DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 902 CS 005 991

AUTHOR Grant, Linda; Rothenberg, James
TITLE Charting Educational Futures: Interaction Patterns in First and Second Grade Reading Groups.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.: National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md.
PUB DATE Apr 81
CONTRACT NIE-G-79-0099
GRANT NIMH-5T32-MH-14598-04
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Grouping; *Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Grade 1; Grade 2; *Group Dynamics; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Performance Factors; Primary Education; Reading Ability; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Student Teacher Relationship

ABSTRACT

Qualitative methods were used to analyze the social environments--or webs of interaction--in reading groups of varying ability levels. Ethnographic observations were conducted for 15 to 30 hours in each of eight first and second grade classrooms with ability-divided reading groups. A code scheme was developed to categorize the quantity and quality of time devoted to each reading-ability group; the discipline patterns in each group; the patterns of praise, criticism, and stated expectations for performance in each group; and personal relationships among children and teachers. The findings supported the notion that children in top reading groups, in comparison to children in lower ranking ones, had more opportunities (1) to learn academic skills, (2) to demonstrate personal competence, (3) to participate in autonomous, self-directed learning, and (4) to develop expectations for future academic success. The findings also suggested that students in top groups enjoyed more trust in their interactions with teachers, engaged in more equal status relationships with teachers, and had more opportunities to form close personal relationships with teachers. Collectively, the results indicate that internal social processes themselves contribute to subsequent differential opportunities for children placed in different ability-graded reading groups. (RL)

CHARTING EDUCATIONAL FUTURES: INTERACTION PATTERNS IN FIRST AND SECOND GRADE READING GROUPS

by

Linda Grant and James Rothenberg*

Department of Sociology

University of Michigan

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association meeting

April 1981

*The authors contributed equally to the preparation of the manuscript. The study was partially supported by a National Institute of Mental Health fellowship to Ms. Grant, grant number 5T32MH14598-04, and a National Institute of Education grant to Mr. Rothenberg, contract number NIE-G-79-0099.

For most American children in public schools assignment to an elementary school reading group is a critical first step in an academic sorting process which channels some toward success, some toward moderate levels of achievement, and some toward failure. Nearly four-fifths of the nation's public school classrooms group children by ability level for reading instruction (Austin and Morrison, 1963). Teachers typically alter reading group assignments in the first few weeks of a new term, but then placements stabilize and there are few additional changes (Weinstein, 1976; Rist, 1970, 1978; Groff, 1962; Hawkins, 1966). In particular, there is little movement into top groups or out of the bottom ones, even when children move on to new teachers in different grades (Rist, 1970).

Although examinations of reading achievement have suggested that reading groups are not a particularly effective means of instruction, especially for low-ranking children, they continue to be a popular instructional technique promoted by teacher training programs and by literature read by classroom teachers (Chesler and Cave, 1981).Although high-ability children perform about as well in classrooms with and without reading groups, low-achieving students seemingly do less well in classrooms which use reading groups.

Research has suggested that interaction patterns, teacher behaviors, and child behaviors vary markedly from one reading group to another within the same classroom (Weinstein, 1976; Rist, 1970; Goldenberg, 1969). Furthermore, there is evidence that reading group assignment becomes for teachers and peers a symbol of generalized academic competence. The labeling effect of reading group membership carries over to other types of learning activities

and may stratify social relationships among children. The latter is particularly likely in classes where group membership is highly visible and where large portion of instruction take place within ability-divided groups (Rosenholtz and Wilson, 1980).

Rist describes the creation and maintenance of ability-differentiated groups as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers initially sort children into groups based largely on nonacademic criteria such as family social class, behavior and performance of older siblings, and children's styles of dress, speech, and personal grooming. Each group then receives systematic differential treatment, so that teachers invest more resources in instructing high-ranking groups than low ones. By the end of the year the differential instruction has produced hard evidence (i.e., achievement test scores) which confirms the "rightness" of the initial placement.

In terms of the stratification system of the entire society the reading groups not only select students early in their careers to train for variable status categories in adult life, but they also perform a cooling out function for students selected for lower tracks. Sorting which often closely parallels race, social class, and sex characteristics of children is legitimated as one based on merit (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Chesler and Cave, 1981). A student's group assignment supposedly is open to change if his or her performance merits such mobility. However, the longer a child remains in school, the harder it is to discard the effects of the initial placement. We will argue that the social processes within reading groups vary markedly according to ability levels, and these different social environments in themselves lead to variable academic and social outcomes for children. These patterns limit prospects of upward or downward mobility, not only in schools but also in adult society.

Goals of the Study

This study uses qualitative methods to analyze social environments -- or webs of interactions among all members-- in reading groups of varying ability levels. Our approach differs from those used by many previous researchers. First, we view reading group social environments as the products of ongoing, contingent social relationships among all members, not solely the outcomes of teacher behaviors toward students. Teachers undoubtedly are more powerful actors than students in creating and controlling group processes, but student members contribute as well to the texture of group activities.

Second, we believe that the impact of reading group experiences cannot be understood simply by summing and comparing micro-bits of activities across groups or across classrooms. Research which compares in a noncontextural manner such behavioral indicators as amounts of praise and criticism, reading turns, reprimands, and types of instructional tasks, has shown inconsistent results (Brophy and Good, 1974; Weinstein, 1976). Ethnographic accounts, however, suggest wide divergences in social climates in different ability-divided tracks (Rist, 1970; 1978). As Weinstein (1976, p. 116) has written: "Perhaps we look too minutely at classroom process when we focus on the transactions between the teacher an an individual child. The context of that transaction both within and without the classroom may be the more powerful expression of expectations."

This study proposes that there are seven key themes, consistent across diverse classrooms, which characterize experiences of students in reading groups which differ in ability ranks. Four relate to academic skills and three to social relationships. In comparison to their classmates in lower ranking groups, children in higher ranking groups (1) learn more academic skills (2) have greater opportunities to demonstrate academic competence (3) engage in more autonomous, self-directed learning and (4) have more experiences

which enhance expectations for future academic success. In addition to these academic advantages, the higher group children (5) enjoy more trust in their interactions with teachers and with peers (6) have more opportunities to establish more equal interchanges with teachers and (7) have more chances to form close personal relationships with teachers. These variable social experiences can lead to differences in children's attitudes toward school, their social maturity and their levels of motivation -- qualities more often thought of as characteristics of the student herself or himself. We believe they are at least in part socially constructed. The social advantages of membership in a high-ranking group directly enhance academic performance, as well as make schools a comfortable place for some children and a hostile place for others.

Methods

The authors completed from 15 to 30 hours of ethnographic observations in each of eight classrooms which used ability-divided reading groups. Observations covered a wide range of regularly-scheduled class activities, with reading group time accounting for from three to eight hours of the total in each class. Observations took place over a five or six month period in each classroom. Observers visited rooms from 20 to 80 minutes, and then expanded notes taken during observations into detailed ethnogrpahic time-sequential notes, usually within 24 hours of the visit.[1]

Table 1 summarizes characteristics of each classroom. Five were in schools which served blue-collar communities, and three were in schools which served white-collar communities. In the former communities, about 30 percent of the districts' graduating high school seniors went on to college. Aggregate reading test scores on a state of Michigan test battery administered to all the state's fourth

1. Some classrooms were observed as a part of the larger "Socialization into the Student Role" project directed by Dr. Steven Bossert. We are grateful to him for his for his comments on this paper.

graders in these communities showed children in the blue-collar communities performing slightly below the median performance level for the state of Michigan and children in the white-collar communities performing above the 95th percentile for all districts statewide.

All classrooms in blue-collar communities were first grades. Of the three classrooms from white-collar communities, one was a regular first grade, one a regular second grade, and one a split-graded first and second grade (labeled G-1 and G-2 in Table 1). In the split graded classroom, first graders and second graders were separated for all reading instruction. The teacher divided children at each grade level into two separate groups. Henceforth, G-1 and G-2 are analyzed as if they were separate classrooms.

Observers were present for at least three reading group sessions of each ability-divided group in each classroom.

A code scheme for analyzing the data was developed inductively from examination of ethnographic notes (Appendix A). Codes summarized recurrent activities in reading groups in each classroom and were designed to retain as much contextual material as possible. Codes covered four major types of activities: quantity and quality of time devoted to each group; discipline patterns in each group; patterns of praise, criticism, and stated expectations for performance in each group; and personal relationships among children and teachers.

We attempted to develop and apply our coding scheme in ways which maintained important variations in meanings of similar types of activities in the classrooms. In doing so, we hoped to avoid some of the shortcomings of micro-coding schemes which group together similar types of activities even when it is clear they have variant meanings. Two examples from a single classroom will illustrate this point. The following activities might both in typical micro-coding schemes be classified under the same code as "complete

workbook activities."

In the first example, the teacher worked with her top ranking reading group:

T tells children to take out workbooks, get ready to complete three pages, tells children: "They're just like the ones you did last week. I don't think you will have any trouble."

T asks children to read directions, asks: "Any questions?" There are none.

T tells children: "Finish these up, and leave [the workbooks] for me to check when you're through." T then prepares art project for later in the day as children finish work on their own, leave for desks when they have completed the assignment.

In the second instance, the teacher worked with the lowest of her four reading groups:

T tells children to get out workbooks to complete a page and adds: "Don't panic. We'll go through these together so that you don't get mixed up."

T tells children to make sure they are on page 14, then checks around table to see if they are on right page. T tells group: "Now pay attention and listen while I read the directions....When you get into level four [two texts ahead], you're going to have to read your own directions."

T reads directions, asks: "Any questions?" No response. T rereads directions, telling children: "Let's go over these again to make sure everybody understands. We had some problems yesterday when people got confused about beginning sounds and ending sounds." T asks again: "Any questions?" and then reiterates part of directions, saying: "Remember, it is asking for ending sounds."

T reads first exercise on page, then asks: "Does anyone know the answer to this one?" One child responds correctly and T says: "Oh good, very good." T tells group: "Now everybody circle the first one-- DUCK," then checks around table to see if children all did this correctly. Enroute, she tells one child who starts to work on the next example: "No, don't work ahead of us. You might get mixed up."

To classify these activities as equivalent, despite the similarity in the type of work performed, would be a serious distortion. In the first example children in the high ranking group worked autonomously, with a high degree of teacher trust that they would complete the task successfully. In the other group children were carefully monitored and reprimanded for showing autoromy. In addition, the teacher scarcely disguised her skepticism that the children would finish the task successfully without her full involvement at every step.

We derived from initial codes of tasks a different classification scheme for group activities based on two criteria; (1) the degree to which tasks offered opportunities for individual performance as opposed to performance as a part of a group and (2) the degree to which tasks promoted student autonomy as opposed to dependence on the teacher.

On individual performance tasks children demonstrated mastery (or lack of it) of the lesson by responding as individuals or turning in work completed individually. On these tasks teachers could judge individual competence of each student. On group-based performance tasks children responded as group members (such as unison reading) and individual mastery was masked by the group. Paperwork completed along with other group members at a teacher-controlled pace also was classified as a group performance task.

Autonomy tasks required children to complete work on their own and to make decisions about content and order. Dependence tasks were carefully monitored by the teacher and children made few decisions about content, order, or pace.

We made frequency and proportional tabulations of activities in analyzing our data (see, for instance, Becker, 1958), but did not use other forms of statistical analyses. Statistical analyses, by necessity, omit important contextual information vital to understanding implications of observed patterns.[2] We also drew upon our formal and informal interviews with teachers, our observations of other in-class and out-of-class interactions, and our perspectives as peripheral members of ongoing social systems in each classroom to aid in interpreting the meanings of observed behaviors.

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2. We question the applicability of most classroom observational data to multivariate statistical analysis, since these data often violate assumptions about sampling and distribution necessary for such techniques.

RESULTS

Mobility in Reading Groups

Consistent with most research, the classrooms in our study had little student mobility in reading group assignments during the five or six month observation periods (Table 2). Only one child in one classroom moved into a top reading group from a second-ranking one. Two children moved from the middle-ranking to the bottom-ranking group in one classroom. Four children moved out of the top-ranking group to a lower one in one classroom. All other mobility was within the middle group. Overall about 4 percent of the 193 children placed in reading groups were mobile during the study. Thus, our findings confirm those of researchers who suggest that reading groups become caste-like classroom strata which change very little. When mobility occurred, it was more likely to be downward than upward.

Tasks in Reading Groups

Table 3 shows task assignments in reading groups in each classroom on the two task dimensions described above. The observer in each classroom reviewed records of task activities and recalled the manner in which tasks operated in each classroom to classify overall activity patterns in each group as strong, moderate, or weak on individual performance tasks and as strong, moderate, or weak on autonomy tasks. "Strong" meant that there was a larger share of individual performance tasks, for example, than group-based performance tasks. Moderate meant there was an approximately equal proportion of each type of task. Weak meant that there was a preponderance of group-based tasks and few individual performance tasks. Similar classifications were made for autonomy.

Table 3 shows that both these dimensions differentiated between activities of groups of various levels, although there were some variations in patterns by social class of the community in which each classroom was located.

In blue-collar classrooms higher reading groups, in comparison to lower ones, were more likely to have high ratios of individual peroformance tasks. Lower groups spent more time in competence-masking activities such as silent reading, unison reading, rote vocabulary drills, and the like.

The observers also noted important qualitative differences in performance patterns among groups in these classrooms. When children in top groups read aloud or responded to questions, each child in turn covered fresh materials. In lower ranking groups students frequently reread materials which other classmates already had covered and questions took on a drill-like quality in which the same information was elicited repeatedly.

In the blue-collar classrooms groups at all levels tended to have low or moderate levels of autonomy. However, high ranking groups were stronger on this dimension than were the lower ranking ones.

As Table 3 shows, white-collar classrooms did not have higher ratios of individual performance tasks in top ranking groups in comparison to low ranking ones. In these classrooms it was the lower ranking groups which spent more time, in particular, in reading turns and responses to teacher questions. Typically, children in top reading groups read smoothly and easily -- well above grade level. Teachers assumed high levels of competence among the students and used reading group time to check work completed out of group and to give directions for future self-directed assignments. Individual performance tasks were more common in lower ranking groups, where teachers believed it was necessary to have children recite and read aloud to check their attainment.

In comparison to the blue-collar classrooms, reading groups at all ability levels in white-collar classrooms had high levels of autonomy. In the white-collar classrooms, all four of the highest reading groups were rated as having

high levels of autonomy, in contrast to only one of the top reading groups in the blue-collar classrooms (Table 4).

Table 4 examines patterns in the highest and the lowest reading group in each classroom and helps to sharpen the contrasts among blue-collar and white-collar classrooms on task patterns in reading groups. The cells in Table 4 represent numbers of classrooms with high or low reading group ranking at each level on the individual performance and on the autonomy dimensions. It shows that individual performance was a more important difference by level in groups in blue-collar classrooms, while autonomy was a more important line of demarcation in blue-collar classrooms.

These patterns are consistent with social class differences in preferred parental socialization patterns described by Kohn (1969). Kohn found that middle class parents stressed the development of autonomy in children, while working-class parents stressed obedience to authority. One other possible difference for the observed patterns is that some of the white-collar classrooms contained second graders. Autonomy may increase with increasing attainment. But these patterns appeared as well for the first graders in these communities, suggesting that the socioeconomic status of the surrounding community might have affected patterns of task assignments in classrooms.

Allotments of Time and Teacher Attention

We looked at how much time teachers devoted to instruction in each reading group and how frequently they initiated or permitted interruptions of instructional activities. In these classrooms teachers averaged more time with their high than their low reading groups in six classrooms, although we are not confident that these differences would be found at all points in the school year. They may vary substantially from lesson to lesson. In six classrooms, teachers spent more

time with top than with lower groups. In two classrooms the patterns were reversed and teachers spent more time with low groups than with others. In a third classroom the teachers spent the most time with the middle-ranking group.[3]

Table 5 summarizes patterns of interruptions of instructional time in each reading group. Included are four types of interruptions: interruptions initiated by children outside the group who come to the teacher to seek help and who get help (IC); interruptions initiated by the teacher to offer help or to give procedural directions to children outside the group (IT); interruptions initiated by the teacher to discipline a child outside the group (ITD); and interruptions initiated by the teacher to discipline children within the group (ID). These instances are normed to observational time for each group, so that the cells of Table 5 represent instances of each interruption per observational hour. Empty cells mean fewer than five instances per hour.

Table 5 shows that teachers tended to protect their high-ranking groups from interruptions in comparison to their time with low ranking groups. Two teachers -- both in the blue-collar classrooms (B and C)-- also provided substantial protection from interruptions of their time with the lowest groups as well. Even in these classrooms, however, the top groups were more protected than were the middles.

Patterns in the white-collar community were i the same directions, but the differences by ability level of group were less distinctive. In Classroom F, a first grade, the high groups were protected more than were the low groups. In the second grade Classroom H the middle group received more protection than did the top group. In the split graded Classroom G top-ranking second

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3.There are two ways to compare total reading group time: total instructional time or time per child in the group. We have elected to report the former, on the rationale that children also learn when they attend to activities of others. Results normed per child are similar.

grade group received more protection than the bottom second grade group but patterns were reversed for first grade groups.

In addition to devoting more time with fewer interruptions to top groups, teachers protected the space and attention resources devoted to high ranking groups in other ways. We observed what we termed boundary maintenance activities where teachers clearly labeled certain resources as exclusive property of top groups. Children in low groups who attended to activities of high groups were told: "We don't need your attention back here. You'll get to read this story later." In one instance a teacher in Classroom A cautioned children from the bottom group not to use during a free period a set of vocabulary cards listing words currently studied by the top group. She told the children in the lower group: "Those are for level sixes, and you're not a level six." In other instances, teachers allowed top group children to have exclusive use of tables, games, and resource materials.

Praise, Criticism, and Expectations

Table 5 also summarizes patterns of praise, criticism, and expectation statements about children's academic performance and potential which occurred in each reading group. The cells here also are adjusted to reflect instances per hour, and empty cells represent groups in which an activity occurred less than once per hour.

Praise refers to teachers' positive feedback for particular performances. Criticism refers to negative feedback for particular performances. Expectation statements are more diffuse types of praise and criticism and represent positive or negative predictions about a child's future academic performance.

With the exception of the teacher in Classroom C, teachers in the blue-collar classrooms used praise and criticism more often than did teachers in the white-collar classrooms. In the latter classrooms, the students and teachers

by the second month of school had fallen into predictable patterns of activities in reading groups which required few sanctions by the teacher to maintain. These teachers also rarely made expectation statements to students, and we recorded no instances of negative expectation statements in these classrooms.

In the blue-collar classrooms teachers tended to praise their top-ranking groups more often and criticize their low-ranking groups more often, although this trend was not absolute. Three of the five teachers praised top groups more frequently and criticized low groups. Two classrooms, however, showed the reverse patterns. In one of these, Classroom D, the teacher made positive expectation statements only about her high group students, although she praised the lows more for specific performances.

We noted some qualitative differences in types of praise and criticisms given to top and lower groups in the blue-collar classrooms. Praise to lows often was qualified, so that lows were praised in some instances for turning in "a really good paper -- much better than yesterday" or a low group was complimented for "learning those words really well, just about as fast as Team A [the top group]." Conversely, criticism to high group members often was buffered, so that a child giving an incorrect response was told: "No, that's not quite right, but the beginning sound is right" or "No, that isn't the way to do these, but I didn't explain that very well." A few teachers also gave extravagant praise to accomplishments of low group members, their enthusiasm in itself almost marking the incident as a rare event.

Personal Relationships among Teachers and Students

Two recurrent interactions among children and teachers which varied by reading group membership suggested that children of varying ability levels had different types of status relationships with teachers. We termed these activities chats and agenda-setting.

Chats referred to personal level interchanges among teachers and students. Sometimes they were initiated by children, who told of trips to the zoo or a relative's visit to the family. Sometimes they were initiated by teachers, who questioned children about personal-life activities or offered information about their own out-of-class activities. Occasionally they were inspired by the content of the lesson, such as a text story about a circus which inspired a long exchange of personal accounts of visits to a circus.

Agenda-setting referred to attempts by children to set or alter the agenda of the day's activities for the reading group. Sometimes teachers offered children opportunities to set the group's agenda, such as inviting the children to decide whether the group would first read aloud or have workbook materials checked. On other occasions students spontaneously attempted to set the group's agenda, such as telling the teacher the group wanted to recite vocabulary words today, or perhaps read one text story before another.

As Table 5 shows there were markedly different instances of chats and agenda-setting in reading groups of different ability levels in most classrooms. In the blue-collar classrooms, three of the five teachers chatted more often with children in their top groups in comparison with low group children. Two of the three chatted only with children in their high groups. The other two teachers in blue-collar classrooms chatted more often with low group children than with high group students. One of these (Classroom D) seems an atypical case. All but one of the teacher chats with bottom group children were with a single child, a black male whose parents had complained to the school about racism among the staff. The white teacher in this classroom indicated she was concerned about the complaints and said she made "a special effort" to get

along with this particular child.

In the white-collar classrooms, the chat patterns were similar. Teachers in the single-graded classrooms spent considerably more time chatting with top-group students than with students in lower groups. In the second grade, Classroom H, the teacher spent more than 28 percent of the total reading group instructional time engaged in such interchanges with children in the top group. She spent no time in this activity with her bottom group.

The split graded Classroom G again showed a mixed pattern. While the teacher chatted more with her top first grade group than her bottom one, the patterns were reversed in second grade.

The second indicator of teacher-student status relationships, agenda-setting, did not occur in all classrooms(Table 5). Where it did occur, however, it was more common in high than in low reading groups. Of the five classrooms in which it did appear, three had agenda-setting activities by students only in the top-ranking group. In Classroom B, it was equally common in the top and the bottom groups, but less likely in the middle-ranking groups. Classroom D represented an exception, in that agenda-setting was more common in the bottom group. Once more, however, these patterns represented high rates of interchanges between the teacher and the one student whose parents had filed complaints with the school.

It is uncelear precisely why children in top groups could chat and agenda-set more readily than children in lower groups. One possibility is that teachers thought they could afford relaxed relationships with high-achieving students whom they felt could spare the time from instructional activities. Cooper (1979) also has suggested that teachers are more willing to grant more "floor time" to high-achieving students whose behaviors they believe they can predict and control more readily than behaviors of low-achieving students. Or teachers simply

might feel closer to children in top groups and hence might be willing to allow more intimacy and more power in relationships.

We noted that teachers in working with low ranking groups sometimes cut off what seemed to be bids for initiating chats on the part of students. A typical example was an instance in which a student in a low group attempted to interject into sequential reading aloud turns a discourse about his brother's birthday party. The teacher cut off the exchange sharply, telling the child: "We have to finish this story today. We'll talk about that later if we get a chance." The implication was that the discourse was an off-task diversion, and that the group could not spare time from instructional activities to pursue it. Similar factors may have affected the differential rates of agenda-setting activities. Teachers may have respected fequests for alterations from high-ranking students but interpreted those of low-ranking students as attempts to waste time or avoid instructional activities.

Implications

Taken collectively, the different experiences of children in various ability-divided reading groups have important implications for opportunities for academic learning and for the development of social skills as well. Our findings support the notion that children in top reading groups, in comparison to children in lower ranking ones, are advantaged in the following ways:

1. They have more opportunities to learn academic skills. Children in these groups not only covered more complex materials at a more rapid pace than did those in lower groups, but they had opportunities to work without interruptions. During sessions with top groups, teachers and students protected instructional time from intrusion and focused attention on one another and the task at hand.

2. They have more opportunities to demonstrate personal competence. Such demonstrations were easier for top ranking students because their groups used work patterns which allowed easy demonstration of individual attainment. In low groups group performance tasks such as unison recitation masked individual competence, so that even if a child progressed at a faster rate than others, it was difficult for the teacher to see the progress. In low groups teachers often required that paperwork be done by all members at a common pace. Children who worked faster than others were trained to wait until the group had completed the task.[4] The higher rates of chats in high ranking groups also allowed students in them to display knowledge and verbal and social skills to the teacher.

3. They have more opportunities for autonomous, self-directed learning. Especially in the white-collar classrooms, children in higher reading groups performed more independently on tasks. Ability to work autonomously becomes increasingly important at higher levels in the educational system and is an imperative skill for doing well in high school and college. High levels of chat and agenda-setting allowed for top students were also indicative of automy in these children's relationships with teachers. They learned active, inquiring modes of learning, while children in lower groups learned passive modes.

4. They have more opportunities to develop expectations for future academic success than do children in lower groups. Our findings are less clearcut on this issue, but patterns of praise, criticism, and expectations in most classrooms suggest that in some children in top ranking groups receive more praise and less criticism.

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4. One consequence was the frequent teacher complaint (consistent with our observations) that low ranking children often lost valuable time on reading tests because they stopped at the end of each page, rather than following directions to proceed.

They also receive most of the admittedly-infrequent positive expectation statements than do low group members, who receive disproportionate shares of negative expectation statements.

Thus, the high ranking students come out as advantaged in comparison to classmates in lower groups on most indicators of opportunities for academic achievement. Internal dynamics of high ranking groups enhance gains and demonstrations of competence in comparison to lower groups, and they may as well enhance students' self-expectations for future academic performance.

Our findings also suggest that students in top groups, in comparison to lower ones, also (5) enjoy more trust in their interactions with teachers (6) engage in more equal status relationships with teachers and (7) have more opportunities to form close personal relationships with teachers. These social advantages derive primarily from differences in teacher-student interchanges in the form of chat and agenda-setting activities. Observed patterns seem to indicate that teachers generally are more easily accessible to top-ranking students, who engage them in pleasant interchanges which it is appropriate for students to initiate. During such exchanges, much of the formality which usually characterizes student-teacher relationships is relaxed. Lower ranking students who attempt such interchanges often are rebuked and find the teacher less accessible.

Teachers also trusted high-ranking children to complete work with little monitoring and accepted at face value and even reinforced their assertions that they understood work or had completed it successfully. Low group children more often had their work checked or directions repeated "just to make sure" when they made similar assertions.

The social advantages accorded to top ranking students make it easy to

why these students might find school to be a comfortable setting, while their lower ranking classmates might find it a hostile one. Social psychological research has indicated that stress inhibits learning and social support facilitates it. The warmer emotional climate of top-ranking groups, and the often unpleasant one within low groups, might make learning easier in the top ones.

Children in top groups also had more opportunities than did peers in lower groups to develop social skills. Increases in social skills likewise are inextricably linked to further increases in academic competence. We found that teachers in the classrooms we studied frequently took indicators such as social maturity and ability to work autonomously into account in making decisions about promotion, retention, and reading group placement in subsequent years. These qualities usually are thought of as characteristics of the child and are often related to levels of maturity or to preschool socialization patterns. Our work suggests that they may, at least in part, be socially constructed in interactions within reading groups.

Conclusion

Our study suggests that internal social processes which develop within ability-graded reading groups themselves contribute to subsequent differential opportunities for children placed in different groups. Our study has been limited to eight classrooms, but it has attempted to define critical dimensions of these social processes which lead to divergent outcomes. The study suggests that processes in groups may differ as well by the socioeconomic status of the communities in which classrooms are located. Finally, it calls for a different type of approach to analysis of implications of interactions in reading groups which does not simply count and compare small units of behavior but which attempts to assess their implications within a social context.

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TABLE 1

Characteristics of Classrooms and Their Reading Groups

Classroom	Grade	School SES	Race of Teacher	Levels	Enrollment in Reading Groups*			# of Children not in Reading Groups
					Black	White	Total	
A	1	Blue Collar	Black	High	4	4	8	4
				Low	1	7	8	
B	1	Blue Collar	Black	High	1	5	6	
				Mid-high	5	1	6	
				Mid-low	2	3	6	
				Low	5	1	6	
C	1	Blue Collar	White	High	2	5	7	
				Mid-high	2	6	8	
				Mid-low	0	4	4	
				Low	1	2	3	
D	1	Blue Collar	White	High	3	15	18	
				Low	7	3	10	
E	1	Blue Collar	White	High	0	12	12	
				Low	3	10	13	
F	1	White Collar	White	High	1	2	3	1
				Mid**	1	6	7	
				Mid	0	7	7	
				Low	1	5	6	
G*** G-1	1	White Collar	White	High	0	4	4	
				Low	1	8	9	
G-2	2			High	0	8	8	
				Low	0	4	4	
H	2	White Collar	White	High	0	8	8	1
				Mid	1	8	9	
				Low	0	7	7	

*Enrollments are reported for the final observation period for each group.

**The two mid groups in this classroom did the same work and progressed at the same rate. The teacher frequently shifted children from one mid group to the other, usually for reasons of convenience. Only minor differences were found between the two mid groups on the activity measures. For analytic purposes these two groups will be considered as a single group for the rest of this paper.

***Classroom G was a combined 1st and 2nd grade classroom. 1st and 2nd graders never read together in the same groups. There were two reading groups at each grade level. G-1 refers to 1st grade groups and G-2 refers to 2nd grade groups.

TABLE 2

Student Mobility Between Reading Groups

Classroom	# children moving	Direction	From	To
A	1	up	Low	High
	1	down	High	Low
	3	down	Low	i[1]
B	1	up	Mid-low	Mid-high
F	2	up	Low	Mid
	2	down	Mid	Low

[1]The teacher felt that these children were unable to keep up with their group and began to work with them individually.

TABLE 3

Task Patterns in Reading Groups

Classroom	Reading Group Level	Task Patterns	
		Autonomy	Individual Performance
A	High	Strong	Strong
	Low	Strong	Moderate
B	High	Moderate	Strong
	Mid-high	Weak	Weak
	Mid-low	Weak	Moderate
	Low	Weak	Weak
C	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Mid-high	Weak	Weak
	Mid-low	Weak	Weak
	Low	Weak	Weak
D	High	Weak	Strong
	Low	Weak	Moderate
E	High	Weak	Strong
	Low	Weak	Moderate
F	High	Strong	Moderate
	Mid	Moderate	Strong
	Low	Moderate	Moderate
G-1	High	Strong	Moderate
	Low	Weak	Strong
G-2	High	Strong	Moderate
	Low	Weak	Strong
H	High	Strong	Moderate
	Mid	Moderate	Moderate
	Low	Moderate	Strong

TABLE 4

Task Patterns in Highest and Lowest Reading Groups
in Blue Collar and White Collar Communities[1]

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

	Low Reading Groups				High Reading Groups		
	Blue Collar Classrooms	White Collar Classrooms	Total		Blue Collar Classrooms	White Collar Classrooms	Total
Strong		2	2	Strong	4		4
Moderate	3	2	5	Moderate	1	4	5
Weak	2		2	Weak			0

AUTONOMY

	Low Reading Groups				High Reading Groups		
	Blue Collar Classrooms	White Collar Classrooms	Total		Blue Collar Classrooms	White Collar Classrooms	Total
Strong	1		1	Strong	1	4	5
Moderate		2	2	Moderate	2		2
Weak	4	2	6	Weak	2		2

[1]This table reports only the High and Low groups. The numbers indicate the number of classrooms where these reading groups fell at each level. G-1 and G-2 were considered as separate classrooms for the purposes of this table.

TABLE 5

Patterns of Time Allotments, Feedback and Personal Relationships[1]

	Classroom	Level	Time Allotments				Feedback				Personal Relationships	
			IC	IT	ITD	ID	Praise	Criticism	Pos. Expect.	Neg. Expect.	Chat	Agenda Setting
Classrooms in Blue Collar Communities	A	High	10.2*[2]	2.8*	10.2	10.2	4.6*	2.8*	.9		1.8*	
		Low	22.1	7.9	9.5	0*	0	11.1	1.6*		0	
	B	High	9.8*	1.5*	2.5*	3.9*	10.8*	3.9*	3.4	1.0*	9.3*	3.0*
		Mid-high	11.1	0*	2.8	8.3*	13.8*	13.8	3.7	3.7	2.8	.9
		Mid-low	11.8	2.1	4.1	8.7	6.7	4.1*	0	2.6*	2.1	1.0
		Low	7.6*	3.8	.8*	12.9	9.1	12.2	3.8	8.4	5.3*	3.0*
	C	High	3.2*	1.1*	2.1*	6.3*	0	3.2		4.2	2.1*	2.1*
		Mid-high	4.0	8.0	12.0	13.0	1.0	6.0		3.0	0	0
		Mid-low	7.0	5.0	8.0*	5.0*	5.0*	0*		3.0	0	0
		Low	1.7*	3.8*	13.1	11.3	3.8*	0*		3.8	0	0
	D	High	1.0*	2.4*	2.4*	12.5*	13.0	2.4	1.4*	2.3	.5	0
		Low	17.3	8.1	28.8	21.9	16.5*	0*	0	0*	2.3*	1.2*
	E	High	6.2*		21.0	1.9*	11.1*	.6*		0*	.6	
		Low	7.0		8.4*	17.4	7.0	2.1		3.5	1.4*	
Classrooms in White Collar Communities	F	High	7.5*	6.1	23.4	1.9*	2.3	1.4*			2.3*	
		Mid	8.9	2.6*	12.2*	7.1	1.5	1.9			2.4*	
		Low	13.4	2.7*	19.7	4.5	3.4*	4.5			.9	
	G-1	High			13.4		2.1	1.4*			2.9*	1.3*
		Low			2.3*		5.1*	2.9			.6	0
	G-2	High			4.0*	.4*	1.8*	1.3*	3.6*		.4	
		Low			5.4	4.9	1.1	1.6	0		4.9*	
	H	High	8.2	4.8	6.8	4.1*					5.5*	3.4*
		Mid	.6*	.6*	5.9*	7.6					2.4	0
		Low	6.4	2.0	7.4	5.9					.5	0

[1]Numbers indicate incidences per hour of reading group time.

[2]Asterisks indicate group(s) which we considered to be relatively advantaged on these measures.

Appendix A

Codes of Activities in Reading Groups

I. Time Allocations

A. Note total time (in minutes) teacher spends with each group, from time group is assembled to time it is dismissed.

B. Interruptions of group time by children.

1. Interruption initiated by a child (IC). A child who is not a group member successfully interrupts the group and gains the teacher's attention.

   Example: Billy asks the teacher the answer to a workbook problem, or Suzanne comes to ask permission to use the pencil sharperner.

2. Interruption rejected (IR). A child attempts to interrupt the teacher as she works with a reading group, but the interruption is unsuccessful.

   Example: Renee approaches the teacher during reading group time with a question on her ditto. Teacher shakes head to indicate "no" and waves Renee back to her desk.

3. Interruptions initiated by the teacher:

   A. Interruption to help or give directions (IT): The teacher interrupts the reading group time to help children in the class or give them directions to children who are not in the reading group at the time.

      Example: The teacher interrupts the group session to tell children doing seatwork at their desks to be certain to complete the back of their ditto sheets as well as the front or to tell a particular child to use a dictionary if he/she needs it to complete an assignment.

   B. Interruption to discipline (ITD). The teacher interrupts the reading group time to discipline children in the class who are not in the reading group at the time.

      Example: The teacher interrupts the group session to tell Sally to sit down or to tell Wally to stop talking.

   C. Interruptions to discipline children in the group (ID). The teacher interrupts the lesson to discipline children in the reading group.[1]

      Example: The teacher tells Paul, a reading group member, to pay attention or tells Maribeth to sit up straight and stop talking during a recitation.

1. Record under this category as well praise for behavior of students in the group, such as: "I like the way Ruth is sitting still, ready to work."

II: Task Patterns in Reading Groups

Incidences of each of the following in each reading group were recorded:

A. Reading Turns.

1. Voluntary (V): Teachers called on children who volunteered to read portions of text, workbooks, boardwork, or chart materials aloud before other group members.

2. Nonvoluntary (N). The teacher called on children of her choice (whether or not they volunteered) to read portions of workbooks, texts, charts, etc. aloud before other group members.

3. Unison reading (U): The teacher asked the group to read aloud in unison portions of the text, etc.

4. Silent reading (SR): The teacher asked group members to read silently portions of the text, workbook, etc., during reading group time.

B. Questions.

1. Voluntary (V): Teacher asked questions about the reading lesson, calling on volunteers to respond aloud to them.

2. Nonvoluntary (N): Teacher asked questions about the reading lesson, calling on students (whether or not they volunteered) to respond aloud to them.

3. Unison (UQ): Teacher asked the group to respond aloud in unison to a question about the reading lesson.

C. Lecture: Teacher lectures or provides information and comments relevant to the lesson which supplement materials which children read.

Example: The teacher expands on a text story about elephants by talking for three minutes about the types of work which elephants can perform on construction projects in remote areas where machinery cannot be used.

D. In-group Written Work.

1. Workbook (WB): Teacher asks students to complete workbook work as a group during reading group time. The work may be checked by the teacher as each child completes it, or the group may go over answers together. (Code work on dittoes, study sheets, etc., as WB).

2. Check work (CW): The teacher checks work which children have completed outside of reading group time.

3. Boardwork (BW): The teacher leads the group in working at the blackboard or on a reading chart, felt board, etc.

E. Questions to Teacher: The teacher accepts questions from children in the group with whom she works.

IIA: Derivative Codes for Task Activities in Groups

Analysis revealed that tasks were used in qualitatively different ways in different classrooms and groups. Thus, derivative codes to characterize overall patterns in each group were developed. Overall activities in each group were reclassified along two dimensions (For further explanation, refer to the text):

1. Individual performance versus group-based performance. Individual performance tasks were those on which children performed individually and teachers could easily assess the competence (or incompetence) of the child on the task. Example: Individual reading turn, completion of workbook work alone at a self-designated pace.
Group-based performance tasks were those in which children performed in groups and teachers could not readily assess the competence (or incompetence) of individual children on each task. Example: Unison reading or teacher-paced and directed workbook or ditto work.

2. Autonomy versus teacher dependency. Autonomous tasks were those performed by students where choice of time, pace, and content were high. Example: writing a story relevant to the lesson.
Teacher-dependent tasks were those which were carefully monitored by the teacher and on which children had little choice of content, time, or pace. Example: completion of written work as a group.

III: Praise, Criticism, and Expectation

1. Praise (P): Teacher praises a child for a specific academic performance.

   Example: Teacher tells Charles "very good" after he reads a passage.

2. Qualified Praise (QP): Teacher praises a child for a specific academic performance, but qualifies or limits the praise in some manner.

   Example: Teacher tells Susan that her workbook sheet is "much better" than the sheet she turned in yesterday. Or teacher tells Roy that he read a passage very well, "almost as well as the people in my top group."

3. Criticism (C): Teacher criticizes a child for a specific academic performance.

   Example: Teacher tells Elmer that he "missed quite a few words" in reading aloud.

4. Buffered Criticism (BC): Teacher criticizes a child for a specific academic performance, but buffers the impact of the criticism.

   Example: Teacher tells Tom his ditto sheet is "not quite right," but adds, "I don't think I explained that very well." Or teacher tells Yvonne that "These sentences are fine, but you forgot to use the words from the lesson."

5. Positive Expectation (E^+): Teacher states a positive expectation or predicts future success on academic tasks for a child or group of children.

Example: The teacher tells Melanie she will "have no trouble" with a new reading text because "you read so well you could just zip through anything in this room."

6. Negative Expectation (E^-): Teacher states a negative expectation or predicts future failure on academic tasks, or expresses skepticism about a child or children's abilities to complete academic tasks successfully.

Example: The teacher tells Roy as she gives him some ditto sheets that "You may find some of these kind of hard. Be sure to come see me when you run into trouble."

(Note: We also attempted to code patterns of attributions, or reasons teachers stated to explain or justify the success or failure of children on academic tasks. Teachers in this study rarely made such statements during reading group time, however.)

IV: Personal Relationships among Teachers and Students.

1. Chats

A. Chats initiated by teachers (CT): The teacher begins a chat with a child or children about personal life activities of the teacher or the child.

Example: The teacher asks Wade how his violin lessons are going or asks Joanna what special plans the family has for her birthday. Or the teacher tells a child or children about her own out-of-sch life, such as her vacation to the beach last summer.

B. Chats initiated by children (CC): The child begins a chat with a child or children about personal life activities.

Example: Danny tells the teacher about his trip to the dentist, or Alicia asks what the teacher plans to do for Thanksgiving this year.

2. Agenda-Setting (A): Children negotiate with teachers about work assignments, or respond to the teacher's invitation to help plan patterns of activities.

Example: Malcolm asks if the group can each take a turn reciting vocabulary words today, and the teacher agrees. Or the teacher asks group members if they would prefer to read their story silently or aloud.

3. Boundary Maintenance (B): The teacher preserves certain resources for exclusive use of members of certain groups or limits access of some children to some resources.

Example: Teacher tells children of lower groups that they can select puzzles only after top group members have selected first or identifies one table as "for level sixes only."