

***ACCELERATION: AN INTERPRETIVE
STUDY OF GIFTED STUDENTS WITHIN A PRIMARY
SCHOOL SETTING***

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DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of gifted Primary School aged students who had been year level accelerated in Western Australia. Surveys were distributed to all Primary School Principals within the Junior School Heads' Association of Australia network and subsequent interviews conducted with three nominated Principals (or their nominees), teachers, parents and students. The purpose of the interviews was to glean a clear perspective of three individual students' experiences of year level acceleration and the corresponding perspectives of their teachers, parents and the School Principal. The findings revealed an overwhelmingly positive experience of acceleration, post acceleration, for all key stakeholders in the acceleration process. The large quantity of literature purporting the effectiveness of year level acceleration for gifted students was well supported through the case studies presented, with key features of a successful year level acceleration based upon the importance of clearly articulated school policies for giftedness and acceleration, awareness of the needs of gifted students', the importance of periods of transition into the accelerated year level and the vital role of communication and shared understandings between key stakeholders in the acceleration process; (Principals, Teachers, Parents and the Child). The need for a specific tool to measure the effectiveness of year level acceleration for gifted students, post acceleration, was clearly evident. The implications of the findings for future research and practice are presented.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this study, Principals (and/or their nominees), three Teachers, three Parents and three gifted children were consulted about their experiences of year level acceleration, post acceleration. The study was influenced by several factors. They included: the trends in gifted education and the range of recommendations contained in the literature; the conditions that exist in the local context; including policies and practices; the assumptions of the researcher as they relate to Primary Education of gifted students and their role within the educational context, the willingness of Principals to nominate participants who have gleaned both positive and negative experiences; and the assumptions about the participants in the investigations.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the words “gifted” or “giftedness” should be interpreted as a student’s outstanding potential and ability in one or more domains (eg intellectual, artistic or sensorimotor).

For the purposes of this study, the word ‘Principal’ should be interpreted as the person in charge of a Western Australian Junior School. The term ‘Principal’ is used concurrently and with the same meaning as ‘Head of Junior School’ and ‘Person nominated by the Principal.’

Trends in Gifted Education

There are many issues surrounding gifted education and one of the most controversial is the concept of year level acceleration. For parents, educators and students, this issue is one of constant debate and discussion. Whilst some may vigorously support the concept and all that it entails (Gross, 1997), it has been the traditional standpoint of

teachers and school administrators to err on the conservative side and sustain the status quo. The 2004 *Templeton Report on Acceleration, A Nation Deceived*, is a testament to acceleration and the authors found that acceleration is beneficial both academically and socially and further claim that acceleration for gifted children and is arguably the most effective intervention for some academically gifted children (Colangelo, Assouline & Gross, 2004).

Currently in Australia, the age at which students enter and leave school is usually determined by their date of birth, not their social, emotional, educational, intellectual or physical characteristics. Prior to World War II, it was not unusual in Australia and countries with similar education systems to have a mixture of ages represented in a single classroom. Indeed, even nowadays, in music and sport, Australian educators tend to support the principle of placement in lessons according to competence. Whilst some continue to dabble with the concept of multi-age grouping, it is not usually adopted explicitly to meet the needs of gifted students. Educators now generally adopt a process of age-appropriate class allocation.

The Context of the Study

This study was conducted in Western Australia. The researcher utilised Western Australian Schools, within the independent sector. Within Western Australia, schools in the public sector are required to abide by the regulations of the Western Australian Education Act. The policies and guidelines for the assessment and management of gifted students are outlined by the Department of Education and Training, through their gifted and talented guidelines (Department of Education, Western Australia 2009).

As this study was not pertaining specifically to schools that were under the auspices of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, it should be acknowledged that the schools participating in this research had somewhat more

flexibility to meet the needs of gifted students, depending on the specific stance of their independent school.

That said, some schools approached for this research, fell under the umbrella of the Western Australian Catholic Education Sector. Their policy for meeting the needs of gifted youth include comments on the concept of year level acceleration.

All other schools involved in this research, typically produced their own individualised policies and guidelines to address the issues of year level acceleration within their schools.

The Role of Research in Broadening Knowledge and Guiding Practice

The theories and beliefs that are stated in literature are generally supported by research. Upon investigation they are then able to become valid theories and can be generated in the specific area of knowledge. This study reveals research that will endeavour to validate previous findings and identify possible areas for future investigation.

The Rationale for the Study

The literature underpinning gifted education and, more specifically the year level acceleration of gifted students, reveals a move towards the promotion of year level acceleration as a positive and productive procedure to meet the needs of gifted children. Additional to the influence of the concepts promoted in the literature, the school policies that have been developed to meet the needs of gifted children and those related to year level accelerated gifted children have influenced advances in this area. In the development of this study, it was determined that the experiences of gifted primary school students who had been year level accelerated, in the Independent School Sector and their Principals, teachers and parents should be interviewed and their experiences summarised.

The rationale for conducting the research in the local context was that research conducted in other locations would not always be relevant. The researcher was not aware of other studies conducted in Western Australia of students, post acceleration within the private school sector. Specifically, the project identified three children of primary school age who had been accelerated during their primary school years by a minimum of one-year level. Through a survey in the first phase of the research and subsequent interviews in the second, the research explored the context, background, underlying reasons and experiences of acceleration from the perspective of the child, the parents or guardians, and the school teachers and administration.

This study has outcomes for the development of a knowledge base and future research. Interpreted data in this study has further supported the claims and deductions of other researchers, allowing them to formulate recommendations which may be measured and tested utilising qualitative methods.

The Outcomes for Practice

This study has outcomes for practice. It has the potential to benefit the educational sector as links have been established between the researcher and key stakeholders in private Primary School Education; Principals and key Administrators who are members of an Australian Educational body, the Junior School Heads Association of Australia (JSHAA). This link could now pave the way for further consideration, within an Australian context, of the needs of gifted children specifically within the independent sector.

In exploring the experiences of three gifted children who have been year-level accelerated, this research has the potential to guide the provision of services for gifted students in all sectors, or enable the future establishment of policies and procedures at the individual school level. Educators, students, teachers and families were all involved in the research process. The linking of all these key personnel has the potential to lead

to a more holistic investigation of the concept of year level acceleration within a primary school setting in Western Australian schools.

The researcher further identifies the need for additional investigation of this concept at a National level, rather than relying on research and evidence collated overseas. At a State and National level, there is a critical need for a wide-ranging investigation of the experiences of children who have been year-level accelerated. Specifically, this research was significant and innovative as it involved a process of reviewing current research and trends pertaining to primary year-level acceleration. It explored pre and post acceleration criteria documentation. The study was one of the first of its kind to critically reflect on the post experiences of primary school aged students in Western Australia who have been year-level accelerated.

Through reflection and analysis of the data collated, this study now has the potential to provide recommendations for the development of new methodologies for evaluating the success of acceleration. In doing so, it could encourage a specific investigation into the benefits or otherwise of year-level acceleration in the primary school setting. The study could also provide significant documentation with the capacity to have a real and valuable impact on the development of educational policy. The study focussed on all stakeholders in the acceleration process. It reflected on the experiences of parents/guardians, educators, and children and associated paraprofessionals, where applicable.

Through post acceleration interviews with parents, children, teachers and Principals (or their nominees), the researcher was able to highlight some shortcomings or benefits inherent throughout the acceleration process. It is envisaged that this, in turn, could lead to the future establishment of a set of indicators that may assist in measuring the effectiveness of year-level acceleration, post acceleration.

The Nature of the Schools Involved in this Study

Specifically, the Schools involved in this study were all from the private sector in urban Western Australia. Schools, who obtain membership of the Junior School Heads Association of Australia (JSHAA), do so through the Membership of the Head of the Junior School (Principal). The JSHAA was established in 1952 and exists chiefly for the fellowship of its members and as a forum for the sharing of ideas and approaches in education. This incorporated body is comprised of members whose schools educate over 120,000 children from Early Learning to 14 years of age. In 2007 and 2008, the JSHAA has a membership of over 350 Full Members, 60 Associate and Life Members and 23 Overseas Members. For the purposes of this document, this service will be referred to collectively as JSHAA (JSHAA website, 2009).

The Intended Audience

The primary audience for this research were educators in key management positions. Specifically, it was intended that the results of the research should be made accessible to primary independent school heads, through the Junior School Heads Association of Australia (JSHAA), of which the researcher is a member. Periodicals are circulated regularly; an abstract will be included in forthcoming publications. The JSHAA also meets bi-annually through a national convention. An abstract and paper from this research study may be presented at a future occasion.

Teachers within the private sector may also be privy to the research, filtered through principals. The research is now also valuable to the parents and teachers involved, and the relevant school administration. Copies of the research will be made available to the Gifted and Talented Children's Association (GATCA). This information will also be of benefit to families considering acceleration an option for their children. This may be presented in the form of a journal article, in the GATCA magazine.

The Participants in this Study

There were two phases to this research study. In the initial Phase One of the research, the participants included Heads of Junior Schools (Principals) who were members of the JSHAA in Western Australia, responsible for providing leadership and fulfilling Administrative roles in Junior Schools. The participants in the second phase of the study were 3 Principals (or persons nominated by the Principal), who were selected as a result of initial survey responses. In addition to this, the second phase of the research also incorporated the participation of 3 primary school aged students, who were identified as gifted and subsequently year level accelerated. Interviews took place between the researcher and the child, as well as interviews with their parents, their principal (or nominee) and classroom teacher.

Within the parameters of the research it was assumed that all children recommended for participation were 'gifted', as described in the research definition (chapter 2) and hence, met the Schools' criteria for year level acceleration.

The researcher has many years' experience within the education sector, both as a teacher and an administrator. Currently, she is the Head of a Junior School in Western Australia. She has an extensive track record attending professional development in the field of gifted education, including conferences within Western Australia and interstate.

In her role as Head of Junior School, she has been responsible for accelerating a range of students identified as gifted. She has elected not to utilise students within her own school for the research, as she recognises that the data gathered could be influenced by the researcher, alongside issues of confidentiality.

Research Questions

In consideration of the literature reviewed, it was argued that research could be developed to address the key research question:

What are the overarching experiences of children, their families and educators of year-level accelerated students in Western Australian schools?

Further to this question, the following specific questions could be explored:

What are the experiences of children, parents, Principals (Administrators) and teachers, who have been accelerated by one or more years, within the Western Australian independent school sector?

Are there any common reflections of experiences of children, families and school personnel pertaining to year-level acceleration, post acceleration?

Are there any common conclusions or observations that have been highlighted by the children, parents and school personnel who have participated in the process of year-level acceleration, post acceleration?

It was anticipated that in order to investigate these questions, the researcher might seek to draw conclusions through interviews with key stakeholders in the process, post acceleration. In doing so, the researcher might be able to suggest that the data obtained was of a deeper and more substantive nature than documentation gathered prior to the child being accelerated to a new year level.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter addresses the concept of acceleration, and more specifically that of year level acceleration of gifted students. The key areas covered include: a definition of acceleration; factors determining suitability for acceleration; methods of acceleration; issues pertaining to acceleration (factors for and against); and factors affecting acceleration.

The Definition of Giftedness

The words “gifted” or “giftedness” should be interpreted as a student’s outstanding potential and ability in one or more domains (eg intellectual, artistic or sensorimotor).

The Definition of Acceleration

Research on the subject of year level acceleration has spanned more than 70 years commencing with the longitudinal studies of Terman and Oden (1947), defined acceleration as “the progress through an educational programme at rates faster for ages younger than conventional” (p.34). Feldhusen, Proctor and Black (1986) describe it as “educational provisions for gifted and talented students usually involving some type of homogenous or ability grouping”. Other definitions include “curriculum flexibility” (Benbow, 1991; Cox, Daniel & Boston, 1988; Robinson, 1983) or “flexible pacing” (Daniel & Fox, 1988).

Academic acceleration is a process that has the potential to incorporate a wide range of educational practices. In recent years, its definition and management has increased exponentially as interest in the concept has gathered momentum. This research will directly investigate one specific form of acceleration that of year level acceleration or grade-skipping, whereby a child is moved into a year or more above their age-appropriate grade allocation.

The Factors Determining Suitability for Acceleration

When considering whether or not it is appropriate to accelerate a gifted student, there are many factors that need to be considered carefully. The International Guidelines on Suitability for Accelerated Progression (1986) are generally the means by which Educators both nationally and internationally gauge suitability. These are noted as follows:

International Guidelines on Suitability for Accelerated Progression

- 1. It is not necessary for every gifted student to be psychometrically tested. However, in the case of students who are being considered for accelerated progression, there should be a comprehensive psychological assessment of their intellectual functioning, academic skill levels and social-emotional adjustment by a trained psychologist.*
- 2. Academically, the student should demonstrate skill levels above the average of the class they desire to enter.*
- 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 inappropriately low grade placement. In such cases the situation may be alleviated by accelerated progression.*
- 4. The student should be in good physical health. The student's size, however, should be considered only to the extent that competitive sport may be viewed as important in later years.*
- 5. It is important that the student should not feel unduly pressured by parents/guardians. The student themselves should be eager to move ahead.*
- 6. The receiving teacher must have positive attitudes towards the grade 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/carers and the psychologist. Gifted students are sometimes rejected by their classmates. It is important that teachers do not confuse the absence of close peer relationships with social immaturity.*
8. *Ideally, grade 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 on a trial basis of at least six weeks. The student should be aware that if the trial period is not a success, they will return to the original grade placement. It is important that in such a circumstance the student should not be made to feel that they have 'failed'.*
10. *Care should be exercised not to build up excessive expectations from grade advancement. A small minority of gifted students are so far 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, Proctor & Black 1986.

These recommendations above are by no means exhaustive but are consistent with recommended practice as supported in James Alvino's (1996), *Parents' Guide to Raising a Gifted Child*. Feldhusen, Procter and Black (1986) recommend that a comprehensive, psychological evaluation of the child's intellectual functioning,

academic skill levels, and social-emotional adjustment be obtained from a psychologist when considering a student's suitability for acceleration. They suggest the child should have an IQ of 125 or a level of mental development above the mean for the grade he or she desires to enter. Academically, the child should demonstrate skill levels above the mean of the grade desired. The child should also be free of any serious adjustment problems, however when adjustment problems are caused by inappropriately low grade placement, grade advancement may alleviate the problem. They further describe that the child should not be made to feel he or she is a failure if the trial does not succeed.

Feldhusen, Proctor and Black (1986) further note in their studies of students who have been year level accelerated, that failure to advance a precocious child may result in poor study habits, apathy, lack of motivation and maladjustment. They recommend careful assessment, review of academic level, assessment of student's ability to adjust, physical health and size, student's eagerness to advance, receiving teachers' acceptance, child's social and emotional maturity, timing of the advancement, and a trial period as the pertinent issues to be explored when examining suitability for acceleration. Gross (1999) reported that such criteria are currently being utilised successfully in NSW to guide in the acceleration of gifted students.

Measurement Instruments

An effective measurement instrument has been developed to assist Educators to make more consistent decisions regarding year level acceleration. This test, the 'Iowa Acceleration Scale' (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, & Liscomb, 1999) can be administered to provide a systemic, holistic assessment of the child's suitability for acceleration.

The Methods of Acceleration

There are many ways in which a child can be accelerated. As a general rule, it is often assumed that moving year levels is the only method of accelerating a child. Clearly, this is not the case as research and current practice indicates the most frequently practised acceleration options currently in Australia include early school entry, grade skipping or advancement, and content or subject acceleration (Gross, 1984). This research will be specifically reflecting one form of acceleration, that of accelerating an individual student to a year level one or more years above that of their age-appropriate peers.

Braggett (1982; 1985) argues that this simplistic categorisation does not adequately convey the wide range of approaches adopted within Australia. Southern and Jones (1991) recommend such strategies as early entrance to school, grade skipping or advanced placement, continuous acceleration, self-paced instruction, content or subject acceleration, combined classes, curriculum compacting, telescoping curriculum, mentoring, extracurricular programmes, concurrent enrolment, advanced placement, credit by examination, correspondence courses, early entrance into secondary school or university. These detailed and extensive options present viable opportunities used in confluence or isolation to cater to the needs of gifted students, across all year levels.

The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) published a revised "Policy and Implementation Strategies for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students" in 2004. The policy and strategies support group acceleration as a viable option. This avoids or minimises timetabling difficulties by grouping gifted students into one class sized groups. This option is valid if a large number of gifted students have been identified within one institution.

Elkind (2007) recommends in-class acceleration in the form of individualised programmes whereby students are permitted to work at interest/learning centres in the classroom. They may be allowed to devote time to their special abilities and interests, or negotiate contracts for independent study. On occasions, Elkind recommends children work with parents and members of the wider community, or employ the assistance of a mentor. Other strategies employed include the study a modularised curriculum; learning in small groups, and whole class acceleration where special classes of gifted children are provided with fast paced learning, providing richer learning opportunities.

It can be surmised that accelerated possibilities need only be limited by the motivation and ability of identified students. If a child is capable and motivated, he/she has the potential to be exposed and involved successfully in the whole gamut of acceleration possibilities.

Issues Pertaining to Acceleration

Naturally, in a situation where the educational norms are being challenged, it is important to explore, in detail, the arguments for and against acceleration. As with any concept, there are many factors to be considered, with the final decision resting on the needs of each individual case. As endorsed by Robinson (1983 page 23), it is of utmost importance that the “premise underpinning the use of acceleration should be responsive to the competencies and knowledge of individual students”.

Arguments for Acceleration

There is a plethora of documentation to support acceleration and further documentation to suggest that grouping children of high ability together benefits their achievement (Brody & Stanley, 1976; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 1993, 2002, 2007; Southern & Jones, 1991; Starko, 1986)

Kulik and Kulik (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 controlled studies on the effects of acceleration. As a result, they concluded that, “the overall message from the thirteen studies (that used same age controls) was unequivocal: acceleration contributes to achievement” (page 17).

It can be argued that acceleration will reduce the amount of time a child needs to study concepts he or she already knows. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity for more flexible curricular options. Smith (2003; p 63) argues that “gifted students are less likely to excel if acceleration is not endorsed”.

Additional arguments for acceleration include the concept that quite often intellectually able students are also socially and emotionally advanced and will benefit from the opportunity to work and socialise with older children. If emotional age can be linked to intellectual age, gifted children should be encouraged to share common interests and abilities with older children. This said, Neihart (2007: p 330) suggests that it is critical that researchers investigate the socioaffective impact of acceleration.

Acceleration caters to children’s needs by supporting the concept of readiness for learning and individualisation of student needs. It allows more flexibility for progress on the basis of readiness, rather than relying on the lock-step of chronological age. If children’s intellectual needs are met, it could be argued that there should be an improvement in motivation, performance and confidence, when children are extended and no longer feel bored and frustrated.

There is a reduced cost of education, as the child completes his/her schooling in fewer years. There is also the possibility of earlier completion of university and higher training. Hence, it can minimise or reduce the problems associated with underachievement and boredom as children can be challenged by more difficult content that is appropriate to their levels of development. Tannenbaum (1983)

suggests that underachievement is very common among gifted students who may slip into boredom, develop sloppy work habits and become hostile to school.

When extending upon the ideals of cognitive psychology, it can be suggested that acceleration has the potential to enhance creativity, outstanding achievement and higher-order thinking skills. Further, it is argued that acceleration can be justified on social and emotional grounds.

In summary, the benefits of acceleration discussed above include increased learning efficiency, increased learning effectiveness, recognition of abilities and accomplishments, increased options for academic exploration, exposure of the student to a new peer group, administrative economy, increased time for careers and increased productivity. As the Senate Committee (2001: p xiv) concluded:

There is overwhelming research evidence that appropriate acceleration of gifted students who are socially and emotionally ready usually has highly advantageous outcomes.

Arguments against Acceleration

Many schools are reluctant to accelerate children for a range of reasons, despite the well supported academic benefits of acceleration, (Gross, 1993: Gross, McLeod, Drummond, & Merrick, 2001; Kulik & Kulik, 1984, 1992; Richardson and Benbow, 1991; Rogers, 2002, 2007; Southern & Jones, 1991). Although some arguments against acceleration are based on a lack of research and understanding, the most common concern is towards the social and emotional development of the accelerated child. Despite the study findings of Rogers, (2002: p 168) who comments:

It is noteworthy that when these children do move to the higher grade they are, in fact, more likely to make friends, perhaps because the older children may have similar interests or are slightly more socially mature.

Robinson (1983) maintained that accelerated students who receive appropriate support do not suffer adverse social or emotional effects from moving ahead, while others have argued that most of the research has been conducted with gifted students who are already achieving. There is evidence to suggest that some accelerated gifted children do have adjustment issues (e.g., Gagne, 2003.) Significant individual differences in perceived social and emotional adjustments have been observed amongst accelerated gifted children in some studies.

Indeed, whilst research suggests that acceleration usually has a positive outcome, it is not a means to an end and will not cure all social and cognitive problems. Acceleration, as a sole option, may well not be enough to remove a child's existing social issues; hence, social issues may need to be addressed separately. Despite this caution, Neihart (2007) maintains that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that accelerated children, as a group, are no more at risk of social or emotional difficulties than any other children.

Additional arguments against acceleration include the concept that students who are intellectually able but socially and emotionally disadvantaged may be denied opportunities to develop friendships with similar students, and possibly denied leadership opportunities. Also students who are adequately enriched in class where teachers are adequately differentiating curriculum and meeting the needs of students should not need to be moved into another year group. Serious gaps can emerge if a child is moved to a higher year level and basic skills have not been reinforced. It could be considered the child may well be operating happily within his/her current, social age-appropriate context and might be traumatised by the concept of acceleration which could place too much pressure on a child to succeed.

Acceleration to a higher year level assumes that a child will be able to succeed in all Learning Areas, including the physical and social domains. If this is not the case, the

child may feel disenchanting and disempowered. It may also be argued that the child may well move from being the most able in the class to an average academic achiever. This has the potential to affect the child's self-esteem.

Additional concerns raised by educators suggest that boys are more at risk as early year level accelerants. Reports compiled by Southern and Jones, (1992) suggest that young gifted boys will be more likely than girls to exhibit frustration with written work at an early age and will be less likely to write. With these points in mind however, it may well be argued that a boy who is not stimulated cognitively will in turn, exhibit the same level of frustration and aggression.

Cultural considerations have also been cited as concerns or disadvantages for accelerating students. Children from cultures that are minorities in society, and children who are from low-income families are less likely to receive specialised gifted programmes or have the opportunity to accelerate by a year level (Frasier, 1993; Tomlinson, Callahan & Lelli, 1997). The inability of children to receive acceleration opportunities is often hampered by culturally insensitive methods of identification of gifted students and a general unwillingness for children to respond to teaching that may not match their learning styles or cultural values.

Other arguments against acceleration include that acceleration is not a gifted programme, and thus will not provide all the answers and manage all the issues pertaining to catering for a gifted child effectively, and some children will be more suited to enrichment, rather than acceleration. In addition, the child may find the pressure of moving class, meeting new children and coping with new academic expectations too overwhelming, without sufficient support and advice. It is not appropriate for the socially immature child to be accelerated. Finally, but not exclusively, acceleration may only be needed in one area, since many gifted children develop asynchronously. Ultimately, acceleration should not be viewed as a placement

decision but rather, as an ongoing process requiring careful preparation, planning, implementation and review.

Factors Affecting Acceleration

Acceleration may not be appropriate for all gifted students. When one is considering whether or not to accelerate a child, it is important to look at the individual and gather data on an individual basis. "It is possible that between 2 and 25 per cent of school students could benefit from some form of acceleration" (Braggett, p 1982: 2).

Acceleration programmes must be well researched and planned, with a great deal of discussion and consideration involved. They should also be the subject of intensive review.

A counselling tool has been developed by Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik and Lipscomb (1999), to evaluate the appropriateness of recommendations for acceleration. The four main dimensions of their approach involve academic ability and achievement, school information, interpersonal skills, and attitude and support. In summary, this tool addresses certain indicators to assess appropriateness for acceleration which include academic ability and achievement. They suggest that the best candidates for acceleration have IQ scores of at least one standard deviation above the norm and measured achievement of 1.5 to 2 years above their current year level. In addition they suggest that acceleration should result in a change to a new school building or district.

It could be recommended that students with high attendance records, who have a larger physical size and more advanced motor coordination skills, will be more suitable. It is also recommended the oldest students in their current grade will adapt more easily, as will those who have accepted leadership roles in the past, demonstrated motivation to complete set tasks, and sought academic challenges. Those students

possessing highly developed interpersonal skills, participating and leading non-school extracurricular activities, have positive relationships with similar aged mates and older peers, and excellent relationships with teachers would be considered good candidates.

In addition, a positive and realistic self-image regarding their abilities, without a history of discipline problems, and whose parents are committed to collaborating with the school would be points to consider. It should also be noted, "Additional points to consider are students without siblings, the student's attitude and the support dimension including the student's attitude towards acceleration, school support and prior planning". They conclude by noting, "Acceleration is only recommended when the student and the school show enthusiastic support for acceleration" Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik and Lipscomb (p.22, 1999),.

Acceleration: Important Points for Consideration

If a child is operating in an outcomes-based, child-centred framework where the individual developmental levels are catered to, he/she may well be able to achieve his/her potential, however this statement does not suggest there is not a place for acceleration for exceptionally able children. As Elkind describes in his book, 'The hurried child':

Promotion of intellectually gifted children is simply another way of attempting to match the curriculum to the child's abilities, not to accelerate those abilities. What promotion does for intellectually gifted children is to make a better fit between the child's level of development and the curriculum.' (Elkind, 1988: p 105.)

The decision of whether or not to accelerate a child needs to be explored very carefully and considered by a Principal, in collaboration with the child, the parents, teachers and psychologists. Permanent decisions should only proceed after thorough and careful consideration of the long-term implications for the child. With these considerations in

place, acceleration may still be the best option for a small number of exceptionally gifted and talented children.

In order to ascertain the positive effects of acceleration, Benbow (1991) suggests the possibility of accelerating several children of like ability at the same time, the need for additional programme modifications beyond acceleration (eg enrichment, independent study, higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving and mentorship), choosing a teacher who supports acceleration positively, with the ability to modify the curriculum appropriately for gifted learners, has an advanced knowledge base, and has excellent classroom management skills. Prior to acceleration, opportunities should also be provided for students to interact socially with older students to help them feel comfortable with their new peer group.

Although there is a great deal of research addressing the impact of acceleration on academic outcomes, there is limited research to determine its effects on social or emotional descriptors, hence making it difficult to recommend or negate. Apart from the studies of Gross (1993, 2003), there is no research to determine the socioaffective impact of gifted children who were eligible for accelerative options yet remained in their regular classroom.

Furthermore, Evans (1996) suggests that acceleration will be more predisposed to succeed if clear guidelines are provided and implemented correctly, when teachers' attitudes are positive, when the teachers have been trained to meet the needs of gifted children, when the levels of giftedness match the degree of acceleration (rapid acceleration for profound giftedness), and when proper monitoring and evaluation has taken place.

As an essential element of any acceleration programme, evaluation should take place continuously and measure how well the programme is working, as well as what is making it succeed. A review needs to be undertaken to ensure all elements of the

programme are working cohesively while considering areas of improvement. A thorough post acceleration review and reflection upon the intended aims of the acceleration must transpire, to ensure a well-rounded and thorough approach to the process.

An additional point to note is the expectation that all talented students need to be enriched and challenged. Regardless of whether the child is accelerated or enriched, it is imperative they be challenged.

Renzulli, Smith and Reiss (1982: p 1) state "It's not just how far and fast we can run, but rather what one can do to apply the material that one has learned in an environment that allows them to generate hypotheses, gather data, to write a play, poem or song." Inherent within this statement, one can assume that without having access to some appropriate "gifted program" - be it acceleration or an individualised education plan - the gifted child will be less likely to excel.

Acceleration: A Summary of Research Findings

There is significant amount of research exploring the concept of acceleration in varying degrees of detail. Most controlled studies have reached positive conclusions pertaining to the effects of acceleration (Benbow, 1991; Braggett, 1982; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; NSW Department of Education, 1992). However, despite these positive reviews and the passing of many years, the impact of this literature appears to have filtered, to only a limited extent, into our current practice and policies. In some educational contexts, there is a perceived reluctance to employ acceleration procedures, as cited by Gold, (1965: p 238) when noted, "No paradox is more striking than the inconsistency between research findings in acceleration and the failure of our society to reduce time spent by superior students in formal education." Little appears to have changed at school level in Australia in recent years although policy development is slowly occurring.

Nevertheless, a growing number of educators and teachers are taking a second look at the concepts of acceleration, extension and enrichment, and exploring them as viable options to cater to the needs of gifted students. Hence, the questions pertaining to research should be explored by those who can best answer the questions; the children who have been accelerated, and the educators and families directly associated with those students.

Research Implications

The literature review reveals elements of recommended processes and procedures as they pertain to year level acceleration whilst also detailing factors for and against its practice. According to the literature, acceleration will be a positive and productive option for gifted students when children are effectively screened for academic, social, emotional and motivational suitability and ideally provided with an opportunity to assimilate or make a gradual transition into their new year level. The literature clearly suggests that options need to be made available for capable students and schools need to have in place written policies or procedures to ensure that acceleration options are available to all students.

The Need for Further Research within the Local Context

The literature available regarding year level acceleration generates broadly from an International and National perspective, the majority of which is from an International level. There is little research available to support the extent of real policy and procedure in schools at a State level, or the extent to which Acceleration is exercised within Western Australia. In light of this, it is appropriate to consult Principals, Students, Teachers and Parents at a State level in an attempt to ascertain most recent practices and experiences at this level.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the methodology and research methods employed by the researcher. Specifically, the researchers position and interpretive approach is outlined, alongside the choice of methods utilised throughout the research. The participants involved in the research are described, and the instruments used throughout the research are explained in greater depth. A timeline and detail of procedures and ethical considerations are explored later in the chapter.

Researcher's position

The ontological and epistemological position of the researcher was acknowledged in the planning of this study. It informed the researcher of their understandings and how the research study was designed to explore previously held beliefs and how this informed the methodology and interpretation of data acquired from the study. The researcher in this study was educated at a tertiary level and has an extensive history working within the schooling system, and currently works as the head of Junior School at a private school in Perth. As such, the researcher was enmeshed within a learning institution and was able to access information based on tacit knowledge derived from her experience within the field, but also acknowledges that working within an educational setting informed her of her understandings of knowledge, achievement and intelligence via the social constructions of the learning institution. These factors influenced the direction and aims of the study.

An Interpretive Approach

The main aim of the research was to explore the notion of acceleration, specifically grade skipping and contribute to the understanding of acceleration in the educational community. Thus the research was an interpretive study, aiming at understanding –

within a minimum of 6 months after acceleration - the complex factor of acceleration from the perspective of the individuals involved.

The assumptions about the nature of knowledge of the researcher were multiple and could only be touched on in this area. On the periphery was the idea of social constructivism, which suggests that the social and cultural aspects of learning affect learning and our perspective of it. This suggests that cognition, learning and intelligence is valued within the western culture and strongly associated with happiness, success and wisdom. Even more so, these social understandings are enhanced within the learning culture and institutions, primarily schools. This was understood by the researcher and its affects on the motivation of the researcher to explore the educational institution where most formal learning is suggested to occur to explore movement within this institution toward student achievement. The suggested method of doing this includes moving the child from a curriculum of learning which bestows knowledge based on age, to an increased age bracket, ultimately with children of a different age bracket. Social aspects, such as social maturity of the child were considered.

At a more specific level, the construction of knowledge, the main belief held by the researcher, was that acceleration would be offered to the children who exhibit qualities of higher or more developed interactive learning. That is that the objective knowledge of mathematics and other 'proven' facts that exist are more easily integrated by the learner, so it is not that the learner is passive, but rather appears to assimilate and apply this knowledge more easily than others of the same age bracket. This places focus of the knowledge learned from the adult to the child, and other types of learning that occur within child. Child interactions constitute part of the individual's ability to interpret objective knowledge, and this tacit knowledge is evaluated as part of the gifted child.

It also suggested that the more challenging delivery of objective information would benefit the child by increasing their knowledge base and as such increase happiness as their understandings and curiosities of the outer world. At another level, placing children with older peers is also suggested to enhance happiness and further social learning by allowing the child to experience more complex social situations (Gross, 1993). Ultimately, the child experiences social enhancement by being within the social institution of school and the cognitive enhancement is deliberate and provided to the child.

Not only did the research explore the candidates who have been exposed to the experience of more complex social situations and how this affects their wellbeing, but also primarily how the enhancement of objective knowledge affects the child, who by virtue of acceleration, demonstrate an increased information processing ability. The results were interpreted to review how the increase of this objective knowledge affected the happiness of the child to demonstrate proof or no proof of the researcher's social constructionist hypothesis that fulfilment in knowledge or challenge to the knowledge of an individual should be associated with increased happiness, fulfilment and decreased boredom and frustration.

This all aimed to see how a cognitive system can benefit those who fit well into such a system, and demonstrate those qualities that are considered beneficial in western society. This was able to fit with the epistemology which suggested that acceleration is information that can be researched, proven and provided to others as another way to enhance change in society (although this is the belief of the researcher, who believes that evidence creates knowledge and change) so the overall aim was not to change society but to create influence using the social systems already in place.

Rationale for Choice of Method in the Study

This study was qualitative in design, focussing on description, reflection and interpretation. Given that a key aim of this research was to explore the experiences of acceleration, post acceleration, it was decided to focus on data collection and analysis that could be carried out and applied in real school settings. For this reason, it was decided that qualitative analysis would be the most suitable approach.

It was recognised that there were some initial problems associated with the identification of suitable students to participate in this research, encompassing children with a range of experiences, pertaining to acceleration in the independent sector.

The researcher's role was one of interpreter. The individuals involved in the study were the voices of the research and provided the data to be interpreted. Information was also derived from a range sources, including feedback from school Principals via a survey. Subsequent interviews ascertained the opinions of the child, the principal (or their nominee) and the teacher. The Principal's and teachers observations of the child provided information regarding the social and academic integration of the child within the social institution of school (with the possibility of additional information from measured tests to provide standardised information on academic achievement), and the opinions of the parent/s regarding the overall child (social/academic) and its impacts within the home environment which were considered to be the result of acceleration.

The information sought was divided into multiple sections such as objective measurement of academic progress, and the subjective measurement of the child's academic achievement and social experiences. Social achievement from the teachers' perspective and how this affected the parents at home life of child were investigated, in an attempt to support the efficacy of acceleration.

The Research Participants

Phase One of this research incorporated all Principals (Heads) within the JSHAA Western Australian group list. The research participants in Phase two of this research were three primary school aged students (ages 6-12), their parents, teachers and principals (and principals' nominees) associated with schools within the JSHAA network of schools within Western Australia. All of the children involved in the research were English speaking and no translation was required. The researcher had no previous knowledge of the student informants. It was recognised that the researcher may have inadvertently, met with or liaised on a professional basis with some or all of the principals involved in the process.

The Research Instruments

There were two key phases in research process. In Phase One of the research, a survey was posted to all Principals, who were members of the Western Australian branch of the JSHAA and current Heads of Junior Schools.

The survey (Appendix A) that was forwarded to principals within the JSHAA network of schools in Western Australia included questions relating to the following:

- Policy for Gifted and Talented students;
- Policy for year level acceleration;
- Number of children within schools who have been accelerated;
- The number of students within the school who had been year level accelerated;
- The age of any accelerated students and the number of years they were accelerated;
- Parent involvement in the acceleration process;
- The role of psychometric assessment and paraprofessional in the acceleration process;
- The implementation of a transition process;

- Student input into the acceleration process;
- Procedures and processes for children post-acceleration, to measure the success of acceleration;
- General opinions of acceleration.

The survey was a simple, one-page format, to meet the need of the research project.

Surveys

In the investigation of gifted students who have been year level accelerated, researchers have employed both qualitative and quantitative measures, the former appearing to be the most frequented mode. Typically however, researchers have adopted the use of surveys and questionnaires and/or interviews (Patton, 2002; Wood, 2002).

As a typical example of a study conducted by Rankin and Vialle (1996), a survey was distributed to Principals on the South Coast of New South Wales. The intention of the survey was to investigate Principals' attitudes towards the early entry of gifted 4 year olds into schools. The questionnaire sought information relating to the screening procedures used in schools, the influence of parents and preschools on selection, program provisions for gifted children, the principal's attitudes to early entry, and impediments to the procedures in their schools. As demonstrated with previous research exploring experience of year level acceleration with gifted students, it can be surmised that a combination of methods will be necessary to meet the aims of the research, with the only danger being the potential for a complexity of data brought about by a complex range of processes for data collection.

Survey Method

The survey method is one employed by many researchers, especially when exploring the concept of year level acceleration. Surveys which aim to elicit information from Administrators in schools generally include a tick box response or a weighting scale.

On occasions, a section for additional comment or feedback is included. This method of data collection holds significant advantage, as it is relatively time efficient for busy professionals to complete and allows for ease of distribution. Some researchers have followed this method in the past, to investigate attitudes of Principals and Administrators. For example, in the study of Gifted Pre-Schoolers conducted by Sanker-DeLeeuw (2002), surveys were distributed to hundreds of Australian Schools in an attempt to gauge from the key personnel in schools the services and opportunities available to pre-school youth.

The Use of Survey in this Research

For the purpose of this research, surveys were distributed in the initial stages as a means of collecting information from all Principals who had contact with gifted students who may have been year level accelerated. This allowed for initial data collection from a wide range of demographic and socio-economic school environments. In deploying a survey in the first stages of the study the researcher sought to gain greater depth and breadth of information. Wood (2002) suggests that questionnaires can be used to gain data from a wider sample than interviews and that data collected can form the starting point for more qualitative methods.

Typically, survey data provides statistical information and for that reason, analysis of the information received is generally quantitative in nature. Advantages can be gleaned from this, as the information or data acquired can be statistically reviewed to draw conclusions between variables. As the surveys distributed in this survey were not anonymous, there was no danger of respondents' anonymity influencing the sincerity of responses received. Furthermore, as all respondents received the same information to respond to, there were fewer variables to consider pertaining to the consistency of the data. As the surveys sent out were relatively succinct and were two pages in length, the chances of a high return rate were enhanced. An additional comment section was

included at the end of the survey distributed to Principals as a means of averting the danger of surveys providing limited opportunities for respondents to express ideas or feelings.

The Survey and Identification of Principals and Schools

The initial phase of the project was the identification of Principals (Heads of Junior Schools). Twenty-five surveys were distributed and nine responses were returned, representing a 36% return rate within a four-week time frame. An email reminder was sent to all Members after two weeks, encouraging full participation from all Members within the JSHAA Western Australian network.

The results of the return rates of the surveys and additional details are outlined in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1 School Descriptions and Survey Return Rates

Number of surveys:	Catholic single-sex schools	Catholic co-educational	Church affiliated single-sex schools	Church Affiliated co-educational schools	Schools from independent category
sent	4	2	11	21	5
received	1	1	2	5	0
Percentile of surveys completed from each sector	25%	50%	18%	23%	0%

The highest return rate of complete surveys was received from the catholic co-educational sector. The catholic single-sex schools had the next highest rate of return, followed by the church affiliated co-educational schools and the church affiliated single-sex schools. No surveys were returned from the other independent schools.

Subsequent to the identification of School A, Student A and upon receipt of all required documentation, including parent permission forms, a meeting was initially established

and conducted with the principal of School A, for the purpose of discussing Student A, and his/her experiences pertaining to year-level acceleration. Prior to this interview, it was necessary to glean some background of the school, to appropriately place the information gathered, within this school's context.

Subsequent to the identification of School B, Student B and upon receipt of all required documentation, including parent permission forms, a meeting was conducted with the principal of School B, to discuss Student B's experiences pertaining to year-level acceleration. Prior to this interview, it was necessary to glean some background of the school, to place the information gathered, within this school's context.

Subsequent to the identification of School C, Student C and upon receipt of all required documentation, including parent permission forms, a meeting was initially established and conducted with the principal of School C, with the purpose of discussing Student C, and his/her experiences pertaining to year-level acceleration. Prior to this interview, it was necessary to glean some background of the school, to appropriately place the information gathered, within this school's context.

Personal Interviews

The Second Phase of the research process involved personal interviews, whereby a range of questions, pertaining specifically addressing the interviewee's experiences of acceleration were administered. Interviews took place between the interviewer and three Principals (or their nominees), three teachers, three parents and three children. Key questions raised in the interviews are included in Appendix B, C, D and E were based around themes pertaining to the following key areas:

- Family and school background of the accelerated child;
- School processes relating to giftedness and acceleration;
- Determining factors for acceleration;

- Pre-acceleration procedures and reflections;
- Post-acceleration procedures and reflections;
- Staff involvement in the acceleration process;
- Outside involvement in the acceleration process;
- School policy relating to giftedness and acceleration;
- Socio-emotional factors relating to acceleration; and
- Personal reflections of acceleration, in general.

The Role of Interviews in this Research

Several researchers have applied interview methods to explore the experiences of gifted children. In a study designed to ascertain the experiences of gifted students within the regular classroom, Knight and Becker (2000), conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 potentially gifted upper primary students from public and Catholic schools in regional Queensland. Semi-structured interviews were recorded on audio-cassette and the children were asked to describe their experiences and perceptions and invited to articulate their needs and to comment on issues they face in the classroom.

Bailey (1997), Gross (1993), Knight and Becker (2002) all developed an awareness of the experiences of gifted children and their needs through the utilisation of similar interview techniques. From interview transcripts, the researchers were able to identify common themes and similarities with all of the children studied. With an open-ended format, the interviewees were all able to convey their experiences without the limitations of structured written constraints, providing a more personalised view.

Personal interviews are deemed an important part of data collection as they have the potential to allow the researcher to gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the experiences, thoughts and feelings of all key-stakeholders in the acceleration experience. In an interview setting, the participants are allowed an opportunity to ask

questions and seek clarification on any content covered. The interviewer is able to tape the interview and hence, a level of formality from note-taking is removed.

When utilising personal interviews, the Researcher needs to be prepared to commit a great deal of time and resources towards implementation and analysis. It is prudent to note that a personal interview may also pose the potential for bias and hence, its qualitative nature. The interviewer may, by default, hold the potential to sway or influence the subject hence careful employment of interview techniques is required on the part of the researcher. The potential for bias in interview is described as:

...the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer; a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in his/her own image; a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support his/her preconceived notions; misperceptions on the part of the interviewer of what the respondent is saying; and misunderstandings on the part of the respondent of what is being asked. (Cohen & Manion, 1980: p 252).

Triangulation of the Data

In culminating the research, a triangulation of the data was essential. As the research involved a small sample of students, parents, teachers and Principals, and was completed over a compacted period of time, the need to review the data across a variety of sources was deemed essential. The data were reviewed across a variety of sources (i.e. Survey analysis and interviews) using a variety of participants, (i.e. Principals, teachers, parents, students).

Research Procedure

In Phase one of the research, surveys were indiscriminately forwarded to all Heads of Junior Schools in the JSHAA Western Australian network. Upon receipt of all received

surveys, the researcher then selected and contacted three of the above principals, via telephone, to determine their suitability and availability to continue with the research. Where Principals (Junior School Heads) were then not available to participate in the research, the Head was able to nominate a senior staff member to participate on his/her behalf. A letter of consent was then delivered to those students identified by the principals (or their nominees). When this approval was received, the researcher arranged interview times to meet with the principal (or nominee), the parents of the child and the current teacher of the child. The researcher then acted more as a facilitator in these interviews, allowing the interviewee to reflect on his/her experiences and perspectives in the acceleration process. Whilst some key questions (Appendices B, C D) were presented to sustain some means of control, the researcher hoped to be led by the participants, in order to gain a more authentic perspective and reflections.

The process of interviewing took place over a period of six months and the researcher interviewed all participants at the accelerated children's schools. Telephone contact was maintained with the participants where appropriate during the interview process, and upon completion of the interview a verbatim transcript was prepared. If requested, all participants were provided with a copy of the transcripts, and invited to confirm they were a true and accurate record of the interview.

Privacy and Confidentiality issues were addressed in all sessions with the participants and the interviewer was mindful of the potential for bias related to the interviewers conduct and the methods of reducing potential bias. All interviews with Principals, parents, children and teachers were of approximately 30 minutes duration, with the longest interview taking approximately 1 hour. It was requested that all participants refrain from naming any people mentioned in interviews. Where this did not occur, the researcher subsequently removed all names from the transcripts of interviews.

Selection of Participants

Participants involved in the research were selected based on the following procedure:

1. A letter and survey (Appendix F and G) were posted to all heads of junior schools, JSHAA members within the Western Australian independent sector, requesting completion of the brief survey and expressions of interest for nomination of students who had been year-level accelerated, to participate in the research. These schools generally had a clientele of socio-economically advantaged students, although schools clientele varied. The letter stressed the importance of a willingness to participate on the part of all stakeholders: the parents, the child, the classroom teacher/s and the head of junior school. The letter outlined that the research involved students, of primary school age (4-12) who had been accelerated within the last 12 months. The letter explained that the administrator, the parents of the child and their current classroom teacher were to be interviewed as part of the research process. The researcher did not contact the participants directly. They were at all times forwarded information from the researcher, through the school principal.
2. When responses were received from principals, the researcher selected three students, based on a balanced range of geographical positions, across Perth's suburbs.
3. Prior to any participants being approached by letter for permission to proceed, the researcher contacted the principal via telephone, to confirm permission to embark upon the research process.
4. A brief interview then took place between the researcher and the principal. At this meeting, the researcher determined if the administrator was keen to proceed with the research. Subsequent to this, the researcher also arranged for the school to forward letters of permission to the prospective students, their parents/guardians and the teacher.

5. The child, parents and current year level teacher were interviewed by the researcher, when permission was gained. In all cases, interviews with students, teachers, principals and parents took place within the school setting. The staff and parents and students were contacted by telephone, to initiate the process.

It was recognised prior to embarking on the above, that permission had to be sought from all participants in the process and the institutions they represented. In the letter of introduction to potential informants, an Authority to Proceed was included. This was signed and completed by all stakeholders in the process. Participants under the age of 18 were required to seek permission from parents and/or guardians responsible for them (Appendices H and I).

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

The anonymity of Principals, parents, teachers, children and Schools has been protected in this research. The names of schools, teachers, principals, parents and children are not mentioned at any point in the research. The interview format and interview questions were presented for Ethics approval prior to the commencement of the research. All subjects involved signed their agreement to participate in the research prior to any interviews commencing.

In some circumstances the gender of the participant has been deleted from the direct quotes as they have been selected from the transcripts. The researcher applied this strategy as required, in order to protect the anonymity of participants and institutions. These amendments have not altered the meaning.

Limitations of this Study

Interpretation of this study may be limited by the fact that Principals were unlikely to nominate students for involvement in the study where the students had negative experiences. Clearly, principals would be hesitant to re-ignite sensitive memories with parents, students or staff if an acceleration experience had not been a positive one.

Therefore, the range of respondents offered was likely to be limited to child involvement with positive or generally positive experiences of acceleration. The researcher also needed to be aware of influence on the subject of a face-to-face interview and the data considered accordingly. Finally, the awareness on the part of some principals of the researcher's own role as a principal in a school had the potential to influence the number of survey responses received and the comments therein.

Summary

Throughout the research, data were collated through the results of the survey to principals and field notes from interviews. These interviews were recorded via a tape recorder and transcribed following the meetings. Audio equipment was utilised to record all interviews with participants. Principals also completed the brief questionnaire (Appendix A).

The researcher presented questions to candidates, to assist with analysis under the following key themes pertaining to acceleration:

- Academic issues – including the role of assessment;
- Socio/emotional issue – including the attitudes/feelings of those accelerated and those associated with the acceleration;
- Administrative/ practical issues – including policies and procedures, the role of the school, etc;
- Attitudes toward acceleration;
- Environmental context – including school conditions;
- The role of transition; and
- Desired outcomes of acceleration.

Deductive and inductive coding was of assistance, when analysing the information collected. Where requested, the researcher conducted an audit trail on all data collected, to ensure that all participants agreed with the researcher's interpretation of

the data received. It was important to the researcher that the data remained 'true' and other readers were called upon to comment on the data reflections and conclusions of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the study, which aimed to investigate the experiences of primary school students who have been year-level accelerated. An overall view of acceleration policy and implementation was obtained from a survey of Principals within the Junior School Heads of Western Australia network. A more in-depth view of acceleration was gained through exploration of the experiences of three children, who have been year-level accelerated, and the experiences of the principals overseeing their schooling, their teachers and their parents.

This chapter focuses on the analysis and presentation of results of the survey and interviews. Firstly, policy relating to acceleration and implementation data from the survey of Principals will be presented. Secondly, the acceleration contexts of the schools attended by the selected participants will be described. Thirdly, a summary of Interviews with principals, students, teachers and parents will follow.

Policy Related to Acceleration

It was expected that all schools would have a policy for gifted and talented students, but may not specifically address year-level acceleration. There was a varied response received from the principals across all sectors. For the purposes of this discussion, results describe if the schools have developed policies for Gifted and Talented Education and/or policies for Acceleration.

Of the responses received, only 4 out of 9 schools reported having a policy for gifted and talented, and 5 held a policy on acceleration. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of responses per sector of independent schools.

Table 4.1

Summary of Principals' Responses on Gifted and Talented Policy

Question	Number of responding schools with policy (N=9)	Percentage of schools with policy for each sector				
		Catholic single-sex schools (n=X)	Catholic co-educational (n=x)	Church affiliated single-sex schools	Church Affiliated co-educational schools	Schools from independent category
Does your school have a policy for gifted and talented students?	4	0	0	3	1	0
Does your school have a policy regarding year level acceleration?	5	0	1	3	1	0
Are there any children within your school who have been year-level accelerated? ¹	3	0	1	3	2	0

Six of the nine responding schools had children who had been accelerated, including schools with no apparent policy on acceleration. The schools without a policy are discussed first followed by the schools with a policy on Gifted Students and/or acceleration.

Schools with no Policy for Gifted and Talented Students nor Acceleration

There were four schools with no policy for gifted students, nor students who were accelerated. Of the church-affiliated Co-educational schools, two claimed to have no policies in place and no accelerated students. If there were no children within their school that had been year-level accelerated within the previous year, principals were

¹ Principals who answered 'no' to question 3 were then directed to Section 2 of the survey. Principals who answered 'yes', were asked to complete questions 4 and 5 and then move to Section 2

asked for their opinion of acceleration. Some principals were clearly open to acceleration:

I am open to the concept of acceleration. The acceleration would be dependent on the results of an IOWA acceleration scale test. (Principal, church affiliated co-educational school with no policy)

We consider acceleration (year level) carefully with testing, teacher reports. Parent interview and any other data-gathering means available (Principal, church affiliated single-sex school with an 'informal' policy on acceleration).

At this point it is not school policy, although it is in discussion (Principal, catholic co-educational school with an acceleration policy but no G&T policy).

Others were more in favour of lateral enrichment and highlighted social issues as reasons not to accelerate students:

My concern would be the age differential that may lead to social problems. Being with the right age groups is important for all of these issues. I believe Enrichment has greater worth for the individual rather than acceleration (Principal, catholic single-sex school with no policy on acceleration).

In exceptional circumstances acceleration has its place however the social consideration is first and foremost in my mind. I would rather see horizontal extension good lateral enrichment (Principal, church affiliated co-educational school with no policy).

Schools with no Policy for Giftedness or Acceleration, with Children who had been Accelerated.

There were two schools that did not have a policy for Acceleration or giftedness, but had accelerated students. One principal of a church-affiliated school claimed to have no policies in place, however had two students within the school that had been accelerated. Both students (boys) accelerated were in Year 3 at the time of acceleration and had been accelerated by one year level. The children's parents had been consulted at the time of acceleration, psychometric assessments completed, and

results gathered indicating that the children had IQ results more than one standard deviation above the mean. For one of the two children, a period of transition into the new year level was adopted, although in both instances, the children's inputs were not sought. The only other information supplied by this principal was an outline of procedures and evaluations that had taken place since the child had been accelerated. The principal described these as, "*Learning programmes within the class programme, Social skills programmes, tests at the beginning and end of the year and levels of achievement.*" Without a policy, the process appears to be more ad hoc. Whilst the responses received in this survey could have been valuable for further investigation, the researcher did not approach the principal due to them being unwilling to approach parents and provide students for participation in the research.

In another school, a catholic co-educational school, the principal indicated that a policy for gifted and talented students was not in place within the school, although there appeared to be a policy regarding year-level acceleration under discussion and a child within the school was enrolled above year level. In the words of the principal, "*The child was accelerated in another school and enrolled in our school at the accelerated level.*" The principal was able to provide some details of the acceleration process that had been used at the previous school. The girl had been accelerated by two year levels when in Year 3. The parents were consulted regarding the acceleration, and a psychometric assessment indicated that the child's IQ was more than one standard deviation above the mean. The opinions of other paraprofessionals were also sought. The principal was unsure as to whether the child's opinion on the acceleration had been sought, or if a period of class transition had taken place.

Schools with Policies for Gifted Children and Acceleration and No Students Accelerated within the Past Year

One church-affiliated single-sex school had a policy for gifted and talented students, and had accelerated children in the school (although the word 'informal' was noted next to this). No further details were available and as the last child had not been accelerated for over two years, this school did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the next phase of the study. The principal expressed a view that acceleration was an option:

We consider acceleration (year level) carefully with testing, teacher reports, parent interviews and any other data-gathering means available. (Principal, church-affiliated single-sex school).

Schools with Policies for Acceleration and Giftedness with Accelerated Students

There were five schools with policies in place and evidence of children who were year level accelerated within the past year. These schools are discussed in terms of implementation data on acceleration and the procedures in place to implement and evaluate acceleration.

Implementation of Acceleration

Table 4.2 outlines responses of schools, which have procedures in place for student acceleration. The results indicated that of the five schools that had accelerated students, four had more than one child accelerated and one school had five students. Whilst School 3 had 5 accelerated students, the school was of comparable student numbers to the other schools participating in the research, suggesting that the school had a rigorous process and policy for Acceleration in operation.

Across the schools, all children were accelerated between Pre-Primary and Year 3. Year 3 and Year 1 were the most popular years for acceleration, with four children accelerated in both year groups. Pre-Primary proved to be the second most popular

age group with three students accelerated, with one child being accelerated in Year 2. As meets study criteria, all children were accelerated 1-year level.

All schools had sought the input of parent throughout the acceleration process, whilst only at School 4 was psychometric assessment not reported as being part of the identification procedures. Hence, aside from School 4, all schools had utilised the results of the psychometric assessments to identify that the accelerated children presented with IQ more than one standard deviation above the norm.

There was some discrepancy in the data, as it related to implementation of a transition period for the accelerated child. Three schools indicated situations where a child had undergone a transition period in some instances, but not in others, one school offered no response and another indicated that they did not implement a transition period. These results suggest the use of transition as a procedure in the Acceleration process, is not an option used reliably or in every circumstance.

Every school except School 1 stated that they had sought the input of the child in the Acceleration process. These results suggest that schools encourage the input of the Accelerated child throughout the acceleration process. (See Table 4.2).

*Table 4.2 Procedure for Student Acceleration

Note: Schools 3, 4 and 5 were selected for involvement in this research subsequent to receipt of the survey results below.

For each child within your primary school who has been accelerated within the 12 months, please answer the following:

	School 1 Church Affiliated Co- Educational School		School 2 Catholic Co- Educational School	School 3 Church Affiliated Single-Sex School					School 4 Church Affiliated Co- Educational School		School 5 Church Affiliated Single-Sex School	
	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5	Child 6	Child 7	Child 8	Child 9	Child 10	Child 11	Child 12
At what age was the child year-level accelerated:	Year 3 boy	Year 3 boy	Year 3 girl	Year 1 girl	Year 1 boy	Year 1 boy	Year 2 boy	Year 3 boy	PP boy	PP girl	PP girl	Year 1 girl
By how many years was the child accelerated beyond their age-appropriate peers	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year
Prior to the child/children being accelerated, please tick if one or more of the following procedures took place (you can tick more than one box):												
Parents were consulted and consent sought.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Psychometric assessment was conducted by a qualified professional.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/R	N/R	Yes	Yes
Results from the psychometric assessment revealed the child's IQ was more than one standard deviation above the mean.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/R	N/R	Yes	Yes
A transition period within the new year level was attempted.	No	Yes	N/R	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
The child's input was sought	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
A transition period was in place, whereby the child had a period of transition within their new year level.	No	No	N/R	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Other:									Yes*		Yes**	Yes***

* Used PIPs as a guide and portfolio from the UK. ** Early entrant*** Year 1-2 mid-year

The schools also had different procedures for monitoring acceleration as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Acceleration Procedures and Evaluations

<p>School 1 Church Affiliated Co- Educational School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Programmes within the classroom programme • Social skills programmes • Tests at beginning and end of year • Levels of achievement
<p>School 2 Catholic Co- Educational School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child was accelerated in another school and enrolled at our school at the accelerated level
<p>School 3 Church Affiliated Single-Sex School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term review – social/emotional/academic • With child • With parents • With teachers
<p>School 4 Church Affiliated Co- Educational School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In class assessment. Marie Clay, professional judgement by staff, ongoing evaluation by learning support teacher
<p>School 5 Church Affiliated Single-Sex School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class monitoring • Speech and language screener • Consult with specialist and teacher of gifted • Parent feedback/questionnaire • Participation in extension activities • Off level testing

There were some similarities that presented, in terms of school acceleration procedures and evaluations. In 4 of the 5 schools, classroom monitoring by classroom teachers was the most predominant form of evaluation and monitoring. Two schools cited parent feedback as an important element of the acceleration evaluation process, with one school involving the accelerated child in the review process.

The predominant method of evaluating the success of student acceleration appeared to be the child's results in subsequent academic assessments. Examples of evaluation utilised included

tests, levels of achievement, Marie Clay Speech and Language screeners and off level testing. Two schools noted social indicators as an important element of evaluation.

The two schools with a policy on acceleration within the church-affiliated single-sex sector, presented with survey responses containing a high level of information. Both schools were ultimately selected for participation in the study by the researcher.

School A, Principal A, cited two children (one boy and one girl) who had been year-level accelerated within the school.

- Both children were accelerated whilst in Pre-primary.
- The parents' input sought.
- No psychometric assessments were completed for either child.
- One child had a period of transition into the new year level.
- Both children's input was sought.

The Performance Indicators in Primary Schools' (PIP) assessment was also utilised as an assessment tool and added in the section entitled 'other'. This principal explained that in-class assessment, Marie Clay, professional staff judgement, and ongoing evaluation by learning support teachers, were the procedures and evaluations adopted since the children had been accelerated.

As this principal was willing and able to permit further research to be conducted within the school, this school was subsequently identified as School A, and was one of the three main contributors to this study.

Principal B from School B identified five children who had been accelerated within the school (four boys and one girl). Three had been six years of age, at the time of acceleration; one had been seven and one eight years of age. All children had been accelerated by one year level.

Aside from one child, who had not completed a time of transition into the new year level at the time of acceleration, all of the children had completed psychometric assessments and presented with an IQ more than one standard deviation above the mean. Parents had been consulted throughout the process and opinions sought from a range of paraprofessionals. The children's input was also sought in all instances.

When describing any procedures or evaluations that had taken place subsequent to the children being accelerated, the principal described:

A term review – social/emotional/academic, with the child, the parents and the teachers.

As this Principal was also willing and able to permit further research to be conducted within the school, this school was subsequently identified as School B, and was one of the three main contributors to this paper.

The second response received within this sector, outlined a school that had a policy for gifted and talented students and acceleration. The school also had children who had been accelerated.

Of the two children described (one boy - boys attend in that year level only - and one girl), one child was four and accepted early into Kindergarten, the other child was six at the age of acceleration. Both children had been accelerated by one year level and both completed psychometric assessments and presented with an IQ more than one standard deviation above the mean. Opinions from the parents, the children and paraprofessionals were sought, although a transition period into the new year level did not transpire. The respondent also noted that one was an early entrant into Kindergarten, the other being accelerated in the middle of the year from Year 1 to Year 2. It was further noted there were ten accelerants in total, within the school, within that year.

The evaluation procedures subsequent to the children's acceleration included:

Class monitoring, speech and language screens, consultations with specialist teachers of gifted students, parent feedback and questionnaires, and participation in extension activities, off-level testing.

Off level testing provides teachers an opportunity to gain a more accurate picture of a child's abilities than would be possible if age or year level specific tests were given exclusively (Gross, 2004). When age or year level tests are given, it is likely that the gifted child may perform at the ceiling level of the test and not have the opportunity to demonstrate ability beyond this ceiling. Off level testing is of significance as a child may be able to perform at levels beyond that expected for his or her chronological age or year level.

In the section available for additional comment, the respondent noted:

We have a very positive and flexible approach to whole-year and subject acceleration across all year levels. Staff members are informed and positive, we use IOWA acceleration test as well as a number of other tools to make decisions, use GATCA and involve parents.

As this Principal (or person nominated by the Principal) was willing and able to permit further research to be conducted within the school, this school was subsequently identified as School C, and was one of the three main contributors to this paper.

Summary of Acceleration Policy and Implementation

Of the survey responses received, schools presented as operating under a range of difference procedures and policies. Principals displayed clear opinions on the concept of acceleration and adopted procedures to reflect those opinions. Of the responses received, three students were selected to participate in the study, all of whom met the criteria as children who had been year level accelerated, within the past year of schooling.

Experiences of Acceleration

This section examines the experiences of three students, identified from the survey to principals, who have been year-level accelerated, and the experiences of the Principals, teachers and parents. The children were chosen because they had all been year level accelerated, and met the criteria to be involved in this research.

The School Context

So that the experiences of acceleration can be understood within the context of their broader school experiences, a brief background of each school is given. The experiences of the School (from the perspective of the principal or nominated representative), the parents, the teachers and the children are then examined.

School A is a high fee paying, co-educational, church affiliated school situated in Perth's southern suburbs. The school is divided into Junior (Kindergarten to Year 4), Middle (Years 5-9) and Upper (Years 10-12). The school is co-educational from Kindergarten to Year 4 and then single sex in the upper years. Most of the children who are no longer able to continue within the school beyond Year 4, attend the single sex sister school located nearby.

There are approximately 300 children from Kindergarten to Year 7 and this is the area from which Student A has been selected. The school representative interviewed in the place of the principal was a member of the school management team, and responsible for the enrichment of student learning from Kindergarten to Year 12. The junior school is single-streamed with classes of an average of 20 children per class. There are specialist teachers for many additional learning areas and an enrichment team is available to work with children in small withdrawal groups, who have been identified as working well above or below their expected year levels academically.

Within Student A's (p. 46) current accelerated class, there are predominately boys. There is one classroom teacher responsible for this class when they are not attending specialised lessons (including Languages other than English, Sport, and Religion etc).

School B is a co-educational, low fee paying church affiliated school, located in the outer southern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia. The school has approximately 340 children in Years 1-6 and is partitioned as a junior, middle and senior school. The junior school campus, from which this student was selected, is comparatively well resourced and the grounds of the school are extensive. The Head of the Junior School is responsible for the overall management of children from Kindergarten to Year 6. The junior school is both single and double-streamed and the classes have an average of 28 children per class. There are specialist teachers for some additional learning areas and an enrichment team is available to work with children in small withdrawal groups, who have been identified as working academically well above or below their expected year levels.

Within Student B's (Table 4.2) current accelerated class, there is a fairly even mixture of boys and girls. There is one classroom teacher responsible for the class when they are not attending specialised lessons (including Languages other than English, Sport, and Religion etc).

School C is situated in Perth's southern suburbs and is a high fee paying, single sex, and church affiliated educational institution. The school consists of a Junior School, (Kindergarten to Year 7) and a Senior School (Years 8-12). The school is co-educational in Kindergarten and Pre-Primary and then single sex in the proceeding years. Most of the children who are no longer able to continue within the school beyond Pre-primary, attend the affiliated single sex school located nearby.

There are approximately 220 children from Kindergarten to Year 7 and Student C is currently in the Early Childhood years of schooling. The person nominated as 'Principal' in this instance was a member of the junior school enrichment team, and responsible for the

enrichment of student learning from Kindergarten to Year 7. The junior school is single-streamed and the classes have an average of 15-20 children per class. There are specialist teachers for many additional learning areas and an enrichment team is available to work with children in small withdrawal groups, who have been identified as working well above or below their expected year levels academically. There is one classroom teacher responsible for this class when they are not attending specialised lessons (including Languages other than English, Sport, and Religion etc).

School C offers an extensive range of activities and programmes for children who have been identified as gifted and talented. These include withdrawal, in-class and extra-curricular activities. Student C is currently involved with all of these options.

The Experiences of the School

The perspectives of the nominated person at each school are examined in turn. The person nominated at School A was a member of the school management team, and was responsible for overseeing that the needs of children were met, through the specialised learning centre and programmes offered. For the purposes of this research, they will be described as Principal A and appeared as the person nominated by the Principal.

Principal A provided a very positive overview of the acceleration experience for Student A. The child was initially identified as very able, whilst in Year 1, and was placed into a withdrawal enrichment programme. The principal described the child as being one of two children within the family, with an older sibling of the opposite sex, who did not attend the same school.

Prior to acceleration, the child integrated well socially and was a real leader within the age-appropriate group context. Academically, the child was performing at an extremely high level, and was placed within the withdrawal programme for additional extension and challenge. After observing the child over a period of three terms, the principal recognised that the child was

meeting and exceeding all academic expectations on a consistent basis, and therefore commenced the process of investigating whether year-level acceleration was going to be a viable option for this child. It was the principal who instigated the process of reviewing whether or not Student A would be accelerated. In order to do this, the IOWA acceleration test was initiated (as per the school's policy), and a range of standardised assessments, including WALNA tests at the accelerated year level, were conducted. The child also completed a psychometric assessment with the school counsellor. The child performed to a high level in all assessments completed, and presented as a suitable candidate for year-level acceleration. Socially, Student A integrated well both prior and post acceleration.

When questioned as to the principal's reflections on the adequacy of the school's role in this process, the response was:

We were proactive in the area. We were constantly looking to see whether we were providing him with the best educational opportunity in the school and then once we were confident of that, yes, we thought that he would be able to work within the Year 3 (Principal A)

Hence, the parents were involved in the acceleration process and their approval and comment sought.

Post acceleration, Principal A detailed how he had continually monitored the child's progress, visiting classes and speaking to parents and teachers. Whilst no formal assessments have been implemented to measure the success of this year-level acceleration, post acceleration, Principal A suggested that reviewing factors on the IOWA acceleration test could be a successful means of evaluating the success or otherwise of year-level acceleration. Specifically, Principal A stated,

I would be looking at their motivation, their self-esteem because the research has shown that there was a concern that their self-esteem may plummet when they go into the next year level. I would also say problem-solving strategies so that when the work does become difficult. Their interaction with peers would be another one for

monitoring, and also confer with parents to see if there were any family issues that had arisen, and also sports are consequences for acceleration.

In Principal A's role as facilitator and initiator of the acceleration process, he was able to confirm there was a policy for acceleration within the school, which was referred to throughout the acceleration process for Student A. Whilst the school was completely supportive of the acceleration of Student A, Principal A was unable to confirm if all staff were aware of the acceleration policy that was in operation within the school.

Overall, Principal A shared a positive perception of year-level acceleration both pre and post acceleration progress of Student A. The principal went on to suggest that the only negative would have been if the child had not been accelerated, as he felt the child would have become frustrated, careless and a potential behaviour problem. He felt there was no specific age that was ideal for a child to be accelerated, although there was a preference for the child to commence school and be observed in their age-appropriate year level, prior to being accelerated. When invited to add any final comments, Principal A noted,

I would rather a parent not approach me and say, 'I want my child accelerated.' I would like to be able to see that from the teacher's recommendation first, rather than the parents'.

The principal of School B provided a comprehensive overview of the student's background. As the person responsible for overseeing the general management of students within the primary years, the principal clearly had a detailed understanding of the students within their care. The principal explained that the child was the older of two children, with both parents maintaining professional positions. The family of the accelerated child had been in England, prior to their child's commencement in the West Australian school system, and the child had commenced in a full-time learning programme in England, at a very young age. When the child returned to Western Australia, it quickly became apparent that the child was not going to be suitably placed within their age-appropriate year level.

Shortly after commencing in pre-primary, the child was accelerated into Year 1. It was quickly apparent to the principal, staff and parents that the child was misplaced in pre-primary, both socially and academically. Whilst the parents had initiated the concept of year level acceleration, the school was quick to act on this recommendation, with the principal overseeing the overall process.

As part of the initial assessment to deem if year-level acceleration would be a viable option, the child was administered the PIPS' assessment. The teachers, parents and administrators then met to discuss the concept of acceleration and when it might take place. A period of transition was discussed and in this instance, the child was placed in their new level the following week. At this point, the child was then closely monitored, to assess how she was assimilating into her new year level, and this was quickly deemed to be a success.

Apart from general teacher assessment, judgement and the PIPS' test, no formal testing was implemented, and the principal felt that the management in this area was sufficient. Furthermore, it was deemed that teacher judgement and observation should form the key indicator for whether or not a child is year-level accelerated. As the school did not have an acceleration policy, there were no other factors for consideration.

Subsequent to the child's acceleration, the Principal reported positive social and academic outcomes. The key factor in determining the success of the acceleration was the child's happy outlook and achievement of academic targets in the new year level. The principal went on to suggest that a pre and post test scenario for acceleration would be a good initiative, although they were not clear on what measures for assessment could be utilised. In the final comments, the principal stated,

I think that the most important thing that we were concerned about was not necessarily the academic progress of the child. We were more concerned about the social and emotional move from Pre-primary to Year 1 but the child has been socially mixing with other children from a very early age and seemed to be able to adapt quite

easily into Year 1. Now whether later on in Years 5 or 6 creates problems, is another issue. (Principal B)

Principal C immediately presented with a strong understanding and awareness of Student C's background. The Principal described Student C as one of two children within a loving family home, who had commenced at the college in kindergarten (aged 4). The child presented initially with advanced social and cognitive skills, and it quickly became apparent that the child was not suited to the age appropriate class placement. Following a screening process, a period of transition for acceleration was trialled in the next year level, to determine if the child could cope with the demands of a higher year. Through this time, it became increasingly clear the child needed to sustain a permanent move into an accelerated year, and hence, the child moved directly from completing Year 1 into Year 3.

In the case of Student C, a period of transition had occurred over a three-month period, with the child accessing work from higher year levels, whilst in their age-appropriate class. Towards the end of Year 1, the principal instigated consideration of year-level acceleration, in close consultation with the staff and parents. During this period of consideration, a range of diagnostic processes were undertaken. These included the WIPPSI and other psychometric assessments. These were conducted by the school psychologist, who worked within the school structure.

Following receipt of diagnostic assessment results, the school was proactive to meet with parents and establish a case profile of the child. The school also utilised the IOWA acceleration test, used to assess the suitability for a child's acceleration. This assessment continued throughout the year (Year 1) and a final decision to accelerate was made halfway through Term 4 of Year 1. At this point, the parents' approval was sought to proceed, which was granted unconditionally.

Since the acceleration of Student C, the school has maintained close contact with the parents. In addition, the child has been welcomed into a 'chit chat' group; this is an informal gathering

of gifted accelerated children from within the school. The children meet regularly and are given the opportunity to share their experiences, anxieties and successes. All assessments completed in the new year level have been monitored closely, and the teacher within the new year level has been regularly approached. The principal felt the whole experience had been entirely positive, as a result of thorough investigation and monitoring.

Post acceleration, no formal assessment has been completed however there has been a range of anecdotal observation collated, to measure social and emotional progress. When prompted to suggest if there might be any further means of measuring the success of year-level acceleration, post acceleration, the principal felt it was important to meet with accelerated students on a regular basis. It was also deemed important for staff to meet regularly, to monitor the success of the child within the new cohort.

The principal described his/her role in the process as that of a facilitator, bringing the process to fruition. Close contact was maintained with the parents, the teacher and the child, as well as formalising a final decision. To ensure the child's progress was monitored regularly, the principal placed the accelerated child in their timetable on their database for the proceeding seven years. This would also ensure when the child entered high school, a thorough handover would take place.

Throughout the process, the principal was able to follow the policy for acceleration operating within the school, and this procedure plan was referred to regularly. In this child's case, the whole acceleration process was easy to follow and the only extenuating factor was the need to consider the child's small stature. Ultimately however, this was not deemed to be a significant factor, and the acceleration was approved.

The principal also observed some interesting points in relation to Student C's social integration into the accelerated year level. Initially, the child spent a good deal of time socialising with age-appropriate peers, and took some time to adjust socially with the accelerated year group's cohort. Nevertheless, this was not perceived as problematic, and

the child subsequently made firm friendships within the new class, and appeared to be very happy.

Presenting from a very strong background in gifted education, Principal C was very positive about the concept and practice of acceleration, and had been so for some time. Over the years as an educator, the principal had not been involved in a negative acceleration experience but emphasised the importance of careful documentation and consultation throughout. In this instance, the process for Student C had been entirely positive and successful. The principal was also very keen to keep abreast of the latest research in the area, and would be interested to know of further assessment tools available to measure the success or otherwise of acceleration, post acceleration.

The principal concluded by emphasising the importance of teacher cooperation and up-skilling in this area. It was emphasised:

I would never accelerate a child into a class if the teacher was not supportive of the process because I just don't think that it would ever work if the teacher is not supportive of it and to me that is absolutely fundamental. (Principal C)

Summary

The responses received from all three principals were overwhelmingly positive. All principals exhibited a clear understanding of the academic issues relating to acceleration and acknowledge the importance of clear policy documentation and shared understandings of this concept. All Principals had been keen participants and bystanders in the acceleration process and had maintained a leading role in the development of procedures and/or policies, as well as being involved in the assessment and observation processes.

The Principals all placed a high level of importance on the social-emotional well-being of the children implicated in the research, and carefully monitored the child's progress throughout the acceleration process. Whilst aware of potential social issues that may have presented, they were not noted at any point.

The Principals involved in the research had clearly established school environments that were supportive of the acceleration process and inclusive for gifted students. Their attitudes prior to and post acceleration remained positive and enthusiastic.

The Experiences of Parents

The parent of Student A first considered year-level acceleration as a viable option for their child when they were in pre-school. This came about as a result of the child missing the cut-off for schooling by a number of months and hence, he/she commenced school a year later than the parents would have hoped.

When Student A commenced school at a different school from the present one, the parent mentioned the concept of acceleration but it was not met favourably. The parents subsequently moved Student A to his current school, where, after a period of time, the school actually approached the parents about acceleration, of their own volition.

The parent was aware that the school had conducted a number of assessments to assess whether the child was a suitable candidate for acceleration, although they could not cite specifics, aside from trialling lessons in the new year level.

Of interest, the parents mentioned that the current school had not initially been supportive of year-level acceleration for this child. The parent suggested that they had been told that it was not something that the school did. Possible reasons for this change may have been due to a change of staffing, or leadership, within the school.

The parent was generally satisfied with the level of support the school had provided, both socially and academically post acceleration, but they were not aware if the school had conducted any formal assessment to measure the general success of the initiative. The parent felt that the child had made gains both socially and academically since he/she had been accelerated, although they did suggest that Student A had experienced some initial problems integrating socially, within the first few months of commencing in their new

accelerated year level. These difficulties presented themselves in the playground, but they were quickly rectified over a period of a few months. When asked to elaborate on their reflections of acceleration for their child, Parent A commented:

It's a godsend. He's a different kid. He's just much easier to deal with and...there are no negatives, it's all positive.

The parent went on to note that where the child had previously felt exasperated and frustrated by his peers, he was now settled and challenged. The initial social issues had now rectified themselves and the child was functioning well in the new year level.

When asked to suggest some criteria deemed appropriate for measuring the success of acceleration, post acceleration, Parent A suggested he felt it was important to measure, observe and monitor the academic and psychological impact on the child.

As a final comment, Parent A suggested he was impressed that the actual acceleration of the child had not been the final stage in the process. Rather, the school had maintained contact with the family and the child, carefully monitoring the progress. The parent felt that this had been an excellent initiative on the part of the school and had certainly set this school apart from state school counterparts. The parent felt that the state school stance on the concept of acceleration was inappropriate.

The parent of Student B presented as a professional person, who had a significant understanding of the process of year-level acceleration, both as a parent who had experienced acceleration first-hand, and as a professional, working as a psychologist.

In her outline of the steps leading up to acceleration, she described how both she and her partner had been keen to find the right 'academic match' for their child, who had worked at a high level academically in the United Kingdom. Following many calls to schools, she was able to find a school that would consider the concept of year-level acceleration for their child; that being School B.

After attending an interview with the current school, they were delighted to note that the school would be prepared to consider year-level acceleration, provided the child was able to sustain academic outcomes of a high level in the incumbent year. As it transpired, the school maintained a positive stance on acceleration, both when the child entered the school at the age appropriate year level, and when the child was accelerated to a new year level some weeks later. The parent found both the teacher and the administration very helpful and open.

Since the child has been accelerated, the parent noted that the school has continued to monitor her child, as it would any other student. Whilst the parent was not aware of any formal assessments that have been implemented to measure the success of acceleration, post acceleration, she mentioned that the child had been sustaining successful academic and social outcomes, since acceleration.

With the parent's background in psychology, she had predetermined views on acceleration and its success or otherwise. In this case, she felt that acceleration is a positive tool to meet some students' needs and this was certainly the case for her own child. The parent explained, 'It would have been the biggest disaster not to have her moving to Year 1 this year.'

In conclusion, the mother felt that acceleration had been a positive experience for her child, as her educational needs were being met, she was happy at school and she had many friends. Whilst it had been necessary to do a bit of 'catch up' in some learning areas, this had been a simple task to achieve at home. The parent's final comments were, 'I'm grateful. I am so grateful that she is able to come into Year 1. It has just made the world of difference.'

The interview with the father of Student C commenced with him providing an overview of the lead up to the acceleration process, as he had observed it. Whilst the school had instigated some transitional sessions for the child from the age of 5, the parents had observed that their child was very able, and seemed to be gravitating towards academic pursuits of a higher level.

The school actually initiated discussions with the family and made it aware of trial acceleration into a new year level. They also sought approval for psychometric assessment, which the family was happy to grant. In the father's professional role as a psychologist, he was already aware of the types of assessment the school might utilise, and was comfortable with these.

Student C's father could recall that size was really the only negative criterion for acceleration in this instance. As the child was slight, the family needed to consider carefully if this might be an issue for the child now, or in the future.

Upon reflection, the father felt the school had sustained a very positive and proactive role in the acceleration process. The school had involved the family throughout the decision-making process, and monitoring, subsequent to the acceleration, had also been positive. The parent described the school's actions as very 'systematic', in that it had involved all members of the child's education in a systematic and constructive manner. He felt the transition time into a new year level was flexible and constructive, with no decisions reached without consensus approval.

Post acceleration, the family has been aware of formal and informal support for the child. The school has maintained regular contact with the family and the child, with several meetings scheduled to monitor individual progress. The school has monitored Student C's social integration and the family has ensured the child has had peers with whom to associate. The father asserted:

She has just fitted in. I think you'll find she has fitted in perfectly. I asked her this question this morning...and she said, "I don't think I am in an accelerated class. I'm just in my class."

When asked to elaborate on whether or not he could recommend some criteria that might measure the success of year-level acceleration post acceleration, Parent C suggested there were two things to consider: firstly, whether or not the child is coping with the work in the new year level and, secondly, if the child has integrated well socially, and developed a sense of

'belonging'. These two considerations should be tabled during the initial year of acceleration, as a measure of success or otherwise.

Summary

The Parents involved in this research were all supportive and positive about acceleration and the journey they had experienced as parents of a gifted child. They all spoke positively about the school processes undertaken leading up to and preceding the acceleration process and emphasised the importance and valued of a strong, communicative relationship between home and school.

Specifically, the parents' concerns focused around two key themes; catering for the giftedness and academic aptitude of their child and ensuring the social and emotional well-being of their child. All noted a correlation between the two themes and observed that both concerns needed to be addressed concurrently, for successful outcomes.

Whilst the parents exhibited knowledge of school policies and processes to a lesser degree than representatives interviewed from within the schools, they had all clearly been aware of and involved in the process of acceleration and happy with the procedures that had been put in place. They expressed strong reinforcement for the place of transition within the acceleration process, as a means of successfully integrating their child into their new year level. In all feedback received, a strong sense of communication and collaboration between home and school was reiterated and reinforced.

The Experiences of Teachers

The teacher from School A was able to provide a detailed summary of the background to Student A's acceleration. The teacher outlined that the parents placed the teacher under no pressure about the child's acceleration and observed that the child had assimilated very well, both socially and academically into the accelerated year level. Whilst the teacher did not have any specific information about the child before they commenced in the class, the teacher was aware the child had been accelerated into a new year level. Whilst the teacher had not been involved with any elements of the acceleration process prior to the child being accelerated, they felt there was not a need for any support from the school, as the child assimilated beautifully into the new year level. Whilst they had not cited any policy documentation pertaining to acceleration, they had not implemented any additional testing to measure the success of the child's acceleration, post acceleration. The teacher simply conducted the standard assessment for all children in the class, and noted the child was performing academically and socially at a level superior to their non-accelerated peers. When questioned as to whether the teacher could suggest any additional assessment that might be suitable to assess the success of acceleration, post acceleration, he/she commented:

Perhaps...there could be some sort of standardised testing that's done through the school and I suppose the question is, do we do I ...do we do it against the other children who have not been accelerated?

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The teacher continued to speak positively about the process of acceleration for Student A, both from a social and academic perspective. He/she felt his/her role as classroom teacher had been successful in the process, as the appropriate groundwork had been undertaken, prior to acceleration. The teacher's reflections on acceleration as a concept were also positive; they felt its success or otherwise were reflective in the amount of careful assessment conducted regarding the suitability of acceleration, prior to its inception.

Whilst the teacher felt it important to measure the success of year-level acceleration, post acceleration, the question remained, how is this achieved? They went on to suggest that anecdotal observations would most likely be the best measure of success, as they were not aware of other methods of suitable assessment. To conclude, the teacher explained:

I think that the acceleration process has been really valuable and it's something that has really come to the fore in recent years. You know, previously, a child being accelerated was quite an unusual thing; it's fairly common now...I am really pleased with the acceleration, it's been done in a very level headed way with a lot of input from all people involved.

The teacher for Student B was able to provide a comprehensive summary of the child's family background, alongside the child's progress. The teacher described the student, who came from a loving family and described the child as, 'A very happy, creative and artistic child.'

Prior to the child entering her class in an accelerated capacity, the teacher held a meeting with the parents and child, and the teacher was impressed with the child immediately. Whilst the teacher was not involved in any formal testing, the child had a trial period in the new year level, and this was successful on all counts. In slight contrast to the report from the mother, the teacher reported a minor issue for the child assimilating socially initially, however this was rectified during the period of transition.

Whilst the teacher was not aware if the school had a policy of acceleration upon which to refer, the teacher felt that academic assessment and close monitoring were sufficient policy procedures. Specifically, the teacher felt it important for any child accelerated to be 'flagged' and monitored closely. In addition, his/her academic and social progress should be tracked and frequent meetings between parents, the principal and the teacher should transpire.

In summary, the teacher reported the child had sustained positive progress in all areas, since acceleration. The teacher's role has been that of monitoring the acceleration and ensuring that the right decision (as to whether or not to accelerate) was made. This has been fed back

through to the home of the child. Prior to Child B entering the class, the teacher did not have direct experience working with children who have been accelerated, however her thoughts were generally positive. The teacher did note that they held some concerns for the child, as he/she grew older, that a gap might widen socially and emotionally in the adolescent years.

The teacher felt strongly that each child's acceleration should be monitored closely to ensure the experience is a positive one for the child. Their concluding statement was as follows:

I think that if a child is ready, parents feel they're ready, socially they're ready I think it's a great opportunity to promote their learning. In terms of my experience with the child, it would have been such a loss for her to spend this whole year in pre-primary. I couldn't even imagine what it would have done to her. This has been the best thing she could have ever done...

The teacher of Student C presented with an enthusiastic overview of the child and their background. They demonstrated a sound knowledge of the factors leading to the child's acceleration, and described how the child had demonstrated a real precocity for learning whilst in pre-primary and Year 1. The teacher had taught the child for one year, since entering the accelerated Year 3 level of schooling. The teacher spoke favourably about the school and the way in which strong links are drawn between the class teacher and the learning enrichment centre. Hence, when the child entered the first year as an accelerated student, the teacher had an excellent understanding of the child's background. Whilst the teacher was not involved in any steps leading to Student C's acceleration, they were aware of what the steps had been.

Since entering an accelerated year level, the school had assisted the teacher to formulate an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for the child, in consultation with the learning enrichment centre. Furthermore, regular meetings were scheduled to monitor the progress of the child. This correlated with the teacher's awareness of a school policy/procedure, for the assistance of students who had/have been year-level accelerated.

From a personal perspective, the teacher had completed a range of assessments to measure the success of acceleration for Student C. These assessments included academic assessment and anecdotal observations of social integration. Academically, Student C sustained high results at the upper end of the accelerated year-level cohort. Socially, the child integrated effectively and is well revered by her peers. Whilst initiating these assessments, the teacher described the child as:

Academically...achieving at an incredibly high level...you can tell just how well liked she is and how confidently she interacts with her peer cohorts being really successful as well.

In summary, the teacher held very positive views on acceleration believing every case should be assessed on its individual merit. A process should be followed, with total parental and staff support in order for it to succeed. Post acceleration, the teacher emphasised the importance of monitoring and tracking the child, to ensure the best educational outcomes are sustained for the child.

Summary

The teachers involved in the research presented as positive and hard-working. They had positive attitudes to acceleration, whilst some had indicated concerns about acceleration prior to their involvement with the children. All of the teachers emphasised the importance of school support and the awareness of clear policy and procedure in the acceleration process.

The teachers had noted and appreciated a keen sense of support from Principals and were confident in the quality and quantity of the testing and review processes initiated. The teachers had clearly initiated a close relationship with the children's parents and had fostered a keen sense of team work in the management of any issues arising. They all noted the accelerated student had assimilated successfully from a social perspective, whilst managing the increased rigour of a more challenging curriculum. These two indicators had been a clear measure of success for the teachers involved.

The Experiences of Children

Student A presented as an enthusiastic, energetic individual. The student was very comfortable with the interview process and displayed no apprehension speaking with the researcher. The child was able to articulate when they had 'moved' year levels, from Year 1 to Year 3, and mentioned that mum and dad had helped them to make new friends and adapt to the concept of moving classes. At school, the child mentioned that the teachers had given him, *Harder stuff like maths and all that stuff so I could get used to the Year 3 stuff.*

Student A spoke positively about the acceleration process and mentioned that whilst they had felt initially nervous about moving into an accelerated year level, they were happy with the move as they, *Liked the challenge and all that stuff and the work was harder.*

When asked to elaborate on things they did not like about being accelerated, Student A mentioned they had missed their friends from the previous year level, and was troubled them for a while. The child had overcome this issue by, 'forgetting them.' They were quick however; to point out they had subsequently made new friends, with whom they were very happy.

Despite initial nerves surrounding the changes involved, Student A found the new accelerated year level a lot more exciting and challenging and the child would recommend acceleration, both socially and academically, for other children. When the student was asked specifically if they would recommend acceleration to other children, the response was as follows,

Yeah, if they're good enough...they just need to work properly, like doing some big challenges so they get it right.

Student B presented as a bright, happy child, keen to relay experiences pertaining to year-level acceleration. At all times, the child spoke confidently and positively about acceleration. The child initially heard about the possibility of year-level acceleration prior to entering the school. Clearly, this was a topic of discussion in the family. The child described themselves as feeling, *Very excited and happy'* about the possibility of going into a higher year level.

Perhaps the one thing they were most excited about was the possibility of making new friends. Since arriving in the new accelerated year level, the child explained how much they enjoyed the new challenges and friendships they have encountered. When asked to describe how these new things made them feel, the response was, *A little bit scared and shy.*

Initially, the child felt quite challenged by the new work expectations, although they have now adjusted to the new changes. Specifically, the child felt challenged by the new year level expectations to read and write and play less. Despite these considerations, they were adamant they would change nothing about their new year level and classroom experiences. Socially, it appeared the child is now very well adjusted, and speaks freely about her 'first' and 'second' best friends. In summary, the child presented as a well adjusted, happy and conversant student, who was assimilating well in all areas of development.

Student C presented as a bright, articulate child. Their initial awareness of the potential for year-level acceleration occurred in Year 1, when the family spoke to the child and suggested they might be moving to Year 3. Completely comfortable with this, the child immediately reflected, *I just think that I am in Year 3 and that's how I am supposed to be.* Initially, the child reported feeling a little 'worried' and anxious about the year-level transition, but quickly assimilated to the idea. Specifically, Student C was concerned about being with bigger, older children. Whilst the child could not recall a period of transition into the new year level, she was able to recall the role her family had in telling her she was going to be accelerated. When asked to comment on how the child found their new year level, Student C reported enjoying the work, which was more challenging. In addition, the child felt: *It's better work for me and also it's getting new friends as well.*

If given the opportunity to change any element of the acceleration process, Student C commented they would not change anything. Socially, they have made new friends. On occasions, Student C still misses her 'old friends,' but emphasised she can still invite them

over for a play or see them at lunch and recess. To conclude, when Student C was asked if she would recommend acceleration for other children, the response was,

Well, I think that they should...that the teacher should do it just the same way they did it for me because it's...now I just think of myself in Year 3 and nothing else is different.

Summary

All of the accelerated students involved in the research were very positive and enthusiastic about the acceleration experience. They had felt a keen sense of support and encouragement, both from home and school and particularly enjoyed the new academic challenges within their accelerated year level. Whilst displaying initial concerns, the children had all managed to assimilate successfully from a social perspective and enjoyed a depth a breadth of friendship opportunities. Without exception, the children embraced the new opportunities, both socially and academically, that presented as a result of their acceleration.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study was based on the assumption that consultation with principals, parents, teachers and students regarding their experiences of year level acceleration would add to knowledge and understandings, with the potential to inform and enhance future experiences for other gifted children. The results of this study are presented in correlation with this assumption.

There are several factors to be mindful of when interpreting the results of this study. Firstly, three children and their parents, teachers and principals have been involved in this research. This represents an extremely limited sample of accelerated children of primary school age and their experiences; therefore, the results should be considered accordingly. It is not possible to represent in this research more than a small sample of potential students' who could be involved in the study and the researcher acknowledges that it was unlikely that children with negative experiences of acceleration would be nominated by principals for participation in this study.

Secondly, there is the potential for bias to emerge in the results as a consequence of utilising the personal interview technique. This was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Finally, the researcher acknowledges their personal role as a Head of Junior School within the JSHAA Network of Western Australia. Her experiences and understandings implicit within this role hold the potential to skew the results. The researcher has been extremely mindful of this in discussion of the results and has attempted at all stages to provide an impartial perspective.

The results will discuss the overarching experiences of principals, parents, teachers and children who have been year level accelerated. Common reflections and conclusions of the key stakeholders will be explored as they relate to the following areas: academic issues – including the role of assessment; socio/emotional issues – including the attitudes/feelings of those accelerated and those associated with the acceleration; administrative/ practical issues

– including policies and procedures, the role of the school, etc; attitudes toward acceleration; environmental contexts – including school conditions; the role of transition and the desired outcomes of acceleration. The discussion will hence address the key research question, summarising the overarching experiences of children, their families and educators of year-level accelerated primary aged students in Western Australian Independent schools.

The Academic Issues Relating to Acceleration

All of the key stakeholders in the acceleration process were acutely aware that the process itself was instigated, in its initial stages at least, as a result of the academic aptitude of the child. Under no circumstances was a child recommended for acceleration as a result of progressive social considerations (although this may have been a contributing factor). Rather, the children were all recommended for acceleration and approved for acceleration as a result of significantly higher level academic achievement.

Methods of Academic Measurement

Children were recognised as candidates for acceleration as a result of high academic performance and their ability to understand and apply higher-order cognitive strategies as compared with children within their age appropriate cohort. From a school perspective (principal and teacher), it was agreed that the accelerated children were not sufficiently challenged within their year level prior to acceleration and exhibited the potential to plateau and stagnate if not presented with sufficiently rigorous academic challenges.

From a parental perspective, all parents noted that their children were displaying signs of being bored at school and generally lacking any enthusiasm for set tasks prior to acceleration. Furthermore, all parents involved in the research had considered the concept of year level acceleration prior to the school recommending the concept and this consideration was based largely on their parental perception of their child's academic ability.

All three children involved in the research described how they felt a sense of boredom and lack of fulfilment at school within their age-appropriate placement, as they were not being sufficiently cognitively challenged. In contrast, all children articulated their delight and sense of happiness, when they were moved into a new year level as they were now being provided with academic programmes that better suited their ability.

In an attempt to specifically identify the academic aptitude of the students involved in the research, all three schools implemented a range of different academic assessments and aptitude measurements. Whilst two of the schools implemented an IQ assessment and all schools utilised standardised testing, all schools also referred to in-class testing, and teacher/principal diagnosis and referral as the key and initial method of academic assessment. All children involved in this study were performing at a level well above their age-appropriate peers in the receiving year level and a period of transition was instigated to confirm this. The results of the trial transition period will be discussed later in this chapter.

Whilst academic identification and assessment were identified as key initial indicators of a child's suitability for acceleration, it was also noted by all stake-holders to be but one of a range of factors for consideration in the acceleration process. There were no examples of children being accelerated on the basis of academic considerations alone and schools examined and measured social skills, appropriateness and the child's feelings about acceleration amongst other issues prior to the acceleration being approved. As McLouglan and Lewis (2001) remind us, educational assessment involves gathering information about children's learning levels, styles and skills to inform planning. In addition, they go on to state, that formal testing is one element of eliciting information. The research supports the literature as academic testing was identified as an important step in the acceleration process, but by no means was utilised exclusively or outside of the child's own context. Hansen (1992: p 75), explains,

Highly gifted students deserve rich and substantial educations commensurate with their advanced abilities. Locating highly gifted students is on the path to sensible educational planning for them.

Hansen moves on to suggest that the first step to acceleration should be utilising tests with good reliability and validity. The results of this research suggest that teachers and schools are adopting a range of sound testing techniques to identify and then plan for meeting the needs of gifted students. The research further suggests that academic identification and assessment is the first stage in the acceleration process.

The Perception of Academic Performance Before and After Acceleration

As described previously, all children who were accelerated described a lack of fulfilment and challenge prior to being accelerated. Parents and Educators all supported this observation and noted a significant improvement in attitude and general well being when the child was placed in their new level. A plethora of research supports the concept that children will be happier and more productive at school if they are presented with academic challenges and opportunities that closely correlate with their ability. Gross, McLeod, Drummond, and Merrick, (2001) question how children will remain motivated to learn if most of the work that they are presented with is material they have already mastered. The experiences of the children involved in the present study support this theory, as the children note that they enjoy school and learning more now that they are in an accelerated year level. All three teachers and principals noted that the children were well motivated and highly competent academically in their new year levels.

The Socio-Emotional Issues Surrounding Acceleration

Perhaps the most significant concern stated in any literature relating to year level acceleration centres around the impact acceleration will have on the child from a social/emotional perspective. Prior to acceleration, all three children involved in this study were described by

their parents and the school as being well-rounded, socially well-adjusted individuals. In fact, all three children were further described as 'leaders' who had many friends to play with. When questioned, the children spoke positively and affectionately about friends from their previous year levels and equally as passionately about their 'new' friends in their 'new' year levels.

The Social Impact of Acceleration

Whilst some research would suggest that there is a perception that social considerations are generally one of the key negative factors for consideration when accelerating a child, it was interesting to note that few of the principal survey respondents cited socialisation issues as a factor for consideration against acceleration. In fact, only one principal made clear reference to this, explaining that they felt acceleration would have a negative impact on children's socialisation.

Despite some initial hesitancy on the part of all three children making the move into a new classroom, all of the children made new friends more quickly than had been anticipated by the parents or the school. The children gradually moved away from playing with their 'old' friends and within months of the acceleration, all three children reported that they were playing quite exclusively with children in their accelerated year level.

Of importance, was the support and guidance offered by both the school and the parents to assist the accelerated child to assimilate socially with their older peers. From the schools perspective, teachers monitored and made anecdotal observations of social situations in the initial stages of acceleration and whilst strategies were in place to assist each child if required, no specific assistance was required in any of the three cases. From a parental perspective, whilst all parents also expressed some initial concerns about their child socialising with older peers, their fears were generally unfounded. Silverman (1995) explains that parents can support their gifted children through recognition, responsive parenting, the development of family relationships, reviewing their school placements and advocating for their children in the

school. Without exception, all parents relating to this research displayed characteristics of the recommendations cited in the paper.

One family noted a few weeks of 'teething difficulties' as their child adjusted socially in their new year level; however these socialisation issues were overcome as the child became more familiar and confident with their new peers in a new learning environment. By the time of the interviews, all of the children were well ensconced in their new social networks and had firmly established friendships with children in their accelerated year group.

As research has emerged relating to the socio-emotional needs of gifted children in recent years, it suggests that when intellectually gifted children look for friends, they tend to gravitate to gifted children of their own age, or older children who may not be as bright as they are, but who are still of above average ability, (Gross, 1993). In instances where gifted children are accelerated to a higher year level, they are extended further opportunity to form relationships with peers who they can relate to at both a cognitive and social level. It makes sense, therefore, that if a child exhibits the characteristics of a socially well-integrated individual prior to acceleration, they will continue to exhibit these characteristics after the process is complete.

Further, it could be reasoned that a gifted child who experiences social challenges prior to acceleration is likely to continue to do so after acceleration, if assistance with socialisation is not provided through the home and school environment. According to Gagne, (1981 in Southern, Jones & Stanley, 1993: p 399), any socio-emotional difficulties encountered by an accelerant would most likely have occurred whether the child was accelerated or not. The evidence collected in this research suggests that gifted children who are socially well adjusted prior to acceleration will continue to exhibit these characteristics post-acceleration and hence assimilate well socially in their new social environment.

The Emotional Impact of Acceleration

A significant element of the research was the attitude towards acceleration of all key stakeholders in the acceleration process (principals, parents, teachers and the children), prior to and after acceleration. This will be discussed later in the chapter. A further element for consideration through the research was the emotional impact the acceleration had on those involved in the process.

Naturally, the child being accelerated was the individual most likely to feel an impact of the acceleration from an emotional perspective. All three children expressed some initial anxiety and hesitancy about how they would assimilate into a new year level and those fears were primarily based around the formation of new friendships. Roedell, (1986: 26) suggests that gifted young children are 'particularly vulnerable to feelings of social isolation and/or discomfort and conflict' and Whitemore (1986) describes that a sense of belonging is inherent in all children. Hence, one could conclude that as all of the children in this research were quickly able to establish a sense of belonging in their new environment, due to their ability to assimilate successfully socially and apply their well developed social skills, they were able to demonstrate a sense of belonging very quickly and displayed little emotional duress.

Secondary emotions were reflected in their concerns pertaining to how they would adjust to their new academic requirements, alongside the practical considerations of 'moving to a new room.' Despite their initial anxiety, the children all expressed great happiness and comfort in their new year levels. This newfound 'happiness' was based essentially on the fact that they had all made new friends and felt socially included. Christie (2001) describes the emotions of two gifted children who were not considered for acceleration. Both reported symptoms of headaches and anxiety about school as a result of a lack of challenge and boredom in their school environment. Through this research, it is indicated that when gifted socially adept children are accelerated, they demonstrate limited negative emotions, after a short period of settling into their new year level.

From a school perspective, acceleration appeared to have limited emotional impact on the part of the principals and teachers involved. Principals made mention to some concerns about the initial social adjustments of the children into their new year levels, but compensated for this by putting into place differing monitoring mechanisms to gauge each child's socio-emotional progress and some examples of monitoring mechanisms included anecdotal observations and note-taking, regular meetings and personal discussions. All three principals appeared to have established a firm communication network between the parents and the school, expressing any concerns as they arose. This appears to have assisted with any initial teething issues.

The teachers of the students were generally positive about each child's acceleration and did not appear to demonstrate any negative emotions pertaining to the process or the child. Some concerns were raised by one of the teachers about the social impact of acceleration on the child as they grew older; however he/she added that he/she still felt that the acceleration was a positive move and would not have changed anything. Surprisingly, all three teachers appeared to be extremely calm, positive and supportive of the acceleration process and this may well be attributed to the thorough planning and supportive processes operating from a systems (administrative) level.

Parents mentioned more concerns and appeared to have experienced more emotional duress prior to their children being accelerated than as a consequence of it. Their primary concerns prior to acceleration related to their children 'dumbing down' and facing boredom and lack of stimulation within their school environment. As their children were making a transition into their accelerated year level, some parents expressed some concerns about their child making new friends and fitting in with older children. One child was particularly small in stature and this troubled the parent. This, and their potential for socialisation, did present limited anxiety for some parents involved although their fears were quickly diminished as their children established new social networks and started inviting new friends over for 'plays' and social outings.

Overwhelmingly, the emotions expressed by all participants in the study were positive. All stakeholders in the acceleration process felt that the acceleration had contributed to productive outcomes and positive socio-emotional effects.

The Administrative and Practical Issues Associated with Acceleration

Feedback from the survey responses received suggests that people at the administrative and management level of Junior Schools (principals) demonstrate some awareness of the emerging issues surrounding gifted children and, more specifically, the concept of year level acceleration. Of the responses received, some had policies and procedures in place whilst a slight majority did not. Of interest to note was the fact that a high proportion of schools had children in their community who had been year level accelerated, although less claimed to have a policy regarding that acceleration.

Policy Documentation

From a system's perspective, the majority of schools involved in this research had a policy for gifted education and a policy for acceleration operating in their schools. These policies and procedures were referred to regularly and reviewed according to how they would impact on each individual student. The procedures outlined in the policy documentation assisted the school principal to streamline the acceleration process, with teachers and parents all commenting on the relative ease in which the acceleration procedures had transpired. It can be concluded that well constructed and considered policy and procedural documentation for schools, addressing the needs of gifted and talented children and acceleration, will be a positive addition to any school community; whether a school agrees with the process of acceleration or not, a policy stating the schools stance would be a valuable addition to their overall school documentation.

It is interesting to note that whilst the majority of schools involved in this research claimed to have a policy pertaining to both gifted students and acceleration operating in their schools,

none of the teachers or parents claimed to have actually read this documentation. Whilst they were 'aware' the school had a policy, they were not privy to a copy of the policies and generally felt that it would be useful to cite them. It should be noted however; that both the parents and the teachers did not feel that the acceleration process had been directly affected as a consequence of not having a copy of policy documentation. Rather, the consensus was that all stakeholders knew there was a policy, as procedures appeared to have been followed well and everyone was aware of what was transpiring at all stages in the acceleration process.

Of the survey responses received, a slight minority of schools stated that they had a policy for gifted students and a policy for acceleration and this appears to have been reflected in the number of children who were being accelerated within their schools. It could be suggested that if a school has a policy in place to meet the needs of gifted and talented students and subsequently, an acceleration policy and procedure to follow, there is a greater likelihood that children will be accelerated within that school community. Written policies serve to raise the awareness of different issues in schools for all key stakeholders and signal to staff the need to draw attention to these issues (Freeman, 1995). Hence, if a school seeks to raise the profile of gifted children and the role of acceleration, it is recommended that policy documentation should be developed.

The Role of the Stakeholders in the Acceleration Process

In all three instances, the parents of the accelerated children were the first to identify their children as possible candidates for acceleration. All parents involved in the study mentioned that they had identified their child as exceptionally able from an early age and had harboured concerns about the level to which their appropriate age-placement year level would meet their children's academic needs. When acceleration was suggested as a possibility with the school, all three schools (principals) were proactive and actioned an investigation of the requests immediately.

In all cases, the principal (or person nominated by the principal), was the individual who oversaw the process of identification and acceleration. As all parents, students and teachers involved in the acceleration spoke favourably of the process, it could be concluded that the utilisation of one specific person responsible for overseeing the acceleration process is useful. When one person oversees the process, a clear understanding and knowledge of the child, the family, the teacher and the school is developed. This person is then able to address any issues that may unfold and monitor the child's progress as they move through the school. As a classroom teacher is only able to monitor the child for the year he/she remain within his/he. class, a separate individual may well be preferable.

Many schools are now appointing specialised Enrichment or Gifted Education Specialists within their schools to address and cater to the needs of Gifted and Talented Students. In these instances, the principal of the school may then refer potential acceleration candidates to the Specialist teacher, who can oversee the process of consideration for acceleration and make recommendations to the principal.

Attitudes towards Acceleration

Attitudes towards acceleration can be discussed from two perspectives. Firstly, from the feedback received through principals in the format of the initial survey and secondly, from the perspective of the key stakeholders in the research, the parents, teachers and the children themselves.

Junior School Principals' Feedback Regarding Attitudes Towards Acceleration

It is an assumption of the researcher that where principals who participated in the survey cited examples of students who had been accelerated in their schools, that they held a neutral or positive opinion of acceleration. Principals, who did not have any accelerated students in their school, were given the option in Section two of the survey to outline their opinion of acceleration. Of the responses received, three of the five suggested they would consider

acceleration, one mentioned that they were developing an opinion (and subsequent policy), and one stated that they would not consider acceleration due to social concerns and would prefer the child be provided with 'enrichment' opportunities.

These factors considered, it could be surmised that Western Australian Independent School Principals generally present a neutral to positive opinion about year level acceleration in their schools. It could be suggested that this is as a result of a growing awareness on the part of principals of the importance of addressing the needs and maintaining an awareness of gifted students in their schools. There has been a growing development in the availability of professional development and resources in this area over the past years which may have contributed to their current perspectives.

Parent, Teacher and Child's Opinions of Acceleration

Whilst some participants in the research may have mentioned initial reservations about acceleration in the past, all stakeholders in the acceleration cases post-acceleration portrayed positive feedback about the outcomes of acceleration, as they related to the child involved.

Some teachers mentioned previous reservations about acceleration and its impact on the children involved, but stated they had changed their minds as a result of involvement in the acceleration process and now felt that it had been the right choice for the child. When asked if there was anything they would have changed, all three teachers unanimously offered acceleration as an excellent option for gifted children who meet the school's criteria for consideration.

All parents questioned in the study spoke favourably of acceleration and noted a significant improvement in their child's overall well-being, as a consequence. Without exception, all of the parents involved were supporters of acceleration and did not regret approving of the process for their children. They all mentioned that acceleration had made a significant positive impact

on their children; improving their attitude towards schooling and their child's general sense of well-being.

When the children involved in the research were questioned about their attitudes towards acceleration, they all spoke positively and appeared to be very comfortable with the whole concept and its outcomes. None of the children interviewed mentioned any hesitation regarding the outcomes of acceleration.

As a consequence of the data collated, it can be surmised that all stakeholders in the acceleration process felt positive and sustained affirmative views of acceleration, post-acceleration.

The Environmental Context for Acceleration

The School Environment

All of the schools involved in the research were Independent Schools, with access to a relatively high level of funding and support. All three schools sustained middle to high fee-paying clientele and were privy to a fairly high level of Professional Development for themselves and their staff. Further, all three schools had specialist staff within the schools who were appointed as Enrichment specialists to address the needs of children operating well-above or well-below expected norms. In addition, the schools maintained fairly high ratios of staff: students. It therefore, can be anticipated that the school environments for the children involved in this study were conducive to positive outcomes for the participants.

Whilst schools within the private sector are more likely to accept and adopt acceleration practices in their schools, schools within the public sector are now developing policy and procedure to address giftedness and, in turn, acceleration. Where schools in the private sector have the flexibility to adopt their own policies and procedures, examples of new policies developed by the Department of Education and Training include gifted policies established in Western Australia (2004) and the gifted policy developed by the Department of Education,

Tasmania (2002). As educators in general continue to develop an awareness of this aspect of education and parents advocacy is enhanced, so too will the level of provision become enhanced across all sectors.

It is important to note at this point, that gifted children who do not have access to the level of resources and staffing made available to the children involved in this research could be at a distinct disadvantage. To that end, outcomes of a research study of gifted children and acceleration in the public sector or remote areas of Western Australia could have the potential to reveal very different outcomes and conclusions.

The Year Levels of Acceleration

All of the children in the study were accelerated in their early years of schooling (Pre-primary – Year 3). Research suggests that gifted children will have their needs best met if they are extended or accelerated from an early age. Dudeney (2007) suggests that early entrance to school may well be the best method of placement for children commencing school with advanced development. Other researchers have highlighted the importance of early intervention for gifted children in order for them to realise their potential (Diezmann & Watters, 1997; Harrison, 1995), and this research further supports the concept that children who are accelerated in the early years of schooling will likely have more positive experiences of schooling and make the transition to a new year level more productively. Walsh, Hodge, Bowes and Kemp (in press) in their discussion of gifted provision in early childhood, suggest while some early childhood educators may view acceleration or early entry to preschool as a form of Elkind's (2007) *hot housing* and early exposure to a formal academic curriculum, that, when carefully managed and considered, this form of acceleration, is an appropriate response to the cognitive characteristics of gifted children that allows them to “progress at the rate at which they are able to learn”.

The Role of Transition

All three children involved in this research underwent a period of transition into their new year level prior to being accelerated. All stakeholders in the process, (children, teachers, principals and parents) purported the value of transition as a means of evaluating (at an initial level at least), the child's suitability to assimilate into another year level.

Transition proved to be a very valuable step in the process, allowing the children time to gradually warm to the concept of moving into a different year level, and further providing opportunity for the child to feel established in a new social context. The teachers were able to assess the child in the context of their accelerated year level and ensure that they would be appropriately placed, both academically and socially. Parents could monitor their child's feedback during transition, smoothing out any potential problems or fears the child might be experiencing and feedback to the school anything that needed to be addressed. In addition to this, the principal could oversee the transition process objectively and make a more considered final decision about acceleration, after observing the child and receiving feedback about their progress within the new context.

This research supports the implementation of transition as an important step in the acceleration process. All participants in the research were advocates of the process and suggested that it played an important part in the success of the acceleration.

The Desired Outcomes of Acceleration

The Outcomes of Acceleration from the Perspectives of Principals and Teachers

From the school perspective, there were several layers of required outcomes from the child's acceleration. Firstly, if the process of acceleration was implicit within the schools gifted and subsequent acceleration policy. The principal was required to observe and follow procedure to first identify and then potentially accelerate a child. Secondly, an important part of a Principal's role is to acknowledge and, where appropriate, action requests from parents. In the case of all

three principals, they were aware of the parents' desires to accelerate their child and, due to their acceptance of the concept, were able to follow through with the parental request.

From both the teachers' and the Principals' perspectives, it was important that the teachers and the school were able to benefit from the process of accelerating the child. Hence, an additional aim was to ensure that the teachers were happy and supported throughout the acceleration process and the children received the support that they required.

The final and perhaps most profound requirement of acceleration from the perspective of the School was the overarching aim to meet the needs of the children within the school environment. All three principals had a desire to cater to the needs of the children within their care and expressly sought to accelerate the children in a further attempt to differentiate the learning environment to better meet the gifted child's needs. It could be surmised that this aim was met, as all children expressed positive outcomes from the acceleration and felt well suited in their new environment.

The Outcomes of Acceleration from the Perspectives of Parents and Children

Ultimately, the parents of the accelerated children sought to ensure that their children's needs, foremost academically and yet also socially and emotionally, were going to be met in their schooling environment. The parents all identified that acceleration could be the means by which to best meet their child's needs and hence, the process was enacted. The parents involved in the research consistently reasoned that if their child was cognitively challenged and enriched, they would, in turn, be happier at school. Whilst all of the parents expressed a keen desire for their children to be included and socially accepted, the key aim and outcome that was sought from the acceleration process was for their child to be placed in a year level where the work produced was of a level more cognisant of their child's ability. The results of the study suggest that this outcome was achieved.

From the child's perspective, his/her level of anticipation and expected outcomes from acceleration presented at a far more basic level. They all indicated that they enjoyed being challenged at school and loved work that was 'harder' and more challenging. They all expressed that this was now the case in their new year level. Of equal importance for the children was the capacity for them to 'make new friends', which all of them reported doing. All three children explained that they enjoyed school and felt very comfortable in their new setting. Based on these observations, it can be assumed that the desired outcomes of acceleration were also achieved for the child, which is congruent with much of the research in this area. Roger's synthesis of research on gifted education led her to state that "despite the many myths rampant about forms of grade-based acceleration, the evidence suggests that the social impacts are very positive for options such as grade skipping and slightly positive for the other forms of acceleration" (Rogers, 2007 p. 388) which is consistent with the outcomes of this small study.

The Implications for Further Research

This study has clearly identified the attitudes and experiences of a small sample of gifted children, their parents, principals and teachers within independent primary schools in Western Australia. The experiences of all key stakeholders in this research have been extremely positive. The majority of findings in this study concur with those of other researchers, however, this study has been limited to a very small sample of the population, and can not be generalised across all populations. The findings of this study have added to knowledge in the area of gifted education and have implications for further research. Further suggestions are discussed below.

Effective Measures of Successful Acceleration, Post-Acceleration

An interesting aspect of the research was a question asked of parents, teachers and principals whereby the researcher attempted to identify the means used to establish and ascertain whether or not the child's acceleration had been successful. Whilst principals and

teachers suggested that informal methods were employed to check on the child's progress (i.e. class tests, anecdotal observations etc), there were no formal tests or procedures in place to formally evaluate the success of the acceleration. Rather, the principals relied on their staff to feedback any anomalies to them (of which there were none), and staff monitored the accelerated children in their class in the same manner they would any other child under their care. Unlike pre-tests for acceleration, which were utilised verbatim, no formal assessment measures were cited for use post-acceleration.

Parents also suggested that they were not aware of any testing procedures that the school had instigated to measure the success of acceleration, post acceleration. Rather, they too relied on less tangible methods of evaluation including school feedback and their child's general sense of well-being. Some parents offered suggestions for potential post-acceleration assessment criteria and methodology and this will be discussed as an implication for further research.

To that end, it would be worthwhile to research the key indicators that are widely understood to deem an acceleration process 'successful'. This may have the potential to lead to the construction of a checklist or formal assessment tool that could be utilised by schools adopting acceleration processes for gifted students.

Teacher Attitudes

It would be useful to further investigate the attitudes of teachers regarding year level acceleration of gifted children. Whilst this research incorporated the opinions of the teachers of accelerated students, the teachers interviewed were generally selected to teach the children due to their positive thoughts of acceleration. It can therefore be asserted that the children in this study had positive experiences of acceleration as their teachers reflected a positive attitude about the process. A wider study of teacher opinions could provide a more holistic overview of teachers' general thoughts and attitudes of acceleration in the wider school communities.

A Wider Study of Accelerated Students from a Broad Range of School Environments

This study explored the experiences of three gifted children who were year level accelerated and the corresponding experiences of their parents, their principals and their teachers. The size of the sample group in this study did not allow for a breadth of representation across schooling sectors, nor did it examine a large focus group of children. In addition, the age group of students selected was a limitation to this study. A wider qualitative analysis of accelerated children, from a range of ages and school sectors across Western Australia could allow for greater depth of understanding of the experiences of accelerated children and lead to some possible hypotheses about the impact of school environments on gifted children's experiences of acceleration.

The Implications for Practice

The major implications that have emerged from this study are for the consideration of principals and their teachers. The interpretation of the results fulfilled the aim of this study, to explore the overarching experiences of children, their families and educators of year-level accelerated children in Western Australian schools. This study was based on the assumption that consultation with principals, parents, teachers and students regarding their experiences of year level acceleration would add to knowledge and understandings, with the potential to inform and enhance future experiences for other gifted children.

The Role of 'Involvement' in the Acceleration Process

A recurring theme that echoed through the responses of all participants was the importance of a four way process of clear communication and shared understandings between all stakeholders in the acceleration process. The input and support of the school (represented by the Principal), the parent, the teachers and the child appeared to pave the way for a successful acceleration outcome. At all stages in the process, from the initial discussions about the possibility of the acceleration (between parents and school) to the final stages of

transition and implementation, all parties shared equal importance and their input and awareness of all steps in the process was vital. It is therefore possible to conclude that acceleration policies and procedures adopted by schools should incorporate ample opportunity for shared discussion, communication and awareness of procedure at all stages in the acceleration process. A flow chart describing recommended procedure in the accelerated process is proposed (Figure 5.1). Furthermore, with this model in place, it is implicit that all stakeholders embrace the concept of acceleration as without total support of all parties, the process has the potential to fail.

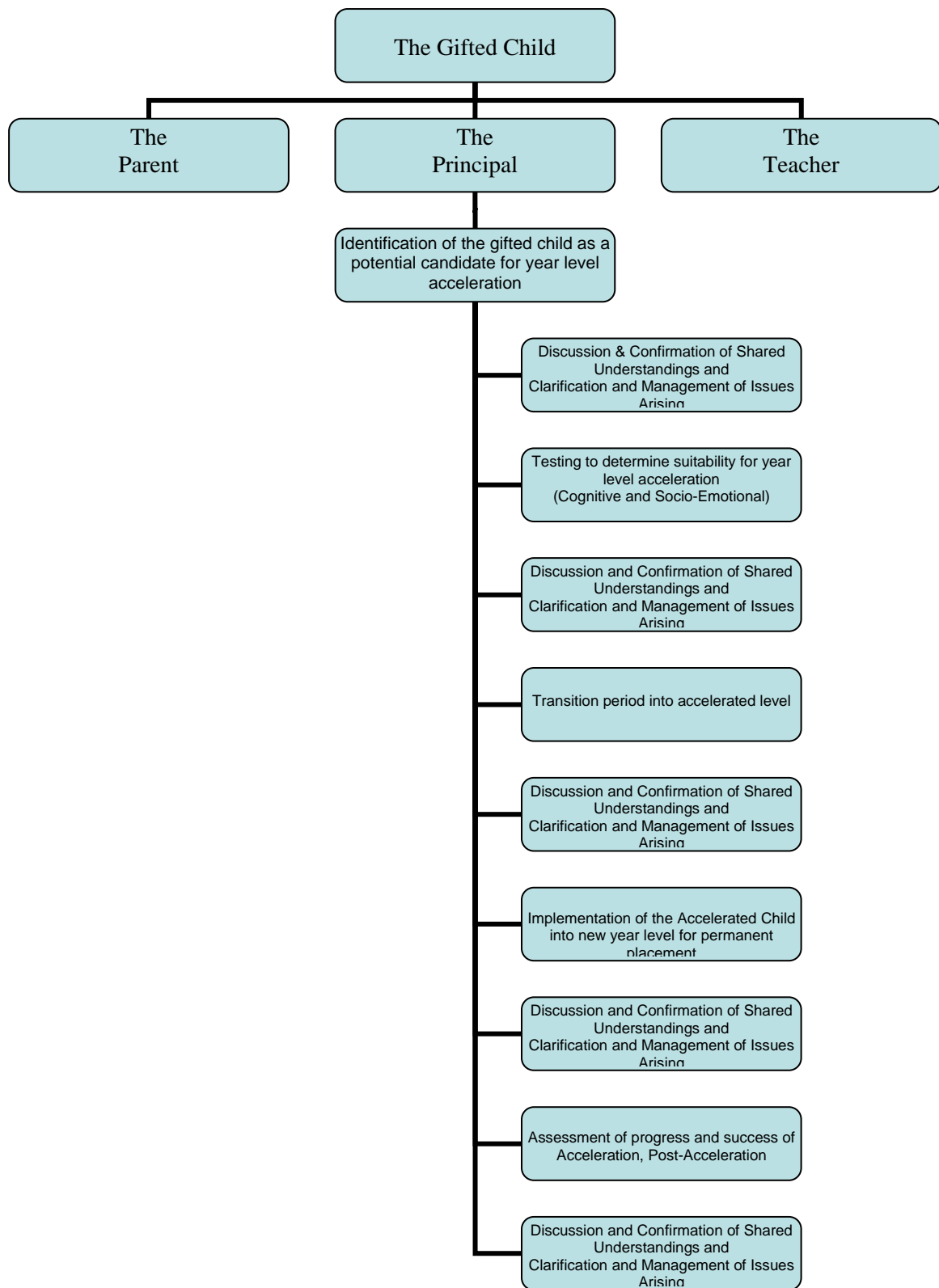


Figure 5.1: A recommended procedure for Acceleration in Primary Schools

Policy Development

It would be a further recommendation from the research that schools clearly develop and articulate their policies pertaining to acceleration to all stakeholders, particularly teachers and parents. Parents and Teachers both expressed their desire to be aware of the schools thoughts and position relating to this area and felt this would clarify any potential issues that may arise. Whether a school maintains positive or affirmative thoughts regarding acceleration, it is recommended that these ideas are documented in the form of a policy and referred to as required.

Parents as Partners

The results of this study suggest that the parents of the children involved in this study knew their children well and were justified in questioning the possibility of year level acceleration with their school.

The role of parents as partners surfaced on many occasions as an important ingredient in the acceleration process. In all three instances, the parents were the first people to identify their child as a potential candidate for acceleration. The parents had a clear understanding of their children's academic needs and sought the best means by which to meet them. One principal suggested that it would be their preference for acceleration to be the result of initial school recommendation of a potential acceleration candidate rather than parent nomination; however, in all three instances parents played the vital role in promoting their child as a candidate for acceleration.

In the case of all three children, the parents were supportive of the school and the processes adopted to address acceleration. It could be suggested that their happiness was as a result of a fulfilment of parents' wishes. It is not possible however, to hypothesise as to whether the feedback would have been as positive if the child had been considered for acceleration and subsequently refused. Nevertheless, the parents indicated a strong trust and support of each

school represented and this could suggest that whatever the outcome, the parents would have been satisfied.

A final consideration pertaining to parents was the fact that all three parents involved in the research were professional, white-collar workers. Two were psychologists and one worked within a university. It could be suggested that all of these parents had already been exposed to the concept of acceleration and its merits through their personal or professional lives and this may have had an impact on their attitudes towards acceleration. This being the case, this is a potential weakness in the study as parents from a different socio-economic or professional standing may well have held different views on acceleration and its potential outcomes. Hence, considerations relating to these aspects need to be factored in to the outcomes of the study.

From the results in this study, it is recommended that schools are respectful of parents' perspectives when they promote their child as gifted and raise the prospect of acceleration. This research has supported parent's important role in this process and schools should be encouraged to establish strong links and shared understandings between home and school.

Understanding the Concept of Giftedness and Acceleration as a Viable Option

The results indicated identification of gifted students and an awareness of their differentiated needs is developing in schools and the larger community. As an adjunct to that, there is an emerging awareness on the part of schools (principals and teachers), and parents that year level acceleration is a viable option for gifted children. Schools should be encouraged to be proactive and vigilant in this area as a means of meeting the needs of gifted youth within the community. Awareness can be enhanced through Professional Development opportunities in schools, alongside parent information sessions and links with gifted organisations in each state.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the experiences of gifted children who have been year level accelerated. The research was conducted from the perspective of the accelerated child, their school principal, their classroom teachers and their parents. By gathering the perspectives of all key stakeholders in the acceleration process, the study revealed a holistic overview of the acceleration process, investigating all elements from identification, through to post-acceleration feedback.

The study results demonstrated that year level acceleration can be a positive and successful experience, provided all participants (child, school and parents), maintain a strong sense of communication and shared understandings. Without exception, all stakeholders expressed positive perceptions of acceleration and would recommend it as a viable option to meet the needs of gifted children who are performing well above their age expected norms.

The study further revealed that acceleration proved to achieve positive outcomes from a social perspective. Not only did the children experience higher levels of fulfilment, challenge and interest in their new year levels when accelerated, they also assimilated well socially within the new year levels and sustained high levels of satisfaction with their newfound friends.

Recommendations for future practice and research were established subsequent to the collation and review of data obtained. The study utilised survey and personal interviews in order to obtain data. The survey results and interview transcripts were reviewed to reveal the themes of the participants' perceptions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY TO PRINCIPALS WITHIN THE JSHAA NETWORK IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

This survey relates to children within your school who have been identified as gifted and talented. Please take a few moments to complete the form below. Should you wish to add additional comments, there is space provided at the end of this survey:

Section 1:

Please circle

2. Does your school have a policy for gifted and talented students?

Yes/no

3. Does your school have a policy regarding year level acceleration?

Yes/no

4. Are there any children within your school who have been year-level accelerated?

Yes/no

*If you answered 'no' to question 3, please go to Section 2 of the survey. If you answered 'yes', please complete questions 4 and 5 and then move to Section 2.

5. For each child within your primary school who has been accelerated within the last 12 months, please answer the following:

	CHILD 1	CHILD 2	CHILD 3	CHILD 4	CHILD 5
Gender	Boy/Girl	Boy/Girl	Boy/Girl	Boy/Girl	Boy/Girl
At what age was the child year level accelerated:					
By how many years was the child accelerated beyond their age-appropriate peers:					
Prior to the child/children being accelerated, please tick if one or more of the following procedures took place (you can tick more than one box):					
Parents were consulted and consent sought.					
Psychometric assessment was conducted by a qualified professional.					
Results from the psychometric assessment revealed the child's IQ was more than one standard deviation above the mean.					
Opinions were sought, (from associated paraprofessionals, GATCA, etc).					
A transition period within the new year level was attempted.					
The child's input was sought					
A transition period was in place, whereby the child had a period of transition within their new year level.					
Other: (please write in the box)					

- If you have more than five children who have been accelerated within the last 12 months, please photocopy page 2 of this survey so that you have sufficient space.

6. Please outline on the lines below, any procedures or evaluations that have taken place since the child/children have been accelerated:

Section 2:

7. If there are no children within your school that have been year-level accelerated within the last year, what is your opinion of this method of acceleration?

Thank you for responding to this survey.

I am/am not willing (please circle your preference) to be contacted to discuss my responses in this survey.

I would/would not be prepared to contact parents of children who have been year-level accelerated on the researchers behalf, to participate in a case study, under the guidance of the researcher.

Signed: (Principal)

School: Date:

Please return this survey to:

Christina Gamble
C/- School of Education
Murdoch University
20 South St
Murdoch, 6150

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS POSED TO PRINCIPAL AT INITIAL INTERVIEW

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the interviewer will make clear to the interviewee that no names should be mentioned during the interview.

A range of questions will be presented to the interviewee, and will be presented under the following key headings. The interviewer may divert from the questions, which will act only as a guide:

Family and School Background:

1. Please provide a brief overview of the child who has been accelerated. Please comment on his/her academic, social, family background etc.
2. At what age was the child accelerated?

School Process:

3. When was acceleration first considered as a viable option for the child?
4. Who instigated this consideration?
5. Did the school utilise any specific formal assessment to deem if acceleration would be suitable for your child?
6. What role did the school play in the acceleration process?
7. Was a trial period of acceleration adopted by the school? If yes, how did this operate?
8. How much time transpired between identifying the concept of acceleration for the child and acceleration of the child? Comment on this time span.
9. Since the child has been accelerated, what has the school done to support the acceleration process?
10. Has this support been sufficient? Please substantiate your answer.
11. Has the school implemented any assessments to measure the success of acceleration, post acceleration?

12. If yes, please elaborate?

13. If yes or no, please describe any criteria that you might deem appropriate for measuring the success of year level acceleration, post acceleration?

Determining Factors for Acceleration:

14. What steps were taken as a lead up to the child's acceleration? Who instigated these steps?

Staff involvement in the process:

15. What was your role in the acceleration process?

Outside involvement in the process:

16. At any stage was an opinion from a paraprofessional sought?

17. If yes, who instigated the consultation/s and what were the outcomes?

School Policy:

18. Does the school have a policy on acceleration? Was this documentation referred to and followed? Please elaborate?

19. Was the school supportive of the concept of acceleration? Were there any extenuating factors for consideration?

Socio-emotional reflection:

20. Prior to the student being accelerated, did they assimilate well socially with their age-appropriate peers?

21. Has the child experienced any problems socially, since they have been accelerated?

22. Have there been some positive social outcomes since the child has been accelerated?

Interviewee reflection:

23. Subsequent to the child being accelerated, what have been your observations about the success or otherwise of the acceleration?

24. How would you describe the outcome of the acceleration for the child? Please elaborate your opinion.

25. What are the key factors in coming to this conclusion (as above)?

26. Do you think it is important to measure or monitor whether or not the acceleration process has been successful? Please elaborate your response.

27. Please elaborate on any area of the acceleration process of which you have not had an opportunity to comment.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS POSED TO THE PARENTS AT INTERVIEW

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the interviewer will make clear to the interviewee that no names should be mentioned throughout the interview.

A range of questions will be presented to the interviewee and will be presented under the following key headings:

Family background:

1. Describe your relationship to the child (i.e. mother, father, and guardian).
2. At what age was your child accelerated?

Pre-acceleration procedures:

3. When did you first consider acceleration as a viable option for your child?
4. Who instigated this consideration?
5. What steps were taken as a lead up to your child's acceleration?

Paraprofessional involvement:

6. At any stage was an opinion from a paraprofessional sought?
7. If yes, who instigated the consultation/s, and what were the outcomes?

School process, policies and procedures:

8. Did the school utilise any specific formal assessment to deem if acceleration would be suitable for your child?
9. What role did the school play in the acceleration process?
10. Was the school at all times supportive of the concept of acceleration?
11. Was a trial period of acceleration adopted by the school? If yes, how did this operate?
12. How much time transpired between identifying the concept of acceleration for the child and acceleration of the child? Comment on this time span.
13. Since your child has been accelerated, what has the school done to support the acceleration process for your child?

14. Has this support been sufficient? Please substantiate your answer.

15. Are you aware of any assessments that have been implemented by the school to measure the success of acceleration, post acceleration?

16. If yes, please elaborate?

Socio-emotional reflection:

17. Prior to your child being accelerated, did they assimilate well socially with their age-appropriate peers?

18. Has your child experienced any problems socially, since they have been accelerated?

19. Have there been some positive social outcomes since your child has been accelerated?

Reflections post acceleration: looking back ...

20. Prior to the child being accelerated, what have been your observations from the perspective of its success? Reflect upon this based on your observations at home and at school (if applicable).

21. In your opinion, has the acceleration of your child been a positive or negative experience? Please elaborate your opinion.

22. What are the key factors in coming to this conclusion (as above)?

23. Since your child has been accelerated, what have you, as a parent/guardian, done to support the change in situation for your child?

24. Please describe any criteria you might deem appropriate for measuring the success of year level acceleration, post acceleration?

25. Do you think it is important to measure or monitor whether or not the acceleration process has been successful? Please elaborate your response.

26. Please elaborate on any area of the acceleration process on which you have not had an opportunity to comment.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS POSED TO CANDIDATE'S TEACHER AT INTERVIEW

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the interviewer will make clear to the interviewee that no names should be mentioned throughout the interview.

A range of questions will be presented to the interviewee and will be presented under the following key headings:

Background information:

1. Please provide a brief overview of the child who has been accelerated. Please comment on their academic, social, family background etc.
2. What sort of information were you privy to, regarding the child's acceleration and background, prior to them entering your class? Please elaborate.

School intervention:

3. Were you involved in any steps leading up to the child's acceleration? If yes, who instigated these steps?
4. Since the child has been accelerated, what has the school done to support you and the child in the acceleration process?

School policy:

5. Are you aware if your school has a policy on acceleration? Have you needed to refer to this documentation?
6. Has the school or you personally, implemented any assessments to measure the success of acceleration, post acceleration?
7. Please describe any criteria that you might deem appropriate for measuring the success of year level acceleration, post acceleration?

Socio-emotional reflection:

8. Prior to the student being accelerated, did he/she assimilate well socially with his/her age-appropriate peers?

9. Has the child experienced any problems socially, since they have been accelerated?

Describe some positive social outcomes since the child has been acceleration?

Teacher involvement:

10. Can you tell me about your role in the process?

Paraprofessional involvement:

11. At any stage while you have been teaching the child, have opinions from paraprofessionals been sought?

12. If yes, who instigated the consultation/s and what were the outcomes?

Reflection on student progress:

13. How is the child achieving in terms of his/her progress academically and socially?

Professional reflection:

14. Subsequent to the child being accelerated, what have been your observations from the perspective of its success for that child?

15. Do you think it is important to measure or monitor whether or not the acceleration process has been successful? Please elaborate your response.

16. Please elaborate on any area of the acceleration process that you have not had an opportunity to respond to or comment on.

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONS POSED IN THE INTERVIEW WITH THE STUDENTS

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the interviewer will make clear to the interviewee that no names should be mentioned throughout the interview.

A range of questions will be presented to the interviewee and will be presented under the following key headings:

This interview will adopt a casual stance and be led by the interviewee. The interviewer will commence by asking the student:

So, I hear you have been moved up a year level. Can you tell me about how this happened?

Whilst the information will be led by the student, the following key areas may be introduced by the interviewer:

1. The students' reflection of their first encounter with the concept of acceleration

"When did you first hear that you would be going to a new year level? Tell me a little bit about how you felt and how you know it was going to happen? "

"Did you trial going into a new year level? If so, how did you feel about this? Tell me about your experiences."

2. How their family was involved in the process

"Tell me a little bit about how your family told you about how you were going to move into your new year level?"

"How did your family help you prepare for your new year level?"

3. How the school was involved in the process

“What did you do at school, to prepare you for going into a new year level?”

“What was it like when you first went into a new year level?”

“What were the biggest differences?”

“What was the best thing?”

“What was the worst thing?”

4. How they felt pre-acceleration

“How did you feel before you went up a year level?”

5. How they felt post-acceleration

“What has been the best thing about going into a new year level?”

“What has been the worst thing about going into a new year level?”

6. Things that would have made the process better

“What would you change about all of this if you could?”

7. Socio-Emotional Issues

“Who did you used to play with before you moved into your new year level?”

“Did you enjoy playing with your friends then?”

“Have you made some new friends since you moved into your new year level?”

“What have been the best things about your friends since you changed year levels?”

“Has there been anything that has made you sad since you changed year levels that relates to your friends?”

8. Would they recommend going up a year level for other children?

APPENDIX F

LETTER POSTED TO PRINCIPAL OF SELECTED JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Sent on Murdoch University letterhead

Dear Sir or Madam

Acceleration of the Gifted Student

I am a Masters Student at Murdoch University investigating the issues surrounding acceleration of gifted students. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr Judy McCallum and Dr Susan McKenzie. The purpose of this study is to explore issues pertaining to year level acceleration for students in primary years.

You can help in this study by completing the attached survey which will assist me to identify candidates for possible inclusion in the research. Contained in the survey are questions relating to students within your school who have been accelerated, encompassing their academic, social and family backgrounds.

Upon identification of suitable candidates, and receipt of your consent to be a part of this research, an interview will be conducted with you to gain a better understanding of your school's rationale for acceleration, and the roles played by the school and family instigating the acceleration process. It is anticipated this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes and, with your consent, will be tape-recorded. I would then seek your permission to interview a student, their parents and the accelerated child's teacher within your school, to gain an insight of their experiences of acceleration.

Feedback on the study will be provided to you, for confidential dissemination to your teaching staff and the parents, and may become a discussion paper in future conferences. At no point will any names of participants or schools be mentioned in the research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me on 9313 9334 or my supervisor, Dr Judy McCallum or Dr Susan Mackenzie on 9360 7857.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law. I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date:

Investigator: (Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch Staff)

Date:

Investigator's Name:

APPENDIX G

LETTER SENT TO PRINCIPAL FOR CASE STUDY INTERVIEW

Letter sent on Murdoch University letterhead

Dear Sir or Madam

Acceleration of the Gifted Student

I am a Masters student at Murdoch University investigating the issues surrounding year level acceleration of gifted students. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr Judith McCallum and Dr Susan McKenzie. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students who have been accelerated by one or more years in the primary years.

As I have identified that you have a student/s in your school that have been accelerated, you could help in this study by participating in a brief interview. This interview would assist me to gain an understanding of your professional experiences of acceleration post acceleration, as they relate to the students within your school. Contained in the interview would be questions relating to the students who have been accelerated, encompassing their academic, social and family backgrounds.

Upon receipt of your consent to be a part of this research, I would like to interview you to get your view of the school's rationale for acceleration, and your experiences working with the families and teachers of these children. It is anticipated this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes and, with your consent, will be tape-recorded. Following this meeting, I may request that you consider the possibility of approaching the identified children within your school, on my behalf, to be interviewed about their experiences. I would also need to interview their parents and their classroom teachers.

Feedback on the study will be provided to you, the student's teacher at the time of acceleration, the parents, and may become a discussion paper at future conferences. At no point will any names of participants or schools be mentioned in the research report or publications arising from the research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me on 9313 9334 or my supervisor, Dr Judy McCallum on 9360 7857.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law. I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date: Investigator :(Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch Staff)

Date: Investigator's Name:

APPENDIX H

LETTER TO PARENTS OF SELECTED STUDENT

Letter sent on Murdoch University letterhead

Dear Sir or Madam

Acceleration of the Gifted Student

I am a Masters student at Murdoch University investigating the issues surrounding year level acceleration of gifted students. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr Judith McCallum and Dr Susan McKenzie. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students who have been accelerated by one or more years in the primary years.

As I have identified that your child has been accelerated, I would ask for your assistance in this study by participating in a brief interview. This interview would assist me to gain an understanding of your experiences of acceleration, post acceleration, as they relate to your son or daughter. Contained in the interview would be general questions relating to your child's academic, social and family background.

Upon receipt of your consent to be a part of this research, an interview would be conducted with you to gain an insight of your experiences relating to your child's acceleration. It is anticipated this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes and, with your consent, will be tape-recorded. In addition, I also seek permission to interview your child, to gain a better understanding of his/her experiences. Please rest assured that this interview will take on a more informal format and will be led by the student's responses.

Feedback on the study will be provided to you, the student's principal at the time of acceleration, his/her teacher and may become a discussion paper at future conferences. At no point will any names of participants or schools be mentioned in the research report or publications arising from the research. If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me on 9313 9334 or my supervisor, Dr Judy McCallum on 9360 7857.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date: Investigator :(Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch Staff)

Date: Investigator's Name:

APPENDIX I

LETTER TO STUDENT

Letter sent on Murdoch University letterhead

Dear Student

Acceleration of the Gifted Student

I am a Masters student at Murdoch University investigating the issues surrounding year level acceleration of gifted students. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr Judith McCallum and Dr Susan McKenzie. The purpose of this study is to explore issues pertaining to year level acceleration for students in the primary years.

As I have identified that you are student who has been accelerated, you could help in this study by participating in a brief interview. This interview would assist me to gain a better understanding of your experiences of moving into a new year level. Contained in the interview would be questions relating to your academic, social and family background.

Upon receipt of your and your family's consent to be a part of this research, an interview will be conducted with you so I can get an insight of your experiences of year level acceleration, and the roles played by your school and family. It is anticipated this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes and, with your consent, will be tape-recorded.

Feedback on the study will be provided to your family and school principal and may become a discussion paper at future conferences. At no point will your name or any names of participants or schools be mentioned in this research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, and your parents, teacher and principal are also happy for you to spend a little extra time with me, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me on 9313 9334 or my supervisor, Dr Judy McCallum on 9360 7857.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date:

Investigator :(Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch Staff)

Date:

Investigator's Name:

APPENDIX J

LETTER SENT TO TEACHER OF SELECTED STUDENT

To be sent on Murdoch University letterhead

Dear Sir or Madam

Acceleration of the Gifted Student

I am a Masters student at Murdoch University investigating the issues surrounding year level acceleration of gifted students. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr Judith McCallum and Dr Susan McKenzie. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of students who have been accelerated by one or more years in the primary years.

As I have identified that you have/had a student in your class who has been accelerated, you could help in this study by participating in a brief interview. This interview would assist me to gain an understanding of your experiences of acceleration post acceleration, as they relate to the student within your class. Contained in the interview would be questions relating to the student who has been accelerated, encompassing their academic, social and family backgrounds.

Upon receipt of your consent to be a part of this research, I would like to interview you to get your view of the school's rationale for acceleration, and your experiences working with the child in their current year level. It is anticipated this interview will take no longer than 45 minutes and, with your consent, will be tape-recorded.

Feedback on the study will be provided to you, the student's principal at the time of acceleration, the parents, and may become a discussion paper at future conferences. At no point will any names of participants or schools be mentioned in the research report or publications arising from the research.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me on 9313 9334 or my supervisor, Dr Judy McCallum on 9360 7857.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law. I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date: Investigator: (Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch Staff)

Date: Investigator's Name: