a group of black children during kindergarten, first, and second grades. Rist found that, in the absence of test information, a kindergarten teacher worked from her own implicit “ideal type” characterization of fast learners when she made decisions about reading groups; this ideal type was based on social rather than academic information. That is, children were assigned to the “fast learners” table (the high ability group) if they “appeared clean and interested, sought interactions, spoke with less dialect, were at ease with adults, displayed leadership within the class and came from homes which displayed various status criteria valued in the middle class” (1970, p. 444). Children who did not meet these implicit standards were placed at different tables (low ability groups) during instruction. All students remained in assigned groups throughout the first and second grades. Although Rist’s appears to be an extreme case and parts of his study have been difficult to replicate (Haller and Davis 1980), several researchers have noted the permanence of ability groups within and across grade levels (Goff 1962; McDermott 1976; Pilkis and Kirsh 1979), and others have found a similar independent effect of family social class on ability group assignment across grade levels (Alexander and McDiI 1976; Michaels 1981; Rosenbaum 1976).

When students’ test results are available, teachers seem to rely heavily on this information when forming reading groups (Borko, Shavelson, and Stern 1981). In fact, teachers often overlook other relevant information and make their grouping decisions on test scores alone (Russo 1978)—rank-ordering the achievement scores and then segmenting the ranks into high, middle, and low ability groups. However, achievement test scores have been found to be correlated with social class status (Fothen and Greel 1980; Harris and Amyx 1962; Rowan and Arcade 1983). For example, in a study of fourth grade boys of varying social class backgrounds, Low and Clement (1982) found that black and Hispanic students scored significantly lower than their white counterparts in lower, middle, and upper classes and that lower class children in general scored significantly below middle and upper class children on standardized reading tests. Although there is evidence that intellectual stimulation at home can mediate the association between reading achievement scores and social class (Iverson and Walberg 1982), when students are assigned to homogeneous ability groups for reading instruction based primarily on reading achievement scores, to a degree, they are assigned according to social class (Hamilton 1983). Thus, whether teachers do or do not use achievement test scores as criteria, lower class children end up in lower ability groups. And frequently replicated research concerning the instruction offered ability groups can be interpreted as conclusions about the treatment of social classes during reading instruction, assuming that social class varies within schools (See Rist 1972 for an explanation of why this is a reasonable assumption).

Teacher expectations and social class

Several studies suggest that teachers have lower expectations of academic and social success for lower class children than they do for middle- and upper-class children (Cooper 1979; Hollingshead 1948; Ogbo 1978). Wilkins (1976) argued that these expectations are actually unconscious manifestations of a general societal philosophy which states that citizens are personally responsible for
their position in society — that lower-class people possess intellectual and character flaws which account for their lack of previous success and inhibit their prospects for the future and that middle- and upper-class people are successful because they are resourceful and industrious. Indeed, Feldman (1972) found that even college students during the “liberal 1960s” rated lower-class people higher than other classes on the likelihood of being coarse and illiterate, but they rated middle and upper classes as more likely to be persistent, farsighted, strong, independent, complex, creative, and intelligent than lower classes. Teachers appear to ascribe similar stereotypical characteristics to lower class children and expect less from them during lessons (Braun 1976; Hamilton 1983; Rist 1973; Wilkins 1976).

In a review of research, Brophy (1979) concluded that “both naturalistic and experimental investigations have shown that teacher expectations can and often do affect how much students learn” (p. 738). For example, Seaver (1973) reported that teachers expected younger siblings of students they had previously taught to have similar aptitudes and comportment. Achievement test scores of these younger siblings after a year of instruction with these teachers “showed increments in pupil performance on all of the dependent variables resulting from favorable teacher expectations and decrements in performance from unfavorable teacher expectations” (p. 339). Good (1961) presented a model which describes how these expectations become real in their consequences: (a) teachers expect different specific behaviors and achievement from particular students; (b) because of these different expectations, they behave differently toward various students; (c) in turn, this different treatment sends different messages to students which affects their achievement, motivation, and self-concept; (d) over time, teacher actions shape students’ behavior and teachers’ initial expectations are met. Merton (1957) explained why these “self-fulfilling prophecies” are resistant to change.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a “false” definition of a situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come “true.” This erroneous validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning. Such are the perversities of social logic (p. 423).

Consider Eder’s (1981) study of first grade oral reading lessons as an example of Good’s model. Eder found that first grade teachers expected greater general verbal competence from students who were considered to have longer attention spans (high ability group) than from students who were judged to have short attention spans (lower ability group) despite considerable evidence suggesting that language competence varies across social settings and that it is not a fixed general ability (Labov 1972; Mchan 1984). Because of these expectations for language competence, teachers allowed students in lower groups to interrupt one another during oral reading lessons in order to give them practice with oral language. On the other hand, these teachers discouraged high group students from any interruptions because they were considered verbally proficient. As a result, interruptions became more frequent in lower groups which required teachers to spend time on management rather than instruction; all of which contributed to lower levels of reading achievement for lower group students. Eder concludes:

Because students are exposed to different learning contexts when they are assigned to ability groups, their behavior is likely to be differentially influenced in line with their group assignments. . . . If students tend to remain in the groups to which they are assigned initially, it is important that these assignments be accurate. However, since most students are assigned to ability groups within the first few weeks of first grade, it is highly unlikely that accurate assessment of students’ aptitudes have been made. The lack of accurate measures of academic aptitude in early grades is particularly important since it increases the likelihood of ethnic and class bias in ability group assignment (p. 160).

Social class and teachers’ unequal treatment of reading groups

As Good suggests and Eder demonstrates, teachers’ expectations and their subsequent behavior toward students have pronounced effects on students’ academic and social learning. Allington (1983) suggested that good and poor reading groups differ in reading competence as much from differences in instruction as they do from variation in individual aptitudes. These differences take many forms: teacher interruption behaviors, the amount of reading during reading lessons, the content of those lessons, and the difficulty of reading materials used.

Several researchers have found that teachers interrupt students in lower ability groups during oral reading between two and five times more frequently than do students in higher ability groups, regardless of the type of mistake that was made (Allington 1980; Hoffman et al. 1984; Pflum, Pascarella, Boskwich and Auer 1980). Teachers give students in low groups less time to correct themselves, and are likely to pronounce any troublesome word immediately to keep the lesson moving. The frequent interruptions contribute to general hesitancy of low students during oral reading, to their frequent appeals for assistance from teachers, and to their reluctance or inability to monitor their own reading.

With both students and teachers interrupting, students in low reading groups have few opportunities for sustained reading (Allington 1977). In fact, students in high groups read about three times as many words per day in reading groups as poor groups do (Allington 1983). While seventy percent of the reading in high groups is done silently, only thirty percent of low group reading is silent. Allington (1983) argued that the greater amount of oral reading in low groups accounts for the discrepancy in the amount of overall reading time between groups because oral reading is slower paced and requires more management than silent reading. Moreover, the differences between reports may actually be greater for individual students because silent reading requires that all group members must read in order to accomplish the task, but oral reading requires but one reader. It seems that as students in high groups practice a more functional method of reading more often, those in low groups practice reading in a manner most suitable for reading lessons. This lead Allington (1977) to ask "If they don’t read much, how they ever gonna get good?"
During oral reading, teachers are likely to direct the attention of students in low groups to the phonemic characteristics of an isolated word, whereas their comments to students in high groups deal more often with the semantic and syntactic content which surround the troublesome word (Allington 1980). This phonetic emphasis for students in lower groups was found in several other studies (Alpert 1975; Collins and Haviland 1979; Gambrell, Wilson and Grant 1981). For example, Gambrell et al. (1981) found that fourth-grade students in low groups: (a) worked on phonics in isolation twice as often as students in high groups, (b) spent half as much time on reading in context, and (c) engaged in nonreading activities during half of their reading lessons compared only to a third for high groups. These differences were even greater for students in low groups who found the assigned reading difficult. These students spent twice as much time on isolated phonics instruction, half as much time reading, and sixty-one percent of their instructional time on nonreading activities.

The relative difficulty of the assigned reading material is an additional difference between the treatment of students in low and high reading groups (Clay 1972; Gambrell et al. 1981; Hoffman et al. 1984). Students in high groups are often asked to read texts which are easy for them; however, students in low groups are often placed in difficult materials in which they misunderstand at least one in every ten words. This difficulty inhibits low group students' use of context, forces them to read word by word, and makes them rely on the phonetic characteristics of unknown words. Their frequent mistakes trigger student and teacher interruptions, and the unfortunate cycle begins anew.

This apparent unequal treatment also extends to the socialization lessons in classrooms. Hamilton (1985) suggests that "the most important finding of ecological research is that the socialization function of schools operates differently for students of different races and classes. disadvantaged students tend to be socialized for subordination; advantaged students are socialized for responsibility" (p. 332). For instance, Leacock (1969) found that both black and white middle-class schools rewarded "nice" behavior and self-control, and encouraged student interaction during social and academic activities. However, in lower class schools, proper behavior meant submission to authority; it was considered an end in itself; student interaction of any type was discouraged. Several researchers note that teachers use more language of control while working with low reading groups than they use with their high reading groups (Eder 1981; Brophy and Good in press; Rist 1970). Reading lessons for low groups are more teacher centered, more tightly monitored, and more likely to require literal interpretations of text (Brophy and Good in press). Allington (1983) speculated that postreading questions in low groups are more a behavior-monitoring device than an instructional tool because these questions are typically asked to see if silent readers can translate print into meaning. However, since most reading in low groups is done orally and most members have only listened to the passage, these questions simply check to see if the nonreaders are paying attention.

Of course, lower class children are not just pawns during reading instruction; their actions contribute to their fate. For instance, Ogbo (1974; 1978) has shown that minority lower class children do not expect schools to improve their social and economic lot in life and often do not invest much energy into school matters. Willis' (1977) study of working-class youths in England demonstrated how lower-class students can select themselves for lower-class status by rejecting all that the "cartholes" (high ability group students) deem important. Labov (1972) has shown that lower-class black children appear mute and disinterested within traditional school settings.

This general lack of interest and persistence contributes to lower reading achievement (Butowsky and Willows 1980; Dweck 1975), and Moles lethal and Na (1980) and Heath (1983) have demonstrated that a mismatch between culture and school or test setting can suppress reading acquisition and performance artificially. Anecdotal reports suggest that lower-class students are sometimes defiant within these situations— in reading groups, classrooms, and schools (e.g. Greenstein 1983). At times it appears that lower-class students and teachers engage in self-perpetuating miseducation during reading instruction among the lines of Allport's (1950) notion concerning how wars start through ignorance about other nations and mutual mistrust among nations. One side acts because it expects the other side will gain an advantage of some sort; then the other side reacts to prevent the first side from gaining the upper hand. In time, the cycle escalates until both sides lose and the cold war becomes war. In the case of reading instruction, teachers and lower-class students' actions escalate until more time is spent on management and other nonreading activities than is spent on reading or instruction. Indeed, both sides lose.

Solutions to the apparent problem

What should be done about this unequal treatment of social classes during reading instruction depends on whom one listens to. Giroux (1983), Moles lethal (1984), and Walmsey (1981) suggested at least three alternative solutions—the academic, the affective, and the emancipatory solutions. These alternatives differ fundamentally concerning their postulates for the appropriate relationship between education and society and it is from these putative relationships that solutions arise.

The academic solution is founded on the notion that education should preserve the social culture and prepare students to fulfill the demanding roles in our technological economy. If schools produce students educated to the extent of their intellectual capabilities, these students will be able to compete actively for the best jobs that the economy has to offer. In this way, both society and the individual are served because students will reach a social class commensurate with their talents and the economy will have a highly trained workforce. From this perspective, the unequal treatment of social classes during reading instruction rests on lower class individuals of their chance to succeed economically and society of a pool of potential talent.

Although there are many examples of the academic solution (See Brophy and Good in press), the most widely known expression is the University of Oregon Direct Instruction Model (Becker and Carrane 1980) and its DISTAR Programs (Becker 1977), which are based on three key assumptions: 1) all children can be taught; 2) to catch-up, low performing students must be taught more, not less; and 3) the task of teaching more requires a careful use of educational technology and of time” (Becker and Carrane 1980, p. 433). In this
model, the knowledge and experience of teachers and students are bypassed—
nor is free to escalate the behavior of miseducation—because a curriculum
designer has developed scripted lessons which explain what teachers should say
during lessons to ensure maximum efficiency and how low students should respond.
These lessons are based on tightly sequenced skills hierarchies which
begin with phonics, are highly controlled by the scripted teacher who uses
verbal signals to elicit student response, and are highly effective in raising
traditionally low-performing students' achievement scores. As this example
shows, within the academic solution, the reading skills of the lower classes are
improved while the social structure remains the same.

The affective solution concentrates on the individual's subjectivity and
gives to society's objective constraints. That is, it is based on the idea that
education should help each student develop as an individual to the limits of his
or her intellectual and emotional potential in spite of social conditions. Through
the socialization of students as individuals, education will improve society
as each member will become psychologically secure. To affect this change,
education must remake itself, losing its present authoritarian structure and
replacing it with a spirit of cooperation and community. Students develop their
own standards of performance and success and learn to express themselves
emotionally. According to the affective solution, once students are socialized
to "be themselves," their free and personal expression will give them the social
and academic tools to become whatever they wish to become.

The open classroom (Kohl 1969) and the free school (Kozol 1972) movements
of the late 1960s can be considered an attempt to implement the affective
solution. One objective of these movements was to change the "oppressive"
socialization of literacy programs which fostered competition for grades and
stilled personal interpretation of literature. Reading programs in these schools
were individualized by having students select their own materials, learn at their
own pace, and evaluate their own progress, and in which adults acted as
facilitators. From the very beginning of these programs, students were told
that written language is a form of personal expression, and they were
encouraged to develop unique understandings of the texts they read and
to write as a means of self-development. Anecdotal reports state that these
schools were helpful to lower class children's development of strong feelings
of self-worth and to their achievement of academic success in terms of authenticity

Advocates of the emancipatory solution postulate that American society is
based on class exploitation and that discrimination against class and race serves
the dominant classes by denying privileged positions for its members (Apple
1982). However, through education, lower class students can develop a critical
consciousness which should allow them to discover the historic reasons for their
social position and provide them with possible methods with which they can
end social domination. While the academic solution suggests that education
should perpetuate the cultural structure, and the affective solution ignores
society, the emancipatory solution calls for education to change the social
order.

Paulo Freire's (1970; 1972; 1978) literacy pedagogy is considered an ideal
vehicle for the emancipatory solution (Eisner and John-Steiner 1977; Giroux
1983; Kozol 1981). He maintains that the lower classes see themselves as

objects of society rather than actors in society. That is, they have internalized
the philosophy of social dominance to a point where they consider themselves
benefits both knowledge and culture. In order to help the lower classes become
literate, educators must engage groups in dialogue concerning mundane events
in their lives which will allow them to recognize the problematic nature of
knowledge and culture and the fact that they do indeed create both every day.
Following the principles of language experience, these dialogues begin with
the creation and interpretation of oral text stimulated by pictures and eventually
work through written words and dictated sentences. According to the emanci-
patory solution, educators and lower class students work to eliminate the social
and academic gaps within schools by understanding how and why they exist
apart from schools.

Next steps
The research discussed and the theoretical solutions presented here should
give us pause for thought. It appears that social classes are treated differently
during reading instruction which may contribute to the stratification of social
classes in American society—at the very least, the evidence suggests that reading
instruction does little to close the gap. Yet the rhetoric which surrounded
reading instruction since the beginning of public schools proclaims that the
ability to read and write will have liberating effects for anyone willing to learn.
Regardless of the solution one considers as most appropriate, the status quo
during reading instruction seems intolerable. Perhaps it is time for teachers to
design lessons which will make this rhetoric a reality. Or shall reading instruction
become one more instance where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer.

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