

One-Dimensional Thinking Run Amok

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Despite and because [“The Bright Children Left Behind”](#) by Finn and Wright is one dimensional thinking run amok, it is an important reminder of a critical defect of our current system. The political correctness of the current system’s hope (triumphing over experience) that one size will fit all plus a ‘No Child Left Behind’ promise equals neglect of the children for whom at least SOME of the mainstream pedagogy is boring.

I emphasized ‘SOME’ because the Finn and Wright book overlooks the multi-dimensionality of children. They argue for a generally more challenging curriculum for the gifted and talented. But children with extraordinary talents are generally not high ability in all areas, AND even in the areas of strength, they need more than higher octane content. They need more *engaging* content. So, to prevent nation-at-risk-generating boredom for children with some significant talent(s), wrapping academics in [different themes](#) or delivering them with different pedagogies can make a big difference.

What we need is choice-driven [‘ability grouping by subject’](#). The *‘by subject’* element is critical. That multi-dimensional perspective makes the grouping non-elitist, while similar-sounding. Very different ‘tracking’ pretends that children are one-dimensionally weak, strong, or average, rather than the multi-dimensional people, with strengths and weaknesses, that are the human norm.

A *Times*’ June 4, 2014 article, [“Tracking Students by Ability Produces Results”](#) and the *Times* June 10, 2013 article, [“Grouping Students by Ability Regains Favor in Classroom”](#) points out the “common sense” that, *“too much variation within a single group causes the whole process to break down.”* The 2013 article’s description of ability grouping in action in

traditional public school classrooms demonstrates why the current system struggles to do the right thing. The photo accompanying the 2013 article shows a teacher roaming a classroom wherein children of different abilities in her subject sit at different tables within the same classroom; a circumstance in which implementation of ability grouping maximizes its difficulty and minimizes its benefits. Ability grouping within classrooms also maximizes the negative stigma effects that are a primary objection to ability grouping by subject and it's one-dimensional cousin, tracking. Ability grouping, *by subject*, in separate classrooms or in specialized schools of choice is the right way to do the right thing. That would match student abilities and interests to school mission and teacher strengths.