

Social class makes a difference in how children tackle classroom problems

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Jessica McCrory Calarco, Indiana University. Credit: Indiana University

An Indiana University study has found that social class can account for differences in how parents coach their children to manage classroom challenges. Such differences can affect a child's education by reproducing inequalities in the classroom.

"Parents have different beliefs on how to deal with challenges in the

classroom," said Jessica McCrory Calarco, assistant professor in IU Bloomington's Department of Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences. "Middle-class [parents](#) tell their children to reach out to the teacher and ask questions. Working-class parents see asking for help as disrespectful to teachers, so they teach their children to work out problems themselves."

Calarco studied four classrooms in a public school from their time in third grade through fifth grade. To isolate [differences](#) based on [social class](#) alone, she only collected interviews from Caucasian students and families, in addition to their teachers.

In general, middle-class children get more attention from their instructors because they actively seek it, while working-class children tend to stay silent through any of their educational struggles so as not to be a bother. Calarco said the differences in how parents teach their children to deal with problems in school stem primarily from parents' level of involvement in their [children's](#) schooling.

"Middle-class parents are more plugged into the school, so they know what teachers expect in the classroom. Working-class parents don't think it's their place to be involved, so they tend to be less aware of what [teachers](#) expect today," Calarco said.

With the widening gaps in educational outcomes between social classes, Calarco suggested that this study could help schools become more aware of these differences and make moves to reduce the inequalities.

"Schools can step in to alleviate these differences in kids' willingness to seek help," Calarco said. "Teachers need to be aware of social class differences that students are bringing with them into the [classroom](#). They need to be more active in seeking out struggling students, because if we leave it up to the kids, they may not seek it themselves."

More information: Calarco's study, "Coached for the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities" will be published in the October issue of the *American Sociological Review*.

Provided by Indiana University

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