

Stephanie Rippstein

Psy 324-02 Psych of Exceptionality

4/25/12

Thornburg, John Cloud. "Saving the Smart Kids." *Time* 27 Sept. 2004: 56-61. Print.

The article's purpose is to present the case favoring acceleration for gifted students. Arguments for and against students skipping grade levels are addressed in order to show that the argument for acceleration has more research and anecdotal evidence to support it. The author hopes readers, after reading the article, will be able to see the benefit of allowing gifted students to move ahead, instead of falling back on common fears and reservations about grade skipping.

Americans, particularly the educators, have a problem with the idea of gifted students skipping grade levels. However, when gifted students consistently outperform their peers, skipping ahead is not about showing off but about finding academic challenges so that they do not become bored in school. Gifted students are actually at risk for dropping out early, or, if they do remain in school, for tuning out. Research shows that accelerated students can achieve more academically than those gifted students who were not allowed to advance grade levels. Educators are concerned that grade skipping will put gifted students at risk emotionally and socially. Studies have shown that most accelerated students participate in extracurricular activities and are generally self-adjusted after the first year. Many students who skipped grades do not regret the experience and actually wish they could have been accelerated more. In response to David Elkind's *The Hurried Child*, it is argued that not pushing your child academically can do more harm than good because the student will be miserable in school. Anecdotal accounts are available for both sides of the argument. One student who entered high school early was teased by the older students and started drinking; she realized later she lacked the maturity to be in high school. To avoid placing immature students in high grade levels, some say that students can be screened for motivation, emotional development, and motor coordination in addition to academic ability for potential success in higher grades; the decision does not have to be made quickly. Stories of gifted students whose needs for challenges were not met support the argument that acceleration would have been beneficial for their situations, but the school was not willing to acknowledge it.

In closing, the author recommends the practice of acceleration. Though it is challenging for schools to meet the individual needs of exceptionally gifted students, Thornburg contends that allowing more grade skipping would help. Acceleration does not require more money, just a change in attitude for educators. The author concludes that gifted students do have needs, and these needs must be met for these students to be successful; these needs can be met when gifted students are permitted to move ahead.

I appreciated that this article provided arguments for both sides of the grade skipping controversy. I can acknowledge the value of acceleration when the student skips one or two grade levels, but I remain concerned about the emotional and social consequences of advancing several grade levels ahead. School does not just have to be about intellectual development; social and emotional development is a part of school, and I hesitate to place a younger student

with much older individuals with whom the young student cannot relate to socially or emotionally. I think the better approach is to find ways to challenge a gifted student academically within the regular classroom. This article is a helpful overview of the controversy surrounding acceleration, and knowing the arguments for both sides can help me as a teacher make recommendations for or against allowing a student to skip a grade. I hope that I can successfully challenge my students within my own classroom.