

Parents have nothing to fear from fast-tracking kids

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A major national study has found that parents and teachers of gifted children are generally supportive of academic acceleration but continue to have concerns about the emotional impact of fast-tracking education.

The study's lead author and international expert on gifted [education](#), Professor Miraca Gross, said these concerns are unfounded and that teachers have inaccurate ideas of what constitutes social and emotional maturity.

“There is a genuine, yet misplaced concern for the welfare of high-ability students,” said Professor Gross, whose study, *Releasing the Brakes for High Ability Learners*, is published today by the Gifted Education, Research and Resource Centre (GERRIC) at the University of New South Wales.

“A very bright child might have a peer group outside of school that matches their intellect and interests but if the teacher doesn't realise that and sees the child being rejected in the classroom by their same-age peers then it is interpreted as social difficulty,” she said.

The study – the largest of its kind in Australia – also finds that some teachers are reluctant to accelerate children for fear this will slow down the class and disadvantage other class students.

However, Professor Gross believes the risk of this happening is minimal as “academically talented students are usually emotionally mature for

their age and are unlikely to have difficulties with the higher standard of work – indeed, they thrive on it”.

Key report findings:

- There is a general pattern of enthusiasm for acceleration
- Teachers continue to have concerns about the socio-emotional outcomes of acceleration
- Respondents disagreed about whether acceleration has adverse affects on a child’s social and emotional development
- Parents are confused about advocacy strategies – their child is denied acceleration if they are too “pushy”
- Students are supportive of acceleration because of increased stimulation and academic achievement. They are socially connected and feel positive about themselves and their school experiences.

The report recommends conducting research to develop an appropriate instrument to measure high-ability learners’ social and emotional development and maturity, and suitability for acceleration.

Releasing the Brakes for High Ability Learners involved 104 nationwide interviews with principals, Gifted and Talented school coordinators, teachers, parents, and older high-ability students across 49 government, independent and Catholic schools.

Both primary and secondary schools were sampled and an attitudinal survey with 211 responses was analyzed. School and region acceleration policies were also analyzed.

The full report is available on the [GERRIC website](#) and will shortly be released as an eBook for teachers and parents.

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Provided by University of New South Wales

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