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## Are Accelerated Students Socially Maladjusted ?

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Double promotion is considered one of the many legitimate techniques of adjusting the school program to the special needs of the more capable learner. Indications are that the bright student can profit from spending less time in the elementary school grades and using this time for advanced studies at the high school and college levels.

Teachers and parents are frequently presented with the problem of double promotion for pupils of unusual ability in elementary school. One of the principal arguments advanced against this practice is that it places the child in competition with older pupils in many areas and thereby adds to his problem of social adjustment. Parents and teachers are vitally interested in the possible social consequences as well as the educational results of this kind of acceleration.

T The study reported in this article was designed to throw some light on the general problem of whether grade-skipping is likely to lead to social maladjustment. The study was carried on in the Los Angeles city schools in the fall of 1960.

The students selected for the study were attending their last year of senior high school. They were divided into two groups: one group consisted of 64 students who had been accelerated, and the other of 64 students who had made the conventional grade-by-grade progress through elementary school. All subjects had intelligence quotients of 120 or above. Since none of these pupils had been accelerated more than two semesters, they could not be considered precocious. The school officials had simply made some attempt to adapt the educational program to the students' superior abilities.

The students' social adjustment was measured by using the California Psychological Inventory; by using information on the cumulative record cards on file at the schools; and by using "information and interest blanks" which

were filled out by the subjects and their parents. Teacher judgment blanks were made out for each student by the B12 and A12 grade level counselors.

The conclusions related to scholastic and vocational interests, participation in activities, in and out of school, measured social adjustment, and attitudes toward acceleration.

All child psychologists stress the importance of children's interests in contributing to their social and emotional adjustment. Other things being equal, the child with salutary interests in the things about him, his companions, reading, school, is probably a happier and a better adjusted child than a child without such interests. Terman's work with gifted children has shown that their interests are a good index to their general social adjustment.

#### Scholastic interests

There appeared to be little if any significant difference in the studies preferred by the two groups. When answering the questions about disliked subjects, more than half of the younger students mentioned mathematics and science. Many girls gave this response; the boys seemed least favorably inclined

toward English.

Ninety-five per cent of the accelerated pupils were rated by their parents as having a strong or fairly strong liking for school. Apparently acceleration helped to maintain or even enhance the children's interest in their schoolwork.

About 60 per cent of the accelerated pupils spent an average of eight to ten hours a week on their studies. Only 5 per cent spent less than five hours a week on outside study. More than half the pupils spent between four and six hours a week on non-assigned, recreational reading. There was no significant difference in the reading interests expressed by the two groups.

#### Vocational interests

The girls as well as the boys indicated ambitions noticeably higher than their parents' attainments. The boys were looking forward to working in some field of medicine, engineering, or science. The girls were more inclined toward teaching. Only 4.3 per cent of the girls preferred the duties of a housewife. This finding is in accord with Terman's findings that gifted

children prefer occupations which are intellectually demanding.

A large proportion of the students in both the accelerated and the non-accelerated groups indicated that they were undecided about their choice of vocations. Thirty-six per cent of the former, and 33 per cent of the latter had not as yet reached a decision in this regard. The closeness of these figures suggests that the disparity in ages had not placed the younger group at a disadvantage in thinking out their future plans. Their objectives appear just as mature and cover just as wide a range as those of their older classmates.

#### Participation in school activities

The type of activities preferred by the accelerated and the non-accelerated pupils were similar. More of the younger boys expressed a preference for active sports. This finding indicates that their physical development was progressing normally. There was no indication that these youngsters were bookish or one sided in their growth.

The accelerated pupils preferred companions of the same age or older. They took an active part in student government, held many class offices, and belonged to various scholastic and service honor organizations. In terms of their participation in athletics, almost as many of the younger students (16 out of 31) had been successful in making various school athletic teams as had the older, non-accelerated boys (19 out of 33).

When students in the two groups were rated for leadership by their grade level counselors, there was no appreciable difference in the ratings.

#### Social adjustment

The instrument used for measuring the social adjustment of the participating students was the California Psychological Inventory. The inventory is concerned with characteristics of personality that have a wide and pervasive application to human behavior. The instrument consists of eighteen scales developed for characteristics which are important for social living and interaction.

The accelerated students scored as high as the non-accelerated students on the inventory. This was true not only for the test as a whole, but for the four major divisions of the test as well. In personal and social maturity, the accelerated group also compared favorably with the general high-school population. The conclusion to be drawn is that acceleration was not harmful to the younger students in so far as their social adjustment is concerned.

#### Attitudes toward acceleration

The accelerated students and their parents were asked to comment on their experiences and to give their opinions as to whether grade-skipping is a desirable practice in the elementary school.

The consensus was that acceleration had not harmed the students' schoolwork, and that in many cases acceleration had been distinctly beneficial. Few ill effects had been observed in reference to the relations of the accelerated students with other members of the student body.

Of the accelerated students, 85.9 per cent would recommend allowing children to skip grades in the elementary school. The comparable figure for their parents was 80.5 per cent.

The same questions were asked of the non-accelerated students and their parents. Slightly over two-thirds of the students and the same proportion of the parents favored the acceleration.

Those who favored grade-skipping felt that it provides an incentive for learning, maintains interest, and prevents boredom. They believed that holding back the capable child can result in loss of interest, poor work habits, and the development of a generally poor attitude toward learning.

Those in the minority who opposed acceleration believed that it might cause problems of social adjustment. They preferred to see the formation of special classes for the more capable learner.

Acceleration could be used more widely for meeting the needs of the more capable learner. Acceleration needs to be an individual matter.

Personal adjustment is not appreciably affected by acceleration, and ought not to be the deterrent it is at present.

There appear to be a number of ways to minimize the problem of adjustment. Allow the child to skip a grade during the early years of elementary school. Whenever possible, skip the child into a split class, such as A3B4. The teacher who is receiving the child should meet with the sending teacher to discuss the accelerant's special abilities and interests. If more children were accelerated, the accelerated child would feel less conspicuous.

Perhaps acceleration should be employed more frequently with girls than with boys. Girls do not seem to encounter the social problems that some of the boys do. They do not mind being younger. Apparently their earlier maturing enables them to adjust faster to new groups.

Acceleration can often provide the stimulus necessary for motivating the more capable learners to work up to their dormant capacities, and to avoid their lapsing into poor study habits,

disinterest, and breaches of discipline. Gifted children want the challenge. They do not want to coast along with the mediocre.

This article is based upon a doctoral dissertation carried on under the direction of Wilbur H. Dutton of the Department of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles

#### References

- (1) ~~E. P. Torman~~ and N.H. Oden The Gifted Child Grows Up. Genetic Studies of Genius, Vol. IV, (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1947).