

20-May-2011

Dear Ms. Calarco:

The reviews are in on your manuscript "'I Need Help!' Social Class and Children's Help-Seeking in Elementary School" and it is time for us to make a decision. Based on the reviewers' comments and our own reading of the manuscript, our decision is to conditionally accept the paper for publication in *American Sociological Review* (ASR).

This decision reflects both the obvious improvements in the manuscript since the prior draft and an awareness that significant work remains yet to be done. We want to be clear that this acceptance is conditional and that there remains a significant amount of work yet to be done in preparing the manuscript for what we hope will be eventual publication. We cannot move forward until a number of issues have been more adequately addressed and are willing to work with you through multiple iterations, if need be.

The reviewers have done an excellent job of highlighting areas where the manuscript can be and needs to be tightened. We encourage you to take time to digest the reviews and to address each of the suggestions the reviewers make, either in your revisions or in an accompanying letter. Below we highlight some overlapping reviewer comments that, in our view, are especially central to the revision.

The most fundamental issues concern the reporting of your data and results, and a literature review and discussion section that are not as sharp as they could be. ASR seeks to publish the very best papers that will have the highest impact on the field and we think your manuscript could be among these. To fulfill this potential, however, we ask you to incorporate the comments of Reviewer B into the analysis and use the comments by Reviewers C and D to nuance and strengthen the text in the literature review and discussion sections.

At the risk of being redundant, please note that it is our goal that all ASR manuscripts be accessible to as much of the potential readership as possible – the vast majority of those with sociology PhDs from research universities should be able to understand why the issue is important, what the argument is, and what the findings are. These goals are achieved in the abstract, introduction, and conclusions but also have implications for writing throughout the manuscript. For example, all disciplinary jargon should be translated into ordinary English so that readers outside the discipline can understand and benefit from your article. Please be mindful of the manuscript's length when making revisions. Any additions should be significantly offset by tightening the prose elsewhere and the next draft should be no longer than the current one.

Finally, to encourage replication and validation of published research, consider adding a footnote offering access to the data, coding syntax, statistical commands, or selected narrative materials. Such supplemental materials might, for example, be posted on your own website. Alternatively ASR will consider posting them on its "Supplemental Materials" website.

To revise your manuscript, log into <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/asr> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

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IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

Submission of the manuscript to another professional journal while it is under review by ASR is regarded by the American Sociological Association (ASA) as unethical, and significant findings or contributions that have already appeared (or will appear) elsewhere must be clearly identified. All persons who publish in ASA journals are required to abide by these ASA guidelines and ethics codes. We thus assume that this manuscript or a substantially similar version of it is not under review elsewhere and that portions have not been published elsewhere in whole or in part. Please let us know if either of these conditions is not true.

Again, we appreciate improvements made in your manuscript since the prior draft. We look forward to seeing the next draft. Once we see the next draft we will make a decision on whether to review it in-house (editors and deputy editors) or to again seek external reviewers. We are excited about the prospects for this manuscript and feel it has the potential to make a significant contribution to field.

Sincerely,

Tony N. Brown, Katharine M. Donato, Larry W. Isaac, Holly J. McCammon
Editors, American Sociological Review
ASR@vanderbilt.edu

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author

I was one of the reviewers for the first version of this article and I expressed concerns about the quality of the data being presented; I also expressed some concern about drawing conclusions from this particular sample (where the working class children were a distinct minority). I am pleased to say that in this new rendition of the paper, both of these concerns (and especially the first) have been adequately addressed.

The new paper, "Title," makes smaller claims than did the original. Rather than tackling the broad issue of "social reproduction," the paper now focuses on how children activate their cultural capital in the classroom. And the paper adequately demonstrates the class differences that it claims with excellent evidence of class-based differences in choosing when to seek help and choosing how to seek help. The addition of multiple examples of behaviors, a numerical count of frequency of behaviors, and clarification about the context for behaviors (so that the comparisons were, indeed, comparable), the author has adequately addressed questions of subjectivity and other concerns about the evidence in the paper.

The issue of whether the working-class children act the way they do because they are a distinct minority is indirectly addressed as well. The author claims that the working-class children were treated well by the teachers and had middle-class friends. The question of whether their behaviors would be different in a different setting is an empirical question that can be left to future research.

Of course, mine were not the only concerns at stake in this "revise and resubmit." As the author recast this paper s/he addressed other concerns and, in so doing, has produced a far superior manuscript. The paper now engages a broader body of relevant literature and, while clarifying its own goals, broadens the discussion to consider consequences while advancing new theoretical claims.

In short, the revised manuscript has met – and it might well appear even exceeded – the expectations of those who suggested that it be reconsidered after extensive revision.

Even so, I have one remaining conceptual issue that should be addressed. Throughout the manuscript the author refers to "cultural resources" and suggests (see page 32) that working class children and middle class children have different "cultural resources" In this the author appears to be following Bourdieu and others who say that different classes have different cultural capital (and it is the cultural capital of the middle class that is valued). But the author really never says what resources the working class children have. (Could we say that they have patience? A tolerance for frustration? Anything?) In the absence of a statement about what the working-class children do have, they appear simply to have less of the cultural resource (assertive help-seeking behavior) than the middle-class children have. But, alternatively, is the author saying that both working class kids and middle class kids have similar cultural resources but the middle class kids activate those resources? And if this is what is being said, then the author might suggest when (on the playground? In their homes?) working class kids activate the same (or different) resources of their own.

I have a few minor issues:

Page 3: I think that the author too quickly argues that "Most [scholars] also agree that these inequalities arise from cultural differences between social classes in society." In so doing, the author overlooks the vast evidence that different social classes attend different quality schools. This should be corrected. Moreover, in the next paragraph the author argues that there are "competing views on the processes by which class impacts children's outcomes." Which is it – broad agreement or diverse opinions?

Page 6: the use of "constitute" in quotes (deriving from Mehan) should be explained.

Page 8: Doctor and registered nurse are quite different social statuses; don't conflate them with a slash

Page 16: The author talks a lot about the interactions of Ricky, Ameilia and Kyle. All of this seems irrelevant to the point and could easily be cut.

Page 23: I don't think that the teachers characterized the middle class children only as being "lazy." Crybabies and Lazy are not quite the same thing.

Page 29: I think it is important to recognize that Rist's evidence was not about middle-class versus working-class but among considerably less privileged children; the children placed at Table 3 in kindergarten has parents on welfare.

My remaining comment might be read as a conversation with the author rather than something that must be addressed in this manuscript. Engagement with this issue would be fascinating. That is, how is the statement about cultural resources any different from the culture of poverty stance of thirty years ago? Is the author "blaming" the children and their families for school failure -- since the "blame" is certainly not on the school or the teachers. And what social changes might bring about greater class equality in educational achievement?

Reviewer: 4

Comments to the Author

Comments to Author:

This paper is an innovative and critical analysis of the role that children play in the activation and strategic utilization of cultural capital. Its questions and theoretical potential are vast for many sociological subfields including sociology of education, sociology of childhood, and social class analyses. The author's results demonstrate the initiation of a research topic that is yet to be thoroughly explored and suggest interesting patterns of class-stratified interactions as early as elementary school. Additionally, this manuscript takes steps toward acknowledging children's agency and voice in their daily lives, an increasingly important development in sociology. The author has clearly responded to most of the reviewers' critiques. However, I have some continuing concerns stemming from the reporting of results and the discussion and conclusion sections. (Page numbers below refer to page numbers on the top of each page).

First, I have remaining concerns regarding the types and extent of interactions that are documented in the piece. These concerns could be addressed by providing additional information regarding how the observations took place and the extent of other forms of interactions in the classroom.

1. While the author engages the "classroom misbehavior" literature occasionally (most in depth on page 30), I think this is a link that needs to be further explored. Working class children, if indeed acting out Lareau's theory, hesitate to question the authority of an institutional agent. Calling out or interrupting any classroom activity seems to also fall under this category. Could the working class children be hesitant because they don't want to break the rules and have not been able to discern when breaking the rules (e.g., interrupting, leaving one's seat) is appropriate and inappropriate? This conclusion would actually strengthen the author's overall conclusion regarding class differences in classroom behaviors but it does need further explanation as a possible reason why working class children are so hesitant to approach a teacher. In other words, it is important to explicitly detail how often middle class children were violating specific rules of the classroom to get help, particularly as interruptions play an important part in the analysis of the data.

2. Unless I misunderstood, the count data in Table 1 is not from the same classrooms and time period that the observational data reported in the text. Does the author have access to count data from these same time/class periods? Additionally, regarding the point above about misbehavior, it would be useful to see count data about class differences in how often teachers were interrupted by students or what

other types of interactions took place and how often. How often are children seeking help? What is the context in which this most often occurs? The author was careful to restructure most of the examples to be comparable across situational context but this prompts the question of in which contexts do children seek help and how does it differ across social class? This may be beyond the scope of the paper but it would be helpful if the author detailed how she selected the particular contexts that she detailed in the text.

3. Regarding methodology, I think by providing even more information about the observation and note-taking methodology, the author could counter many claims from researchers questioning if the research merely confirms an assumption of the author's part. For instance, is it possible to detail in a table how many observation sessions took place in each classroom over the course of the two year time period? How many total student-teacher interactions did the author observe? What percentage of these were help-seeking behaviors? This could also lend evidence to the author's claim that help-seeking behaviors aid achievement (see below). Perhaps if they are taking up more instructional time than other behaviors or are the only type of behavior in which working class and middle class children differ observationally, this has stronger ramifications for achievement. Additionally, the author mentions that working class students often volunteer, help out teachers, and show their work (pg 29). It would substantiate the argument of the paper to see a table showing that these behaviors did not differ across social class but help seeking behaviors did differ (what Table 1 currently shows).

Second, the punchline of the paper seems underdeveloped. These findings, the focus on children as agents, and the nature of the data develop theory in a relevant and critically needed way. The place to really push this at the reader is in the discussion and conclusion section but this section feels tenuous at times, particularly when responding to the reviewers' previous comments.

1. The link to the sociology of childhood needs amplification particularly engaging how students might perceive their environments and respond accordingly. If the author is going to engage the idea of agency like a previous reviewer suggests (and I agree, this is necessary to the argument), the discussion needs to be more in depth and explanatory of why and how children make decisions to act. The author explains that she had a close connection with many of the working class children. Perhaps these connections could lend insight into the decision making process. This could substantiate the claims in this paper, giving depth to the observations since breadth is difficult with such a small sample size. What mental process do the children go through when seeking help? How do we know they are enacting cultural capital? Perhaps this data cannot explicitly answer this question (does the author have field notes on her interactions with the children themselves?). If so, then the discussion and conclusion section could detail how this could be done in the future. It is important not just to nod to children's agency but also to explain the interactional process behind how children decide to act as well. If this is beyond the scope of the current study, future studies could aim at understanding how children decide to seek help or not. The author should explicitly detail how a research question that centers on children's agency is analyzed using only teacher-child observations and not direct information from the children themselves (I'm not saying this can't be done but it may be a point of contention with sociologists who study and advocate for giving children voice).

2. The paragraph discussing dimensions of difference that could account for part of the observed class differences in help seeking behavior still falls short of satisfying readers that are all too aware of the many categories of difference that children experience while in school. The argument for class differences is significant and important so this section needs to be as rigorous as possible. Could the author supplement this section with another table documenting gendered patterns of help-seeking

behavior or perhaps help-seeking behavior across high and low achieving students? I worry that readers need more than one or two sentences that help-seeking behaviors across other characteristics were insignificant, particularly with such a small sample of working class children. The more the author can do to answer this question before it happens, the better.

3. Similarly, the author briefly explains why an environment like Maplewood may be the least likely to exhibit these class-based patterns of behavior but falls short of developing this explanation to the fullest by engaging the available literature about the context of class and race segregated schools. The author needs to further support a statement like “if there was any setting in which working-class students would actively seek help from teachers, it would be a school like Maplewood.” Generalizing from the experience at Maplewood to all middle-class dominated schools seems dangerous without citing other literature that suggests the same pattern.

4. One strength of this study is that it has significant implications for how institutional agents perceive students later in their educational careers. This is the point that the author should focus on the most in terms of implications for the future (pg 31 and ff). The discussion about achievement is still puzzling because of the documented quantitative evidence regarding the summer learning gap. I don't think footnote 19 suffices to make a counterargument against the closing achievement gap during the school year (Condron 2009, Entwisle et al 1997). If indeed the author is going to make this counter-claim, it needs to be strengthened and further developed. However, it's unclear what the author means by “absolute scores remain lower.” This should be explained further and probably should be moved to the text as readers of ASR will be familiar with the seasonal learning literature. However, I don't think the paper loses any power if this discussion about achievement is removed and the author focuses on how these behaviors lead to alternative perceptions by institutional agents. This has large ramifications for middle and high school including course taking, college counseling, development of social capital, etc. By building up this argument and either eliminating or substantially strengthening the argument against the summer learning gap, the implications for this research are strengthened.

Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author

The author has done an excellent job of responding to the criticisms of the previous version of the paper. Of particular note are the following:

1. The introduction is now much more compelling. Ambiguities noted by the reviewers have been addressed by identifying the issues and concerns more sharply. Additional references have been included not just to catalogue related studies, but to support the author's argument and to distinguish it to past research. The role of children in fomenting their own class reproduction is no longer assumed, but is posed as the central question for the paper.

2. The table is a remarkable addition to the paper. Each of the reviewers raised questions about the systematicity of the findings (though some gave this criticism more weight than others). In my judgment the table fully answers this concern.

3. Alternative explanations are discussed briefly but I find the discussion satisfactory.

Although I think the paper now offers a strong contribution, it could still be improved in a few ways:

a. The importance of Willis as a precursor to this paper is still underappreciated. Although Willis (and MacRobbie) studied adolescents and this paper focuses on young children, the fundamental argument was the same: children create the conditions of their own reproduction. The author might elaborate the distinction by noting that these authors focused on active resistance while this paper focuses on differential engagement (or help-seeking).

b. P.3, first paragraph under "Stratification of Opportunities..." -- the author seems to be saying that inequalities arise ONLY from cultural differences, whereas I assume s/he would agree they arise from cultural as well as material differences across social classes. The issue carries forward into the next paragraph as well.

c. The discussion of Rist on p.5 is a bit too thin to support the interesting comparison on p.29. The latter would be set up better if the former were elaborated a bit.

Reviewer: 5

Comments to the Author

I found the paper to be compelling and significant. Its emphasis on how children put cultural capital to work in classrooms is an important intervention into the work on class and educational processes/outcomes. It substantially fills out some of the existing literature about middle-class entitlement providing an answer to what that looks like in the daily life of schools and how it might translate into different school outcomes. While I have some suggestions for consideration, none will require major rethinking or revising.

1. The paper might at least make an attempt at the end to address how these kinds of stratifying forces might be countermanded in schools. For example, paper states that "Because teachers responded in this way, middle-class students also received more assistance, clarification, information, and checking than did their working-class peers." It strikes me that the teachers role here is to think about how they might be rewarding class differences...It might well be that middle-class children's help-seeking make teachers better at their jobs by asking for the clarification that should be provided to all. Teachers can generalize that info to all by, for example, providing information collectively rather than individually so doesn't become stratifying mechanism.

2. Just because the study is only of white children doesn't mean that race isn't at work here. If kids were all black or all Latino we'd still have to talk about. For example, p. 32 – the paper suggests that class didn't shape teachers treatment of students. Is there evidence that teachers knew all kids class status? Status construction theory suggests it would matter if they did — is there some wages of whiteness here where presume whiteness leads to presumptions of middle-classness?? Lewis talks about this as symbolic capital of race (Lewis 2003 – Race in the Schoolyard)

3. I think the work on race and cultural capital does a better job of incorporating agency here—I think here, for example, of Prudence Carter's work on students strategic work to deal with schools' institutional expectations of how they will engage as students. Would likely help to at least reference some of this work. Race is so often

4. I found the following bolded statement confusing -- "Because teachers controlled assignments, requests for clarification and checking helped middleclass students to complete their work more quickly and correctly."

5. Great nuance in highlighting not only how class background shaped decisions about when to seek help but also how. Come back to this again at the end.

6. Edit carefully for redundancy – in the findings section a few times same point was repeated several times in only slightly different language

7. I wasn't totally convinced about the "dark side" or drawbacks of middle-class students assertiveness. Yes, might be annoying to teachers eventually but only after getting lots of assistance.