

Policy and implementation
strategies for the education of
**gifted and talented
students**

Revised 2004

Guidelines for the use of strategies to support
gifted and talented students



Policy and implementation
strategies for the education of
**gifted and talented
students**



Guidelines for the use of strategies to support
gifted and talented students



© State of NSW, Department of Education and Training,
Curriculum K-12 Directorate, 2004

Copies of this document may be made for use in connection with activities of the Department of Education and Training on the condition that copies of the material are made without alteration and must retain acknowledgement of the copyright.

Any enquiries about alterations, or about reproduction for other purposes, including commercial purposes, should be directed in the first instance to Curriculum K-12 Directorate on (02) 9886 7743.

ISBN: 0731383176

SCIS: 1168942

Educational programs: Strategies to support gifted and talented students

This document is an adjunct to the New South Wales *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (revised 2004). Its purpose is to outline some of the strategies that can be used to improve the outcomes of schooling for gifted and talented students.

Developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students incorporate a combination of grouping strategies, enrichment, counselling interventions and acceleration.

In programs for gifted students, teaching practices, grouping strategies and acceleration are interdependent and strongly supported by research as central to maximising learning outcomes for gifted students. However, the key ingredient in the success of any gifted program is the provision of developmentally appropriate opportunities by differentiating the curriculum (Van Tassel-Baska, 2000).

Differentiation ranges from slight to major modifications of the curriculum through adjustments to content, processes and skills. It provides a planned, documented and challenging curriculum that matches the ability of gifted students to:

- learn at faster rates
- find, solve and act on problems more readily
- manipulate abstract ideas and make connections to an advanced degree.

Differentiation should include **enrichment** and **extension** activities. **Enrichment** refers to the broadening of the curriculum to develop knowledge, application, thinking skills and attitudes to a degree of complexity appropriate to the students' developmental level (Braggett, 1997). **Enrichment** activities are often found only in extra-curricular provisions and need to be written into programs to ensure all students have access. **Extension** activities involve the deepening of students' knowledge, understanding and skills. These concepts are consistent with the elements of good practice, as described in the NSW model of pedagogy in *Quality teaching in NSW public schools: Discussion paper* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003).

Acceleration

Gifted and talented students have cognitive and emotional abilities that allow them to learn much more quickly than their age peers. Acceleration is any administrative strategy that allows students to progress through the curriculum at a faster pace. The following types of acceleration may provide for the educational needs of gifted and talented students.

Subject acceleration

This type of acceleration permits each student to progress in a subject or content area at the rate that best suits the student's ability and current level of performance. It may occur in primary or secondary school and take any of the following forms:

- Curriculum compacting, where the curriculum is streamlined to delete previously learned material. This requires assessment or pre-testing of students to assess their achievement of outcomes.
- Individualised work through the use of contracts or modules, independent research or online learning.
- Flexible grouping options, so that students can proceed through the curriculum at their own pace. This requires that students of similar ability or performance are grouped for some or all of the time.
- Subject acceleration, where students access a subject designed for older students.

Year or Stage acceleration

There are two types of Year acceleration: Early entry and Year advancement.

- Early entry: some young children who are intellectually gifted may be enrolled in Kindergarten early. Similarly, some students may obtain early entry to secondary school or tertiary institutions.
- Year advancement: some students who are well advanced may be accelerated to a higher Year or Stage of learning. This can occur with individuals or with a cohort of students. The Board of Studies publication *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000), describes the criteria, rules and procedures for this type of acceleration. This document can be accessed at:
<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/index.html>

School considerations about acceleration

- A total school policy is required so that school staff and parents/caregivers have a common understanding about why and how acceleration occurs in the school.
- A student's social and emotional development and cultural affirmation are major considerations when contemplating any type of acceleration.
- Counselling is required to enable gifted students to understand the purpose, procedures and implications of accelerative opportunities. Accelerated students should have the opportunity to return to their previous situation if necessary.
- A strategy for peer support of the accelerated student should be devised, implemented and monitored in consultation with the student.
- Qualitatively different work should be offered. If acceleration results in additional amounts of work, it may be entirely counterproductive. There should be a differentiation of the curriculum so that it provides advanced conceptual opportunities and stimulates higher-order thinking skills (including making comparisons, value judgements, synthesis, evaluation and opportunities for reflection and critical analysis).
- Research and independent study skills need to be taught. Accelerated learners must be taught information and problem-solving skills and how to evaluate their own products.
- Teachers may need to modify their teaching strategies when working with gifted and talented students, as such students frequently require less explanation, fewer routines and reduced time for revision. There may be an increased need for discussion, group work, exploration of issues and emphasis on "guidance" or discovery learning rather than "direct instruction".

6.3.1 School principals have the final responsibility for deciding when the early entry to school of a student who is intellectually gifted and talented is appropriate, in order to meet the student's educational, social and emotional needs.

(NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004)

Early entry

Early entry is a placement procedure. This placement should not be considered an educational program. Schools should ensure that an appropriate educational program is available for students who enter school early. Parents/caregivers and pre-school teachers can provide information about the abilities and achievements of early entrants.

Recommendations on early entry

It is recommended that:

- principals consider children aged four or older (at 31 January of the year of enrolment) as appropriate for early entry.
- a comprehensive, culturally fair psychological evaluation of the child's intellectual functioning, academic readiness and social-emotional maturity should be conducted. Decisions should be made collaboratively and should involve the principal, parents/caregivers, school counsellor and receiving teacher.
- each region should identify a reference person with early schooling expertise and experience in gifted and talented students' education. This person can provide advice about early entry and also alternative options. These options should be developed through discussion among parents/caregivers, pre-school teachers and representatives on gifted and talented students committees.
- screening should involve the use of culturally appropriate measures of performance and potential. These may include anecdotal records, interviews, standardised tests of cognitive ability and behavioural checklists.
- schools should seek appropriate in-service and education in cultural awareness if it is needed by the teacher of the receiving class.
- each school which accepts a student for early entry will provide information on programs and support structures to the senior regional officer with responsibility for gifted and talented students for the maintenance of a regional database.

6.3.2 School principals have the final responsibility for deciding when any form of accelerated progression is appropriate for individual gifted and talented students in Years K-12 to meet each student's educational, social and emotional needs.

(NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004)

Accelerated progression

Accelerated progression is a placement procedure, not an educational program. Schools should ensure that, whether a gifted student is accelerated or placed with age peers, he or she has a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

The curriculum for gifted students should be academically rigorous, intellectually stimulating and sufficiently flexible to meet their educational, cultural, social and emotional needs. Educational programs for these students may contain:

- content acceleration to match students' abilities
- thoughtfully planned relevant enrichment
- the opportunity to work with peers of similar ability
- the opportunity to work with mentors who have high levels of expertise.

Recommendations on accelerated progression

It is recommended that:

- each region identify an officer who can provide information about the purpose and practice of accelerated progression. It may be necessary for this officer to be trained in cultural education or to collaborate with staff who have specialist

cultural expertise. This officer will also be responsible for the collection of data for the purpose of reporting on the outcomes of accelerated progression.

- schools within regions work together and share resources and information about the management of the accelerated progression of gifted students.
- schools may seek advice from the regional gifted and talented students committee or other regional networks when making decisions about accelerated progression in individual cases, and when planning provisions for these students.
- the Department and Board of Studies work collaboratively to provide teachers with professional development in accelerated progression.
- schools refer to the Board of Studies document *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000).

International guidelines on suitability for accelerated progression

Board of Studies NSW. (2000). *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000. Sydney. *Appendix 1*).

School principals should use these guidelines in determining students' suitability for accelerated progression.

1. When a student is being considered for accelerated progression, a trained psychologist should perform a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, psychological evaluation of the student's intellectual functioning, academic skill levels and social-emotional adjustment.
2. The student should demonstrate skill levels above the average of the class of intended entry.
3. Socially and emotionally, the student should be free of any serious adjustment problems. Principals should be aware, however, that in some gifted students social or emotional difficulties may have been caused by placement in an inappropriately low grade. In such cases the problem may be alleviated by accelerated progression.
4. A student's physical attributes should not be a major consideration when determining suitability for acceleration.
5. It is important that the student should not feel unduly pressured by schools and parents/caregivers. The student should be eager to move ahead.
6. The receiving teacher must have positive attitudes towards Year advancement and must be willing to help the student adjust to the new situation.
7. Judgements about the student's social and emotional maturity should include input from the student's parents/caregivers and the school counsellor/psychologist. Gifted students are sometimes rejected by their classmates and within their own culture. It is important that teachers do not confuse the absence of close peer relationships with social immaturity.
8. Ideally, Year advancement should occur at natural transition points, such as the beginning of the school year. However, mid-year advancement may sometimes be desirable where the student's prior teacher and receiving teacher may more easily confer about how best to help the student make a smooth transition.
9. All cases of accelerated progression should be arranged as a trial of at least six

weeks. The student should be aware that a return to the original year placement will occur if the trial period is not a positive experience. It is important in such circumstances to avoid a sense of failure.

10. Care should be exercised not to build up excessive expectations from Year advancement. A small minority of gifted students are so advanced in their intellectual or academic development that one year of accelerated progression may still leave them bored at school. For such students further advancement may be advisable at a later period in their schooling.
11. Decisions regarding accelerated progression should be based on facts rather than myths. The research literature on acceleration reveals that accelerated progression benefits the gifted student both academically and socially. Conversely, failure to advance a highly gifted student may result in poor study habits, apathy, lack of motivation and maladjustment.

Adapted from Feldhusen, J.F., Proctor, T.B. & Black, K.N. (1986).
Guidelines for grade advancement of precocious children,
Roeper Review, 19(1), pp. 26–27.

Grouping strategies

Grouping by ability or achievement is a form of instructional management that can be used in conjunction with accelerated progression, differentiation of the curriculum and counselling interventions to improve the learning outcomes for gifted and talented students. Learning gains are more likely to be maximised when gifted and talented students spend the majority of their learning time in the academic core areas with others of similar abilities.

Grouping by ability or achievement (Students of high ability or high achievement are put into a separate group for differentiating their instruction. Can be full- or part-time, permanent or flexible sorting)	
Full-time ability grouping	Students are placed in opportunity classes, selective high schools or full-time, selected, extension classes
Multi-age classroom	Students are grouped by their achievement level in a subject rather than by grade or age level
Regrouping by achievement for subject instruction	Students are sorted according to their subject ability or achievement into different classes: flexible sorting of students within the school matches curriculum with student level
A cluster-grouped class	The top 5-8 high ability students are placed in the same class, where they can access a differentiated curriculum
Within-class performance grouping	Sorting of students by topic or subject provides differentiated learning for each group
Co-operative grouping with like-ability learners	Groups of learners are organised in three- to four-member teams and the group task is adjusted accordingly
A pull-out (withdrawal) program for children gifted in a specific subject area	Students are regularly withdrawn from class

(Adapted from Rogers, 2002)

References

- Board of Studies NSW. (2000). *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000). Sydney.
- Braggett, E. (1997). *Differentiated programs for secondary schools: Units of work for gifted and talented students*. Highett, Vic.: Hawker Brownlow Education.
- Feldhusen, J.F., Proctor, T.B. & Black, K.N. (1986). Guidelines for grade advancement of precocious children. *Roeper Review*, 9(1), 25–27.
- NSW Department of Education and Training. (2003). *Quality teaching in NSW public schools: Discussion paper*. Sydney.
- NSW Department of Education and Training. (2004). *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (revised 2004). Sydney.
- Rogers, K.B. (2002). *Re-forming gifted education: Matching the program to the child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Van Tassel-Baska, J. (2000). Theory and research on curriculum development for the gifted. In K.A. Heller, F.J. Monks, R. J. Sternberg & R.F. Subotnik (Eds.). *International handbook of giftedness and talent* (2nd ed., pp. 365–386). Amsterdam: Elsevier.