The association between student social origin and school achievement is a well-established finding. Theoretical approaches emphasize different mechanisms but have a common core: Social origin determines family resources and parents’ use of these resources in childrearing resulting in social inequality in academic achievement. Commonly, the literature addresses the impact of four family resources: Parent’s economic, cultural, social and educational resources. Even though it acknowledges that various family resources operate simultaneously, it does not consider equivalent operationalisations of all resources and may overestimate the effects of measured resources while underestimating the full scope of the social origin effect. This paper wants to address this gap providing a theoretically guided approach to unpack and fully capture social origin effects on academic achievement: We simultaneously consider parental class to measure family’s economic situation, parental education to represent educational resources and a ‘Weberian’ social status-measure to identify the effect of sociocultural resources in terms of cultural tastes, activities and beneficial networks.

We further propose that parental occupation has an additional impact on students’ achievement net of economic, cultural, social and educational resources because parents transmit different occupation-specific knowledge, skills, affinity and attitudes, which are more or less valuable for attainment in school, to their children through every-day interactions. Therefore, we advance a measure that takes into account parent’s occupational resources. This measure is based on a regrouping of SOC1980 according to occupational skill requirement.

Preliminary analyses with the National Child Development Study (NCDS) show that sociocultural, educational and economic resources have independent effects on reading and math test scores at age 11. The full social origin effect is smaller on math than on reading scores. Parents’ occupational resources have an additional effect only on reading scores, revealing that teacher children score by far the highest. Analyses of examination results at age 16 detect the same remarkable net effect for teacher children. These findings support our assumption that social origin affects school achievement via an additional channel, namely via specific skills and knowledge that parents acquire through their occupation.