Learning in the Fast Lane

by Suzy Pepper Rollins, 2014

Introduction

The best chance learners have to achieve success is the first time they go through a class or course. After that, the outlook becomes decidedly bleaker. When students fail to show mastery of concepts, and instruction turns to remediation, students' hopes dim and their academic options narrow.

My experience as a veteran classroom teacher, an educational consultant, and a coordinator of remedial programs in one of the largest school districts in the United States has led my thinking to one conclusion: to reach their potential, struggling students need the most powerful, effective instructional practices that research and practice have to offer. Tragically, the opposite often happens: instruction that aims to catch up lagging students or fix all their past problems ends up providing classroom experiences that are not compelling, rigorous, or engaging. Such instruction may inadvertently widen rather than close achievement gaps.

Accordingly, this book introduces a framework of eight high-impact instructional approaches that can move academically challenged students toward success. Rather than slowing students down, these instructional changes will enable students to grasp concepts more effectively and place them securely in the fast lane with their peers. These hands-on, ready-to-implement strategies will help you

- Use acceleration to immediately get students moving in the right direction.
- Make standards and learning goals explicit to students.
- Tackle many of the underlying causes of failure, such as lack of student motivation.
- Build students' self-efficacy so that they become active, academically hopeful participants in class.
- Encourage students to persevere rather than give up.
- Address the problem of skills gaps within the context of new learning.
- Improve students' vocabulary—one of the key deficits found in students who are at academic risk.

Students who are not making it academically have a great deal on the line. There is a well-established link between grade retention or course repetition and school dropout (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). When students are compelled to repeat coursework, academic success and behavior can actually *decline*rather than improve.

Neither retention nor social promotion constitutes a viable academic plan for struggling students. Retention and remediation are costly to districts: teaching the same students the same subjects more than once piles up teacher allotments and administrative costs. Social promotion presents its own issues; moving students with known gaps forward to the next set of teachers doesn't fix anything.

The only solution is for students to legitimately master the concepts. The good news is, they can. Do they land in our classrooms with frustrating problems? Yes. They may not read at the desired level, have basic skills committed to memory, know the words they should, or even arrive with a pencil. But there is nothing more rewarding for teachers than to see the light of understanding dawn in a student's eyes, or watch a student who didn't think he could do it shoot up his hand with a correct answer.

The mission of this book is to provide help for those students who can be so challenging to teach yet have so much potential for academic growth. The eight overarching practices work together to address gaps in vocabulary, reading, basic skills, and student motivation in the context of new learning. Even better, these strategies foster academic achievement in *all* students—not just those who are at highest risk for academic failure. By bringing reflective, research-based, high-impact instruction to your classroom, you can help all your students get it the first time.

Chapter 1. Acceleration: Jump-Starting Students Who Are Behind

I recently came into a freshman remedial class to find students busily logging in to the school's basic-skills software. Those who were deemed the furthest behind, according to a diagnostic pre-test, practiced skills that were the furthest removed from the current curriculum. Students who weren't as far behind worked on skills from the previous year or two. Any connection between the skills the students practiced and the standards being introduced in their "regular" classes that same day was entirely coincidental. A young woman rolled her eyes at me as she entered her password on the keyboard: "We've been doing this program since 4th grade."

Hours away in a middle school classroom, bored students identified as requiring remedial interventions sat passively with their workbooks, practicing missing skills, while the higher-achieving students next door engaged collaboratively in hands-on, rigorous exploration aimed at a specific learning goal.

The traditional remedial approaches used in these and countless other classrooms focus on drilling isolated skills that bear little resemblance to current curriculum. Year after year, the same students are enrolled in remedial classes, and year after year, the academic gaps don't narrow. And no wonder: instead of addressing gaps in the context of new learning and helping students succeed in class *today,* remedial programs largely engage students in activities that connect to standards from years ago. Rather than build students' academic futures, remediation pounds away at the past. We spend significant amounts of time teaching in reverse, and then ask why students are not catching up to their peers.

This chapter provides thoughtful answers to a pressing question: *how can we help students with gaps from the past succeed today?* You will learn to provide a different, more effective type of support for struggling students that will yield immediate improvement in their academic progress, self-confidence, perseverance, and grades and test scores. In addition, you will see higher levels of participation and engagement and fewer incidences of off-task behavior.

Behind on the First Day of School

We know more about underperforming students today than ever before. Expansive color-coded spreadsheets detail every possible gap. Mountains of standardized test data reveal missed items from every subject area. Fractions, multiplication tables, parts of speech, order of operations, decimals, author's purpose, long division, branches of government, reading to infer … the list of things students should know (but don't) is daunting.

On the first day of school, many students are already behind. Marzano (2004) shares a gut-wrenching reality: what students already know when they enter the classroom—before we have even met them—is the strongest predictor of how well they will learn the new curriculum. Concepts, skills, and vocabulary from last semester, last year, and three grades ago can haunt students' efforts to acquire new information.

It works like this. As information is being taught, students' brains try to make sense of new concepts by linking and integrating the incoming barrage of information with prior knowledge. This *schema*, or individual storage unit of information, plays a critical role in new learning. Vacca and Vacca (2002) explain that when students' brains link background knowledge with new text, students are better at making inferences and retain information more effectively. Hirsch (2003) contends that prior knowledge about a topic speeds up learning by freeing up students' working memory so that they can connect to new information more readily. In short, students with background knowledge on a given topic are likely to grasp new information on that topic quickly and well (Marzano, 2004). Conversely, a lack of adequate prior knowledge can create a misfire in the learning process.

For example, read the following short passage:

Betsy had never tackled the Cement Mixer before. Although many fears cycled through her mind, her two main concerns were handling the backdoor and the lip. Her confidence rose, however, as she reminded herself that if she could just get into the barrel she had a good chance of winning, especially if conditions were cooking. She stared out at the horizon, shook her fist triumphantly in the air, and shouted, "I'm ready for you, Meat Grinder! I can handle the biggest Macker you can deliver!"

Now, in your own words, explain what Betsy is doing. Stumped? Every word is familiar and the reading level is basic, so what's the problem?

As it turns out, Betsy is a surfer. Terms like *backdoor, lip*, and even *Cement Mixer* have their own special meanings in the surfing lexicon. Without prior knowledge of Betsy's particular sport, true comprehension of this text is quite difficult. If you lack a schema for surfing, reading this passage would fail to spark a connection between prior knowledge and new information, and the text would be meaningless—and you'd fall behind in class.

The Trouble with Remediation

Just as a lack of background knowledge about surfing would lead to a lack of comprehension of the passage about Betsy, students who have insufficient academic background knowledge tend to have a multitude of missing academic pieces. Remediation, the correction of deficiencies, attempts to fix everything that has gone wrong in students' schooling—to fill in all those missing pieces. Unfortunately, many of those pieces may have nothing to do with what is happening today.

Remediation is based on the misconception that for students to learn new information, they must go back and master everything they missed. So, for example, all of the students who are weak in math—probably determined through a pre-test—are herded together and assigned a teacher who will reteach them basic math skills. The students who have the largest gaps and are thus the most academically vulnerable are sent the furthest distance back.

In the end, this remedial model may produce a student who can finally subtract two fractions; unfortunately, that student may now be a junior in high school. While the rest of her classmates moved forward, she moved backward. Reverse movement at a tedious pace with little relevance to today's standard will not catch students up to their peers. In fact, this model may contribute to widening gaps, as stronger students get even stronger while the weaker ones continue to sink further.

This failure to move forward can lead to decreased student motivation. Aside from the fact that students who have already grown to dislike math now have additional classes in the subject they despise, it's difficult to feel motivated when there's no apparent progress. In addition, remedial courses typically provide a surfeit of passive, basic-skills work and little real-world relevance. Boredom and futility creep in, and students often give up and shut down.

Why Acceleration Works

The primary focus of remediation is mastering concepts of the past. Acceleration, on the other hand, strategically prepares students for success in the present—*this* week, on *this* content. Rather than concentrating on a litany of items that students have failed to master, acceleration readies students for new learning. Past concepts and skills are addressed, but always in the purposeful context of future learning.

Acceleration jump-starts underperforming students into learning new concepts before their classmates even begin. Rather than being stuck in the remedial slow lane, students move ahead of everyone into the fast lane of learning. Acceleration provides a fresh academic start for students every week and creates opportunities for struggling students to learn alongside their more successful peers.

As we know, students learn faster and comprehend at a higher level when they have prior knowledge of a given concept. The correlation between academic background knowledge and achievement is staggering: prior knowledge can determine whether a 50th-percentile student sinks to the 25th percentile or rises to the 75th (Marzano, 2004). Accordingly, a crucial aspect of the acceleration model is putting key prior knowledge into place so that students have something to connect new information to. Rather than focus on everything students don't know about the concept, however, the core and acceleration teachers collaboratively and thoughtfully select the specific prior knowledge that will best help students grasp the upcoming standard.

Although the acceleration model does revisit basic skills, these skills are laser-selected, applied right away with the new content, and never taught in isolation. To prepare for a new concept or lesson, students in an acceleration program receive both instruction in prior knowledge and remediation of prerequisite skills that, if missing, may create barriers to the learning process. This strategic approach of preparing for the future while plugging a few critical holes from the past yields strong results.

Closely related to the prior knowledge piece of the acceleration model is vocabulary development. Gaps in prior knowledge are largely related to vocabulary (Marzano, 2004). For example, if you ask a student who has a rich understanding of fractions to write down everything she knows about the topic, she would likely list terms and concepts like *improper fraction, denominator, numerator, reciprocal, mixed number*, and*parts of a whole*. Likewise, a student asked to write down everything he knows about government would include terms like *bicameral, popular sovereignty, checks and balances, legislature*, and *federalism*. A sizable chunk of these students' prior knowledge consists of academic vocabulary. Therefore, a key step in the acceleration approach is to introduce new vocabulary (and review previously covered critical vocabulary that students may be missing) before the lesson begins in the core class.

Moving forward with students in an acceleration model requires teachers to carefully lay out the pieces of exactly what students need to know to learn the content at the desired pace. Before other students have even begun the unit, the accelerated group has gained an understanding of

- The real-world relevance and purpose of the concept.
- Critical vocabulary, including what the words look and sound like.
- The basic skills needed to master the concept.
- The new skills needed to master the concept.
- The big picture of where instruction is going.

Figure 1.1, which emerged from my work developing acceleration classes with teachers and leaders, presents a comparison of remediation and acceleration.

FIGURE 1.1. Acceleration and Remediation: A Comparison

	Acceleration	**Remediation**
Self-efficacy	Self-confidence and engagement increase. Academic progress is evident.	Students perceive they're in the "slow class," and self-confidence and engagement decrease. Backward movement leads to a sense of futility and lack of progress.
Basic skills	Skills are hand-picked just in time for new concepts. Students apply skills immediately.	Instruction attempts to reteach every missing skill. Skills are taught in isolation and not applied to current learning.
Prior knowledge	Key prior knowledge is provided ahead of time, enabling students to connect to new information.	Typically does not introduce prior knowledge that connects to new learning.
Relevance	Treats relevance as critical component to student motivation and memory.	Relevance is not seen as a priority.
Connection to core class	Instruction is connected to core class; ongoing collaboration is emphasized.	Instruction is typically isolated from core class.
Pacing and direction	Active, fast-paced, hands-on. Forward movement; goal is for students to learn on time with peers.	Passive, with focus on worksheets or basic software programs. Backward movement; goal is for students to "catch up" to peers.

In my experience helping schools develop acceleration classes, the most common feedback I get from teachers is how quickly student confidence and participation increase. This marked improvement in students' self-efficacy makes perfect sense: concepts are placed directly in students' paths just in time for new learning in their core classrooms. Students' newfound knowledge increases the odds that they will know the correct responses to questions, and suddenly, raising their hands seems safer, and their fear of embarrassment diminishes.

As Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) explain, fear of peer reaction to an incorrect answer is a driving force in students' level of class participation. Conversely, positive feedback from teachers and peers ignites students' desire to keep succeeding. Spikes in self-efficacy, Pajares (2006) found, can lead students to engage more, work harder, stick it out longer, and achieve at higher levels. Students are able to perceive genuine progress, so this increase in self-efficacy is not superficial; it is the brain's response to real success. Acceleration can fuel new hope and motivation in students who once perceived their academic situation as hopeless.

Implementing Acceleration

There are a few logistics to address when implementing an acceleration program. The first step is identifying students who would be good candidates for acceleration, typically by reviewing standardized test data. Some schools focus just on "bubble" students—those who are right on the verge of passing their standardized tests. However, some schools in which I have consulted, after realizing acceleration's potential to yield significant results, expand their acceleration classes to include students with more significant gaps.

Another issue to address is deciding who teaches the acceleration classes. The teachers of acceleration classes may be either students' regular content-area teachers or separate teachers. There are pragmatic reasons to schedule students with their core teachers as much as possible. For example, when students attend acceleration classes with their core teachers, teachers can make just the right instructional moves during acceleration to facilitate student success in the later core class. When a different teacher is used for acceleration, daily communication and coordination of curriculum pacing become essential to maximize the program's effectiveness. The acceleration teacher *must* know where the core teacher's instruction is to be able to prepare students for success.

Carving out time is another important issue to address when beginning an acceleration program. Some schools schedule a short time (usually around 45 minutes) at the beginning of each day in which all students receive acceleration or enrichment. I've known schools to refer to this time as anything from ELT (Extended Learning Time) to Ram Time (schools can replace *Ram* with their own mascot) to Fast Lane Class (my favorite).

A second option is to incorporate acceleration into electives, specials, or pullouts. This model often provides more time than the ELT model and is typically used for the "double dose" approach, in which students receive extra instruction in problem subjects. Elementary and middle schools often use an additional teacher for this time, which enables core teachers to use this period for planning. The person in this acceleration role varies by school but is often a special educator or remedial teacher. In high schools, the core teachers often teach their own acceleration classes.

Before- and after-school tutoring or Saturday school is a third option. My first experience with acceleration was through tutoring at the middle school level. I phoned parents and explained to them that this was not going to be traditional tutoring—that our mission was to get their children ahead of the game. Parents were more than willing to make a commitment to ensure their children's attendance. Every day, for 30 minutes before school and 30 minutes after school, I accelerated the group in their trouble courses of math and science. Within a week, core teachers reported significant gains in student participation (one of the key components of success) and achievement. A thrilled science teacher said of one student, "He hasn't made over a 50 on a test all year, and he passed this one with flying colors!"

Students in an acceleration class should always be a session or two ahead of their peers in the core class. On a block schedule, one class period (typically around 90 minutes long) is generally sufficient. If the school is implementing acceleration through shorter tutoring sessions, two sessions are workable for jump-starting the

content. These times are just general guidelines; however much time schools are able to set aside can be maximized with acceleration. The duration and frequency of acceleration classes vary according to individual schools' schedules as well as students' progress, which can be assessed through ongoing observation.

The Acceleration Framework

Accelerating students is not pre-teaching; that risks tedium. Rather, it is an enriching experience designed to stimulate thinking, develop concrete models, introduce vocabulary, scaffold critical missing pieces, and introduce new concepts just prior to acquisition of new learning. Students are provided with just enough prior knowledge to latch on more readily to new concepts. There is a symbiotic, complementary relationship between "the core" and "the more"—that is, the core content and the supplemental learning and support provided by acceleration. The core and the more share the single purpose of helping students master standards the first time.

The acceleration model includes several crucial components, which I have developed as six steps over time, first through my work with my own students and later through my work with numerous schools tweaking the acceleration model. Each step is essential to student learning and motivation.

Step 1: Generate Thinking, Purpose, Relevance, and Curiosity

One or two days before the core class begins the concept or standard, acceleration begins with a thought-provoking, hands-on activity that encompasses the big idea of the standard. Typically working in small groups or pairs, students explore the new concept by generating their own formulas, developing ideas, discovering patterns, discussing observations, or examining the content's real-world relevance. In math or science, the teacher can use some of this time to develop concrete representations before embarking on abstract ideas. In all content areas, this step speaks to students' need to answer the question "What does this have to do with me?" *Success starters*, which vary by standard and content area, are a good way to get students to plunge into the new content and gain curiosity and confidence. Here are some examples (see Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of success starters).

In math, students could

- Use string to measure the circumference of a jar lid, then discuss the relationship of the circumference and the diameter using the string as a guide.
- Go on a scavenger hunt for items with surface area.
- Sort angles by similarities or differences.
- Read a picture book about fractions.
- Spin a game spinner and then discuss why the game may not be fair and determine what would make it fair.

In science, students could

- Draw items from bags, determine which ones they believe are renewable and which ones are nonrenewable, and explain their reasoning.
- Choose a pretend animal from a grab bag and brainstorm how their animal may adapt physically and behaviorally to changing environmental conditions, such as a drought or flooding.
- Respond in writing to pictures of earthquake damage.
- Watch the weather report and jot down vocabulary used.
- Tour the school as environmentalists searching for evidence of the building's carbon footprint.

In social studies, students could

- Develop their own Bill of Rights.
- Create a rapid-fire list of everything they know about government at any level.
- Examine websites of local banks and list common characteristics.
- Respond to a slideshow of images from World War I using just adjectives.

In language arts, students could

- Watch a short clip of a cartoon that uses alliteration and jot down examples.
- Identify elements of a story in a piece of literature similar to one that will be studied in class.
- Piece together a sort of the parts of an essay.
- Create a sort on tricky verb conjugations.

Why step 1 should never be skipped: Students who struggle academically are more likely to shut down on concepts that they perceive as irrelevant. Their motivation to work increases in direct correlation with their perception of the content's value and interest level. Right out of the gate, success starters create value, relevance, and interest and foster both motivation and long-term retention of content.

Step 2: Clearly Articulate the Learning Goal and Expectations

The placement of this step is quite purposeful. Step 1 showed students the real-world relevance of the new concept and triggered their curiosity. By step 2, their brains should be primed for the teacher's introduction of the learning goal—for example, "What we just explored is actually the first part of the standard we'll be learning" or "In 40 minutes, you will be able to compare and contrast the core, the mantle, and the crust."

Explicit learning expectations are essential, but students often lack clarity about what they are studying. Learning goals are the basis of student learning, and this step is too important to rely on a wordy posted standard. Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, and Wiliam (2005) concur that simply posting a standard is rarely successful because standards tend not to be written in student-friendly language. Stiggins (2007) holds that standards should be deconstructed into classroom targets that unfold into opportunities for daily formative assessment. Personally, I advocate for standards walls (discussed further in Chapter 2), which provide a visual avenue for articulating the patterns of standards. Standards walls help clarify for students the progression of learning—how separate goals crescendo into an understanding of the big picture of a concept. Providing these patterns for learning has an additional benefit: Willis (2006) explains that delivering new information to students in a way that builds connections to other learning enhances brain cell activity, leading to improved long-term memory and retrieval.

Why step 2 should never be skipped: All students, but particularly those at risk of failure, benefit from explicitly stated, student-friendly learning goals. Vague references to academic expectations have little value. Without specific goals, students can lose sight of the purpose of learning, and class becomes a blur of papers and exercises to complete rather than a logical progression of learning that leads to an important goal.

Step 3: Scaffold and Practice Essential Prerequisite Skills

(*Note: steps 3 and 4 can be switched in sequence or taught in tandem.*)

After step 2, acceleration pauses as students briefly move backward to remediate the deficits that would present a barrier to learning the new standard. To edit a potentially long list of gaps, complete the following statement: Students could master the new standard if they just knew _____.

Next, start filling in the high-priority gaps you identified. For example, if knowledge of integer rules is essential, have students create bookmarks listing integer rules and then provide guided practice reviewing integers. If students need to be able to multiply decimals, shore up their skills and develop a scaffolding device, such as a cheat sheet with an example. You can create these scaffolding cheat sheets with examples of anything students need reinforcement in, such as parts of speech or types of sentences (simple, compound, and complex). If a separate teacher is providing acceleration, the regular teacher should communicate these essential prerequisite skills so that students can shore up these areas before the lesson.

Figure 1.2 demonstrates judicious use of scaffolding: if students do not remember all of their multiplication facts, you can create a chart that includes just the ones they do not know. As students learn facts, take them off the chart. The purpose of scaffolding devices is to enable students to access the rigor of the standard. Without them, students can get mired in their gaps, and frustration sets in. It's just as important not to provide too much scaffolding, however; keep tabs on each student's progress to get an idea of when you need to reduce or withdraw support.

FIGURE 1.2. Scaffolding Example: Partial Multiplication Table

	6	**7**	**8**
6	36	42	48

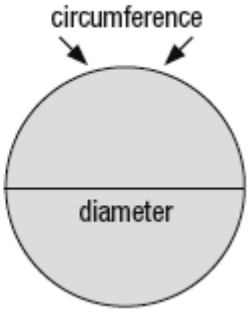
7	42	49	56
8	48	56	64

Why step 3 should never be skipped: Without this step, students may embark on their work with enthusiasm but use the incorrect integer signs on every answer, or the decimal may somehow fall in the wrong place. All that work and no payoff! Scaffolding prerequisite skills in context allows students to realize success on new content.

Step 4: Introduce New Vocabulary and Review Prior Vocabulary

Because vocabulary understanding is developed over the course of time and is a key component of prior knowledge, acceleration students in particular benefit from rich vocabulary experiences. An effective starting point is to create a *TIP:* a continually growing anchor wall chart that includes vocabulary *terms*,*information* on those terms, and *pictures* of the terms. As words are introduced, they are added to the TIP. The TIP provides a constant reference point for students, so when a student is asked, for example, "What part of a cell is most like the water boy on a football team?" she can glance over at the TIP for guidance. Figure 1.3 shows an example of the TIP process for an acceleration math class. Once the term*circumference* has been introduced and defined, the class would come up with the picture together, with the teacher suggesting, "Circumference is the distance around a circle, so how about we draw a circle with arrows showing circumference?"

FIGURE 1.3. TIP Chart: Math Vocabulary

Term	Information	Picture
Circumference	Distance around a circle	
Diameter	Straight line passing through the center of a circle	

The TIP is a good start, but multiple representations are crucial to build students' deep, sustained knowledge of vocabulary. Jenkins, Stein, and Wysocki (1984) contend that students' sixth exposure to a word is around when they begin to truly internalize and be able to use it. Acceleration gives students a head start on this process.
A key to vocabulary retention is immersing students in hands-on, playful, multisensory vocabulary experiences. During acceleration classes, vocabulary development practices should be memorable, hands-on, and interactive. In Chapter 5, I discuss powerful vocabulary strategies to use in acceleration instruction.
Why step 4 should never be skipped: Providing targeted students with advance knowledge of new vocabulary reaps major benefits in the core class. As the heterogeneous group begins the new unit, acceleration students realize success and gain confidence: "Oh, I know what that word means!"

Step 5: Dip into the New Concept

During the first four steps, students have already begun work on the new concept. They have established the concept's relevance and purpose and have a clear idea of the learning goals. They are shoring up their gaps in prerequisite skills in the context of new learning, and vocabulary development is under way. Now students are poised for going a bit deeper into the new content. This is the part they really appreciate: they get to do some things that their classmates have not even seen yet!
In math, this "dipping in" may amount to some guided practice on whiteboards (used individually or in pairs) calculating perimeter, or a scavenger hunt to locate different angles. In language arts, students may score

sample papers using a writing rubric. The science acceleration class might examine pictures of the circulatory system. These activities will not be duplicated in the core class; the repetition would lead to boredom. Instead, the acceleration time sets students up for mastering standards in the core class, so that when a new concept is introduced, students can say, "I know something about that!"

Why step 5 should never be skipped: Students' self-efficacy and enthusiasm soar as they are, possibly for the first time in their lives, ahead of the class.

Step 6: Conduct Formative Assessment Frequently

Because the goal of acceleration is to help students learn content in their core class the first time, it is essential to collect ongoing data of student progress. There should be a continual flow of formative assessment information between the core teachers and the "more" teachers, although the same teacher may serve both roles.

Acceleration lends itself beautifully to ongoing, transparent formative assessment that yields timely, detailed feedback from teachers and peers. Having students hold up their answers on individual whiteboards fits perfectly, as do strategies like sorts and problem solving on sticky notes. Or students can work on chart paper on the floor or at their desks. Essentially, anything that will help teachers continually "see" what students know provides valuable information on where students are and where they need to go. Formative assessment strategies are further explored in Chapter 4.

Why step 6 should never be skipped: Instructional adjustments in acceleration are immediate and ongoing based on student data. This is not a class in which papers are scored traditionally and returned days later. Students targeted for acceleration have an urgent need for real success right now. For that to occur, teachers must use primarily "soft" formative assessment to provide descriptive feedback.

Reflections on Acceleration

In my experience with the acceleration model, I have found that teachers and students alike can feel a strong gravitational pull to revert to remediation. Students may lack confidence in completing homework on their own or need tutoring on current work from the core class. Such bumps in the road can shift the focus from moving students forward to helping them survive today. Teachers report that when a test is looming, students feel an urgent need for help with preparation and have difficulty focusing on learning concepts beyond the test. In cases when students' need for review or remediation is especially pressing, my advice is to split the time in two: first help students review, and then introduce the next concept.

Accelerating students as a method of boosting academic achievement is as much a shift in mind-set as it is in instruction. It will always be difficult to resist the urge to try to fill in students' gaps and fix, fix, fix everything that went wrong in the past. And it is all too easy to slip back into remedial worksheets when students have so many missing pieces. But don't give in to the temptation. Adherence to the acceleration instructional model is crucial. The model is carefully designed and highly tactical: your goal is to shore up just what students need to be successful on new concepts.

The following section highlights a school whose teachers decided to make the change from remediation to acceleration. The results they observed in their students mirror what I have seen and heard in many schools.

In the fall of 2012, the math teachers at East Jackson High School were ready to try something new. Dissatisfied with test scores from the previous spring, they embarked on a different path to help students who were struggling to master the content.

The biggest change came from Julie Bruce, who taught the support class, or double dose. In the past, she had always provided remediation, typically spending class time helping students with homework and revisiting concepts they had missed in the past. Not this year. She announced to her students, "I'm not worried about what you've already learned; I'm worried about what you're going to learn."

Instead of retreading old ground, Julie began getting her students ready for their upcoming core class. She introduced the new concepts and explained the vocabulary words as they came up, in student-friendly terms. Students became accustomed to hearing, "This is what you're going to see tomorrow." She routinely stayed a day or two ahead of the core teachers.

At first, students were a bit wary of the new approach. But soon enough, Julie began seeing positive changes: one student announced, "This is the first day in math class that I wasn't confused!" while another proclaimed, "This is the first time ever in my school career that I could answer questions in math class."

Sandy Akin, one of the core teachers, noticed a change in the confidence level of the acceleration students in her heterogeneous class: they had begun participating more and asking questions. Sandy commented, "These aren't students who misbehaved. If they were lost, they didn't say anything; they just shut down." She attributed their increase in self-efficacy to the jump-start they received in their support class: "After starting acceleration, they came in the room with more confidence."

East Jackson teachers credit ongoing collaboration as a critical component of acceleration in their school. Core teachers quickly discovered that if Julie taught a concept a bit differently in acceleration, it threw students: "That's not how Ms. Bruce showed us!" Accordingly, teachers learned to get on the same page in terms of curriculum pacing, instructional approach to new concepts, and assessment.

Their reflective, collaborative approach to acceleration paid off: 72 percent of the support students passed the state end-of-course math test, compared with 50 percent the prior year. Among students with disabilities, 80 percent passed, compared with 20 percent the prior year. The acceleration students' test scores improved overall by 6 percent.

Julie's concluding thoughts on her school's move toward acceleration? "I'm a believer."

Checklist for acceleration:

□ Students can clearly articulate the meaning of today's learning goal.

□ Students receive scaffolding for prerequisite skills in the context of new learning.

□ Vocabulary development is hands-on and ongoing and focuses on clearly identified academic vocabulary terms.

□ Remediation provided is just in time and set in the context of new learning.

□ Assessment is visible and yields immediate feedback.

□ Students largely work cooperatively in a safe learning environment.

□ Students are learning the big idea of new concepts in advance of their core-class peers.

□ The acceleration teacher and the core-class teacher engage in ongoing collaboration regarding pacing and student progress.