

**Exploring the Self-Concept and Sense of Belonging of
Academically Accelerated Gifted Male Adolescents in
a New Zealand Context**

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requirements for the degree of Masters in Educational Psychology

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Lindsay James Yeo

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Abstract

When it comes to provision for intellectually gifted students, acceleration – the introduction of curriculum early or at a faster rate than usual – is not a popular choice in New Zealand. This is despite overwhelming overseas research finding academic acceleration to be a very effective way of meeting the needs of gifted learners. Research has also identified that many parents and educators hold a common fear that accelerating children will negatively affect their social-emotional development. The current study aimed to explore the validity of this fear. A mixed-methods study with an explanatory-sequential design was used to explore the self-concepts and sense of belonging of a cohort of 30 male Year 13 students at a single-sex secondary school in New Zealand. The students were all dually-enrolled in a variety of 100-level courses through a local university. The participants completed the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale 2, with the results compared to the test norms; other than physical-self-concept, no significant differences were found between the norms and the cohort on the domains measured, with all scores within the “Normal” range. Five of the participants were then purposively selected for semi-structured interviews investigating self-concept and sense of belonging, and how their experiences in their school’s acceleration programme may have impacted upon these. All of the interviewees expressed a strong sense of belonging to the school and the acceleration programme, and felt that the programme had enabled them to develop socially. The questionnaire and interview results indicated that the accelerated students felt comfortable in their identity as “accelerates”, while also feeling accepted by their fellow students. These findings suggest acceleration classes to be a positive provision for gifted students that does not significantly impact their social-emotional development.

Keywords: acceleration, gifted, talented, self-concept, belonging, social-emotional

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“Ma whero ma pango ka oti ai te mahi” – Māori Proverb

“With red and black the work will be complete.”

I stumbled upon this proverb, and the message resonated with me. It speaks of the traditional colours of the marae, and how they come together to complete the kowhaiwhai pattern. This message of collaboration has been a treasured lesson I have learnt this year, as I would not have made it to this point without the assistance of others. I therefore take this time to thank the whero to my pango:

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