

A study by Indiana University sociologist Jessica McCrory Calarco found that working-class and middle-class parents often take very deliberate – but different – approaches to helping their children with their school experiences. Working-class parents, she found, coached their children on how to avoid problems, often through finding a solution on their own and by being polite and deferential to authority figures. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, were more likely to encourage their kids to ask questions or ask for help. These self-advocacy skills taught by middle-class parents not only can help the children in school – because these parents know that in educational settings teachers often expect and reward such behavior – but they could help later in life in other institutional settings. “Youth who do not learn to advocate for themselves might have more difficulty interacting with social service providers, financial service providers, legal authorities and other bureaucratic institutions,” said Calarco, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology in IU’s College of Arts and Sciences. Calarco discussed her research on August 19 during the American Sociological Association’s annual meeting in Denver, Colorado. Her study focuses on the interaction between parents, children and teachers during the students’ fourth- and fifth-grade years at a public elementary school. Her school observations took