect them to cope well with their first challenging experiences when curriculum becomes more complex, nor can we expect them to cope easily with being second

> or third or tenth in competition if their early years in school provided them only with 'being first' experiences (p. 10).

In addition, highly intelligent children often find it hard to relate to their same-age peers socially and they develop feelings of ostracism (Colangelo et al., p. 46). Grade skipping is one alternative that is often overlooked. There is evidence to support the use of acceleration in some cases of highly intelligent youth which indicates that students who are correctly identified for grade skipping in elementary school develop a thirst for knowledge (Lynch, 1994); go farther with their education (Swiatek, 1993); feel more socially accepted (Higham & Buescher, 1987; Gross, 1989); and have more positive feelings towards school and themselves (Roedell, 1985).

In 1991, Swiatek & Benbow revisited SMPY's study with a ten year longitudinal follow-up of ability–matched accelerated and unaccelerated gifted students. Among their findings, they addressed the affective domain, namely the topic of burnout. They pointed out the "risk of burnout is offset by an even higher risk of underachievement due to boredom if a gifted student is forced to remain in regular classes" (Compton, 1982; Paulus, 1984). Furthermore, in the case of the gifted, it has been noted that boredom in the classroom may lead to other adjustment difficulties, such as social withdrawal (Compton, 1982) or lack of self-discipline (Compton, 1982; Paulus, 1984).

Rimm and Lovance (1992) addressed affective concerns at this time, also. They were concerned with gifted underachievement and stated, "If adults don't make accommodations to challenge the gifted child, it gives the child a message that academic challenge is a lesser priority than social conformity and that hard work is not mentally healthy (p. 10)."

Similar to elementary school grade skipping, grade skipping in middle school is not a common practice in American schools. Single subject acceleration occurs more often at the middle school level but, again, not to the rate that research has suggested.

Once a highly gifted student reaches high school there seem to be more options for him/her. Advanced Placement classes are one option for acceleration. Advanced placement courses are offered as part of a program developed by the College Board where high schools offer courses that meet criteria established by institutions of higher education. In many instances, college credit may be earned with the successful completion of an AP exam in specific content areas. Studies have shown the benefits of this form of acceleration for highly gifted students since the program's infancy. In Florida, the Ford Foundation sponsored a series of annual studies in the 1970s of students who had successfully completed College-Level Examination Programs while in high school. The study followed up on the students after their freshmen year in college and examined their academic achievement, their opinion of the experience of acceleration, and their advice to other students faced with the option. The conclusions were all positive. They did well academically, evaluated the experiences positively, and suggested that other students be informed about and encouraged to take such examinations in the future.

Early entrance to college is another form of acceleration which is rarely utilized. Studies regarding the emotional impact of this practice substantiate beneficial claim when recommended appropriately, but the use of Advanced Placement courses and mentorships often predominate the interest in and promotion of this option. If a student can find challenging options within his/her schooling environment (and possibly earn college credit) early entrance to college often seems a mute point.

Acceleration addresses the academic needs of highly gifted youth. *A Nation at Risk*, the national examination of our education system (1983), stated that "All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost" (Archives, p.1) and acceleration seeks to reach the few students who need more challenge and rigor than the same-age classroom can provide and the academic gains can be substantial (Kulik & Kulik, 1984, 1985, 1990; Vaughan, 1990). Interviews with accelerated students in their 20s and 30s found they overwhelmingly expressed positive attitudes toward the practice and would recommend it to students in similar situations. Common themes of praise of acceleration were avoidance of boredom, the opportunity to start a career earlier, and association with intellectual peers. The only negative theme that emerged was the disadvantage the students had in competitive sports.

Meeting (or failing to meet) the needs of these students has immediate and long term socio-emotional implications as well. Although studies have found that accelerated students experience a feeling of reduced self-concept upon initial acceleration, this effect has been related to the gifted students' comparison to other gifted or advanced students and these studies have found that after a period of adjustment those feelings subside and self-confidence improves (Feldhusen et al, 1986; Festinger, 1954; Kulik & Kulik, 1984, 1990; Noble & Drummond, 1992; Rimm & Lovance, 1992). In contrast, long-term studies have shown evidence of high sociability (Buescher, 1987; Roedell, 1985) often developing two groups of friends (Lynch, 1994); greater achievement in higher education (Gamoran & Berends, 1987); and more self-confidence and satisfaction with school (Buescher, 1989; Richardson & Benbow, 1990; Vaughan, 1990). Studies have shown that the social and emotional outcomes of grade acceleration are predominately positive, ranging from minimal to moderate. Negative impacts are far outweighed by studies

touting positive long term social and emotional results although most studies emphasize looking holistically at individual children when making the decision to accelerate.

Considerations for Acceleration

The best candidates for acceleration are students whose physical size is larger than age-peers, who have excellent attendance records, have greater motor coordination, are among the oldest in the present grade, take leadership in extracurricular activities, are motivated by comprehensive completion of assignments, seek academic challenges, are emotionally well adjusted, are under-challenged in the current educational setting, have supportive faculty and family members, have positive responses to the possibility of acceleration, and maintain extraordinarily high achievement (1.5 – 2.0 years above) and ability scores (IQ 145 +). Silverman (1997) found that highly gifted students who fall into this category but are denied the right to be accelerated have more negative feelings towards school. In addition, these students become less involved with school and establish lower career and educational goals and aspirations (Silverman, 1998), and often feel socially ostracized because of advanced interest and precocious verbal behaviors (Feldhusen, 1992). In addition to coasting through school, many educators in the field of highly gifted youth relate concerns about boredom, lack of motivation, and subsequent poor preparation for life (Benbow, 1992). According to Freeman (1987), if unchallenged, a gifted child may escape into imagination or reading, behave disruptively, or simply conform to low expectations. In 2001, Lubinski et al followed up on a study of profoundly gifted youth conducted 10 years prior. Again, the findings showed considerable support for the academic benefits of acceleration this group encountered and positive, but more modest, benefits socially and emotionally for acceleration. In fact, “of those participants who did

not indicate satisfaction with their accelerative experiences, the majority indicated that they would have preferred to have been accelerated even more, not less (p. 722)." The participants indicated that their acceleration "made no detectable difference in their social life or in their ability to get along with their age peers (p. 722)." Similarly, follow-up findings Charlton and Marolf (2002) of 12 others who were participants in a radically accelerated education. They were "convinced, and . . . convincing, that rapid progress through school grades all the way to the Ph.D. degree (was) nearly optimal way for persons like themselves to enrich their education and prepare for adulthood (p. 149)." They expressed no regrets having to do with social aspects.

Montessori and Piaget's findings are still relevant in the 21st century. Feldhusen et al. supported these perceptions when they related studies that demonstrated that selecting a new learning task at just the right level of student readiness improves retention and generalization to other concepts and situations. When a new task is too difficult, students are frustrated; when it is too easy, they're bored and lose interest in learning. "Advancement of a year or two often brings the child closer to an appropriate level of challenge and pace and into contact with more intellectually stimulating peers (Feldhusen, et al, 2002, p. 1)."

2000s

In 2003, Ma followed up on the national, longitudinal research study of over 3000 mathematically precocious youth begun six years prior and found findings closer to those of other studies of early acceleration of gifted students. Students in the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth reported similar satisfaction with schooling and themselves to that of ability-matched students who were not accelerated (Swiatek & Benbow, 1991). The participants did not appear to burn out because of early acceleration; from a motivational and affective perspective, they (did) quite well (p. 458).

Public education made great strides at the turn of the 20th century in establishing policies and a framework by which millions of students have benefited over the last 100+ years. The progress the United States has seen in public education has had drawbacks, however and one is the loss of focus on the positive elements worth retaining from the past, including elements of the one-room schoolhouse. The industrialization of the public school system was vast and all-encompassing. The prospect of moving gifted students through the curriculum at their own pace has become a daunting task for educators.

Acceleration: Findings and Implications in the U.S. and Abroad

Although the most obvious goal for acceleration is usually motivating and challenging able students, Rawlins (2004) found that this motivation was but one reason the option of acceleration was considered in the studies he examined. The other more long-term goal was that of securing scholarships, or broadening a student's subject base.

Research has shown consistently and overwhelmingly positive long-term personal accounts of radically and moderately accelerated students. Upon reviewing and studying acceleration, Pyryt (1998), in a conference for the Centre for Gifted Education at the University of Calgary, touted the benefits of acceleration: appropriate curriculum challenge, opportunity for flexible curricular options, reduced educational costs, competitive advantages, and increased self-esteem. Paulus (1994) as cited in collected conference works of Annual Conference of the Society for the Advancement of Gifted Education (1998) suggested an "increased zest for learning and life, enhanced feelings of self-worth and accomplishment, and a reduction of egotism and arrogance (when one is in a group of intellectual peers one doesn't usually brag or show off)." Rimm and Lovance (1992) found students that skipped a grade (or more) viewed

themselves positively (as intelligent) and made conscious commitments to work harder to catch up to their classmates. Gross (2006) examined a 20 year longitudinal study of 60 young Australians with IQs of 160 and above. The study looked at the academic, social, and emotional development of the participants. The examination found that participants would have benefited greatly, both academically and socially, from grade advancement, while the considerable majority would have benefited from radical acceleration. Gross' findings were that 17 were radically accelerated and the majority (n = 33) were retained with age peers throughout their schooling." Gross found that,

> "despite being some years younger than their classmates, the majority topped their state in specific academic subjects, won prestigious academic prizes, or represented their country or state in Math, Physics, or Chemistry Olympiads. The majority entered college between ages 11 and 15. Several won scholarships to attend prestigious university in Australia or overseas. All . . . graduated with extremely high grades and, in most cases, university prizes for exemplary achievement. All 17 are characterized by a passionate love of learning and almost all have gone on to obtain their Ph.D.s (pp.12-13)."

When interviewed years after the acceleration, none of the accelerated youth in Gross' study had regrets and all supported the option enthusiastically. This is consistent with findings by Lubinski et al(2001) on profoundly gifted accelerates and Charlton and Marolf (1994) on rapid accelerates. In New Zealand similar follow-up research on accelerates showed they expressed the same sentiment regarding the positive attitudes towards their experiences with acceleration. It is interesting to note that New Zealand offers an option to drop back to the age appropriate grade if deemed necessary or preferred. Even students who chose this option related the acceleration

experience favorably and with the aid of hindsight, would not have chosen otherwise (Rawlins, 2004, p. 46). Lynch (1994) reported heightened interest and enthusiasm for school. Feldhusen (1992) expressed the importance of a challenging environment. “When there is abundant opportunity to read, to hear voices presenting new information, to see video tapes and films, to investigate, to observe, to examine, to ponder ideas, all of the good qualities of curiosity, enthusiasm, imagination, and motivation grow and become more intense. When the avenues for intellectual stimulation are limited, curiosity diminishes, enthusiasm wanes, imagination dies, and motivation is lost (p. 42).” Swiatek (1993) surveyed accelerates at age 18, 23, and 33. Similar to Lynch’s findings, Swiatek’s findings revealed that rather than burn out academically, gifted accelerates completed college, attended graduate school in numbers higher than the national average and over 90% of the students that were accelerated in mathematics planned to major in math or science in college.

Unsubstantiated Viewpoints

Critics (often educators and administrators) often shy away from the practice of acceleration due to concerns for detrimental social and emotional factors which seem likely when placing a young child with older students. This viewpoint has been perpetuated due to consistent misunderstanding and persistent conversation about the concerns. Hoogenveen, vanHell, and Verhoeven (2005) noted that this negative attitude toward acceleration is based on presumptions, attitudes, or once-only experiences rather than on systematic observations (e.g., Gross, 1989; Heinbokel, 2002; McCluskey, Massey, & Baker 1997; Southern & Jones, 1991). Gold (1965) wrote, “No paradox is more striking than the inconsistency between research

findings on acceleration and the failure of our society to reduce the time spent by superior students in formal education (as cited by Pyryt, 1998, p. 25)."

The Social Aspect

Often these highly precocious youth for whom grade skipping would be beneficial, don't relate well socially to their same age peers and the placement with intellectual peers provides an opportunity to be amongst others with similar interests and intellectual capacities. Studies have shown that grade skipping may provide a more suitable environment both academically and socially for youth with exceptional intellectual capacity (Gross, 1989; Richardson & Benbow, 1990; Roedell, 1985). Lubinski et al (2001) polled accelerates and found favorable opinions in regards to self acceptance, acceptance of their abilities, personal growth, and an increased ability to get along with their intellectual peers and with adults. Furthermore, Gross (2006) contends that students who show capabilities well beyond their years benefit from grade skipping most when it is provided at an early age (preschool through early elementary) before the social stigma of realizing they don't fit in with peers negatively affects their psyche. "The skills of friendship building are first learned in the early years of school, and children who are rejected by their peers may miss out on these early and important lessons informing relationships (p. 416)." Ma (2003), upon examination of longitudinal data on early accelerates in mathematics, found they did not appear to burn out because of early acceleration. In fact, they did quite well. Hollingsworth, as early as 1926, found the IQ range of 125-155 as socially optimal intelligence. Students scoring in this range were "socially self-confident young people who enjoyed the friendship of age peers, children with IQs of 160 and above experienced ongoing problems of social isolation. She believed that these difficulties arose from the cognitive and affective differences between the exceptional gifted child and his or her age peers (Hollingworth, 1931 as cited in Gross, 2006, p.

406). Similarly, Richardson and Benbow (1990) found that the social difficulties that are associated with acceleration may, in reality, relate more closely to sociability differences in highly gifted students. There may be extreme difficulties in finding peers with common interests. Terman (1947) also noted a difference - the preference of students who scored about an IQ of 180 for solitude and concurred with Hollingworth. In her book on gifted children Professor Hollingworth presents case studies of a dozen children whose IQ's equal or surpass 180. The data amassed in these studies would appear to fully justify her generalization that the majority of children testing above IQ 180. . .

> play little with other children unless special conditions such as those found in a special class for the gifted are provided. They have great difficulty in finding playmates in the ordinary course of events who are congenial both in size and in mental ability. Thus they are thrown back upon themselves to work out forms of solitary intellectual play." The children in our gifted group whose IQs are over 180 tend to fall into the social pattern described by Hollingworth (pp. 173-174).

Considering the difference between socialization and social adjustment, highly gifted youth may never fully experience the optimal socialization opportunities in any school setting simply because the likelihood of finding friends with similar abilities of similar age is remote. However, acceleration has shown to provide a higher degree of social adjustment for these youth because they often found others who had more similar interests. Gross' (2006) long term study found that, in every case, the radical accelerates had formed "warm, lasting, and deep friendships. They (attributed) this to the fact that their schools placed them, quite early, with older students to whom they tended to gravitate in any case (p. 416)." In contrast, Gross found those who were retained with age peers until fourth grade or later tend to find socializing

difficult. Sayler and Brookshire (as cited in Hoogeveen, vanHell & Verhoeven, 2005) conclude that accelerated students' emotional adjustment and feelings of acceptance by others is higher than average students. VanTassel-Baska (1986) reviewed literature on all types of acceleration and found the benefits to include motivation, confidence, and scholarship of gifted students. In addition, it provided the benefit of preventing habits of mental laziness. If unchallenged, gifted students may escape into imagination or reading (Freeman, 1987), behave disruptively (Diezmann & Watters, 2001), or simply conform to low expectations.

Acceleration is a viable option for many highly gifted youth and is recognized again and again in research throughout the United States and abroad. The United States leads the field in research on the subject and the misinformed sentiments and attitudes or misunderstanding of educators, administrators, and parents have huge repercussions. We're beginning to realize the research often contradicts the position of reluctance so prevalent in schools today and often efforts are begun to implement change but the news and the efforts are not being embraced.

The social and emotional well-being of students is a concern for parents and educators alike when discussing the ramifications of grade acceleration. Gross' (2006) longitudinal study of 60 profoundly gifted youth found that for all 60, participants experienced positive short-term and long-term academic and socioaffective outcomes. The pressure to underachieve for peer acceptance lessened significantly or disappeared after the first acceleration. Even the Ministry of Education of New Zealand recognized the social concerns related to not appropriately meeting the needs of gifted and talented youth. "Failure to recognize and meet the needs of gifted and talented can result in their boredom, frustration, mediocrity and even hostility" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 6 as cited in Rawlins, 2004).

> If we don't provide a challenging environment, we are, in a defacto way, teaching our children to underachieve. If for years "being smart" is easy and fast, we can't expect them to cope well with their first challenging experiences when curriculum becomes more complex, nor can we expect them to cope easily when being second or third or tenth in competition if their early years in school provided them only with "being first" experiences (Rimm and Lovance, 1992, p. 10).

Planning

Of course the success of any program hinges on proper planning and implementation. Gross (1993) indicated that factors influencing the success of acceleration programs includes program design and planning; enhancement of social self-esteem; provision of an intellectual peer group; and the reversal of underachievement. Attention to these key elements and a willingness to implement change with an open mind are the key to utilizing the strategies that research has proven so promising.

"As educators, our goal should be to expand, rather than constrict, the academic and social worlds of gifted students, including the most highly gifted. (Gross, 2006, p. 24)."

Summary of Findings of Socio-Emotional Effects of Early Grade Acceleration

Lupkowski & Assouline (1992) as stated in Assouline and Lupkowski-Shoplik (2005) listed five important points concerning acceleration:

1. Healthy social development means learning to get along with people of all ages and skills.
2. There are many opportunities outside of school to interact with age peers.
3. Having a large number of same-age friends isn't as critical to a child's healthy social development as having a few close friends with whom to share ideas.

4. An indicator of social readiness for acceleration is a preference for playing with more mature children.
5. Finally, long- and short-term planning is essential. Students, parents, and teachers need to remember that there may be a few years during adolescence when minor inconveniences become major ones (p. 183).

The current study examined the perceptions of students who were grade accelerated in early elementary school. The focus on students who attended public schools throughout their schooling and were identified as gifted is summarized to help enhance the literature on the social and emotional adjustment of early elementary school grade acceleration.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Participants

Eight individuals at local universities in the southeastern United States participated in the research. Individuals were working at various points of study in their undergraduate programs from the first semester of freshman year to the last month of senior year. Five females and three males participated in the study. All participants were grade accelerated during elementary school; attended public school during part or all of their elementary, middle-, and/or high-school years; and all but one were identified and served in the gifted program at their local schools. The one individual who was not identified as gifted by her school district Because of the point in these students' lives when the data were collected, IQ scores were not accessible and therefore not obtained. Participants volunteered their time and input with no compensation or reciprocation for services.

The participants took part in a series of three individual interviews. Archival documents such as grade reports and journals were sought and two participants provided personal journals from elementary and high school. Otherwise, no other archival information was provided by the participants. Interviews were conducted individually in locations such as study rooms on the respective university campuses. Two interviews were conducted in the participants' parents' homes. The atmosphere was casual yet focused with interviewer and interviewee positioned at a table directly across the each other. When administered at three separate sittings, most interviews took under an hour to complete, therefore totally approximately 2 – 3 hours of interview time. When the three interviews were combined into one sitting they took approximately one and a

half hour to complete. While the original data collection plan was to conduct separate interviews, to retain some participants in the study and not lose them because of excessive time commitment to the data collection, the researcher opted to collect all interview data at one setting for three of the participants. The answers obtained in this method seemed to be as contemplative and thoroughly explained as those of the participants who were interviewed at three separate sittings. All interviews were audio recorded. In addition, the researcher took notes regarding her initial thoughts and reactions following each interview. One interview had to be duplicated due to technical difficulties with recording equipment but the data received on the second interview seemed to convey the same emotions and reflections as the first, based on notes and reflections by the researcher.

Interview Process

Because of the reflective, self-analysis nature of this study, a qualitative method of research was employed to provide the necessary data to describe the responses, conditions, practices, and activities of this study. This method was used in an attempt to understand the meanings the participants have constructed over time. This phenomenological study investigated the various reactions to and perceptions of grade acceleration in early elementary school. It focused on commonalities of perceptions of the participants in order to understand the essence of the experience. The focus was placed on how the participants made sense of the experience of acceleration and how it impacted their social and emotional well-being, in general. Researching low incidence populations inherently requires special considerations and presents certain limitations. The investigation of the long term social and emotional effects of grade acceleration

in elementary schools presents specific concerns and problems in terms of the generalization of the data. The small size of the population made clear transferable conclusions difficult to obtain.

Selection of Participants

Participants for this study were chosen through purposive sampling from a small population as identified by the criteria listed above (accelerated in elementary school, attended public school for some of all of school years, working on undergraduate degree). Purposive sampling is appropriate to use when researchers are seeking a sample the researcher believes will provide the data he/she needs. Due to the small population and the limited response received, this actually turned out to be a convenience sample. The participants were recruited via flyers posted in dormitories and classroom buildings as well as through emails to professionals in the field of education requesting referrals. The qualifying criteria included attendance of a public school during some or all of elementary, middle, or high school; grade acceleration during elementary school; student in undergraduate college program.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was interviewing. Individual interviews with participants were employed. The types of questions were semi-structured and unstructured. They followed more of a conversational format in order to allow for free expression and reflection. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Discussion of Semi-structured Individual Interviews

The semistructured interviews were scheduled in advance with each of the eight participants and were approximately one week apart. The interview questions focused on the

participants' recollections of personal experiences with acceleration and the impact of those experiences on the participants' social and emotional well-being. The relationship between acceleration and its impact on those experiences was addressed. The interviews contained a mixture of structured and open ended questions. The interviews were guided by a list of questions, the exact wording and order of the questions was not determined ahead of time in order to allow the conversation to flow. In addition, questions and probes were used to gain deeper insight into the participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions.

Data Coding and Analysis

All interviews conducted were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. After the transcriptions were completed, relevant statements from each subject's description of the experience were clustered into themes. Open coding was used to organize and manage the data by similar themes, experiences, and interpretations in order to identify overriding themes across all data. Main characteristics and associations were examined to look for commonalities. A narrative description of the phenomenon was then composed outlining the findings based on the themes. Particular attention was paid to statements relating to the social experiences and categorized in regard to effects on family dynamics, impact on extracurricular activities, effects of and on academic rigor, adjustment issues, and peer relations. Axial coding was then applied within these categories to address similarities and differences in responses of participants. Key phrases and terms were identified within each category and the conditions, interactions and consequences of experiences were examined.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Usefulness

The nature of qualitative research is such that facts and values are inextricably intertwined. The need for confidentiality during and after the investigation was imperative.

Credibility

The perspective and interpretations of the researcher are central in ensuring that the theoretical framework generated is understood and is based on the data obtained from the study. Therefore, possible threats to the trustworthiness of the results were addressed. This study addressed possible threats including participant characteristics, data collector bias, and location. The selection of participants was carefully considered to glean important data from multiple viewpoints. Although it was difficult, the researcher managed to identify eight participants from a variety of home and school environments. Data collector bias was carefully examined and the researcher utilized a personal journal to express her own personal assumptions and viewpoints after each interview to monitor subjective interpretations and attitudes which could have clouded the analysis. The researcher involved in the study had taught for 23 years in elementary schools had participated in a number of conferences in elementary schools in which she worked to determine whether acceleration of a student was a viable option. She was aware of the perpetuating discussion of social and emotional implications of grade acceleration and the common negative viewpoints. In addition, during the course of the months on research, the researcher taught first grade at a suburban school and was assigned a child who was grade accelerated. She consciously set aside preconceived viewpoints and attempted to remain neutral and objective both in her dealings with the participants of the study and with her first grade student. She refrained from making position statements or any reactions to comments which might disclose a bias in any direction in regard to grade acceleration. In addition, location

threats were minimized through the use of similar locations for interviews with all participants. Unclear descriptions or terms which required clarification from interviewee were revisited and thorough audio recording and transcription aided in the concentrated examination of data. Multiple interviews were conducted and sources of data and remarks were recorded.

Trustworthiness

Because of the qualitative nature of the study the integrity of the researcher and her interpretations are key to maintaining trustworthy results. The researcher sought to create honest, appropriate, and credible interpretations of the findings and back them up with data. The goal was an irrefutable interpretation of the phenomenon based on the data. Dependable and consistent conclusions that others understand was the aim. Outsiders may not concur with the results, but the researcher's conclusions should be deemed feasible and reliable.

Usefulness

With such a small sample size generalization of the data is not possible. Some commonalities to future acceleration candidates may be identified and assumptions may be made, but the overall goal of the researcher was to investigate the phenomena of elementary school grade acceleration and the social and emotional impact of this intervention. This study adds to the pool of data on the topic in an attempt to give a clearer, more accurate picture to the dialogue related to acceleration and open up more positive and informed discussion. The aim of the researcher is to increase the likelihood that ample consideration to this intervention is given.

Description of the Case Study

The case study centered on eight young individuals attending college in the southeastern United States. The participants were located through flyers posted in dormitories and classroom

buildings and through emails to professional in the field of education. Qualified participants skipped a grade in elementary school, were in college working on an undergraduate degree, and attended public school during elementary, middle, and/or high school. An informational email was sent to inform participants of the details of the study (see Appendix A). Once participants were chosen and releases were signed (see Appendix B), appointments were set up. All interviews were audiotaped. The interview (see Appendix C) was semi-structured in nature and focused on early childhood (family setting, family members, home environment, friendships, relationships with parents/peers, educational focus, introduction to formal school settings, etc.). The questioning was formatted in a casual, non-threatening format to enable the researcher and the participant to establish a level of trust. A follow-up interview was scheduled with each individual participant and journaling was encouraged to reflect on personal memories and impressions of the early elementary school years when grade acceleration was being considered and when it was implemented.

The second interviews (see Appendix D) were conducted in the same setting as the first. At each individual interview, the participant was encouraged to share his/her journal entries and expound on thoughts and feelings related to the early elementary school age years. Artifacts were shared and discussed. Most participants did not journal or provide artifacts. The researcher asked questions related to acceleration in regards to the participant's feelings, his/her parents' actions and reactions, his/her teachers' participation, his/her peers' reactions, etc. Again, a semi-structured format was adhered to in order to have a series of guiding questions yet allow for more in depth probing of experiences and personal reflections. Each participant was encouraged to use any type of creative expression such as photography, sculpture, drawing, poetry, etc. to

reflect his/her feelings, impressions, reaction to, etc. the experience of grade acceleration. The next follow-up interview was scheduled and, again, journaling was encouraged.

The third interviews (see Appendix E) focused on each participant's experiences during the adolescent, teen, and college years. None of the participants chose to provide pictures for discussion. Journal entries and recent artifacts participants provided were collected and discussed. The questions focused on relationships; with peers, teachers, parents, dating, participation in extra-curricular programs, academic readiness, etc. Each participant was asked about college in regards to the same topics. Open dialogue was encouraged.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Careful analysis and coding was used to establish underlying themes or commonalities between the participants so that conclusions and additional insight into the social and emotional impact of early grade acceleration could be drawn.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Overview

Case presentations from each of the eight participants follows. The focus of the study was the long term social and emotional results of elementary school grade acceleration. Special attention has been given to each participant's recollections of and feelings towards the dynamics of his/her family and home; peer relations in elementary, middle, high school, and beyond; adjustment issues in regards to skipping a grade; the impact of academic rigor (or lack thereof); and the implications of grade acceleration on extracurricular activities. Following the summaries of the eight individual cases is a synthesis of the participants' findings focusing on commonalities and differences.

Participant # 1: MEGAN

Dynamics of family and home

Megan grew up in a suburban community outside Atlanta with her brother and her two parents. Her parents worked outside the home. Her mother was a school psychologist and did most of the parenting while her father worked in finance. Megan has a brother who is three and a half years older than she and when she was young they "were not really close but (there was) nothing bad between (them)." She just felt they "didn't have that much in common." Megan described her brother as more laid back than her but "really smart." Megan described her parents as authoritative and she remembered privileges and restriction as effective parenting techniques

utilized while she was growing up although she didn't remember getting into too much trouble. Megan remembered her neighbors as always being involved in her life and described her community as a good, middle class community.

Peer relations

Megan had a close friend who lived across the street from her as she was young. The friend was a year younger and they were not together in school, just in the neighborhood. She recalled playing in their backyards and playing dress up. When reflecting on childhood friendships, Megan recalled having "different friends every year depending on who happened to be in (her) class." She recalled these friends all had the same interests at the time in which they socialized. When Megan skipped a grade (from kindergarten to second grade) she did not remember a significant impact on her relationships with friends or her social life. She had no strong memory of the changes and, when asked, shrugged her shoulders and stated, "I guess I made new friends. I didn't really talk to them again, I guess." As Megan discussed friendships throughout elementary, middle, and high school she had a casual, matter-of-fact way of describing a variety of friends. There were no long lasting deep friendships that seemed to be mentioned throughout all years of her schooling although she said she was still friends with some of the students from the class she was moved to after acceleration. Although Megan did not latch onto a constant companion during her childhood there never seemed to be loneliness or adjustment issues in regards to peer relations. She often mentioned circles of three or four "really good friends" but the circles didn't seem to stay in place over the years for a variety of reasons (moving, different interests, etc.) and the friends changed. In high school, dating took a spot in her social calendar as well. Grade acceleration did not seem to have a significant impact on her social life and her relationships with peers. Acceleration may have affected the specific friends

she had for a period of time but she had no negative recollection of the events surrounding peer relationships at any point during Megan's precollegiate school years.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Megan attended a Montessori school for her preschool years until kindergarten. She stated that she learned to read there when she was three and she remembered that she liked the school. She remembered being excited to go and recalled the centers and recess. Megan attended a public school for kindergarten and then attended another school for her first grade year. It was then that the subject of skipping a grade was brought up. She recalled that it was about nine weeks into the school year and Megan's belief was that the teacher broached the subject of acceleration. Megan recalled her mother talking with her about it. Megan had already been attending a second grade class for math and felt her maturity level was more in line with the older students. Megan recalled her reaction at the time was that of apprehension because she was concerned about not being able to see her brother at lunchtime. She remembered arrangements being made so that she could still see her brother during the school day after the grade acceleration. Megan described the initial period of acceleration nonchalantly. "I guess I was nervous but I don't remember really being concerned about it." She remarked that she liked the teacher, enjoyed the classroom, and she had good friends in the class. She remembered the teacher asking her if things were going okay but, "other than that (Megan didn't) think she treated (her) differently." Megan did not recall strong reactions from friends in either the class she left or the one she joined. Brief acknowledgement and questioning occurred but the subject passed quickly. As far as efforts from her parents to help with her adjustment, Megan could not clearly recall anything but felt it seemed her mother would have had some type of reward system in place to help her try to make an effort to fit in and make the change work.

Impact of academic rigor

According to Megan's recollection she learned to read at an early age and was more mature than many of her same age peers. She recalled that she enjoyed school and never remembered having any trouble with the work until high school when honors classes and advanced placement classes added to the challenge. When Megan felt challenged in school she never attributed it to skipping a grade. She felt that certain classes were challenging for many students and she felt that her acceleration placed her in the grade which was appropriate for her.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Megan participated in a variety of activities from sports to Girl Scouts to competitive academic clubs such as Odyssey of the Mind. She never perceived a difference in her ability level or her acceptance based on her younger age. She made friends and enjoyed a wide range of activities.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Megan

Megan felt like there were never any problems in school that were unusual or associated with her grade acceleration. She felt she had minor issues but she'd just talk about them and work them out. When pressed to discuss difficult periods with grade acceleration Megan stated, "I don't remember having any trouble with it really." In Megan's words, "I enjoyed learning…I guess if you're good at something then you like doing it so…I enjoyed being in school, I liked going to school."

Participant # 2: BRIAN

Dynamics of family and home

Brian grew up outside of Atlanta, Georgia in a community with a wide socioeconomic range. As Brian explained, it was split up "in a series of mansions on one street and then a mile down the road there will be trailer parks." He lived with his parents who, at the time of the interviews, were both teachers. Previously, Brian's dad owned a company that cleaned corporate jets. He decided to change professions after 25 years because of an injured back. Brian had two siblings, a younger sister and a younger brother. He described his relationships with his sister as swinging back and forth between being close and fighting. Regarding his brother, Brian stated, "My brother is seven years younger than I am and so I never went to school with him, kind of got thrown into the sort of babysitting category a little early but I think he sort of looks up to me." He described both of his siblings as bright and said his brother was served in the gifted classes and his sister "apparently just missed the gifted classification." When discussing his parents, Brian reflected on an absent father during his early year, working "upwards of sixty hours a week so when he was home he was usually pretty exhausted and so it was sort of…I could tell I wasn't fully getting everything that I could be getting from him but you have to make do with what you've got." He stated it was a little difficult to weather. Brian described his mother's parenting style as "a little light-handed but authoritative." Brian was an avid reader and researcher and his mother provided all the reference materials he desired.

One side note of significance in regarding to Brian's overall adjustment and social and emotional well being was the fact that, around the age that Brian was recommended for grade acceleration the second time (in 3rd grade) he was diagnosed with anxiety and depression and medication was prescribed. He described that period of his life as frustrating and difficult prior to

the diagnosis and was at a loss to recall any fond memories. He stated that once medication was prescribed and the placement in the gifted program was finalized, he "was picked up emotionally and in terms of academic motivation."

Peer relations

When Brian was young most of his friends were older than him. Due to redistricting he had to establish new friends. In addition, he noticed a pattern from elementary to middle to high school of having friends that were "less academically motivated" which seemed to lead to a disassociation. Eventually almost all of Brian's friends were students in his gifted classes. Brian's disconnect with students less academically minded continued through high school as he stated one of the most challenging aspects of high school was "putting up with other students." When Brian skipped a grade the friendship factor was a "bit awkward" but he attributed it to being the "new kid" and, after the initial period of adjustment, the awkward phase subsided. The topic of grade acceleration was occasionally brought up through the years and was greeted with surprise, but wasn't too much of an issue throughout school.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Brian had a difficult period in early elementary close to the time of his grade acceleration. He skipped kindergarten and was recommended for grade acceleration again in second grade but his parents "opted against it" because they thought it would be "socially awkward." Brian was accelerated during the school year (in November), after friendships had been established. He stated that, "It was a little awkward, I think mostly because (he) was put in November and so it was a third of the year had gone by and so a lot of the people had already like made little social playmates but after a few days it was pretty much back to normal." Brian has always been on the

larger end of the growth scale for height and weight so skipping a grade was not noticed as much size-wise.

Impact of academic rigor

Brian stated that he began to read at age 18 months and his earliest memories of learning revolved around a voracious appetite for reading. He sought out new subjects and information on his own. Brian stated that he was less concerned about what his parents thought about his grades and was “really mostly interested in knowing the material.” A psychologist recommended Brian skip a grade for a second time by the time he was in third grade but his parents declined. The school work, even after acceleration, was not challenging for Brian. He described it as “dry and childish.” At times Brian’s grades dropped due to his lack of interest and his refusal to do homework assignments because they were “dull.” Brian described elementary school and middle school as a period where he was just “kind of pushing on waiting for high school.” He never felt challenged until he began high school and, even then, only found challenge in the Advanced Placement courses in which he readily enrolled. Brian’s personal web journal showed a tormented soul with suicidal thoughts who vacillated between absorption in academia and stress from the work load. Even with the rigorous workload in which Brian opted to enroll, he described high school as boring; a time of impatience; just waiting for college.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Brian was extremely active in academic endeavors. He participated in academic clubs and competitions and practiced art and sculpture at home. In addition, he began a “Free Thinkers Club” and started a website to showcase his poetry and journal entries.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Brian

When asked about his experience with grade acceleration and his recommendations on this subject to others, Brian stated, "To me, it occurred early enough that it just sort of became something in the background that wasn't really an attention point so I'd say probably by the time I was in fourth grade I didn't think about it. I think that the age differential caused by skipping grades and the impact of that decreases over time because you know the proportional differences are so small . . . I think that if you have a child who is becoming frustrated academically due to a lack of challenge and is generally significantly above average across the board then go ahead and push him through. It's one of those things of it will take a little adjusting to initially but in the end, you'll end up with less frustration at a younger age. . . . I think that if you have a child is profoundly socially immature then advancing him a grade would probably do at least some damage in the short term but I think that the average student could probably pick up with it, especially if it's done either between school or at least between years. I think it'd probably be a little hard to stop like mid-year through the year. . . . I think that the big issue with early elementary school, assuming that there's not a maturity issue, is age bracketed extracurricular activities, like in a lot of athletics are 5-7, 8-9, and so on. And you end up with kids that are in distinct social groups in terms of academics and athletics and that sort of thing. . . . I think it was a pretty positive experience."

Participant # 3: SURI

Dynamics of family and home

Suri grew up in an Indian community in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia with four or five families nearby with whom her family was particularly close. Her parents both grew up in India

and, as she described, are “really hard working and they always encourage (her) so (she didn’t) think (she) would’ve done a lot of things if (her) parents hadn’t pushed (her) to.” Suri has a younger brother with whom she didn’t get along as a child but has become better friends with as an adult. Suri’s brother was recommended for grade acceleration, too but he declined because of friendships he had established. Suri talked briefly about how he later questioned that decision. Suri’s mother is a pediatrician and her father is a “computer something.” Suri recollected staying at daycare until around six o’clock every day because her parents worked long hours. Suri’s parents were very strict and placed an emphasis on learning. She was discouraged from spending free time on frivolous activities such as attending football games and the like when she could be studying. Dating in high school was frowned upon as being too “forward.” Suri’s grandmother was in and out of her childhood as she alternated her time in the United States and India. Suri’s recollection was that her grandmother was mostly around during her childhood.

Peer relations

Suri’s friends in elementary school were “pretty much the same” friends as she has in college. A couple of them are from her Indian community and a couple “Americans.” Generally Suri’s friends have always been a bit older but that was mainly because they were in classes together. Suri described herself as always being mature for her age but she felt “like a baby” and lacked confidence. Suri’s friends have always played an important part in her life and she recalled turning to them, as opposed to her parents, when she had problems. She stated, “I never really had any social issues, like even if I didn’t have too many friends it wasn’t a big problem for me.” Suri was introverted and well accepted. Her social acceptance was evident in the fact that she was elected to the homecoming court in high school.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Suri actually skipped two grades in school. She skipped kindergarten and went to first grade and then skipped second grade and went to third. It was not as noticeable a change as one would expect because she switched schools a couple of times during this time period. Suri described her reaction to the grade acceleration as one of excitement. She remembered no anxiety and no trauma. Suri stated, “It wasn’t hard for me. The material was just stuff I had to learn. I made friends with kids.” When asked about ways in which Suri’s parents helped with the adjustment she could not recall them doing anything to help her. Suri’s casual attitude and ease of adjustment towards the grade acceleration was reflected in her statement, “I don’t think I ever thought about it because my friends didn’t really treat me any differently.” When the discussion moved through the grades and the interview focused on high school Suri mentioned it being a little “scary socially.” When pressed to touch on this topic more she explained, “It was definitely my personality. Even if I wasn’t two grades younger I would have felt the same way. I’m introverted and it was a whole new group of people.”

Impact of academic rigor

Suri stated, “I don’t remember it being challenging. . . . I was just as challenged as my peers. I don’t think I really struggled much and if we all took a really hard test, I would probably score on the higher range.” This changed a bit as she entered high school. She enrolled in eight Advanced Placement classes during her high school career and stated, “I was challenged. I always got stressed out about a grade in high school so even though I was doing better than most of the students, I would still get stressed out about the class.” In college she has continued to stay focused on academics and has relished the abundant opportunities for extra learning. The most rewarding part of college for Suri has been . . . “Definitely the lectures. There are so many things

going on everyday that I check the master calendar and there are so many lectures, people coming to talk and I always take advantage of that."

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Suri was involved in soccer and piano as a child and loved to watch cartoons, but when she began high school she developed an interest for any and all academic clubs and competitions. Many of her friendships centered around the friends she had in these clubs. Sports did not come as easily to Suri and she found that she didn't quite have the potential to make the tennis and soccer teams at her high school, although she tried more than once. Extracurricular activities held such an important spot in Suri's high school experience that, when asked about the most rewarding part of high school she stated, "I think being able to go to all those competitions, like science fairs and extra learning outside of the classroom. Those were some really good opportunities in school."

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Suri

When asked when she would recommend grade acceleration to someone else and what time she felt would be ideal, she stated, "If they are bored in all of their classes; if they're not learning anything; if they already know stuff. . . . (Grade acceleration should) not (occur) too late because by then you've already formed like really good friendships and there is more advanced material that you shouldn't miss." When addressing how large a factor social maturity should play, Suri stated, "It definitely helps if the child is social to begin with because then they will be more social and they'll have an easier time adjusting. But I think we just all develop naturally and I don't think that if you're younger you're stunted in your social development." "I was glad that I was accelerated . . . it's not that big of a deal." It seemed that Suri could be

described using the same adjectives she chose to describe her high school experience – ambitious and fun!

Participant # 4: KIM

Dynamics of family and home

Kim was born in Brooklyn, New York and moved to Trinidad in the Caribbean before she turned one. She remained there, living with her maternal grandmother until she was four or five when she moved to the United States to live with her mother and her grandmother. Her father has not been a part of her life. Kim has an older, more out going brother. He is two and a half years older than her and she was very close to him as a child.

Peer relations

It was obvious through the course of the interviews that strong friendships and close interpersonal relationships were very important to Kim. She spoke with enthusiasm and warmth about her elementary school years and the close friendships she established (some of whom she remains friends with today). Her grade acceleration seemed to have little impact on her relationships with her peers except with regard to whom she connected. She stated that she didn't feel like she could have related to the students who she should have been in school with had she not skipped a grade and was glad she was accelerated because then she fit in.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Kim felt the teachers had a large part in helping with her adjustment and her success in elementary school. Although at times they treated her no differently than the other students, she knew they were always looking out for her. Kim's friends thought it was "cool" that she had skipped a grade and, although she remembers being teased for being younger, she was never

embarrassed and a note of pride rang out as she talked about how her brother “bragged about it” to his friends.

Impact of academic rigor

In Trinidad, formal schooling began very early. Kim stated that she was writing paragraphs by age four. Kim skipped kindergarten after strong urging and negotiating by her mother in front of the school board. Kim spoke fondly of elementary school and the caring teachers and the academic standards they upheld. She felt she could handle all that came her way but nothing less than A’s were accepted because of the dedication of her teachers and her mother. Middle school was more difficult for Kim because she was no longer the top of the class academically all the time. Her mother was told, “. . . here you need to realize that she’s not the smartest kid and she might never be the smartest kid again.” Kim found that “really tough because (she’d) never fallen that low on anything, it was really hard.” As she entered high school Kim experienced a period of flux – her beloved grandmother died and she began to have more difficulty with challenging classes. Choosing honors classes instead of Advanced Placement classes made the difference and the most challenging aspect of high school – the academic rigor was accompanied with the most rewarding part of high school – building relationships with teachers.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Kim was involved in many extracurricular activities throughout her school years. She enjoyed academic clubs, orchestra, and, although did not have a passion for it, sporting activities including being a football trainer and participating on the wrestling team. She felt accepted in all activities but Kim was introverted and always preferred to read quietly by herself, even at parties.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Kim

Kim's experience had some emotional times and some periods when she questioned her placement and the impact it had on her. Years later however, as she reflected on the experience Kim stated, "I just know that I would not have enjoyed life had I not been skipped. I wouldn't have had really any friends because like I just didn't click with any other people that I knew that were a grade below me. Like I could say hi to them and carry on a conversation but they weren't people that I could see myself being friends with forever like the people I know now. So, I say if your child can and if you think that they can handle it mentally and emotionally, that you should do it because it might be in the best interest for the child. . . . I'm really glad it happened to me. I know that I would have been the same person if I hadn't."

Participant # 5: Kellie

Dynamics of family and home

Kellie grew up in a rural community in southern Georgia with approximately twenty thousand residents. She was the youngest of six children with a large difference in age between her and all of her other siblings. Her next oldest sibling was fourteen years older than her. When asked about her family, Kellie stated, ". . . by the time I was four or when I started school or old enough to remember, (my siblings) were out. So, it was like I was an only child with six other parents." In addition, Kellie has eleven nieces and nephews who she sees regularly. Kellie's father is a third generation farmer and her mother worked at DFACS. Her dad seemed to always be nearby working on the farm. Kellie described her mother as strict but understanding. Both of her parents made sure that Kellie saw the value of a good education. Her mother stressed the importance of getting a degree and shared her regrets in not finishing her bachelor's degree and

her father encouraged her to continue to keep learning, even after she gets her degree. Kellie has a heart condition and endured multiple heart surgeries as a child. She stated that her parents approach to her surgeries or any difficult times was matter-of-fact. In Kellie's words, "It wasn't ever like, 'Oh, let's talk about it' and be emotional; it was like, 'Okay, we've got to do this, let's get it done' and then move back into normal life. That's pretty much how everything was handled. Everything was pretty logical. They'd be like, 'Okay, we've got to do this, let's do it and get it done.'"

Peer relations

Kellie's small community meant that most everyone knew everyone so Kellie's grade acceleration was known to everyone. Kellie recalled clearly the conversation with the teacher when the subject was broached and she recalled her peers' inquisitive reaction. She remembered when the teacher called her over to discuss the prospect and hand her a letter for her parents, Kellie was nervous because she thought she was in trouble for something. Kellie had been moving up to the older classes for much of the academics since she was in first grade; the same year she was identified as gifted so the idea of moving up a grade did not scare her. She recalled, "When I first found out about it they were a little bit angry because they'd be like, 'Why am I not good enough to skip? Why are you good enough?' But they'd get mad at me and I was like, 'I don't know. It's not my fault,' so other than that, and they just tease me like when I was called 'the smart one' and everyone would always ask me to help them with their homework." Throughout the years Kellie recalls being playfully teased about being younger than her peers and hearing many comments about her being cute. Because she was a heart patient she was smaller than her peers and the grade acceleration accentuated the differences. Kellie never minded the teasing and found it comical to hear her friends chide her and prompt her to approach

authority figures for privileges they were to afraid to ask for. “Nothing really made me feel different. I mean, I did feel younger but…I didn’t really care.” She felt well accepted and did not recall any “traumatic social experience or anything.” Kellie stated that she felt a bit naïve in middle and high school in terms of sexuality and puberty but she chuckled as she stated that she still is naïve about issues of sexuality. She stated that she never has been one to get involved in the “drama” of relationships. She felt she had friends but she stayed out of the complicated issues.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Kellie’s siblings were encouraging when they heard about her grade acceleration. Kellie stated, “They were like, ‘That’s a good thing’ and my brothers, being brothers would pick on me, ‘You have to be smarter than anybody else, didn’t you?’ and I was like, ‘Well, you know . . . when you got it, you got it!’ But my sisters were always very encouraging…they weren’t upset about it.” Kellie was quick to say that she has always loved school. She recalled not being nervous about skipping a grade because she had attended the higher classes for years but her grade acceleration meant leaving the elementary school early and attending the middle school. When the first day rolled around Kellie related a different feeling. She described her thoughts as,” ‘Whoa, this is big!’ It wasn’t really that much bigger because it was only three grade and there were six grades in my elementary school. But it just felt bigger and everyone looked bigger and I remember the first day walking around like very tense and just like, ‘Oh my gosh. What have I done?’ I always call it like an out of body experience…it wasn’t really but it was just like very, ‘Oh, no, what did I do?’ but after that it was fine. . . After like that first day I got acclimated very well. I’m usually pretty good about meeting people and talking to anybody about anything and so it was fine.”

Impact of academic rigor

She recalls spending many hours listening to books on tape and she believes that's how she learned to read early. Kellie remembers spending much of her free time outside with the animals or reading.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Kellie liked to keep busy. She was not much of a television watcher as a child and throughout her school years she enrolled in academic clubs, color guard, and an agricultural club. She had an active social life and spent much of her time helping her father on the farm or playing with her farm animals.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Kellie

Kellie's words regarding her personal experience: "I've really enjoyed my experience. I'm really glad I've had the experience I've had. It's a great thing that I will graduate with a Masters at twenty-two. And it's like I've always had a head start on everything as far as your life because you're done earlier with everything. You have friends across two grades, the people you were with and the people that you're with now. I really enjoyed it. I'm really a fan of my experience." When asked about her recommendations for others on the subject of grade acceleration, Kellie was an advocate. She stated, ". . . I have seen kids that are ready to skip, they're really bored. And that's obviously a behavior problem but it comes from a result of an academic problem. So, that would be mediated if they were to skip and be able to do work that challenged them."

Participant # 6: Andrew

Dynamics of family and home

Andrew grew up in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia with his older brother and his mother and father. His mother, a teacher, home schooled him and his brother until he was put into a Christian school at age six. When he entered school he was tested and accelerated to the second grade. Andrew's relationship with his brother was amicable but they had different interests and the three year age gap made it difficult. Andrew had fond memories of playing baseball, football, soccer, and other sports in the neighborhood with his friends.

Peer relations

Andrew was in the middle of the age range of his neighborhood playmates but when Andrew made friends from outside the neighborhood they tended to be bit older than he. After he began Christian school Andrew remembered noticing that he was a year younger than his classmates but he felt his maturity level was in line with his classmates. Andrew described the adjustment this way: "When I skipped a grade, it kind of matured me into the level of those peers in my class that were a year older than me. And so I kind of left behind those that were my age in the grade younger and I acted more like those that I was around more." He recalled immediately enjoying the new experience and feeling well accepted by his peers. The subject of his young age or his grade acceleration arose from time to time but was quickly dismissed. Andrew felt his peers did not have a problem with his grade acceleration. "They all (considered) me pretty lucky that I'm ahead of the game and they think it would have been a good experience, something that they might have enjoyed as well. So, they (considered) it, I guess, a privilege to go ahead and skipped a grade."

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Andrew's adjustment issues related to school were minor and seemed to center more on his acclimation to Christian school or public school as opposed to home schooling. He reflected on difficulties related to writing in cursive and he remembered noticing the age difference but he never felt there were problems related to his acceleration.

Impact of academic rigor

Andrew did not have difficulty throughout elementary, middle, and high school keeping up the academic rigor. He strived to achieve A's and B's and was able to do so without much difficulty. In high school Andrew took college prep classes (not Advanced Placement or honors) and he felt well prepared for college.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

A great deal of Andrew's free time was spent playing sports through both school teams and recreational leagues. He was on teams based on both his age and his grade and he enjoyed them both. He appreciated the challenge of playing with older kids on the school team and felt he was able to excel more with kids his own age.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Andrew

"I think it has made me more of a confident person in who I am and what I'm here (in college) for and being different than everyone else, you always…you tend to feel like you're at a disadvantage but then again, realizing that you're in the situation, that makes you stronger willed in what you're here to do and accomplishing what you're setting out to accomplish and things like that. So, it's been good in those areas." When asked about his recommendations for others considering grade acceleration, Andrew stated, "I think that skipping a grade can be good as long as you're sure that your child is ready for it and that they're going to be handle the pressures and

that you communicate with the teachers that you're going to send them into the classroom and see if they are also in favor of it and if they're going to be able to help them out in any area that they need. So, there has to be good support behind the child that is going to be skipping a grade, but if there is that kind of support, then I think it's a good thing."

Participant # 7: Pierce

Dynamics of family and home

Pierce grew up in a rapidly growing suburb northeast of Atlanta, Georgia. Although he mentioned that he was raised by both parents he never mentioned his father's impact or made any references to his father throughout the interview. He moved to the Atlanta suburb right before kindergarten and was already showing signs of a bright intellect by this time. He has a sister about four years younger than him and he referred to their relationship as "pretty good." Pierce spoke with warm regard of his mother and her supportive, encouraging nature. He mentioned how she would do all she could to work with him if he had concerns or was having difficulty with any academic task.

Peer relations

Pierce's friends mainly came from his affiliations in gifted classes. He was placed in the gifted program in kindergarten in a school that typically did not serve kindergartners so early on he was intermingled with kids who were a year older than him. In this way he established friendships with kids in the grade above his and this later made the transition to the accelerated grade easier for Pierce. In elementary school Pierce was not able to socialize with his friends outside of school much due to the wide layout of the school boundary lines but he seemed to feel comfortable with the friendships he made in school. At times the issue of him being younger

than his classmates came up but it wasn't an overshadowing presence. He mentioned that a few of his classmates never seemed to fully accept him due to his young age and he found that bewildering as a child.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Besides the few classmates who seemed to keep Pierce feeling as an outsider in his accelerated class, Pierce felt well accepted. He stated he did not remember feeling any resentment from his peers. Pierce skipped third grade and he remembered being a bit nervous before he moved on but he was excited at the prospect of being challenged. He stated, "I was also relieved and really was hoping that it would help me be able to do better in school, be more challenged academically and get where I felt like I needed to be." He felt the teacher treated him like anyone else in the class. He recalled that he rarely thought about his grade acceleration and never brought it up with his peers. If it came up in conversation he acknowledged it and usually there was little fuss made. Pierce felt that grade acceleration placed him in the grade in which he should've been. He said, "I think in my mind I thought it more as before I skipped a grade I was really a grade *behind* where I should have been and so skipping a grade put me at the grade that I truly should have been in rather than treating it like I was a grade ahead. I just felt like I had finally caught up to where I should be." When asked about his recollection of his maturity level in relation to his classmates in his class after acceleration Pierce recalled, ". . . a lot of the maturity kind of winded up evening out through the course of the year because there would be maybe something that I was doing that wasn't what the rest of the kids were doing and I'd realize from watching everyone else, 'Wait a minute, nobody else is doing this, maybe this isn't something that all the kids do' and so I'd stopped doing it."

Impact of academic rigor

Pierce had an IQ test in Tennessee before moving to Georgia. If he had remained in Tennessee, Pierce recalled, he would have been accelerated from kindergarten to second or possibly third grade at the beginning of school. When he moved to a metropolitan suburb of Atlanta, Georgia however, his family ran into roadblocks due to state regulations regarding students' age at the start of kindergarten and he was put in kindergarten where he was bored and unchallenged. His mother continued to be an advocate for his acceleration and by second grade she had the support of Pierce's teachers and he was promoted to third grade. When Pierce skipped a grade he remembered feeling like his good grades finally felt like "accomplishments." Pierce recalled middle school as the first point in which he felt stressed academically and it was then that he received his first "B." When he went to high school Advanced Placement classes provided additional challenge for Pierce and he enjoyed those classes. He had completed ten Advanced Placement classes by the time he graduated and he described high school as "stressful . . . but worth it."

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Pierce participated in Chess Club and academic clubs throughout the years. He felt well accepted in those and he participated in sports in order to get some physical activity. He stated he never really excelled in athletics but he enjoyed them. He felt well accepted in school and beyond and felt high school was rewarding due to the social interaction.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Pierce

Pierce said he was glad he had the opportunity to skip a grade. He realized that there were some challenges posed by the situation but he stated, "I think it has definitely just helped me to just work hard and it's been something that…I've realized that it isn't something that everyone

does and that I need to take advantage of the fact that I was able to do that. And so it's been something that has encouraged me to do my best and to keep doing well." He commented he would recommend it to others but stressed the importance of making sure the child is beyond his years in all subjects, not just one and he pointed out that one should expect gaps in academic skills throughout the years that would need to be addressed.

Participant # 8: Anna

Dynamics of family and home

Anna grew up in a small rural community in Georgia. She has one younger brother and a large extended family that she saw on a regular basis. She was closer to her brother when she was young than she is as an adult. Anna described her brother as more laid back than she. Anna described her parents as loving and authoritative. They set boundaries and limits that she felt were reasonable. Anna's mother was an insurance agent and her dad worked for an electric company as a lineman.

Peer relations

Anna described herself as "bossy" to her cousins and to her classmates. Her assertive nature made her a leader at an early age. In her opinion this contributed to the decision to accelerate her. Of course, this was coupled with advanced academic skills. When she was accelerated Anna remembered some of the other students in her new class were upset. They ". . . were like so jealous, (they'd say,) 'How did she get to do this? This is not fair.'" Anna was not phased. She stated, "I just kind of jumped right in and felt like I was really supposed to be there." Anna described all stages of her school years in positive terms in regards to friendships and

social interaction. She mentioned that middle school was a bit difficult with the girls and their "cattiness" but that's not unusual for that age.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

Anna began kindergarten younger than her peers although she just barely missed the age cut off that would have placed her in the next grade. Shortly after school began the "kindergarten principal" arranged a meeting to discuss grade acceleration. Her parents were a bit apprehensive but they decided to try it to see how it would work. Anna stated, "I'm glad they decided I could do it. . . . I think I would have been miserable had I stayed in the same grade."

Impact of academic rigor

Anna began reading at age three. She recalled watching the video of this and witnessing her grandmother's disbelief as she watched it also. When accelerated Anna felt the work in her new class was not too difficult. She mentioned the teacher was ". . . very caring towards me in the beginning and I guess when she saw that the adjustment wasn't that difficult, then she backed off and pretended like I was part of the class." She continued to have a strong work ethic throughout school and, although she didn't qualify for the gifted program, she took four Advanced Placement classes in high school and maintained a respectable grade point average throughout school. When asked what impact she felt the decision to have her skip a grade had on her work ethic Anna stated, "I think it could have had a negative impact on…if I'd been in the grade below, like I would have felt like 'Oh, well, I don't have to keep up, I'm way above them.'"

Involvement in extracurricular activities

Anna participated in many social activities where she felt she always fulfilled the role of "party planner." She was a cheerleader for many years. Anna never spent much time watching

TV. She was always looking for something to keep her busy. She felt comfortable with others in most arenas and did not feel her confidence was hindered by being younger and she felt that her abilities were on par with her peers in all of her activities.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration on Anna

Regarding her own grade acceleration Anna stated, "I might have been just kind of unhappy in the setting that I was in just because I would have been so far ahead of the others. It's done well for me. I do see that it could probably not turn out so well for everybody but for me, I think it was a good decision. . . .I think I would have been bored, especially in elementary school, maybe not so much in middle school but in elementary school I would have been and I feel like I probably would have been…more mature, like all through which is kind of frustrating sometimes . . ." She felt early elementary school would be the ideal time to skip a grade. In general her feelings towards grade acceleration were overwhelmingly positive.

Synthesis of the Findings

The focus of this study was the social and emotional impact of elementary school grade acceleration. It became evident early on in the course of the interviews that all of the participants felt very strongly that their experiences with grade acceleration were positive and the decision to skip a grade was the right one for each of them. They each expressed feelings of doubt in terms of how they would have felt had they not been grade accelerated. It was unclear whether there was any connection between the fact that each of the participants *voluntarily* answered the recruitment flyer to participate in the study and the fact that they all had positive experiences with grade acceleration. I wondered if perhaps only those with positive experiences would want

to discuss the circumstances or if truly most students who were accelerated in early elementary school experienced positive long term social and emotional effects.

Dynamics of family and home

The participants consisted of five females and three males from a variety of cultural and societal backgrounds. One had parents who were raised in India; another was raised partly in Trinidad; one was raised by a single mother and another described his father as absent; some were raised by both parents; one had teachers for parents; another had a power line worker; another a pediatrician and "computer-something"; two attended Montessori preschools; one was home schooled. There seemed to be no common thread throughout the households except a strong emphasis on the importance of education and the expectation that the participant would attend college.

Peer relations

Most of the participants developed strong bonds of friendships throughout their school years. Some of the participants established lifelong friendships at a very young age while others shifted from one group of friends to another. None of the participants seemed to feel lonely or ostracized and all seemed to associate with friends in their new accelerated class the most. Occasional difficult periods sprang up throughout the school years for several of the participants but they seemed to be in line with typical childhood angst and never seemed to be traumatic or particularly related to their experience with acceleration. The majority of the participants related feelings of belonging in the class into which they were accelerated. A few of the participants (Brian, Anna, and Pierce) recalled feeling out of place prior to acceleration with their same age peers and remembered feeling different than the others. One participant (Brian) had more anxiety and depression issues throughout school and seemed to be in a state of emotional turmoil through

much of his school career, however. This was diagnosed very young and treated through medication. Some of his experiences may have been rooted in his extreme intellect but this is unclear and, if anything, the grade acceleration seemed to have a positive impact on this problem. Brian stated the period of acceleration was a positive turning point for him. It is unclear how a second grade acceleration that was recommended by a psychologist would have affected his adjustment and emotional issues but it seemed clear that the grade acceleration itself was not the cause of his depression and anxiety.

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

For all of the participants the initial period of acceleration was met with excitement and to differing degrees, a bit of nervous tension. None of the participants were overly scared or worried however and they all seemed to feel that the placement was more in line with their abilities. They all discussed brief periods of teasing or inquiries by peers throughout the years regarding their placement but none of the participants felt this was a major issue. Pierce related an experience where he pondered why the younger students couldn't read simple text when he was reading chapter books.

Impact of academic rigor

It's amazing how similar the feelings of the participants were in regards to academic rigor. All were bored; welcomed the chance to feel they were accomplishing something; and none of the participants felt that the decision ever "caught up with them" leaving them feelings the new grade was too difficult academically. In addition, all of the participants related extra challenge as the years progressed, especially upon entering high school and even more so with Advanced Placement courses. Most spoke with enthusiasm about the learning opportunities and felt they were prepared throughout school for the next year. One participant felt a bit

apprehensive about the prospect of attending college with regard to the difficulty of the work but was pleasantly surprised to find the workload no more difficult than high school's. Several of the participants related academic issues as the most rewarding part of high school and college with social interaction the other common response. At times participants listed high school and college academics as both the most rewarding aspect and the most challenging aspect. Most, but not all, of the participants opted to take Advanced Placements classes in high school and for the majority, these were the most interesting and rewarding classes for them.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

This line of questioning suggested that the participants, like any randomly selected group of students, had a variety of interests. Many participated in academic clubs; most did some sort of sports; a few created their own clubs and social activities; some expressed fine art interests through sculpting or orchestra; one delved deeply into computer associated pastimes. All of them found a niche in which they felt accepted and no one related experiences of social exclusion.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration

Eight participants from various backgrounds; with varying interests and strengths; accelerated at different ages and in different settings; all with overwhelmingly positive feelings towards the experience. The common link – someone noticed a need and acted upon it at an early age and a young developing mind benefited from the intervention. The majority of the participants perceived the experience helped them establish a strong work ethic and/or an interest in learning. A couple of participants felt it kept them from misbehaving and becoming a problem due to boredom. Expressions of gloom were common when we explored how the participants might have felt about school if they hadn't been accelerated. For these eight college students

early elementary school grade acceleration had a positive impact on a young bright mind that has carried over to college and young adulthood.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The topic of grade acceleration has sparked controversy for decades. Educators, administrators, and parents throughout history have cowered away from this form of intervention for gifted and under challenged youth, usually because of perceived feelings perpetuated through conversations among professional not steeped in research touting the detrimental social and emotional impact of such a drastic intervention. In reality, research has suggested quite opposite findings and the intervention itself has proven to be relatively simple to employ (Buescher, 1989; Charlton & Marolf, 1994; Charlton, Marolf, & Stanley, 1994; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Gross, 1989; Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1990; Richardson & Benbow, 1990; Roedell, 1985; Rogers, 1991; Stanley, 1987; Vaughan, 1990).

This study examined eight undergraduate college students from three schools in the southeastern United States. All of the participants had been grade accelerated at some point in elementary school and all had attended public schools for a period of time. The findings from this study support research findings on similar topics conducted over the past several decades (Arends & Ford, 1964; Buescher, 1987; Lynch, 1994; Richardson & Benbow, 1990; Roedell, 1985).

Dynamics of family and home

The participants in this study came from a variety of home environments and cultural backgrounds. The common thread with all was an emphasis on the importance of education. The students felt supported and encouraged.

Peer relations

The results of this study are consistent with Gross' (2006) long term study. Gross' study also found radical accelerates had formed "warm, lasting, and deep friendships" and the participants from both studies believed the early intervention aided the establishment of these bonds. Feldhusen et al (2002) found "advancement of a year or two often brings the child closer to an appropriate level of challenge and pace and into contact with more intellectually stimulating peers." In this study, participants related feelings of belonging when accelerated. They stated that after acceleration they felt they were where they were supposed to be all along. This study confirms the findings of Buescher (1987), Lynch (1994), and Roedell (1985).

Adjustment issues in regard to grade acceleration

In this study, each participant expressed feelings of confidence in their academic abilities and strong work ethics because of acceleration. This realization is not uncommon among accelerated youth and young adults. As early as 1964, Arends and Ford looked at 125 nine grade students and focused on the impact of acceleration on their self-esteem. Their findings suggested similar, and at times more positive, self-esteem than that of the control group in the study and higher achievement in the area of mathematics. Similarly, Charlton, Marolf, and Stanley (1994) highlighted individuals who were grade accelerated and were "convinced that rapid progress

through school grades all the way to the Ph.D. degree is the nearly optimal way for persons like themselves to enrich their education and prepare for adulthood (p. ??)" The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (1987) found accelerated youth often showed a greater desire to earn higher degrees. Most of the participants in this study planned to go past the bachelor's degrees to advanced degrees. This is in keeping with the findings of the SMPY study.

Impact of academic rigor

The ERIC Resource Center (1994) noted, "The majority of studies have shown that children who have been educationally accelerated do not suffer academically. Their grades are higher than those of their peers who chose not to accelerate, and they compare favorably with those of older students in their classes. Accelerated students also report heightened interest in and enthusiasm for school (ERIC Digest E526, 1994, p. 3)." This study reached similar conclusions. The participants often related, even after acceleration, that school posed few great challenges academically until they took Advanced Placement classes in high school. Most of the participants continued to achieve exceptional grades and felt comfortable, if not under challenged, with the workload throughout elementary, middle school, high school, and college. They expressed feelings that their abilities fell in line with their peers' achievement levels. One participant skipped two grades and another was recommended for a second grade acceleration, but his parents declined. Both of these participants showed exceptional scholastic motivation and continually sought out academic challenges and enrolled in extracurricular activities that were academically oriented. This also parallels the findings of Swiatek and Benbow (1991).

Involvement in extracurricular activities

In 1994, the ERIC Resource Center's summary of their evaluation of research in answer to the question, "Is educational acceleration harmful to the child academically?" found that students who were "well-adjusted and socially at ease before accelerating (reported) having two groups of friends – they (belonged) to a circle of older students, but they also (retained) friendships with children who (were) the same age (p.3)." In this study, participants expressed the same experience and were at ease in two groups – with same age peers and accelerated classmates. All of the participants in this study were involved in a number of extracurricular activities and felt well accepted and competent in the vast majority of activities in which they chose to participate. Many of the participants spoke of being active and involved and found engaging and challenging extracurricular activities worthwhile. They spoke fondly of the association with intellectual peers. The range of involvement in extracurricular activities spanned from intellectual to social to physical. Many found success in all areas however one participant had difficulty making the cut to join high school sports teams and tried unsuccessfully a number of times. This is in keeping with findings from Kulik and Kulik (1984, 1985, 1990) and Vaughan (1990) who found the only negative theme that emerged from their studies on accelerated youth was the disadvantage the students had in competitive sports.

Overview of effect of grade acceleration

All of the participants in this study related positive experiences in relation to their elementary school grade acceleration. Consistent with studies conducted by Ma (2003), Rimm and Lovance (1992) and Paulus (1994), each of the participants in this study stated they were glad they had had the opportunity to skip a grade and gave numerous reasons why the decision

and intervention was worthwhile for them. The main reasons centered on academic challenge, positive social interaction, and improved or sustained work ethic.

Several of the participants made mention of queries they had had with themselves as to whether their experience with grade acceleration may have prevented them from getting into trouble from boredom. Similar evidence supporting these findings can be found in studies by Rimm and Lovance (1992) that have shown that periods of latency when children remain unchallenged and are not accelerated, lead to boredom, poor study skills, lack of initiative and drive, weakened thirst for knowledge, negative feelings towards school, mischievous conduct, etc.

Elementary school grade acceleration remains a controversial and resisted intervention even though numerous studies have shown the benefits which may be found. Most of the participants of this study recommended the serious consideration of early acceleration for the social and emotional adjustment of highly advanced, gifted youth yet public opinion reinforces hesitation and apprehension from parents, teachers, and administrators alike and public policy remains unchanged and perpetuates the problem. State policies often enforce arbitrary birthday cutoff dates for entrance to kindergarten and first grade students and make the prospect of accelerating a young child to meet his/her abilities doubly difficult. In this study similar difficulties were encountered by on participant and his acceleration was delayed for two years even though state guidelines in a neighboring state would have allowed earlier acceleration. Another participant in this study attended private school and was allowed to skip kindergarten. She later went on to skip another grade. She believed this early intervention was beneficial for her. Similar studies support this participant's feelings regarding the early intervention. Lynch (1994) found when a child was challenged the result was an increase in enthusiasm towards

school and Guenther (1998) found that early admission to kindergarten allowed children to be accelerated without the disruption of social life and curriculum that later grade skipping might cause. Gross (2006) contended that students who show capabilities well beyond their years would benefit from grade skipping most when it is provided at an early age (preschool through early elementary) before the social stigma of realizing they don't fit in with peers negatively affects their psyche. This was the predominant feeling of the participants in this study, also.

Summary

According to the participants in this study and the countless research findings on the topic from the past the benefits of elementary school grade are many. The participants interviewed for this study related academic rigor, social dimensions, work ethic issues and increased confidence; all issues of which each could personally relate and share feelings and experiences. Other studies support the findings of this study. That literature suggests that accelerated youth develop a thirst for knowledge (Lynch, 1994), go farther with their education (Swiatek, 1993), feel more socially accepted (Higham & Buescher, 1987; Gross, 1989), and have more positive feelings towards school and themselves (Roedell, 1985).

One additional benefit of grade acceleration that is often overlooked is that of resources and ease of implementation. Although further counseling issues may arise or attention may need to be paid to adjustment issues, it is relatively easy to implement the intervention. Toth (1999) cited programs across the study which had implemented grade acceleration to varying degrees. She noted the miniscule or nonexistent financial impact of acceleration and the ease of implementation as a positive reason for action.

One finding from previous research studies that was not substantiated in this study was the experience related by Festinger (1954), Kulik and Kulik (1984, 1990), Feldhusen et al (1986) and Rimm and Lovance (1992). These researchers found accelerated students experienced a feeling of reduced self-concept upon initial acceleration. They attributed this effect to the gifted students' comparison to other gifted or advanced students and found that after a period of adjustment those feelings subsided and self-confidence improved. None of the participants in this study related to feeling this way. Every one of the eight participants believed they were able to just "jump right in" and keep up with their new classmates. Rimm and Lovance (1992) found however, students who skipped a grade (or more) viewed themselves positively (as intelligent) and made conscious commitments to work harder to catch up to their classmates. This positive self image and dedication was in keeping with the findings from this study.

In this particular study the participants were in college and were recruited through college bulletin boards. Therefore their academic direction was certain and predetermined. The question this researcher wondered following this study related to the pool of participants. Are their responses typical of elementary school grade accelerated individuals or does the fact that they were recruited on college campuses skew the responses to reflect a positive, focused, well-adjusted persona? In addition, are persons with positive experiences more likely to answer such a recruitment advertisement?

One of the limitations of this study lies in the effects of long term recollection. The long term retrospective recollection of experiences raises questions regarding accuracy. In addition, each participants' experiences in and out of the school network was different – what impact did those different environments and experiences have on the results? The diversity in the population was wide and one cannot attempt to generalize the results to all grade accelerated individuals.

Directives for further research could include expanding the population pool to have a more substantial body of data: collecting data at various points throughout the school experience to get the individuals' feelings and perspectives at present time, rather than retrospectively; soliciting parents' input regarding individuals' social and emotional adjustment throughout the school experience before, during, and after acceleration; soliciting teachers' input as to social and emotional development and interaction with peers in school; including individuals who experienced acceleration in elementary school who did not attend college and possibly did not complete high school for their input regarding social and emotional effects of the intervention.

This study highlights a need for more attention to the subject of grade acceleration and its implications in teacher education programs and more teacher awareness and education for teachers presently in the field of education.

The conversations and policies impacting elementary school grade acceleration should be changed. This study reinforces findings over several decades promoting the benefits of elementary school grade acceleration yet many youth remain under challenged, frustrated, and disengaged while parents, educators, and policy makers remain misinformed and succumb to the litany of unsubstantiated explanations of why maintaining the status quo is in the best interest of our best and brightest. For the extremely bright remaining under challenged is like sentencing an average child to attend classes with a class full of significantly intellectually delayed students without enhancing the curriculum to meet the average student's needs; just teaching the slow paced curriculum and making the average student wait. For our brightest youth, this experience is commensurate with what they experience every day in the typical classroom. Acceleration is not right for many, but for the few that show exceptional abilities and average sociability, it's not right to do anything but.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT

December , 2008

Dear :

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett in the Education Department at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled ***Long Term Social and Emotional Effects of Early Elementary School Grade Acceleration.*** The purpose of this study is to examine the impact early elementary school grade acceleration may have had socially and emotionally on students through reflective interviews.

Participants in this study must be 18 years of age or older, have skipped a grade in between kindergarten and third grade, attended public school throughout elementary, middle, and high school, and have a measured IQ ranging from 125 to 155.

Your participation will involve three interviews approximately 1-2 weeks apart which will be approximately one hour each in duration. These interviews will focus on early school experiences and academic, social, emotional issues, along with peer and school relationships since skipping a grade in school. These interviews will be audiotaped for later description. You will be asked to share artifacts related to the subject matter and will be asked to journal any additional pertinent thoughts, either on paper or through email. You will be encouraged to share or express feelings, experiences in other forms as well. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your identify will be confidential and pseudonyms will be used in all written documentation and publications related to the study. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide information on the experience of skipping a grade and what the retrospective view of that action is on young adults.

The research will provide insight into experiences associated with early elementary school grade acceleration and the impact it may have on the social and emotional well-being of youth and young adults. This will help further shape grade acceleration decisions regarding youth in similar situations in the future. There are some minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. They include possibly emotional distress at realization of suppressed memories. Interviews may be suspended or halted completely at any time at your request for any reason.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me, Patty Baxter at 678-478-8590 or send an e-mail to plinton106@yahoo.com. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this questionnaire in the envelope provided, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Patricia B. Baxter

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

I agree to take part in a research study titled "The Long Term Social and Emotional Effects of Early Elementary School Grade Acceleration", which is being conducted by Patricia Baxter, Elementary Education, University of Georgia, 678-478-8590 under the direction of Dr. Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett, Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology, University of Georgia, 706-502-4247. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of the study is to examine the long term social and emotional effects of early elementary school grade acceleration. Little is known about the experience of skipping a grade and what the retrospective view of that action is on young adults.

I may not benefit directly from this research. The research will provide insight into my experiences associated with early elementary school grade acceleration and the impact it had on my social and emotional well-being. This may help further shape grade acceleration decisions of youth in situations similar to mine in the future.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1. I will be informed about the process and involvement required for the study and the general nature of the study.
2. I will answer interview questions which will last approximately one hour in duration. There will be three of these interviews that focus on my early school experiences and academic, social, emotional issues, along with peer and school relationships since I skipped a grade in school. These interviews will be audiotaped for later description. I will be asked to share artifacts related to the subject matter and will be asked to journal any additional pertinent thoughts. I will be asked to create an album to reflect feelings, experiences, events, etc. that were significant in my experience in relation to early elementary school grade acceleration. I will also be asked to explain and discuss each picture in relation to my feelings, experiences, events, etc. and their significance in relation to early elementary school grade acceleration.

Minor discomforts or stresses that may arise will be in relation to recollection of difficult memories. The effects are expected to be minimal and I may stop the interview(s) at any time or skip any questions I don't feel comfortable answering. No risks are expected.

The only people who will know that I am a research subject are members of the research team. No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential unless required by law. I will use pseudonyms in any written presentation of these data. Any individually-identifiable information about me will be kept confidential.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 678-478-8590.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**
Telephone: _____		
Email: _____		
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	**Signature**	**Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW #1

The first interview will be semi-structured in nature and focus on early childhood (family setting, family members, home environment, friendships, relationships with parents/peers, educational focus, introduction to formal school settings, etc.). The basic format of the questions is listed below but the order may change and the interviewer may digress towards other related subjects as the course of the interview progresses and pertinent reflections are divulged.

Family . . .

1. Tell me about your family and childhood community.

- Where did you grow up? Please describe your community.
- Who did you live with as a child?
- How many siblings did you have?
- What was your relationship with your siblings?
- Where did you fall in the birth order?

2. Tell me about your siblings and the family dynamics.

- Tell me about yourself in relation to your siblings.
- Did you feel different than your siblings or peers?
- How would you describe your parents?
- How would you describe your parents' parenting style?

3. Tell me about your early academic experiences.

- When it came to learning, what are your earliest memories?

- How was education regarded in your childhood household?
- How old were you when you started formal schooling?
- What do you remember about the start of school?

4. Take me back to your early elementary school years. What were they like for you?

- What was the academic experience at a young age like for you?
- How did your parents address your concerns and interests in regard to academics?

5. Describe your closest friends when you were in elementary school. Describe your friends and experiences with peers.

- Did you have close friends when you were in early elementary school?
- How old were these friends at that time?
- How did you feel your maturity level compared to the other students in your class or other kids with whom you socialized?

6. Describe what you did in your free time.

- What extracurricular activities were you involved in?
- What did you typically do with your friends in your free time?

7. When was the possibility of skipping a grade first discussed? Tell me about that conversation.

- Who recommended grade acceleration and why?
- What were the reactions of the school officials involved?
- How was the subject broached with school personnel and others involved?
- How was the subject broached with you?
- What were your feelings towards skipping a grade?
- What is your earliest memory of the new class assignment?

- How would you describe the first few weeks/year?
- Did anything happen that stands out in your memory?

8. What memories do you have of others' reactions to your grade acceleration?

- How did your teacher relate to you and work with you in your new environment?
- How did you parents help you with the adjustment?
- How did your siblings handle the change?
- What was the reaction of your friends?
- How did the students in the new class treat you?

9. What is your fondest memory about that time period?
10. What was the most difficult part of the experience?
11. What were relationships like?
12. What do you remember about the next couple of years; academically/socially?

At the end of the interview, the participants was encouraged to reflect on personal memories and impressions of the early elementary school years when grade acceleration was being considered and when it was implemented and was offered a journal or an email address to record and relay thoughts. In addition, the participant was encouraged to seek out school records and other artifacts pertinent to this time period.

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW #2

Elementary School and Middle School Years:

The participant was encouraged to share his/her journal entries and expound on thoughts and feelings related to the early elementary school age years. Artifacts and/or notes were shared and discussed.

1. Now that you've had a week of reflection time and time to gather your thoughts, is there anything else you'd like to add about your recollection of the time in which you were accelerated?
2. Tell me about these documents that you've got to share with me.
3. Tell me about your teacher during the first year of acceleration.
4. How do you feel the teacher(s) you had affected your adjustment to the new grade?

- Did you feel he/she was an advocate for your placement in the new grade?
- How challenging was the work in the new grade initially?
- As the years progressed, did the level of challenge change in any way? How?
- How often did you think about grade acceleration as a child? . . . Were you preoccupied with it? Were you self-conscious about it? Did you forget about it?
- Did you feel there was a turning point of any sort along the way?

5. What was middle school like for you?

- Did you feel different in any way and if so, how did it affect you?

- How did your parents address difficult times you might have had?

6. Tell me about extra activities in and out of school. How did you spend your free time?
7. Describe your high school experience.

- Did you feel prepared – academically, socially, emotionally? Explain.
- Was your experience with grade skipping “common knowledge” in your learning environment? If so, how did your peers handle it?
- During high school, what was your attitude towards acceleration?

8. Describe the social experience of high school.

- What, if any, were your dating experiences in high school?
- With whom did you socialize?
- How did you feel when it became time for your friends to drive?

9. What was the most challenging aspect of high school?
10. What was the most rewarding part of high school?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW #3

Adolescent, Teen, and College Years:

During each individual's interview, the creative expression and/or artifacts he/she brought were displayed and the participant was asked to expound on his/her thoughts related to them. In addition, the journal entries were discussed.

1. Tell me your thoughts about what you brought in.

- Were there any memories of experiences, feelings, etc. that surfaced as a result of your reflection that you'd like to share?

2. If you were to sum up your high school experience, what adjectives would you use to describe it?
3. How did you spend your free time?
4. How were you accepted in the activities? How did you fare in comparison with the others involved?
5. What type of courses did you take in high school?

- What classes did you enjoy the most and why?
- Did you take AP or Honors classes?
- How did you feel about the level of challenge of those courses?
- In what ways did the high school challenge you academically?

6. When you were in high school, what were your thoughts regarding higher education?

- Did you feel you were ready for college? If so, in what ways?

- What conversations did you have regarding higher education?
- What steps did you take to look into academics after high school?

7. Describe the experience of starting college at a younger age than the other students.

- What conversations did you have regarding higher education? With whom did they occur? Tell me those conversations and any advice you may have received from these individuals.
- What role did your family members play in considering the options for collegiate life?
- How old were you when you began college?
- Did your age present any problems when you began college?
- Did you feel prepared for college – academically, socially, and emotionally?

8. What has been the most challenging aspect of college?
9. What has been the most rewarding part of college?
10. Describe your parents' role in your college experience.

- How did your parents help you adjust to college?
- What did they do to help you prepare for college?
- What were their thoughts about you going off to college?

11. Describe how college affected the relationships you had with friends from high school.

- Did you attend college with any friends from your high school?
- How did your friends (or lack of) affect your adjustment?

12. Describe the social experience once you arrived at college.

- What were your dating experiences like?
- How did your age affect your social life?

13. What were your thoughts upon entering college towards your grade skipping?

- Overall, how would you describe your experience of grade acceleration to others?
- Would you recommend grade skipping in early elementary school to others who might be considering it for their child?
- Under what circumstances would you recommend grade skipping in early elementary school?

14. We've explored your experiences through elementary school, middle school, high school, and now college and have attempted to examine your social and emotional experiences and how grade acceleration may have impacted your social and emotional development. Are there any last thoughts you'd like to share?

Table #1:

Overview of Participants' Characteristics and Experiences

	Parents	*Sib-lings*	*Eth-nicity*	*Type of Commun-ity*	*Extra-Curricular/ Clubs*	*Grade Skipped*	*Gifted / AP Courses*	*Personal Thoughts/ Recommendations Re: Acceleration*	*Peers*	*Academic Interests*	*Other*
#1 Megan	Mother: School Psychologist Father: Finance Officer	1 older brother (+3 years)	Cau-casian	Suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA	Girl Scouts, Odyssey of the Mind, Swim Team, Tennis	First	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. Unsure of exact number of AP courses taken but she felt academics in high school was most challenging part.	Positive - Recommend for others; "no big deal"; no significant problems.	3 or 4 close friends that changed throughout year; Most friends in accelerated class.	Business	
#2 Brian	Both teachers Previously, father owned jet cleaning company	1 younger sister (-2 years) & 1 younger brother (-7 years)	Cau-casian	Suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA with wide SES range	Little league baseball and basketball, Academic Bowl, Chemistry Olympiad, Science Olympiad, Governor's Honor Program, Chess Club, Free Thinkers' Club, Sculpting, Painting, Computers	Kindergarten; Psychologist recommended skipping third too but parents declined.	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. Took 11 AP courses. Began to feel challenged.	Positive – Recommend for others; "kind of in the background - didn't really think about it"; no significant problems.	Friends centered around classmates in his gifted classes.	Psy-chology, Chem-istry, Biology	Diagnosed with depression and anxiety issues before second grade. On prescript-tion med-ications throughout pre-collegiate years

#3 Suri	Mother: Pedia-trician, Father: Computer Technician	1 younger brother (-8 years)	In-dian	Suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA with large Indian population	Book Club, Chess Club, Science Club, Math Club, Math Team, Science Olympiad Soccer, Tennis	Kindergar ten and Second Grade	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. Took 8 AP courses. These and clubs were most rewarding part of high school.	Positive – Recommend early acceleration before really good friendships form and before more advanced material is missed.	Very close friends established at young and still close.	Micro-biology	
#4 Kim	Raised in Trinidad by grandmoth er until four, then by mother and grandmoth er (occupatio ns unknown)	1 older brother (+2 years)	Carib -bean Is-lander	Trinidad; Brooklyn, NY; suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA	Girl Scouts, Beta Club, Fellowship of Christian Students, Voices of Culture, Wrestling Team, Trainer for Football Team, Cross Country	First Grade	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. Took 1 AP course then opted out of any others because they were too stressful and difficult.	Positive – Brief period of doubt and discouragement when Kim began high school but eventually came to conclusion that she is glad she was able to be accelerated.	Very close friendships with 4 or 5 in elementary school. Strong friendships since but different individuals throughout years – usually friends in accelerated class.	Law	Mentioned teachers repeatedly as having strong impact on academic and emotional success.
#5 Kellie	Mother: works for DFACS, Father: 2nd generation farmer	5 older siblings (+14 or more years)	Cau-casian	Rural area outside of Atlanta, GA	Beta Club, National Honor Society, Academic Team, Math Team, Girl Scouts, 4H, Future Farmers of America, Color Guard	Fifth Grade	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. Took 3 AP courses (all that were offered). Didn't feel classes were challenging; AP were ***more*** challenging. Doesn't feel college is particularly challenging either.	Positive – Really enjoyed the experience and felt it gave her friends across two grade levels.	Close friendships throughout the years from both grade levels.	Sciences	Heart patient; underwent seven surgeries as a child

#6 Andrew	Mother: teacher, Father: occupation unknown	1 older brother (+3 years)	Cau-casian	Suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA	Baseball (both rec and high school team), basketball, soccer	First Grade	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. 0 Chose to take college prep courses but no AP courses.	Positive –Felt it matured him.	Close circle of friends from accelerated class and gifted classes and friends in neighborhood and on rec. sports teams (various age levels).	Business	
#7 Pierce	Mother: occupation unknown, Father: unclear if he was part of upbringing	1 younger sister (-4 years)	Cau-casian	Suburban area outside of Atlanta, GA	Baseball, Chess Team, Chorus, Fine Arts	Third Grade	Identified in Elementary School as Gifted. 10 AP. AP and Gifted classes were challenging. Had to work hard.	Positive - Recommends it for child ahead in all areas.	Close friends prior to acceleration who he lost touch with. Established and maintained friends in gifted classes.	Unsure	
#8 Anna	Mother : Insurance agent, Father: electric company lineman	1 younger brother (-4 years)	Cau-casian	Rural area outside of Atlanta, GA	Cheerleading, softball, church choir, National Honors Society, German Club	Kindergar ten	Tested for gifted in elementary school but did not qualify. Took 4 out of 6 AP courses offered. Challenging and time consuming,	Positive – Recommended acceleration. Felt parents were good judges of own children. Felt she would have been bored and frustrated if she hadn't been accelerated.	Close friends throughout school, usually from accelerated class or older peers.	Early Childhood; Special Education; Speech Therapy	