

## What's Good for Gifted Is Good for All

Susan Demirsky Allan, in her article "Ability-Grouping Research Reviews: What Do They Say About Grouping and the Gifted?" (March 1991), states that parents and educators are asking "whether grouping, with *appropriate* differentiated instruction, has any positive effect on student achievement." Her answer is "yes," especially in the high-ability groups. In his response, "Susan Allan Sets the Record Straight," in the same issue, John Feldhusen says that the findings of researchers Jeannie Oakes and John Goodlad simply indicate that we have a serious problem with *instruction* in low-track classes and must find ways to improve instruction for these youths.

But instruction in the high-ability group should not be labeled "gifted" educational instruction; it is simply *good* educational instruction that should be offered to *all* students in the same setting.

I should know. I received my M.A. in Gifted Ed. at Kansas University in 1982. Throughout my course work, the question that kept nagging me was, "But aren't these just good educational techniques for all students?" I was taught techniques labeled "differentiated instruction geared for the gifted student," which included (1) how to create an atmosphere that fosters creativity, (2) the steps for creative problem solving, and (3) strategies to help students produce a project to present to an audience. All these techniques are just as applicable to a 9th grade pre-algebra class as they are to my freshman honors algebra class. Having been trained in cooperative learning and other so-called "gifted" educational techniques, I bet I could teach low-, middle-, and high-ability students some good geometry in a heterogeneous setting, and everyone would benefit in more ways than one. But since even our society is tracked, I

probably won't get the chance. I'd love to try.

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## Staff Development Essential to Un-tracking

Dennis L. Evans' article "The Realities of Un-tracking a High School" in your May issue identified a six-step approach to evaluating and dismantling a counterproductive tracking program in English and Social Studies. As the principal of a school that did so successfully seven years ago, may I add a missing piece?

Extensive staff development is essential to address instruction in the newly heterogeneously organized classes. Without this, the lower-level students will not succeed. It is important to develop a variety of instructional methods so that all students can be involved in the learning activities. Though cooperative learning comes immediately to mind, there are other approaches: developing a variety of questioning techniques and learning how to use them; structuring homework assignments to cover the broad range of students in the class; re-examining the materials used for instruction, including textbooks, supplementary materials, and teacher-prepared ones; learning to pay close attention to student oral responses and using those to extend discussion and to evaluate learning; implementing, where appropriate, learning styles research; introducing mastery learning techniques; carefully teaching all students appropriate methods of using the textbook, studying for an exam, and doing the homework assignment.

Teacher perceptions and attitudes must be examined in staff development efforts. Years of tracking have created certain mind sets that must be addressed and overcome.

Finally, one must reinforce Mr.

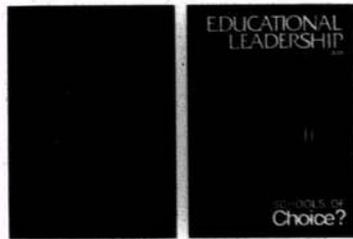
Evans' recommendation of tutorial support programs whether they be before or after school. Ideally, peer coaching is most appropriate and, by insisting that higher-achieving students or those recognized for excellence or for membership in the National Honors Society have to play a role in helping their fellows, a philosophy of community service and support for peers can be enhanced.

Un-tracking is an essential in our democratic society. Doing it well and successfully requires more than philosophical agreement.

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## Apologies

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