

Targeting children based on genetics would do more harm than good

In "[The Downside of Resilience](#)" (Sunday Review, Nov. 30), Jay Belsky points to evidence that certain children are genetically predisposed to be helped by good teachers and supportive environments, and should therefore be identified as the best use of our scarce intervention dollars.

The idea that we should sort children into groups based on genetics and then treat those groups differently is unsettling to many people, as well it should be.

Mr. Belsky couches his proposal as an opportunity to help children with certain genes and not to take away from others, but distributing scarce resources is by definition a zero-sum game, and in advocating more for one group, you are by necessity suggesting that we give less to those who have different genes, a dangerous and misguided precedent.

People are not defined by their genes. That's not wishful thinking; traits and behaviors are related to the genes we carry but in complicated and unpredictable ways. Patterns that emerge from looking at a population are interesting, but they rarely dictate how an individual will perform.

And the associations observed between a particular gene and a behavioral outcome have not been reliable, either because subsequent research proves them false or because they turn out to be true only in a narrow set of circumstances.

But arguing about the science suggests that if we got the science right, it would be a good way to set social policy. In fact, history suggests that the whole idea of treating people differently based on what genes they have is a bad use of science.

Read full, original article: [Help Children Based on Genes? 'A Bad Use of Science'](#)