

## Academic Acceleration in the Outback

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### Description

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Borland (1989) highlights the enormous gap between what research has revealed about the benefits of academic acceleration and what teachers and education administrators practise. In Australia, Bailey (1998) noted that acceleration options are not commonly used. Since his study, there have been significant changes in policy and in promotion of 'differentiated curriculum', which includes various options of acceleration. GERRIC (a research centre at UNSW) is conducting research on the practice of acceleration in metropolitan areas. There is research and anecdotal evidence that suggests that at least some rural schools are implementing various options of acceleration. A determination of the extent and nature of such programs would indicate what is appropriate for rural schools.

This study examines the extent to which academic acceleration is implemented in regional and rural NSW. In particular, the study examines the extent to which the various options of acceleration in mathematics (perceived to be more common than in other subjects), ICT (perceived to be student-directed) and science (a subject perhaps neglected in primary schools) are implemented in schools in regional and rural NSW.

It also explores equity issues concerning the impact that social disadvantage (isolation, rural background, low SES and cultural minority status) have on gaining access to options of academic acceleration in regional and rural NSW. Implicit in the study is an exploration of both the extent to which public schools are implementing the DET 'gifted education' policy and whether independent schools have a policy for gifted students.

The study, which is a collaboration with Charles Sturt University and Southern Cross University, undertakes research in three regions of NSW - central west, north-west and north coast. Schools targeted are public and independent high schools and feeder primary schools, central schools and colleges in towns.

A phone survey on acceleration was conducted with 'gifted coordinators' in each school. Data was collected from selected high schools and feeder primary schools in order to develop a 'case studies' to triangulate data.

### Participants

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- Central West: Bathurst to Broken Hill (including Orange, Parkes, Condobolin, Ivanhoe and Menindee);
- North Coast: Grafton to Tweed Heads and Ballina to Tenterfield; and
- North West: Armidale to Tibooburra (including Barraba, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Wanaaring).

### Findings

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Many schools do not have a 'gifted and talented' policy; acceleration is practised more widely in independent schools than in public schools, but individual public schools are developing acceleration programmes to attract more students; external examinations have had an impact on the development of flexible curriculum structures; several small schools that embrace multi-grade teaching practice have exemplary acceleration programmes; access to tertiary level units of study while still at school remains a vexed issue; in general, there appears to be an enormous gulf between educational experiences of acceleration in metropolitan and regional schools.

### Outcomes

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#### Conference presentations

- Merrotsy, P., Wood, D., Andersson, R & Vasilevska, S. (2008, July). Acceleration in the Bush. Paper presented at the 12th National Gifted and Talented Conference, Australian Association of Gifted and Talented Children, Hobart.

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- Merrotsy, P., Wood, D., Andresson, R & Vasilevska, S. (2008, July). Acceleration in the Bush. Paper presented at the 10th Asia-Pacific Conference for Giftedness, Asia-Pacific Federation of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Singapore.

## Impact

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Not yet assessable.

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