# 10 Treating Expectations for Competence

It is time now to return to the dilemma of groupwork discussed in Chapter 3. What have we done about the problem of high status students dominating interaction and of low-status students withdrawing from the group? There is an even more fundamental question: Have we done anything to change low expectations for competence, the underlying cause of nonparticipation by low-status students?

Recall that high status students are generally expected to do well on new intellectual tasks and low-status students are generally expected to do poorly on these same tasks. When the teacher assigns a group task, general expectations come into play and produce a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the high status students talk more and become more influential than the low-status students. The net result of the interaction is that the low-status students are once again perceived as incompetent. This occurs even if groups are given a rich, multiple-ability task that does more than stress ordinary academic skills. Groupworthy tasks are a necessary albeit insufficient condition for creating equal-status interactions.

Two strategies will have some impact on this problem: (1) establishing cooperative norms such as "everyone participates" and "everyone helps," and (2) giving every student a part or role to play. Both of these strategies will raise the participation rates of both low and high status students and will prevent high status students from doing all the talking. Furthermore, low-status students, just by talking and working together, will improve their performance.

Doesn't that take care of the status problem? Well, not completely—because not much has happened to change expectations for competence. Imagine a well-prepared group with different students playing different roles; on the average, the low-status students might just be talking as much as the high status students. Nevertheless, members of

the group still think of the low-status students as having less powerful ideas and fewer useful suggestions than the high status students. The low-status students may be active, but they probably are still less influential and less active than the high status students. The low-status students still feel that their contributions to the group are less valuable and less competent than the contributions of the high status students. Furthermore, in moving from the successful group experience to other group tasks, there is no improvement in expectations for competence.

To boost active behavior in low-status students that will be perceived as competent, and to produce expectations for competence that will transfer to other tasks, changing the essence of those expectations for competence is imperative. Without such change, expectations remain uniform, and consistently negative. Creating positive expectations for intellectual competence that will combine with the preexisting set of negative expectations is necessary.

If you resolve the problem of consistently low expectations effectively, students who have been unsuccessful in your classroom previously will demonstrate their abilities and their skills and acquire a sense of competence that will be acknowledged by their classmates. As you proceed to other groupworthy tasks, students can expect themselves, and can be expected by classmates, to make useful and relevant contributions to each new assignment. Designing situations where previously low-status students can demonstrate successful performance is key to raising their expectations for themselves and for changing their classmates' perceptions of them.

## FROM LOW STATUS TO INTELLECTUAL RESOURCE

One way to change low expectations for competence is to design a situation where the student who is expected to be incompetent will actually function as an expert. A relatively simple and probably the safest way to do this is to find a task where the student is already an expert. When appropriate and relevant, for example, a Spanish-speaking student could teach classmates a song or a poem in Spanish; a Chinese-speaking student could introduce Chinese characters and explain to his peers some of the Chinese writing system; an immigrant student can share with her classmates important past and present

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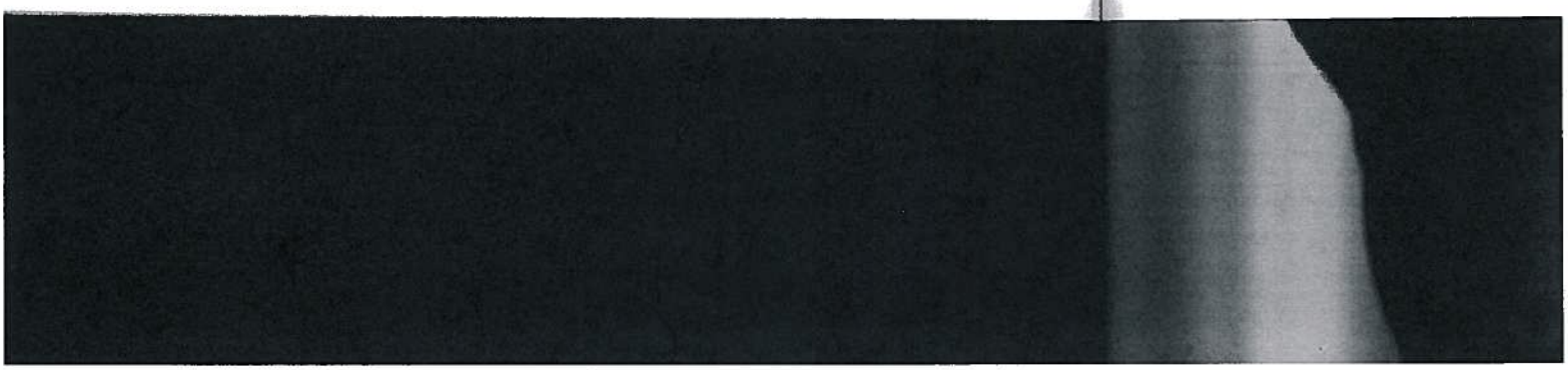

historical events in her native country. However, even this fairly obvious strategy requires careful analysis. Do not assume that because a student has a Spanish or Chinese surname or speaks some Spanish or Chinese, he or she knows how to teach something in Spanish or Chinese. Teaching someone else is a separate skill from reciting a poem, singing a song, or writing in a different language. You need to prepare the student carefully for this teaching role and make sure she or he has the tools to be successful.

Speaking in Spanish is a kind of expertise that everyone, rightly or wrongly, expects Latino students to have. This is a narrow and specific expectation for competence, almost like a stereotype. It is unlikely that the experience of being an expert in Spanish will change expectations for competence on other kinds of tasks because it is a stereotypic expectation associated with ethnicity. A similar situation involving stereotyping would be to expect a female to demonstrate expertise in cooking or an African American to demonstrate expertise in playing basketball. Although people are willing to grant females and African Americans expertise in these two areas, the expectations for competence *do not transfer* to other valued tasks.

Despite these limitations, a narrow brand of expertise has some merit if it gives the low-status child a chance to assume a leadership role like that of teacher. However, unless you point out to the students that the act of teaching the class is a special kind of competence and that it is an important skill, the group will never notice that "teaching the Spanish song" is a different skill from "singing the song."

Every student in your class is an expert in some valued intellectual skill acquired and developed through previous learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. Observe your students and ask them about their interests and experiences outside the classroom. Group-worthy tasks allow you to see skills and talents that ordinary classroom assignments rarely permit. Take note of areas of expertise and find ways to allow different students, particularly those with low academic, social, or peer status, to function as experts in a group. This technique is workable as long as the members actually have evidence that the student is an expert and an intellectual resource; in other words, as long as the student is truly competent. Next, we explore more fully how to change students' expectations for competence for themselves and for their classmates.

## EXPECTATION TRAINING: EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

With her graduate students and colleagues, Elizabeth Cohen carried out a number of experiments to demonstrate if and how expectations for competence can be changed. In these experiments, expectations were treated by having the low-status student become a teacher, an expert, and an intellectual resource for a high status student on a new, challenging, and valued task. This method is called "expectation training." Tasks for expectation training are not culturally specific or stereotyped for any group. The researchers used tasks such as constructing a model from straws based on a mathematical principle, building a two-transistor radio, and solving an intricate and ingenious puzzle.

The strength of the intervention lies in the way that it changes expectations for competence held both by the low-status students for themselves as well as those held by others regarding their performance. Theoretically, making low-status students experts on a new task and making them teachers of that task provides two new sources of positive expectations for competence. The students derive positive expectations from displaying competence on the task itself; in addition, they derive expectations for competence from being successful teachers. These new positive expectations combine with the older set of negative expectations and by creating a mixed set they raise the general level of expectations for competence. The welcome result is improved participation and influence on new group tasks.

In laboratory settings, expectation training has consistently produced an increase in the participation and influence of children with low social status; treated groups exhibit a pattern of equal-status behavior. The treatment has worked for African American and white groups (Cohen & Roper, 1972), for Chicano and Anglo groups (Robbins, 1977), for Canadian Indian and Anglo groups (Cook, 1974), and for Western and Eastern Jews in Israel (Cohen & Sharan, 1980).

In a field experiment conducted at a summer school with white and African American 5th- and 6th-grade students, Cohen, Lockheed, and Lohman (1976) were able to show that when expectation training was implemented during the first week, it was possible to maintain equal-status interaction for 6 weeks. African American students taught white students a series of academic and nonacademic tasks. For this purpose, the African American students came to the summer school a week early for advance preparation in their role as teachers. At the end of the program, the African Ame
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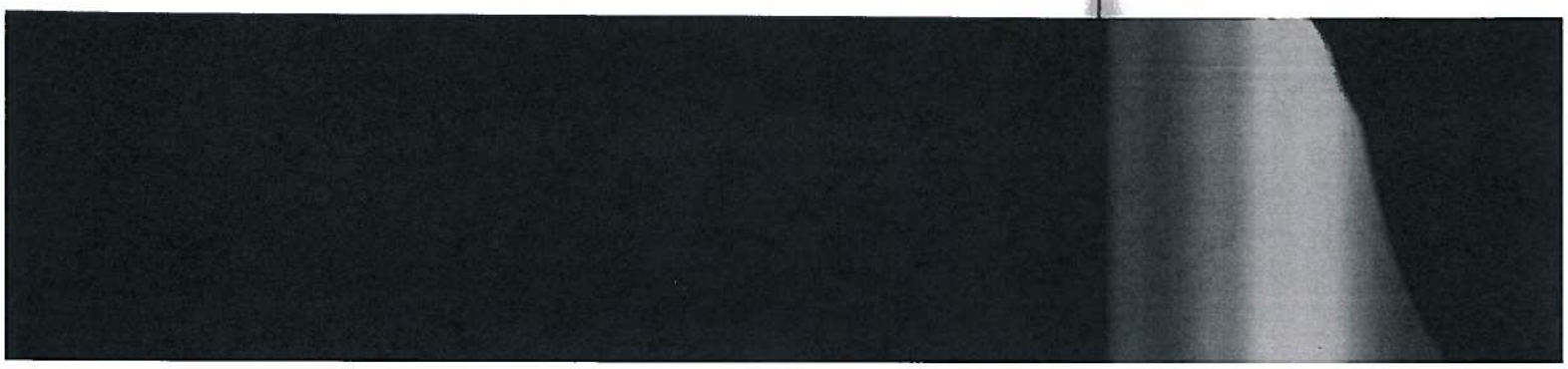

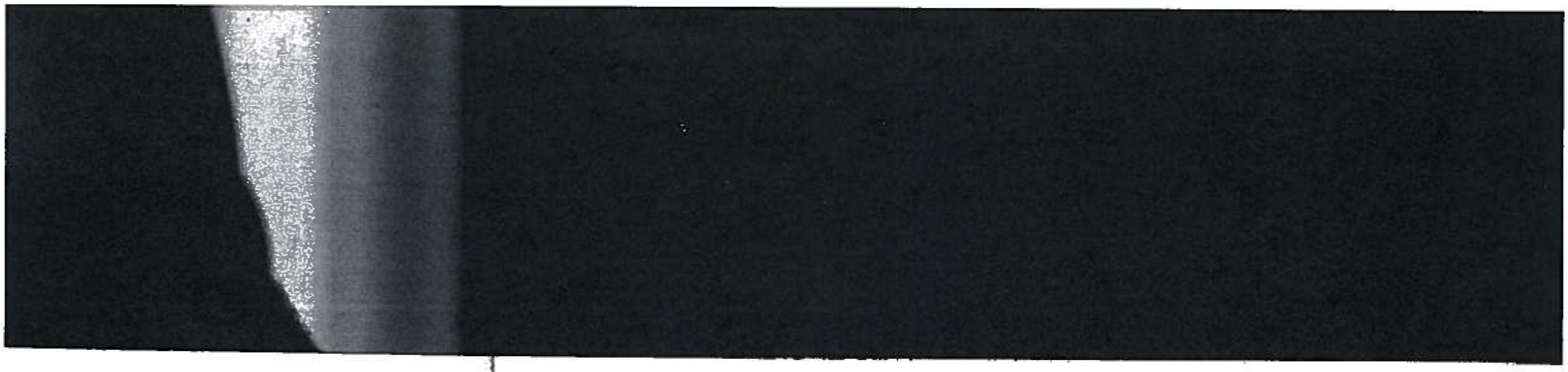



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program, the African American students were as active and influential, if not more active and influential, than the white students on the standard group task of Shoot the Moon. In this field study, the African American students were from a markedly lower socioeconomic class than the white students. However, in the summer school setting the curriculum did not require conventional school skills as a prerequisite to perform the tasks successfully.

Expectation training is a powerful treatment. The low-status student not only displays impressive competence, but is in a position to direct the behavior of the high status student as does every teacher—a rare opportunity for someone on the bottom of the classroom status order. Even with a nonacademic task such as a complicated puzzle, favorable expectations of those who can visualize the solution and teach others will transfer to a wide variety of group tasks requiring different intellectual abilities.

One of the most difficult things to achieve in this or any other kind of status treatment is to convince the low-status persons of their own competence. It is actually harder to change the expectations these students hold for themselves than it is to change the expectations classmates hold for them. Sadly, low-status students have had too many instances where they were not successful and were thus perceived as incompetent by their peers. You may observe that low-status students can carry out the task and teach it with considerable skill. But you would be surprised to realize that these students still do not see themselves as skillful. Their perception of incompetence is deeply engrained.

This phenomenon is similar to "stereotype threat" first conceptualized and introduced by Claude Steele and his colleagues in the early 1990s (Steele, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Since then, stereotype threat has been widely recognized as a potential contributing factor to long-standing gaps in the academic performance of members of negatively stereotyped groups such as racial/ethnic minorities and females. Research concerning the social-psychological impact of stereotype threat and interventions designed to mitigate its effects have gained wide recognition recently (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006).

Expectation training should never be undertaken without serious thought and planning, and should not be attempted at all if the teacher does not have the resources (classroom assistants, older students, volunteers) to spend time with each low-status student who will play the role of expert. The danger is that if you allow the low-status student to fail as an expert, you will have knowingly exposed that student to another

overwhelming negative evaluation. *This must not be allowed to happen.* Individualized coaching is indispensable to assure that the student is highly confident and can demonstrate his or her competence to your satisfaction before going on to act as an expert and teach.

Expectation training is not the most practical of classroom treatments. Most teachers do not have the time or the opportunity to prepare students for their role as teacher or expert so that a successful performance is guaranteed. Even if another adult is assigned this task, she will need to be carefully trained so that each student reaches a specific criterion level of competence before any demonstration of teaching skills takes place. Although this kind of intervention might sometimes not be practical for many busy teachers, the laboratory experiments and the subsequent field experiment demonstrate both the need and the potential value of interventions designed to change expectations for the performance of low-status students.

Over the years, we have worked with many teachers as they take steps to change students' expectations for competence by using two kinds of status treatments: the multiple-ability strategy and assigning competence to low-status students.

## THE MULTIPLE-ABILITY STRATEGY

As you see people working together, you see all of the abilities that other students have that you didn't see before. There was this one kid, and he was really shy. He was always, like out of everything. He was never doing something or speaking out until we had an art project we had to do and he, like he just *visualized,* just got a pencil and piece of paper and like acted and draw a lot things that people didn't even see in him until that one time that we saw another part of him. (Maria, a 7th-grade student, Campbell, CA)

Maria is a student in a classroom where the teacher has been using a multiple-ability treatment for status problems. Maria does not think of her fellow students as "smart" or "dumb." She sees her peers as having multiple intellectual abilities, and groupwork as an opportunity to find out about those special abilities.

Furthermore, Maria realizes that the groupwork tasks her teacher assigns require many different intellectual abilities, skills, and competencies. After listing and describing many of these abilities, her teacher has said many times: "None of us has all of these abilities. Each one of

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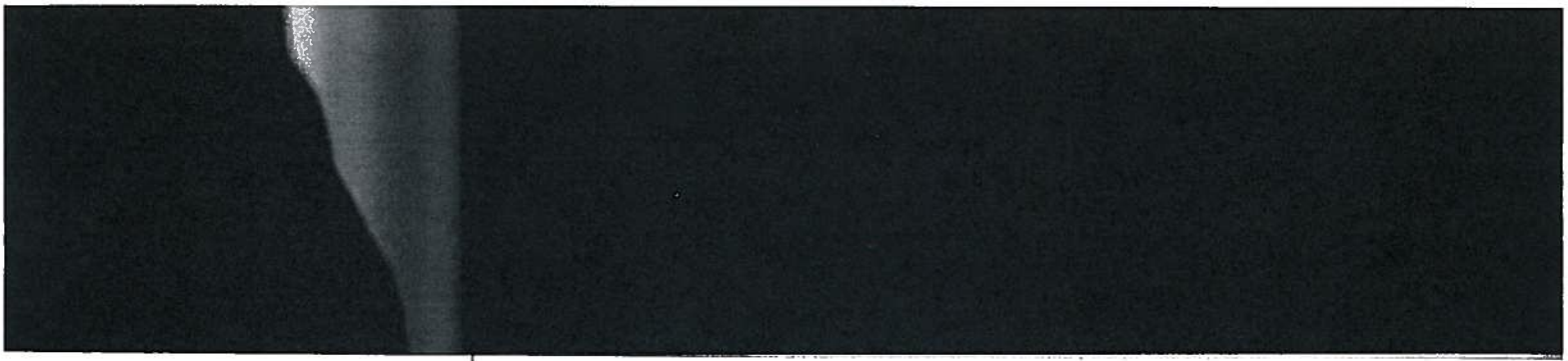



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us has some of these abilities." Thus, at the beginning of a new task, Maria expects that each student will have something valuable to contribute and that no one student will know or be able to do it all. As a result, she and other group members are prepared to listen to contributions from each group member and are less willing to sit back and let one person do most of the contributing.

The effectiveness of this treatment lies in altering the set of expectations with which students start on a new task. Instead of uniformly high expectations, high status students are expected to show strengths and weaknesses like everyone else. The same is true for low-status students, who are now expected and expect themselves to be competent at some of the important abilities and skills relevant to this task. The teacher has created a *mixed set of expectations* for everyone. Thus, when the students work together, the gap in expectations for competence between high and low-status students is smaller than in classrooms where teachers do not use such a status treatment.

### Research Evidence

The multiple-ability treatment was developed by Tammivaara (1982) in a laboratory study. Participating students were selected on the basis of having high and average estimates of their own reading ability. Her treatment consisted of explaining the different abilities necessary for a survival task of Lost on the Moon (see Hall, 1971) before the groups began their discussions. The host experimenter said: "No one person will be good at all these abilities, but each person will be good on at least one" (p. 216). Furthermore, students were told that reading had no relevance to this particular task because all of the objects were pictured on cards. Those groups that had heard the multiple-ability introductions showed equal-status behaviors, whereas those who had not heard such an introduction exhibited a pattern of dominance by the high-ability readers. This study demonstrated that one can effectively interfere with status processes by defining multiple abilities as relevant to a task, thereby preventing students from assuming that academic status will be the only relevant basis for predictions of competence.

Rosenholtz (1985) created a 1-week multiple-ability curriculum for classrooms of 4th-graders who had known each other for some time and who had many opportunities to make evaluations of each other on reading ability. In this classroom experiment, Rosenholtz created a mixed set of expectations, not by telling the students about abilities but

by having them experience three new abilities in the context of small groups, each supervised by an adult. The three new abilities were visual thinking, reasoning, and intuitive thinking. Group tasks were carefully engineered so that high-achieving readers could not dominate and struggling readers would gain more favorable evaluations of their competence. This was accomplished by having students take turns at guessing the answers and by using tasks where everyone contributed something different to the final product. Groups were recomposed between tasks, so students worked with a wide variety of their classmates.

On the standard game of Shoot the Moon, the results showed that low-achieving readers who had experienced the curriculum were significantly more active and influential on the new task than comparable readers from an untreated class. Behavior did not fully equalize status in treated groups in that there was still a tendency for strong readers to be more active and influential. But the advantage of the high-achieving readers was greatly reduced by the treatment.

The multiple-abilities curriculum provided low-status students with the opportunity to develop favorable self-evaluations and to be evaluated favorably by peers in the context of tasks defined as requiring new and different abilities—tasks where division of labor and turn-taking prevented status phenomena from operating. Once the favorable evaluations had been formed, they combined with the old set of expectations for competence and modified the status effects on a new and different task.

In multilingual, academically heterogeneous classrooms where small groups were working on discovery tasks in math and science, Cohen (1984) demonstrated strong status effects. When teachers used a multiple-ability status treatment for this same setting, similar to that used by Tammivaara (1982), effects of status on interaction were reduced, although not eliminated (Cohen, Lotan, & Catanzarite, 1990). High status individuals were still more likely to offer assistance than low-status individuals, suggesting that status was associated with expectations for higher levels of competence. An additional strategy became necessary to strengthen the impact of status treatments, as described later in this chapter.

## What Are Multiple Abilities?

Use of the multiple-abilities strategy means thinking in a new way about human intelligence. Instead of thinking about how intelligent or unintelligent, smart or dumb, competent or incompetent a student

is, consider different kinds of intelligence, intellectual abilities, and "smarts" that are called forth in different kinds of situations and for different aspects of a given task. In this context, the word "abilities" connotes its basic meaning of "being able to (do an activity)." Take, for example, the task of teaching. Among many other intellectual abilities, teaching requires interpersonal intelligence, organizational acumen, conventional academic skills, verbal agility, as well as creativity. Teachers plan interesting lessons, they formulate intriguing questions, they provide valuable feedback to students, they communicate with families—the list is endless. Teachers use their many different intellectual abilities in what they do all day, every day.

When we think about the adult world of work, it might be easier to recognize that many different kinds of abilities are essential for any profession or any job, just as with teaching. Yet often when we think about intelligence among students, we automatically narrow the concept to conventional academic criteria—being good at reading, writing, and computing quickly. That narrowness is, in part, a reflection of the narrowness of school curricula focused merely on basic skills and of accountability systems that rely solely on outcomes of standardized testing of students' performance. Instead of reflecting the way adults use their minds, such school curricula and testing systems reflect a limited and counterproductive conceptualization of what is to be learned and demonstrated as "smarts," and what is required to be seen as smart in school.

The narrowness of conventional academic tasks and assessments is one of the features of classrooms that help to create a unidimensional status order, where students rank each other on one dimension of ability. One is good, average, or "no good" at school tasks. Furthermore, one of the earliest indicators of the child's academic ability is his or her achievement in reading. Reading ability becomes an index of general intelligence in many classrooms for both students and teachers.

The multiple-ability approach is in line with current work on reconceptualizing human intelligence. For a long time, human intelligence has been thought of as unidimensional; it could be characterized by a single number; people (and whole races) could be ranked from gifted to stupid. Stephen Jay Gould, in his important book *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981), has done the field of education a great service by tracing the history of this idea to its roots, deep in Western culture. His analysis of biases present in his research on the concept of intelligence raises fundamental doubts as to whether we can continue

to think of intelligence as unidimensional. With the introduction of multiple intelligences in his book *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner (1983/2011; 1993) redefined and reconceptualized human intelligence as multiple and rooted in specific areas of the brain. He distinguishes among different kinds of intelligences (e.g., linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal). Sternberg (1985) sees intelligence as a set of processes that individuals bring to bear on situations with which they are faced. For Sternberg, intelligence is both multidimensional and imminently trainable. "Abilities Are Forms of Developing Expertise" is the title of one of his seminal articles (Sternberg, 1998). Sternberg's (2007) explorations of the relationships among culture, intelligence, and education are illuminating. Different cultures have different views of intelligence. Acts that demonstrate intelligent behavior also vary from culture to culture. Carol Dweck (2008) recognized that a person's implicit or explicit theory of intelligence plays an important role in that person's behavior and actions. According to Dweck (2008), a growth mind-set, that is, a person's recognition that intelligence is multidimensional and malleable, leads to potentially more successful performance through increased motivation and extra effort.

The multiple-ability treatment requires you to convince the students that many different intellectual abilities are necessary to successfully complete groupworthy tasks. Before you can convince students, however, you must analyze the tasks in terms of these intellectual abilities required. There is neither an official nor an exhaustive list of multiple abilities. It is a new way of looking at something we have known all along—that we use our intelligence in many different kinds of ways to solve problems and to accomplish important tasks in work and family life. Keep in mind that adults engage in highly complex problem solving as part of their daily lives. Some of these activities are academic, others are technical or political, and many are interpersonal, social tasks. Examples of such adult activities are managing, coordinating, taking the role of the other, teaching, learning, researching, directing, supervising, writing, drawing, building, developing, investigating, negotiating, evaluating, counting, calculating, and acting. These are all activities you can find in rich groupworthy tasks.

If we could think about students in the same way we think about ourselves as adults, each with strengths and weaknesses to do all that is required to live and work successfully, many of the status problems

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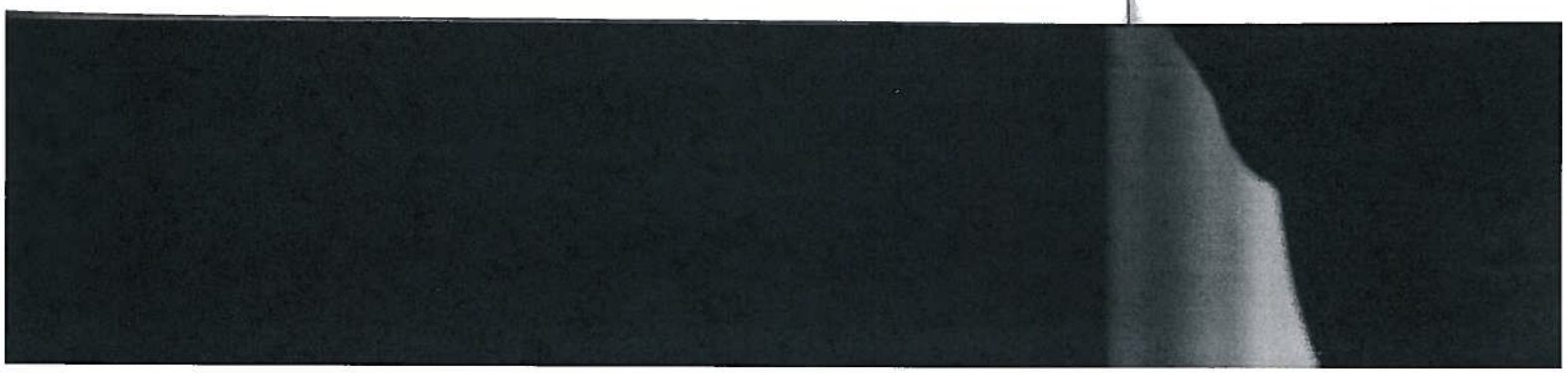

described earlier would fade. Thinking in this way does not require that each person be labeled as having particular and special abilities and therefore not allowed to acquire and develop new abilities. Rather, we recommend thinking about intellectual abilities as *specific and relevant* to particular activities, so that any person can be shown to have many different and useful abilities. Students should have the opportunities to engage in a wide variety of activities, so that they will continue to develop their intellectual abilities.

### Steps of the Multiple-Abilities Strategy

There are two steps to a successful multiple-abilities strategy: (1) convincing the students that many different intellectual abilities are required for the task; (2) creating a mixed set of expectations for each student.

The best time to use this treatment is during an orientation to groupwork. You can convince your students that many different abilities are required through your own analysis of the assigned tasks. Suggest some of the *specific* intellectual abilities or skills that you think these tasks require. You can ask students to suggest abilities or skills that they think will be required. Point out how these abilities are useful for adult problem-solving situations. During the wrap-up, point out which of the multiple abilities that were identified during the orientation were used while completing tasks at the learning stations. You could ask students to share additional abilities that turned out to be critical. Many students, just like Maria, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, learn how to analyze tasks and to think in this new way quite quickly.

Some students may have excellent reasoning ability. You will want to talk about this general ability in very specific ways. For example, logically analyzing or solving a problem experimentally, figuring out how something works mechanically, analyzing an issue from various perspectives, or making connections between ideas and concepts are all specific ways to describe how reasoning is required by particular group tasks. Instead of describing students in general terms as creative, you could talk about writing or performing a dramatic role for a skit, generating multiple alternatives, thinking of new uses for familiar objects, composing a song, conceiving of an idea for an illustration, imagining what it must have been like to live a long time ago, or taking the role of another person very different from oneself. Some of the groupworthy

tasks described earlier require spatial and visual ability. Again, to be more specific, you might talk about diagramming mathematical concepts, drawing an idea as a cartoon, creating a model, or seeing how a sophisticated mechanism can be constructed. Note that using verbs to describe and introduce these multiple abilities makes the overall message more concrete and signals to the students that these activities can and should be learned, developed, and demonstrated.

The second step is critical although often omitted. After explaining that these tasks call for many different abilities, include the following statements: *None of us has all of these abilities. Each one of us has some of these abilities.* Help students see why this is likely to be true. If the tasks are truly groupworthy tasks, it is most unlikely that any one person will be outstanding in all the required abilities. And surely each student will be able to make an intellectual contribution in some way. This message is the heart of the multiple-ability treatment because it helps students to see that there is no such thing as being good or bad at groupwork, but that the most sensible position is to hold mixed expectations for competence. Teachers who are highly skilled in using this treatment often state that for the best possible group product, it will be necessary for students to recognize and use everyone's abilities and to serve as intellectual resources for one another.

### Do's and Don'ts of Successful Treatments

Focus on abilities that students see as intellectual. Some students (and some adults) value but do not see some social skills as intellectual abilities. Unless you can convince students that there is such a thing as interpersonal intelligence, don't refer to "getting along with others" or "being nice" as one of the multiple abilities.

Avoid talk about abilities that suggests that some students are good with their heads while others are good with their hands. In general, Western culture rarely considers work with the hands or artistic work as intellectual work. When discussing artistic ability, be specific in the way that Maria was; say "visualizing or creating a design," or "using artistic representations."

Be very specific about how these abilities are important for particular tasks. Encourage students to analyze necessary abilities for themselves. Urge your students to develop new abilities. Refrain from implying that people only have inborn abilities.

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## The Multiple-Ability Curriculum

Obviously, you cannot use the multiple-ability treatment unless the tasks are groupworthy and actually require multiple intellectual abilities. These are the rich groupworthy tasks described in Chapter 6. If the group assignments are routine seatwork, then the students will never believe that many different abilities are required, nor will they have opportunities to use and recognize many different abilities.

Groupworthy tasks are by definition multiple-ability tasks. Students can discuss challenging questions prior to or as part of creating a final group product. Science tasks are readily seen as requiring multiple intellectual abilities: making observations and recording them precisely, manipulating science equipment carefully, hypothesizing causes and effects, and writing up the report clearly and concisely. Current curriculum standards reflect many of these intellectually and academically necessary practices and uses of language.

## Reading, Writing, and Calculating

Basic skills are still part of multiple-ability tasks. For example, someone has to read the activity card. Everyone has to complete an individual report, even if it is only a sentence in the case of a young child or a drawing that serves as a prewriting activity for an emergent writer. Arithmetic operations are often part and parcel of an interesting groupworthy task.

However, basic skills are not a prerequisite for successful participation in the task. Struggling readers can receive assistance from group members. They can listen to the group discussion about what is involved in completing the group product. They can interpret pictures and diagrams on activity cards. Developing writers will be motivated to express their own ideas after participating in the creation of group products that employ central concepts. They can receive peer assistance in expressing and recording their own ideas. They may also be motivated to write about ideas they have contributed or heard in the group discussion. Often, creating collaborative drafts or rehearsing group reports will enhance group members' grasp of the central idea or the essential question.

In the multiple-ability orientation, you and the students will undoubtedly list basic skills as required for the task. Because they are

only part of the required set, they will be seen as important but will not, as in many traditional classrooms, have the power to make some students who are struggling in these areas feel as if they cannot ever do well in the classroom.

Once you have set the stage with the multiple-ability strategy, assigning competence to low-status students is a second treatment you can use to modify expectations.

## ASSIGNING COMPETENCE TO LOW-STATUS STUDENTS

Miss Del Rio, a 4th-grade teacher of a bilingual classroom and the author of a case about the experiences of Miguel, a low-status student (Shulman, Lotan, & Whitcomb, 1998), describes what happened when she observed, identified, and made public the abilities Miguel used:

> Miguel was a shy and withdrawn child who spoke no English and stuttered when he spoke Spanish. His Spanish reading and writing skills were very low, and although math was his strength, nobody seemed to notice. Recently arrived from a small community in Mexico, Miguel lived with relatives—more than 10 adults and three children in a two-bedroom apartment. He came to school hungry and tired, and wearing dirty clothes. Shunned by his classmates, who said he had the "cooties," Miguel was left out of group activities. Even when he had a specific role, other members of the group would take over and tell him what to do. Miguel was obviously a low-status student.
>
> When I observed Miguel's group I saw that the other members simply wouldn't give him a chance. Cooperative learning was not helping him at all. Miguel grew more isolated by the day. Students increasingly teased him, and he was getting into fights and becoming a behavior problem. I realized the only way to change students' views about Miguel was to show them that he had certain abilities to contribute to his group. My challenge was to identify his strengths and show his peers that he was competent.
>
> One day in May, we were working in cooperative groups building different structures with straws, pins, clay, and wires. I was observing Miguel's group and saw him quietly pick up some straws and pins and start building a structure following the diagram on one of the activity cards. The other members of the group were trying to figure out how to begin their structure, and as usual, were not paying much attention to

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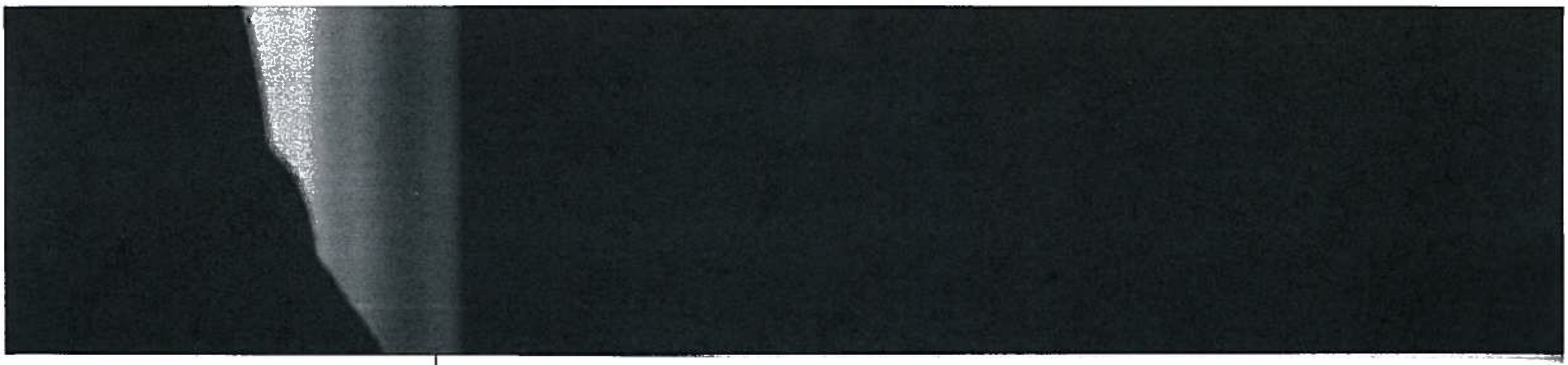



Miguel. I observed that Miguel had used double straws to make the base more sturdy. He knew exactly what to do because he had looked at the diagram on the card. In other words, Miguel knew that the task was to build as sturdy a structure as possible, and he understood the principle of making the base stronger by using double straws.

I knew that this was the chance I was waiting for; it was clear that Miguel had the ability to build things by following diagrams. I decided to intervene, speaking both Spanish and English, since not everyone in the group spoke Spanish. I told the group that Miguel understood the task very well and would be an important resource because he had a great ability to construct something looking at a diagram. I also said that Miguel might grow up to be an architect since building sturdy buildings by following diagrams is one of the things architects need to do. I also told the group they had to rely on their translator so Miguel could explain what he was doing.

I continued observing the group from a distance, and sure enough, a few minutes later the translator was asking Miguel for help. Miguel explained to the members of his group what he had done and why. It was obvious he had abilities that could help him succeed in cooperative learning groups, and his group finally realized it. But I wanted everyone in the classroom to know that Miguel was very good at building structures. So when his group reported on their work, I said I had noticed that they had some problems understanding the task, and I asked their reporter what had helped them complete the task successfully.

He told the class that Miguel had understood what to do and had explained it to the group. I then reinforced the reporter's explanation, adding that Miguel had shown competence in building things by looking at a diagram and that his contribution had helped his group solve the problem successfully. By assigning competence to Miguel in front of his group and the whole class, I made sure everyone knew that Miguel had a lot to contribute to his peers. This was a wonderful example for everyone of how important it is to explore the multiple abilities of all group members in completing the task. After this, things changed for Miguel. His group members not only recognized him as an active member but began using him as a resource to help them balance their structures. (pp. 69–70)

Status treatments such as this one take advantage of the power of the teacher as an evaluator. Students tend to believe and value evaluations teachers make of them. Thus, if the teacher publicly

evaluates a low-status student as being competent on a particular multiple ability, that student will tend to believe the evaluation. The other students who overhear are also likely to accept the evaluation's validity. Once the evaluation has been accepted, expectations for competence for this task are likely to result in increased activity and influence of the low-status student. Success at this task will translate into success in future groupwork tasks, as it did in the case of Miguel.

Assigning competence is a powerful intervention. It can do much to boost the participation of a low-status student. Ordinarily you may only watch low-status students to see if they are confused or staying out of trouble. You and the other students in the group may not even notice when the low-status student does something really well. To assign competence you must observe and witness when the low-status students actually do make intellectual contributions. These instances might be rare as you start out with groupwork. You need to make sure to create opportunities for the low-status student to demonstrate competence rather than just waiting for it to happen. It is a good idea to take notes while students perform groupwork and record your observations of what the low-status students are doing and how they are demonstrating their competence.

An effective assignment of competence has three critical features:

- Evaluations are public.
- Evaluations are specific and refer to particular intellectual abilities or skills.
- The abilities/skills of the low-status student are made relevant to the successful outcome of the group task.

Public recognition of competence is a key factor. Assigning competence is not simply a treatment for the low-status student—it is a group treatment; the problem lies partly in the expectations that others have for the low-status student. Therefore the group's expectations for this student must also be changed. Public recognition means that you are making it known that you consider this student competent on a particular skill or ability. This helps to change the student's expectations and the expectations held by classmates for this student.

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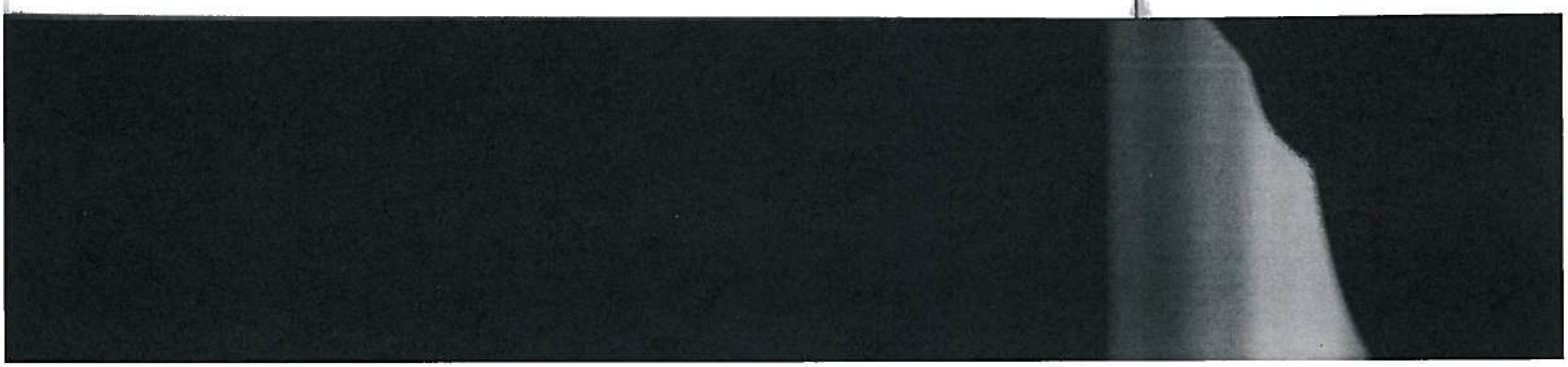

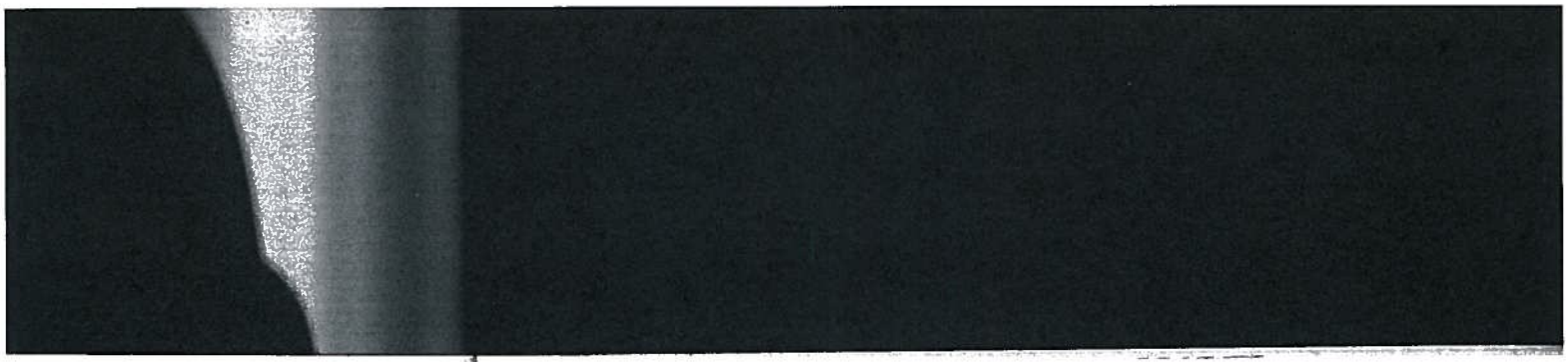



to the student and possible sanction from peers. Just state in a matter-of-fact way what you are actually observing about his or her skills; don't gush. Be honest; don't make up stories about the student's abilities and performance that you didn't actually see or that are not valued intellectual abilities. Also, you don't have to reserve this treatment only for the lowest-status students in the class. Many students from the middle to the lower ranges of the status structure and most students if not all greatly benefit from this kind of feedback. It contributes to creating a positive classroom culture because students feel recognized and valued.

If you are very specific about the ability or skill the student is exhibiting, the student and the entire group will know exactly what he or she did well. It is not hard to be specific if you, like Miss Del Rio, speak in concrete terms about skills like building a sturdy structure by following a diagram.

Finally, making the ability relevant to the task has the effect of making the improved expectations for competence especially strong for the current activity. To make the ability relevant, teachers often say something similar to "Rosita is an important resource for this group. She can help you with putting together your tangrams" (or whatever skill or ability you are discussing with respect to the task).

Assigning competence is a sophisticated strategy and not easy to carry out. It is not simple praise. It requires you to observe students in terms of performance on multiple abilities. It also requires you to analyze what they are doing so that your intervention is specific and so that you can make the ability relevant to the task. Many teachers find that it is useful to take notes while students are in their groups and present the assignments of competence the next day when they have had a chance to review and study their notes in peace and quiet. Assignments of competence can be combined in an orientation with feedback to the groups on yesterday's cooperation and performance. In any case, assignments of competence are always welcome.

The more frequently teachers use the multiple-ability treatment and assign competence, the higher the participation rate of low-status students in elementary classrooms (Cohen, 1988). In classrooms where teachers used these treatments more frequently, there was less difference between the participation of high and low-status students than in classrooms where teachers used these treatments less often. We found evidence that the combined use of these two status treatments was associated with higher rates of participation of low-status students and

had no effect on the participation of high status students. Analysis at the classroom level was associated with more equal-status interaction and thus with narrowing the participation gap among high status and low-status students in classrooms where teachers combined the use of these two strategies (Cohen & Lotan, 1995).

Thus, these combined strategies for treating status problems are critical for equitable groupwork. They will increase the engagement and participation of low-status students. They will improve expectations for competence in a way that will transfer to new and different group tasks. There is no reason, however, to expect newly acquired favorable expectations for competence to transfer to reading and math lessons conducted in a traditional fashion. If you use ability groups and if these lessons use only a narrow range of skills, you can quickly reconstruct a status order. If you stress competitive marking and grading as the major form of feedback for students, you will also aggravate status problems.

With some changes in tasks and assessment practices and with proper treatment of status problems, you can create a more equitable classroom. Such a classroom has many dimensions of intellectual competence. No one student is likely to be rated highly on all these dimensions. Each individual is likely to be rated highly on at least one dimension. Thus, there are no students who are generally expected to be superior regardless of the nature of the task. Students' competence will be evaluated by the abilities they demonstrate rather than based on demographics and background characteristics such as gender, race, native language, socioeconomic status, or cultural heritage.

To create an equitable classroom, use more groupworthy tasks featuring higher-order thinking and integrating basic skills. Students can be temporarily grouped for instruction for specific basic skills with which they are struggling. As long as students see mathematics, reading, and other subject areas as requiring a variety of skills and abilities, you can avoid reconstructing a status order. These changes enable you to teach at a high intellectual level despite a range in traditional academic skills. Furthermore, the gap in various achievement measures will narrow as more students gain access to challenging curricula and equal-status participation, and will have increased opportunities to demonstrate intellectual competence.



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