Supporting or Subverting Learning: Peer Group Patterns in Four Tracked Schools[1]

Frances Schwartz*

Why do proeducational peer patterns emerge in one classroom and anti-educational relationships in another? Focusing on the school's role in generating these differences, this paper argues that peer group academic orientation is a reaction to the expectations and constraints of a specific educational structure. It analyzes the impact of one structure—tracking—on the peer group and speculatively explains the emergence of contrasting high- and low-track patterns. CLASSROOM ETHNOGRAPHY, TRACKING, PEER GROUP INTERACTION PATTERNS, EXPECTATIONS.

I. Introduction

The scene is an inner-city school. Classroom 314 is quiet as students listen attentively to the teacher's questions about a recent lesson. Suddenly, eager hands begin to wave and bodies twist out of their seats amidst shouts of "ooh me," "I know," "ooh-oh." Quiet returns when one student is chosen to answer. As soon as she has responded, others begin to yell out refutations or additions and compete again for teacher recognition. As they participate wholeheartedly in class, several students are simultaneously but secretly passing notes and candy and signaling to each other in sign and face language. When the questions end and seat work begins, some students offer to help others who are unsure of how to proceed.

But across the hall in room 315, chaos reigns. The room is noisy with the shouting, laughter, and movement of many children. Though most students are seated, many are walking or running aimlessly around the classroom. Some stop at others' desks, provoke them briefly, and move on. Several students who are lining up textbooks as "race courses" for toy cars laugh when the teacher demands their attention. As the teacher struggles to ask a question over the noise, few if any students volunteer to answer. When one student does respond correctly, others yell out "You think you're so smart."

What accounts for the striking contrast between these two classes? Relations among students promote academic performance in room 314 but hinder it in room 315. Why do proeducational patterns emerge in one classroom and antieducational student relationships in another? The explanation is undoubtedly complex, relying on home environment and school characteristics, as well as many cultural and psychological factors. Focusing on

*Senior Research Associate
Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

the school's role in generating these differences, this paper will argue that such contrasts in student social organization are not random or coincidental. Explanations for contrasting peer group patterns rest not at the individual but at the institutional level. While not denying the impact of a particular teacher or a certain mix of students on peer relationships, this paper contends that the behavior of both the students and the teacher can be more profitably understood in the broader institutional context. Both are embedded in a specific educational structure that influences what they expect of each other and themselves and, consequently, how they behave. By viewing the peer group's academic orientation as a reaction to the expectations and constraints of a specific position in the educational structure, we can begin to systematically and predictably understand the differences between classrooms.

As anthropologists with an emphasis on culture, we have tended to ignore the impact of a specific instructional structure on students' interaction patterns. Instead we have looked more to the link between home and school than to factors within the school itself for explanations of student performance. Now we need to ask, What is the educational structure of the school? What are the mechanisms and criteria for student assignment to a particular classroom? What is the instructional approach of the school?

This paper will analyze the impact of one controversial system, tracking (or the hierarchical placement of students on the basis of ability), on student social organization. Drawing on ethnographic data from inner-city schools, we will first identify consistent differences in high- and low-track peer group interaction patterns. Then, more speculatively, we will attempt to explain the emergence of the specific patterns. We will suggest that students' positions in the academic hierarchy correspond to contrasting peer and teacher expectations. As students in high and low tracks respond to these positive and negative expectations, respectively, they devise behavioral patterns that perpetuate and solidify spirals of academic success or failure. We will speculate that tracking becomes the organizational and expectational framework that shapes the educational activities and priorities of teachers and students alike, and influences the utilization of educational facilities and resources.

There is a circular relationship between expectations and behavior. Behavior that may develop initially in response to the contrasting social climates of high- and low-tracked classrooms eventually itself becomes an independent influence on institutional expectations (see Metz 1978). However, in its attempt to clarify the impact of the instructional system on students' educational orientation, this paper speculates exclusively about the link from expectations to behavior and not the obverse.

One perspective from social anthropology, situational analysis (Van Velsen 1964) guides this study. With its emphasis on individuals as social actors whose behavioral options are defined by their specific structural positions, this perspective is especially valuable for the analysis of behavioral differences between students in high and low tracks. It illuminates these differences as the outcome of a decision-making process. Students in high and low tracks devise distinctive strategies for coping with the contrasting expectations they

confront in their respective academic placements. With its focus on individual interpretation and response to the constraints and possibilities of a specific social situation, situational analysis helps to clarify behavioral shifts within each track, as well as between them. As the classroom activities shift from teacher centered to child centered, students' behavioral options change, too. Students react to the shifts in constraints with corresponding changes in their own social priorities and organization.

In Section II, we summarize findings from previous studies of the impact of tracking on students' performance and peer group norms. In Section III, we demonstrate the remarkable similarity of peer group interaction patterns among similarly ranked high- and low-track students in four different schools. In Section IV, we offer conjectures about the emergence of these similar patterns. Finally, in Section V, we draw conclusions and offer suggestions for further research on the impact of educational structure on student social organization.

II. Tracking and Student Interaction Patterns

Although the impact of tracking on student social organization has not been widely studied in this country, U.S. researchers have documented the system's influence on student achievement. Students are tracked on the basis of ability. Yet it is not ability alone that shapes their academic activity. "Classification itself generates . . . self-fulfilling prophecy of success or failure" (Sexton 1961: 58). Placement itself, independent of teacher style or student background, influences a student's willingness to perform. If a child is placed in the wrong track, that is, if ability is misinterpreted, she or he acquires the academic attitudes of that track. Performance improves in the higher tracks and deteriorates in the lower (Barker Lunn 1970). Rank has been shown to determine performance more than social class, IQ, or past achievement (Schaefer and Olexa 1971).

However, we know less about the classroom social processes that generate these differences in performance than about the outcomes themselves. The work of Lacey (1970) and Hargreaves (1967) in Britain provides valuable insights into the relationship between academic placement and peer group performance norms. Each has identified a link between student position in the formal hierarchy of tracked secondary schools and their social and academic attitudes. As high and low tracks are academically differentiated, they become socially polarized as well. High-streamed students develop a proacademic subculture that endorses and links social status to academic achievement. By contrast, low-streamed students adopt an anti-academic subculture. Status in this group is based on defiance of school and teacher norms. Social differentiation from the top stream is expressed academically in an unwillingness to participate or perform voluntarily in the classroom.

This study analyzes the social processes that generate previously documented academic outcomes of tracking among U.S. students. Like Lacey and Hargreaves' studies in Britain, this research illuminates the contrasting social organization of high- and low-tracked students. However, unlike these

studies it relies on systematic observations of students' and teachers' behavior and on structured student interviews to offer speculative explanations for the genesis of these patterns.

III. Peer Group Interaction Patterns

In its analysis of academic placement and students' social relationships, this paper draws on ethnographic data from four inner-city schools where students are tracked on the basis of standardized test scores. Research reported here was conducted initially at one New York City elementary school and secondarily at three Philadelphia schools, one junior high and two elementary. Initial investigations at the New York City school, the King School,[2] disclosed dramatic differences in the social organization and educational attitudes of high- and low-tracked students. While high-track peer groups appeared to endorse academic activity, low-track social ties hindered and subverted participation in classwork. Yet further research was required to ascertain the generalizability of these patterns. Later, in conjunction with an applied research project in the Philadelphia schools, we had the opportunity to observe the impact of tracking in greater depth. This investigation not only confirmed King School findings, but also suggested tentative explanations for the specific patterns observed previously.

Research methods at both the King and Philadelphia schools consisted primarily of intensive observation of student-student and student-teacher interaction. Observations were conducted several times a week for six months in both cities. (An assistant worked with me at the junior high school.) At the King School, three fourth grades, a high, middle, and low class, were observed. Observations in the Philadelphia elementary schools focused primarily on high and low, third and fourth grade classes—six classes in all. Moreover, we had already observed fourth grade peer group patterns at one of the schools during a previous school year. At the junior high school, one high- and one low-tracked seventh and ninth grade class were studied. In addition, the same major subject area teachers were observed with classes of different rank.

Additional research techniques at the King School included the following: interviews with parents of each class to determine their knowledge of and involvement in children's education, and examination of students' permanent school record files. In all three Philadelphia schools, interviews were conducted with students to determine their understanding and assessment of their own placement. At both elementary schools, sociograms were conducted with all fourth grade students to clarify possible links between popularity and rank.

The four schools studied differed in size and ethnic composition. The King School, with a student population of 1,100, is located in the midst of a vast low-income housing project. Ethnically, the school is composed of 51 percent Hispanic, 44 percent black, and 5 percent other students. Unlike the King School, two of the three schools in Philadelphia were ethnically homogeneous. However, like the King School, all three serve predominantly working- or lower-class populations. With a student population of 500, the

Waverly Elementary School, located in an old, entrenched working-class neighborhood, is 99+ percent white. The Schooner Junior High School, located in a once lower middle class but rapidly declining black neighborhood, has a population of 1,400 students who are almost all black. The third school, the Potts Elementary School, is located on the ethnically diverse borders of the Waverly School neighborhood. Its student body of 350 pupils is approximately 33 percent black, 33 percent white, and 33 percent Hispanic.

The interaction patterns of students in each of these schools will be described in two situations typical of children's school experiences—formal and informal classtime. The two vary both in the degree and type of adult control exerted and in the extent and nature of the academic work demanded. The first situation, formal class time, occurs when the teacher dominates the class and demands the attention of all the students for an academic lesson. The second situation, informal class time, occurs when the children work independently and are permitted to interact with peers. For both elementary and junior high school students, informal time might include periods in specialty classes, as well as time in academic classes when the teacher is working with one group and the rest of the class is assigned independent seat work. Students in high and low tracks respond to each of these situations in different ways. While high-track students' reactions endorse academic performance, low-track students' responses hinder it.

Formal Classtime

While top-track students interact covertly with peers during teacher-centered lessons and lectures, low-track pupils relate to peers in an overt and disruptive manner. Overtly, like the top-stream students studied by Lacey (1970), top-track students appear to accept school goals and to adhere to the teacher's behavioral standards. Yet, at the same time that they display appropriate formal behavior, unbeknownst to the teacher, the entire class is often involved in an intricate network of secretive interaction, or "sneaking." It is so well disguised, in fact, that this behavior can be observed only by sitting in the midst as opposed to the rear of the classroom.

Various forms of sneaking are practiced. One is secret communication. Students talk by putting their heads down on the desk (as if resting) and then turning around discreetly and whispering to a friend. To pass food, candy, and notes, students lean back in their chairs and hand a neighbor the item in a book or pencil case. Another form of sneaking is secretive amusements. During each lesson, at least two or three children secretly read library or comic books. A child places the reading material on his or her lap, keeping the correct school book open on the desk and looking up from time to time. Children also play games of tic, tac, toe and knit or crochet under their desks.

During 15 minutes of one junior high school English class, the following sneaking occurred:

> The room is quiet as the teacher instructs the students in the difference between adverbs and adjectives: "O.K., some of you seem to be confused about what an adverb does, and how it differs from an adjective. Several of you made mistakes on the test. An adjective describes what? Who can tell me?" As students raise their

hands to answer the questions, a number (4 girls and 3 boys) are circulating notes to each other. When one student secretly receives a note, several around him ask to see it, and it is passed along to his neighbors.

At least three students are finishing homework from other classes. Several are passing gum and potato chips to one another. The teacher continues with her questions: "O.K., who can tell me where the adverbs and adjectives are in this sentence?"

A girl who has volunteered to respor ·sily taps another girl to tell her that a third friend is trying to signal to her. The ·· ,rl is called on by the teacher, answers the question correctly and then returns to the note she was writing before she raised her hand.

By contrast with the scheming of the top tracks, the low tracks display overt antischool and antiteacher behavior similar to that identified among low-stream students by Lacey (1970). These students are well aware of and frequently allude to their academic status in their discussions:

> Well I never got left back. Last year I was a dumb-dumb. This year I'm better. Lillion [another girl in the class] is such a dumb-dumb now. She can't even read.

Their classroom behavior is characterized by challenging and teasing the teacher, obstructing academic activity, and misusing educational resources.

These students directly undermine the teacher's authority. Using their academic position to legitimate their misbehavior, they respond when confronted by the teacher, "What do you expect from me, I'm only in the dumb class?" Sometimes they provoke the teacher outright. Two boys began to taunt the teacher. One says "pow." The other says "pow, teacher, pow." A student walks into a junior high classroom late and slams open the door. His peers start to laugh as he shouts, "O.K. teach, I'm here. Go ahead and teach." Then others begin to taunt the teacher, yelling, "Yeah, teacher, teach, teach."

Low-track students react to academic lessons by teasing each other, by using academic resources inappropriately, by moving continually around the classroom, and by sabotaging the activity at hand. In elementary school classrooms, many students spend more time misusing academic materials, by turning books upside down, dropping materials on the floor, pinning pencils together end to end, and falling backward in their chairs, than attending to their classwork. In the King School, pairs of students paint their clothing and faces, run around the classroom, stopping to wrestle on the floor, and stand up and dance during lessons. Two boys who are asked to obtain paper go to the supply closet and pull reams of paper onto the floor. When a third boy mounts the closet, shouting and laughing, the other two begin throwing pieces of paper at him. Junior high school students often skip class and/or arrive late. Once there, they get out of their seats, throw books, tease each other, and ignore the teacher's questions or directions.

In testing situations, students blatantly defy accepted rules of conduct. By exposing everyone in the class as a cheater, grade school students prevent a spelling test from occurring. As the teacher passes out papers, two boys start to spell words to each other. Another child announces to the teacher that the boys are cheating. A girl turns around in her seat and questions her neighbor about a word. Soon many of the students in the class claim that others are copying words and the test is canceled.

In one junior high school English class, students disrupt a test by openly exchanging papers and calling out answers to each other. The teacher's efforts to regain control and proceed with the test fail, and the test is aborted.

T. O.K. Number 10.
Karl: Why you keep messin? You ain't said number 9.
T: Close that book!
Karl: You giving words ain't in the book.
T: Turn around please . . . .

A girl turns around and spells the word out loud to a student behind her. Another girl shows her paper to her neighbor. A boy yells out the correct spelling of the word and others laugh . . . .

T: Number 15. Commercial.

A girl moves her desk next to a friend's and begins to copy her words.

T: Don't show her your paper.

By this time, several students are openly exchanging papers or spelling words for each other.

T: If I knew the test would be like this, I wouldn't have given it.

Eventually she halts the test and destroys the test paper.

Thus students in high and low tracks respond to formal classtime not only in contrasting ways, but also in different social units. As a single unit, students in top classes share an open academic life with the teacher, but rely on each other to sustain a secretive social life. By contrast, mostly as pairs, the low-track students use their relationships with each other to obstruct the academic enterprise.

Informal Classtime

By contrast with formal instructional periods, during informal classtime, there is no immediate pressure for public performance and little threat of academic evaluation. As the teacher becomes less central, either observing or working with a small group as students work on their own, students' classroom opportunities and priorities shift. As they react to the constraints and possibilities of this situation, students alter their classroom organization. High-track students utilize the opportunity to experiment with antischool activity toward nonacademic teachers and to work cooperatively with peers in academic settings. Although low-track students react less wildly and destructively toward the teacher, they continue to undermine each other's academic efforts.

In high-track classes during noninstructional time, the sneaking networks comprised of the entire class dissolve. Students interact openly with each other in smaller groups. In elementary classes with specialist teachers and in nonacademic junior high school classes like music, art, and shop, students adopt language and behavior typical of low tracks during formal time. Boys and girls often exhibit different behavioral patterns. The girls verbally abuse the school and the teachers, and the boys prove themselves physically. The girls openly express hostility to and about teachers and chastise each other for relating nicely to a teacher. In the King School library, for instance:

Alice: The teacher just wants to make you cry. He thinks he's gonna take away those books. Shoot!
Carole: That's what he did to Anita.
Tanya: I won't cry for anything.
Alice: I don't know how she could talk to the teacher and how she could like him. I would make the student teacher wipe the floor with my hat.

Too, they laughingly use profanities ordinarily barred from the classroom. The boys attack each other physically and talk back to nonclassroom teachers. They brag about running wildly in the hallways, throwing objects at each other and the teacher, and fighting and wrestling.

A top ninth grade section bursts into the Art room noisily laughing, slamming drawers and chasing each other around the room. They threaten to paint each other and put chalk and crayon on their faces. Several students refuse to sit down when the teacher calls for order. The teacher yells angrily: "Do you act like this in other classes? I am shocked at a top class behaving like this. Now sit down and get quiet immediately."

During independent work periods in academic classes, particularly reading, students continue to work seriously. Many volunteer to help each other and respond positively to peers' requests for academic help. In the Waverly School, high-track fourth grade students are working on math problems:

Ronald is helping David. Bob watches and says: "Don't tell him, help him figure it out." Steven tells Rick that he doesn't understand one of the problems. "Here, I'll help you."

During reading at Potts:

David: What page do you want to do now?
Tommy: I don't know, let's take a little breather. Then we can keep going.

The boys briefly stop work. Then Tommy suggests they turn to the next page and they begin to work cooperatively.

Frequent comparison and competition about grades do not seem to diminish student willingness to provide assistance.

Eric: What page are you on?
Joe: 12.
Eric: Oh. I'm ahead of you. I'm on 15.
Joe: Must have been when I was absent. I'll help you anyway.

Students' academic weaknesses or poor showings on a test are not equated with a lack of intelligence. A poor grade seems to be seen less as a reflection of a person's innate capabilities than as an indication of his or her lack of preparation.

Teddy: David, you're a bad speller. Might be a good reader but a bad speller. Need to study words more.

In a junior high math class, student papers are returned. Students ask each other, "What did you get? What did you get?" When one boy admits that he did

poorly, another looks over his paper and remarks: "Boy, you didn't even study for this test? You got to get yourself together, man."

Students' comments as they work reveal a positive identification with the group and others in it. They often comment humorously about their math and reading groups as they cooperate. Several students remarked laughingly, "Hey, this is a crazy group!" Others note, "What a group. The best!"

By contrast, during informal periods in nonacademic settings, low-track students shift their activities to discussion of their real and imagined life outside school. Their taunting is replaced by conversations about a world where they know more and can be more. In small groups they discuss neighborhood and family events and share their fantasies about the future.

In music class a group of seventh grade low-track students discuss a recent neighborhood incident, a robbery in a local grocery store. Several of the same students who sit silently through formal classtime except to challenge the teacher describe their versions of the robbery.

In their fantasies, elementary school students' future success depends on age and wealth, *not* on education:

Linda: We can't talk about that stuff now. Only when we're teenagers.
Claude: I won't be around here when I get old.
Kevin: I'm going down South.
James: I'm going to get $100 and a car when I go down South.
Kevin: If I want money all I have to do is ask my grandmother.

During independent work time in academic classes, low-track students are caught in a no-win contradictory situation. On the one hand they undermine those who make academic efforts.

A fourth grade teacher asks a low reading group to put test papers on the bulletin board. When one boy goes to the board, others around him comment, "You think you're so great. There you go showin off." Others comment that another student, who got 100, copied.

Yet on the other hand they accuse each other of cheating and being stupid, and compete continually about their work.

As they begin independent work, two girls cover their workbook pages with books. Catherine to girl next to her: "You can't copy off me." Nancy: "I'm not. You're the one that's copying." A boy announces that he has gotten the answer right and others say, "You copied off her." A boy points to another's paper: "You got it wrong, did it wrong. You stupid."

Rather than identify positively with their groups, like the top tracks, these students attempt to differentiate themselves from their peers. They distinguish themselves as "smart" from others whom they label as "stupid." In a fourth grade reading period:

Kelvin: What page you on?
Sandra: 47.
Kelvin: I'm way ahead of you. I'm smarter than all of them.

Sandra: No, I'm smarter than you.
Kelvin: No you ain't.
Sandra: You didn't even pass your test.
Kelvin: So, you can't catch up to me.
Sandra: Yes I could, little boy.

Thus these students are undercut by peers if they do succeed and belittled by them if they do not. By contrast with the cooperation among high-track students during informal classtime, low-track students fail to support each other's academic efforts.

Thus, with the relative easing of adult control, high- and low-track students continue to react divergently. High-track pupils utilize the absence of immediate academic consequences to experiment with misbehavior. By contrast, free from the necessity to defend themselves against academic humiliation and failure, low-track students focus on life outside the school. Although they compete during independent work situations, the high-track students facilitate each other's academic efforts. In their interactions they emphasize their shared group status and collective identity. By contrast, low-track students' interactions with peers focus more on the mechanics and organization of activity than on substance. They spend more time accusing each other of doing work incorrectly and cheating than actually dealing with content. Their preoccupation with form and competition about relative "smartness" appear to obfuscate attending to the task at hand.

IV. Speculative Explanations

In Section III, we demonstrated that students in the same structural position in four inner-city schools display remarkably similar educational attitudes and peer group interaction patterns. But can we explain why these *particular* patterns emerge within a tracked school? Some possible explanations are outlined later.

However, before elaborating on these conjectures, it is important to offer an initial caveat about them and to refute some of the more obvious competing explanations. It must be recognized that these conjectures are ex post facto. They are not based on controlled comparisons among tracked schools or between tracked and nontracked schools. Hence it is impossible to claim with certainty that the following discussion identifies *the* cause (if indeed a single one could exist) or eliminates all competing explanations for the observed behavior. Rather these conjectures are offered as suggestions that require further research before they can be considered convincing.

Although research was not rigorously controlled, investigation at four different schools does permit some comparison. In fact, the similarity of observed patterns at four ethnically and organizationally distinct schools enables us to refute two possible arguments about the emergence of distinctive high- and low-track behavior patterns. First, one might argue that the contrasting behavior of high and low tracks is merely a reflection of the different ethnic and subcultural backgrounds and styles of the students. While not denying the impact of extraschool influences on school life, the similarity of peer group patterns in four schools of different ethnic composition implies

that students' social organization does not correspond solely to their ethnic identity. Second, one might argue that different high- and low-track behavior patterns are shaped by the institutional subculture of a particular school. However, the appearance of similar patterns at four different schools with distinctive institutional subcultures and organizational dynamics indicates that it is not the unique, but the common elements among the schools that generate these patterns.

In fact, data from these four schools illustrate that it is their similar educational structures that promote these particular patterns among students. We can speculate that the contrasting student social patterns develop as high- and low-track students respond to divergent institutional expectations. In these tracked schools we suggest that the formal hierarchy generates a system of informal social norms and educational myths in which rank predominates. The dramatically different school experiences of high- and low-ranked pupils prompt them to devise contrasting priorities and strategies for coping with the educational setting. Our data indicate that students in like positions in the formal structure come to share similar understandings about themselves and the social and educational opportunities in their classrooms. Their academic status appears to shape three fundamental and formative aspects of their school experience:

1. How they evaluate their classroom situation and their classmates.
2. How others rank them socially and educationally.
3. How teachers perceive and interact with them.

The higher the students rank, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their academic placement, to choose like-ranked peers as friends, to be popular with grade mates as well as classmates, and to be the object of their teachers' positive expectations.

Obviously, these dimensions of school life do not operate independently of each other or of student behavior. It is important to stress that we are not assuming a unidirectional cause-and-effect relationship between student and teacher norms and student behavior. Teacher expectations and behavior may initially shape students' values and modes of interaction (see Rist 1973). However, once high- and low-track peer groups' educational orientations emerge, they in turn perpetuate the perceptions that generate them in the first place. Eventually, teachers and students alike interact in a mutually reinforcing and circular network of institutional expectations and behavior (see Finn 1972 for an elaboration of this model).

While not denying the complex and multistranded nature of the links between institutional expectations and behaviors, we focus here only on those phenomena that influence students' observable behavior. We do not analyze either its impact on teacher behavior, as Metz (1978) has done, or its effect on student social preferences, as Lacey (1970) has done. To explicate the emergence of pro- and antieducational behavior patterns, we have viewed this complex system aspectually, from the students' perspective only. We proceed "as if" the social process were frozen at the point where peers' social norms and teachers' expectations and actions converge on high- and low-

track students. Hence, to understand how peer group behavior emerges, we have attempted to approximate the students' experience in the classroom. First, we will explore the students' and then the teachers' expectations.

Rank and Social Standing with Peers[3]

In the classroom, students' peers become their social and potentially educational resources. Their perception of the worth and attractiveness of these peers determines if and how they choose to interact with them. It becomes a key constraint that shapes their behavioral options. For elementary students in top tracks, classmates are valued as individuals with whom interaction is desirable. By contrast, among low-track students, classmates are viewed as social outcasts to be avoided. Instead, these students prefer to associate with high-track peers. Sociogrammatic data from the Potts and Waverly elementary schools indicate that, while high-track students choose others of the same rank as friends, low-rank students tend to choose those of high rank. In fact, the lower the rank is, the fewer the reciprocal ties between classmates. Multidimensional sociograms required all fourth grade students in each school to group a stack of cards representing each individual in the fourth grade into three piles: (1) Those you hang around with the most, (2) Those you hang around with some of the time, and (3) Those you hardly hang around with or don't know.

Results indicate that 50 percent of lower-rank students choose more high- than low-rank peers to "hang around with most." By contrast, less than 1 percent of high-track students choose those of low rank as much or more than their own classmates for this category. Low-rank students have fewer than one half as many reciprocal friendship choices as high-rank pupils at Potts and one eighth as many at Waverly. The grouping patterns that emerge as a result of those choices indicate that top-track students cluster into reciprocal groups and exclusive cliques, while low-track students tend to be linked in less dense reciprocal pairs.

Overall, the higher his or her academic rank, the greater is the student's popularity. Results indicate that academic placement corresponds to the number of times a student was chosen in the top category, "hang around with most." With a mean of 6.5 top-category choices for each child in both schools, three times as many high as low students received 8 to 9 choices and two times as many high as low students received 10 or more choices.

Rank and Satisfaction with the Classroom Situation

Students' feelings about their academic situations further inform their behavior. If one associates his or her classroom activities with academic stigmatization and "dumbness," he or she is likely to react against and avoid "involvement" in them. Conversely, if one equates classroom placement with superior intelligence, one is likely to willingly engage in activities that reinforce status.

Data indicate that, while top-tracked students view their positions positively, most low-ranked students do not. Looking up to their top-ranked

peers, many low-track students view their own situations with disdain and dismay. Interviews with fourth grade students at Potts and Waverly and with seventh graders at Schooner reveal that almost all students (98+ percent at all three schools) know their academic rank and understand the basis for this placement. Low-rank students almost unanimously express dissatisfaction with their placements and know far more about the activities in the higher tracks than those in high tracks know about them. While over 95 percent of the low-rank students would like to be in another class or track, less than 1 percent of high-track students express a similar desire. Indicative of the comparative value they assign to their respective tracks, 70 percent of the low groups can name the Basal readers and other books used in high tracks. Additionally, 46 percent can accurately describe high-track academic activities. By contrast, only one top-track student at Potts, three at Waverly, and two at Schooner can describe the material used in the low track. Virtually none can describe low-track classroom activities. Most note only that they do "easy work."

Rank and Teacher Expectations

The institutional structure that colors students' perceptions shapes those of teachers as well. Previous research has demonstrated that teachers, faced with institutional pressures to upgrade achievement, develop a commonsense strategy for dealing with differentially tracked students (see Schutz 1962; Sharp and Green 1975). High-rank pupils who are likely to succeed and contribute positively to the teachers' professional image are perceived as ideal pupils whose specific educational needs the teacher is capable of meeting (Becker 1952; Rist 1973). By contrast, teachers tend to distance themselves from low-ranked pupils, viewing them more as an unreachable group than as a series of individuals with distinctive educational problems. Rather than risk professional failure with pupils whom they fear they will be unable to motivate, teachers often make fewer demands on low-rank pupils and apply less exacting standards to their own performance with them (Keddie 1971; Leacock 1969).

Like the patterns suggested by previous research, teachers at the four schools studied here displayed contrasting expectations of and modes of interacting with high- and low-track students. Their differential norms are demonstrated both in written comments about students and in their interaction with them. Year-end comments on King School students' permanent record cards from kindergarten to the fourth grade indicate that, by the time a student reaches the fourth grade, academic rank is likely to determine teachers' apparent educational interest in him or her. Over this four-year period, record cards reveal a progressive polarization in the length and nature of teachers' year-end comments about high- and low-track students. While in kindergarten, most students received either positive, diagnostic, or constructive comments; by the third grade, many of the low-track students were negatively labeled with a single phrase. In kindergarten, many of the high-rank students were described as eager, ready to learn, and cooperative. However, many low-track students were described as needing more reading readiness work, more training in classroom participation, or more socialization for

school. By the third grade, only eight of the high-track students received even mildly negative comments about behavior, such as "talks too much" or "does not talk enough" The rest were cited as academically excellent and cooperative. Their strengths in a variety of academic subjects, their interests, and their personal characteristics were detailed. By contrast, six students in low tracks were characterized only as N.E. (non-English speakers), and the rest were cited as "disruptive," "nonconformists," "withdrawn," "day-dreamers," and "non-participants," with no fuller explanations.

It is impossible to determine whether the predominantly negative comments about low-rank students and the largely positive statements about the high-track students are accurate descriptions of their behavior or a reflection of teachers' expectations about and characterizations of high- and low-track students. However, whatever their accuracy, these comments do reveal differences in the attention and detail with which teachers describe high and low tracks. By the third grade, top-rank students were clearly afforded more particularistic and elaborate evaluations than the low-tracked pupils.

Observational data confirm and elaborate teachers' use of contrasting standards. Observations of the same junior high school teachers with both high- and low-track students, as well as ethnographic analysis of King, Potts, and Waverly school classrooms, reveal consistent differences in teachers' behavior toward high and low classes. From their initial modes of address through their questioning and disciplinary procedures, teachers structure their interaction with high- and low-tracked students in markedly different ways.

At the beginning of class periods, teachers of high groups tend to emphasize students' shared, superior status. They require that all students be seated and prepared to work before they begin classwork. They emphasize the class's exclusive status by challenging them to live up to their image of a top group and chiding them not to act like "9-9" (the lowest ninth grade track).

> As a noisy high-track 9th grade enters its math class the teachers says, "Am I in the wrong class? Is this academic or axademic?"
>
> Another teacher says to a top 7th grade: "We will sit here and wait 'til everyone is ready. And I mean everyone. I'm not in competition with you. I'm not answering any questions 'til it's quiet and you show me you're ready."

By contrast, with low tracks, teachers tend to begin the period without waiting for the students' undivided attention. Rather, as soon as one half to three quarters of the students are quiet, the teacher begins.

> As a low 7th grade enters English class the teacher says, "I saw a lot of you come into the room too noisy. I do not want to hear anyone. I know what to expect of you and a lot of you are paying attention so let's begin." As she begins to review the previous day's quiz at least 8 of the 26 students present are out of their seats, talking to friends, or misusing academic supplies.

Once teachers begin classwork, their instructional patterns differ as well. As a group, students in lower sections receive half as many directions about

classroom activities and one-third fewer explanations, lectures, or demonstrations by teachers than higher-track students. Teachers tend to review or correct homework assignments 20 percent more with the high-than low-tracked students. Teachers adopt different questioning strategies with high and low tracks, also. High-track students are encouraged to volunteer, either individually or collectively, to respond to questions as often as they are called on by name. When they answer incorrectly, the teacher tends to either correct them, push them until they obtain the correct answer, or indicate that they are wrong and question someone else. By contrast, low-track students are rarely asked to volunteer. Instead they are questioned by name. Often teachers announce that they want to see who is misbehaving or is inattentive and direct questions to those students:

> In a low seventh grade social studies section, the teacher begins to question students: "O.K. No more talking. James, sit down. Derrick, turn around. I don't want to see that again, Troy, if you're so smart. If you know it all and don't have to pay attention, tell me the definition of latitude." Troy does not answer. The teacher scans the class and says, "Let's see who else is too smart to pay attention!"

When one student fails to respond, or responds incorrectly, teachers question another, often without indicating whether the first answer was correct or not.

In their instructional patterns, teachers apply different standards to high- and low-track performance. Rather than gear work to the ability level of the class, many junior high school teachers present the same material with different emphases to both tracks. High-track students are praised for their intelligence and pushed to excel. With high tracks, teachers stress achievement and the need for perfection:

> I expect you all to do an excellent job on this assignment.

With low-track students, however, they tend to stress behavior more than achievement. These students are reminded that they can compensate for poor academic work with neatness and good manners:

> Some people were disappointed with their grade. Remember notebook is an easy way to get a good grade. Neatness, accuracy, indentation, and completeness.
>
> I guarantee you'll do well if you put forth effort in behavior. . . .

Teachers are less demanding and more lax with low groups. Some teachers explicitly express their differential standards with high and low tracks. One junior high math teacher, who was exacting with the top classes, explained the absence of academic activity with his lowest group. "I play the role of Godfather and father-confessor to these kids. Tell me their problems and I help them out. It takes a while to get started. First I let them do errands around the school building."

Teachers also tend to establish different reward and punishment systems with high and low classes. Students in high-ranked sectors are touched and praised for their behavior and their performance twice as much as low-ranked peers:

> During the first 10 minutes of top-group reading class the teacher calls five students

> darling or babe, affectionately touches two students, and jokes with three others. With a low-track section, the same teacher touches no one affectionately, and calls two students darling.
>
> Teachers remark to high tracks as they work, "What a smart group this is" or "I'm really proud of you," or "This class is making me very happy."

Moreover, teachers tend to personalize their interaction with high-track students, discussing noncritically their own and the student's interests and home lives.

Although teachers complain about low-rank students' behavior more frequently, they actually punish high sections more. While low-ranked students are threatened with punishment twice as much as high sections, high-ranked students are *actually punished* three times more than their low-ranked peers. Their threats and the rules they enforce differ from high to low section as well.[4] Top-track students are admonished for their personal conduct:

> What did I tell you about gum chewing.
>
> Get rid of it.
>
> There is to be no eating in this class.
>
> For the last time throw out the potato chips.
>
> Sit up like a lady and get busy. Now.
>
> Cut the talking 9-1.

And they are threatened with punishment primarily for failure to complete their classwork.

> This is classwork, not homework. If you do not finish it in class, you will be late to lunch.
>
> No one leaves this classroom until he has finished the assignment. I'm serious. Either it's done now or you stay in.

When students fail to complete assignments, teachers' threats are often carried out. For instance, one group of students from a seventh grade math class miss 20 minutes of their 40-minute lunch period, and several top ninth graders are detained a half hour after school in order to finish incomplete assignments.

By contrast, low groups are reprimanded primarily for disrupting the class and moving without permission:

> Get in your seat, who said you could get up.
>
> Daniel, what did I tell you yesterday. Face the front of the room.
>
> George, shut up.
>
> Tyrell, turn around, the front of the room's this way. Move your desk back into the row and leave Sandra alone.

Students are threatened not with academically related punishments but instead with exclusion from the learning environment:

> Felicia, I've had it with you. You're going to the office.
>
> O.K., who's going to get detention.
>
> Daniel, any minute now I'm sending you out of class.

Thus year after year students in high and low tracks interact with teachers who approach them in dramatically different ways as both students and people. When one views the classroom situation from the teachers' perspective, it is not difficult to understand how the demands of their role and their experiences with differentially ranked students promote these contrasting styles (see Metz 1978). Yet, the fact remains that, whatever its source, this behavior does emerge and contributes to the perpetuation of students existing academic labels. Unfortunately, most teachers (and students) are too enmeshed in their respective institutional positions to either see the situation from the other's perspective or to be able to actively change it. As Keddie (1971) notes, once inside the classroom, even those teachers who most vehemently oppose tracking in the abstract become unwittingly ensnared in its expectational and behavioral patterns.

Student Behavior and the Classroom Social Climate

In a tracked school, then, rank shapes students' social and educational experiences. To obtain a fuller understanding of the way in which institutional expectations encourage the particular behavior and academic orientation of each track, we can integrate the preceding data into a composite picture of the classroom as students experience it. We can speculate about the way in which teacher and peer expectations converge to support the specific social patterns and educational priorities we observed among high- and low-track students.

Summarizing the influences on top-track behavior, we can suggest that their peer group endorsement of academic participation through cooperation and sneaking is prompted by the following:

1. Teachers' and peers' treatment of these students as an exclusive group.
2. Teachers' careful and constant monitoring of their classroom participation and performance.
3. Students' personalized interaction with the teacher.
4. Students' unwillingness to jeopardize their high status by risking predictable punishment for overt misbehavior.

From the moment they enter the classroom, the top tracks are treated collectively as a special and superior group and individually as students with distinctive personalities, interests, and educational needs by peers and teachers alike. High-tracked students come to view their classmates as individuals whose high social status is linked to their own academic success. Group identification and solidarity become equated with academic superiority. Popularity with peers and their treatment by teachers set them apart

from others socially as well as academically. Students see themselves collectively as individuals whose prized position is both demonstrated and maintained by their social grouping into exclusive cliques.

While the source of the high track's group orientation becomes apparent, their formal classtime sneaking requires further explanation. One could characterize the classroom message these students receive as, "You can't slide. We are watching you." These students learn that they are closely and carefully monitored by the teacher, and that almost every time they perform an academic task, there will be consequences. When they answer a question, they can expect the teacher to listen to their response, to indicate if it is correct, and either to push them to obtain the right answer or turn to someone else. Any evidence of misbehavior or failure to complete homework or classwork is likely to result in punishment and, perhaps more seriously, to threaten their educational position. These students also learn that because they have the flexibility of participating in class voluntarily, they can shape classroom discourse and pace their own involvement in it. When they are prepared with an answer or comment, they can volunteer and gain teacher recognition.

Hence students devise a means of differentiating themselves from teachers who care about them without directly challenging their authority. Rather, sneaking constitutes an indirect way of maintaining peer ties without jeopardizing academic standing. As long as students function academically, inserting themselves into classroom activities and completing their written work, they can simultaneously pursue their surreptitious social relationships. Ironically, these students establish a system outside the teacher's domain that reinforces the very norms she or he has conveyed to them. Sneaking confirms not only their shared group status, but also the need to be vigilant and attentive.

During informal classtime, when student behavior is less closely monitored, the classroom constraints shift. For these students there seems to be a direct relationship between the academic authority of an adult and the degree to which they feel they must behave. The greater the official power of the individual teacher to control their educational rank, the less these students act out. Although these students retain their collective focus during informal time, their activities change. With nonacademic or specialty teachers other than their own, students can risk experimentation with overt misbehavior. In these settings their behavior is less likely to result in punishment or to affect their academic reputations. Too, since students rely on the entire class to misbehave, it would be most unlikely for all of them to be threatened with academic demotion. By contrast, during informal periods with academic instructors or classroom teachers, there is no basis for sneaking. Students learn that they can interact with peers as long as they continue to work. While they do compete, they also sustain their group identification by helping and cooperating with each other on academic tasks.

By contrast, for low-tracked students we can speculate that lack of popularity with even their own classmates and negative teacher expectations promote their competitive, disruptive, and largely dyadic interaction. We can suggest that this antieducational pattern is supported by the following:

1. Student and teacher devaluation of low-track standing.
2. Teachers' use of academic participation more as punishment for misbehavior than as recognition for effort.
3. Students' lack of personalized interaction with the teacher.
4. Students' repeated exposure to teachers' failure to follow through with threats for misbehavior.

Through their interactions with teachers and peers, low-track students learn that academic and social worth rest not on solidarity with, but rather on differentiation from, their classmates. The segmented approach of their teachers and lack of esteem from their peers foster competition and fragmented patterns of interaction. As they come to devalue their academic label and classroom activities, they opt not to pursue friendships with others who remind them of that status. Instead, they find one person with whom they can identify and set themselves apart from others. Group activity would belie the very label they seek to deny.

The classroom message conveyed to the low class could be summarized as, "It doesn't matter what you do. Nothing counts." They are subject to classical patterns of low expectation conveying behavior (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). Classroom organization discourages students from either taking themselves, their work, or their teachers seriously. Little work is adequately explained or demanded from them. They learn that, despite repeated threats, misbehavior is *not* likely to be punished, and effort is *not* likely to be rewarded. There is an inverse relationship between student motivation and teacher recognition. If one behaves correctly, one is ignored academically. When one volunteers, one is not often called on, and when one tries to do seat work, one is often unclear about directions. Further, when the student is finally called on, she or he often gets confusing feedback about the accuracy of the answer. Unlike top tracks, these students have little sense of the teacher as a person who is interested in them as individuals.

Thus these students have little to lose academically and run little risk of punishment for wild behavior. By taunting teachers to whom they are not personally attached and mocking classroom activities, they react against reminders of their inferior status. By jeering at peers who attempt to perform publically in class, they effectively restrict academic activity in general and their own participation in particular. In fact, their one collective action is cooperation to actively sabotage tests and undermine teachers' academic authority.

During informal periods in their own or academic classes, these students turn their negativity about their status onto each other. When the teacher is no longer a target for their reactions, they vie with each other to deny their shared status. Left to their own devices without the threat of public performance and without the confusion of teacher questioning and correction procedures, many students at least try to do their seat work. Yet, caught in a dilemma by their academic label, it becomes more important to compete with and differentiate oneself from like-ranked peers than to complete the task at hand. By downgrading others' efforts and intelligence, one can set oneself apart from classmates and ensure that they do not succeed where one might fail.

Though the teacher is not actively involved in these independent activities, students seem to incorporate her or his negative messages into their interactions with each other. As they work, they continually repeat the teacher's explicit and implicit expectations. During informal time, then, they seem to defend themselves against their label by imposing it onto others.

By contrast, during informal time with teachers other than their own or with nonacademic specialists, it is no longer necessary to defend themselves against possible failure and humiliation. During these periods when they are not confronted by their academic inferiority, they have less of a motive and focus for misbehavior. Instead they escape their role in the school context by discussing their lives outside that setting and their activities outside the classroom.

V. Conclusions

In the classroom, student peer group relationships can be an educational resource or an academic impediment. In this study we have attempted to demonstrate how the educational structure influences these relationships. In our analysis of the impact of tracking on peer group interaction patterns, we have argued that students' educational orientation is determined more by institutional than individual factors. We have attempted to demonstrate that classroom behavior of students and teachers alike is organized by a powerful system of institutional expectations in which rank predominates. Educational and social assumptions about students in different academic positions shape divergent classroom social climates for high- and low-tracked students. As individual students in different tracks react to these contrasting expectations and constraints, they come to share different views of themselves, their teachers, and their peers. These understandings in turn promote different social priorities and markedly contrasting strategies for coping with their academic label and classroom situations. High-track students utilize peer ties to preserve their academic status as they simultaneously create their own social domain. Low-track students, however, use peer ties to react against the situation that has negatively labeled them.

If we as educators and researchers are going to learn how to harness the educational potential of the peer group, we must systematically understand the factors that determine its organization. This study has attempted to take one step in this direction by analyzing the influence of one type of educational structure on student social organization. However, additional research is essential. First, we must systematically examine the impact of different educational structures on student endorsement or subversion of educational activity. Research in schools with different instructional systems and mechanisms for academic placement is needed. Research in tracked and nontracked schools with traditional approaches and socioeconomically similar student bodies could ask the following questions:

1. Do pro- and antischool factions exist among students in nontracked schools? If so, what is the basis for and composition of each? How does student position in the school structure influence these patterns?
2. What are the patterns of popularity and of satisfaction with classroom

situation and classmates in nontracked schools? How do these differ from those in tracked schools?

3. What informal systems of educational expectations emerge in nontracked schools? What is the basis for negative and positive teacher expectations? Are expectations linked primarily to in- or out-of-school characteristics?

Studies of student educational orientation in traditional and alternative settings could investigate the influence of the schools' instructional and organizational approach on student academic attitudes. In alternative schools where students are encouraged to participate in the creation and maintenance of the educational structure, and where their academic placement is primarily decided by them, research might ask, Does student opposition to educational activities lessen? If so, what modes of reaction to the educational setting emerge instead? How do these behavioral patterns influence performance? My own investigation of the same student population at traditional and then at an alternative junior high school indicates that willingness to support academic activities increases dramatically in the alternative setting. At the alternative school, leaders of the formerly pro- and antischool factions acquired a new, shared status as they competed for control of the new setting. Faced with a minimum of teacher direction and authority, students began to vie for leadership of academic as well as social pursuits. Eventually, the social and the academic merged for many, and participation in certain academic activities became a mark of social status for both the formerly pro- and antischool groups (Schwartz 1976).

Second, although this analysis has focused solely on in-school influences on students' academic orientation, it is important to understand how extraschool factors, when translated into the classroom setting, influence the educational nature of peer ties. It is possible that the same extraschool factors acquire varied in-school significance in different educational structures. For instance, in this study, ethnicity does not appear to be the key determinant of student willingness to perform. However, in other settings it may play a key role. Future research might ask such questions as the following:

1. How are aspects of students' extraschool lives expressed socially and academically in different educational structures? In which do they tend to predominate?
2. Does the academic impact of the peer group differ between situations in which student alliances are based on values and assumptions external to the school or their latent subculture (see Becker and Geer 1968) and those where patterns formed within the school, or their manifest subcultures, predominate?

Future research can further elucidate these complex institutional processes and structural influences that determine whether the peer group supports or subverts learning.

It is hoped that educators and researchers will go beyond the mere acknowledgment of the school's role in shaping the peer group's educational orientation. It is imperative that we begin to combat the negative labeling that

so severely restricts students' educational opportunities. By formulating new instructional approaches or reforming existing ones, we must devise policies that encourage rather than extinguish the educational motivation of students like the low-track pupils studied here.

Endnotes

1. This research was funded in part by a grant from the Hazen Foundation (New Haven, Connecticut) to the Affective Education Program of the School District of Philadelphia. Kathy Connors, Earlene Sloan, and Hank Kopple of the Affective Education Program helped to formulate the research problem and strategies. Carole Joffe, Marc Ross, and Michael Weinstein offered many insightful comments and suggestions about earlier drafts of this paper.
2. The names of all four schools have been altered in order to disguise the research site.
3. Sociograms on which these findings are based were not administered to junior high school students. Given Lacey's finding that, once secondary school students are assigned to tracks, they tend to develop divergent high- and low-track norms for popularity, it may be that this discussion about peers applies primarily to elementary school students.
4. In enforcing different rules, teachers may well be reacting to differences in student behavior. As previously stated, student patterns themselves become an independent influence on teacher behavior. However, regardless of the type of misbehavior, teachers do differ in their willingness to actually follow through and punish high and low tracks and in the punishment they assign.

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Report of the Nominations Committee

The Nominations Committee (Steven Arvizu, Tom Carroll, Evelyn Jacob) is happy to propose the following persons, each of whom has signified willingness to serve if elected:

For President, 1981-83

- Judith T. Guskin
  University of Wisconsin-Parkside
- Jean J. Schensul
  Hispanic Health Council, Hartford, Conn.
- Richard Warren
  University of Kentucky

For Member-at-Large, Board of Directors, 1981-83

- Robert Carrasco
  Harvard University
- Margaret Gibson
  California State University at Sacramento
- Jeanne M. Fulginiti
  Pupil Support Services, West Hartford Public Schools

The CAE by-laws provide for additional nominations by the membership, provided that the nomination is supported by ten signatures of CAE members. If you wish to make a nomination, please send it, together with the supporting signatures, to the Secretary-Treasurer no later than 1 August. The ballots will then be prepared and sent out early in September.