

**Grace S.E. Chng** (Research School “Education and Capabilities”)  
Stennerstr. 21, App 005  
Bielefeld 33613  
grace.sechng@googlemail.com

## **An empirical study on the effects of Parenting and Socioeconomic Status on Argumentative Competence and Epistemological Understanding in children**

The present study extends previous research concerning inequalities by analyzing them in the framework of the Capabilities Approach. According to this perspective, reasoning and evaluative capabilities are seen as essential preconditions for the construction of one’s concept of a ‘good life’. Based on this idea, the study has two main research goals. First, we examine the effects of SES on the epistemological understanding and argumentative competence in 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Second, we investigate whether parenting styles mediate the effect of SES and/or contributes to the explanation of variance in students’ understanding and competence.

Argumentation skills are relevant in and out of school context, as students often encounter positions that need to be developed, defended or evaluated. In their everyday lives, children have to interpret informal situations critically in order to make appropriate judgments and decisions. Argumentative competence can be enhanced or constrained by epistemological understanding, as defined by one’s understanding about the nature of knowledge and knowing. In fact, to be able to produce and evaluate arguments is highly linked to one’s beliefs about the nature, source, justification, validation and appropriation of knowledge. Therefore, naïve epistemological beliefs as well as low argumentative competences consequently lead to children being disadvantaged in their educational and social chances in life.

Child and family researchers have long recognized the important contribution of parenting to child development. A rich empirical history has demonstrated how various parenting attitudes and practices influence child behavior and the development of either prosocial competencies or psychosocial maladjustment. Evidence also has indicated that there are consistent differences in parenting styles and behaviors associated with the socioeconomic status (SES) of families. Using Baumrind’s typology of parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian or permissive; 1971), it was found that higher SES parents are more like to display an authoritative parenting style, i.e. they are responsive to the needs of their children, and foster demands through bidirectional communication and the encouragement of independence. In contrast, parents of lower SES have been found to adopt an authoritarian style of parenting where they are strict, expect obedience and assert power when their children misbehave. Based on past findings, it is hypothesized that differences in parenting result in different trajectories of students’ epistemological understanding and argumentative competence.

Furthermore, we propose that parenting styles may mediate the effect of SES on understanding and competence.

In order to examine the contribution of parenting styles and SES on the development of epistemological understanding and verbal argumentative competence in children, approximately 700 5<sup>th</sup> graders visiting the lowest (Hauptschule) or the highest track (Gymnasium) of the German educational system will be investigated. Parenting styles and epistemological understanding will be measured by self-administered questionnaires (e.g. Parental Authority Questionnaire, Buri, 1991; and Epistemological Understanding Questionnaire, Kuhn, Cheney & Weinstock, 2000) the target children will receive and complete within the classroom context. To assess argumentative competences, vignettes will be given describing a child that is confronted with a problem. The target child will be asked to verbally argue for his point of view. A coding framework (Felton & Kuhn, 2001) will then be used to assess the quality of argument.

#### References

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