

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development

EDUC 874
The Achievement Gap
Fall, 2010
Monday, 4:30 – 7:10, East 121

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Office hours: M/T/Th 2:30 – 4 and by appointment

Prerequisite: None

Course Description and Relationship to Program Goals: A doctoral seminar in which students will research and analyze the gaps in student achievement related and the practices being tested to close the gap.

Course Objectives

The learner will:

- Develop an understanding of the achievement gap in schools today including, its causes, its effects, its solutions, and the implications for policy formation;
- Deconstruct and explore in detail one aspect of the achievement gap, e.g. poverty, race, gender, teacher quality, student assessment practices, etc.;
- Explore “gap-generated” school reform models for their promise and for the barriers that need to be addressed;
- Prepare an in-depth analysis of one aspect of the gap related to her/his local setting.

Required Readings

Achieve. (2008). *Closing the expectations gap*. Washington, DC: Author.

Chenoweth, K. (2009). *How it's being done*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Cohen, G., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., and Master, A. (2006). Reducing the racial achievement gap: A social-psychological intervention. *Science*, 313, pp. 1307-1310.

Coleman, J. (1987). Families and schools. *Educational Researcher*, 16,(6) 32-38.

Ferguson, R. (2007). *Toward excellence with equity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Noguera, P. & Wing, J. (2007). *Unfinished business*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schecter, S., & Sherri, D. (2009). Value Added?: Teachers' Investments in and Orientations Toward Parent Involvement in Education. *Urban Education*, 44(1), 59-87.

Suggested Readings (and many more on blackboard “course content” and “weblinks”)

- Barton, P. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.
- Borman, G., Hewes, C., Overman, L., Brown, S. (2003). *Comprehensive school reform and student achievement*. Baltimore: CRESPAR.
- Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It's being done*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Christensen, C., Horn, M., Johnson, C. (2008). *Disrupting class*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Education Commission of the States. (August, 2003). *Research sheds new light on Hispanic-White achievement gap*. Denver: Author.
- Education Trust. (2005). *Stalled in secondary*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Gamoran, A. (ed.) (2007). *Standards-based reform and the poverty gap: Lessons for No Child Left Behind*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Jencks, C. & Philips, M. (1998). *The black-white test score gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Loveless, T. & Chubb, J. (2002). *Bridging the achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Perry, T., Steele, C. & Hilliard, A. (2004). *Young, gifted, and black*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Programme for International Student Assessment. (2005). *Learning for tomorrow's world*. Paris, FR: Organization for Economic and Co-operation and Development.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Thernstrom, A. & Thernstrom, S. (2004). *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

Recommended Text:

Publication of the American Psychological Association. 6th ed. (2009).

Additional readings posted on <https://gmu.blackboard.com>

Additional Online Resources

The Center for Education Policy. <http://www.cep-dc.org> ; The Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center helps Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. It does not represent any special interest groups.

Childstats. <http://childstats.gov>; The website of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/> ; The Harvard Family Research Project is a very good source for information about “out of school” time and issues related to students and their families.

Kids Count. <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount> ; A report on the condition of children in the US from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov> . This website is the home of the nation’s report card. Most statistics on the condition of education can be found at NCES.

TQSource. <http://www.tqsource.org>; A service of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) intended to track changes in state regulations concerning teacher quality.

Learning Point Associates. <http://www.learningpt.org>; Formerly the North Central Region Educational Laboratory, this is another very good site for school reform.

Many others are posted on blackboard for your perusal and information.

Supplies

Computer with Internet access and current GMU email account.

CEHD Course Expectations

The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) expects that all students abide by the following:

- **Professional Dispositions:** Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/teacher/professional-disposition>
- **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory, as the discussions that take place in this class are essential to achieving the course objectives.
- **Tardiness:** Prompt arrival for the beginning of class is expected.
- **Participation:** Each student is expected to complete all the assigned readings and participate in the discussions. It is expected that each student will be attuned to group dynamics in order to ensure the active participation of all in the class.
- **Absence:** If you must miss a class, you are responsible for notifying me (preferably in advance) and for completing any assignments, readings, etc. before the start of the next class.
- **Assignments:** All assignments must be completed in MSWord and sent to me as an attachment via email prior to class on the date each is due. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.
- **University Honor Code:** Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/> for the full honor code.

- **Students with disabilities** who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/student/drc or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.
- **Computing Use:** Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See: http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=1045#resp_use_comp_poli

Course Delivery

This course is a doctoral seminar, and my teaching style revolves around the concept of “learning via conversation.” As such it is expected that you will read in advance of class and continue to try to find the bigger picture as you learn to sort through the findings of one study to the next. In addition to classroom attendance and participation, I expect you to participate fully in whole class and small group discussions, group, pair, and individual projects, internet research, analyses of case studies, and reflections on practice. I will use GMU’s web-accessible Blackboard course (<https://courses.gmu.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct>) framework throughout the course; many of the examples are posted there for you to read in advance of our discussions.

Assignment: Due date: December 13.

There is only one assignment and that is to prepare a 15-20 page paper on one dimension of the achievement gap that is found in your own school or (if you’re not working in a school) that is an area of interest for you and to explore:

- 1) the nature of that dimension e.g. LEP, inequitable access to knowledge, etc.;
- 2) how it contributes to the gap with data to support your case, e.g. performance of LEP students;
- 3) the policy debate surrounding it (what policies and practices have tried to help close this gap?); and
- 4) a discussion of promising practices that might close this dimension of the gap with a selective literature review of research and evaluation studies as supporting evidence.

No later than **November 8**, please send me an email with a one-paragraph description of your topic and with an abbreviated reference list (no more than a page. This is just to I can find ways to assist you.)

All assignments must be completed in MSWord and sent to me as an attachment via regular email prior to class. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.

Evaluation and Grading

3 = highly accomplished (letter grade = A). The paper clearly delineates the nature of the area that the literature suggests “causes” the achievement gap. The discussion includes research studies in which the data clearly indicate the gap. The student also presents a deep discussion of the policies enacted that are intended to alter practice to close the gap, and lastly, there is a solid presentation and critique of the promising practices designed to close the gap and a judgment of their strengths and weaknesses.

2 = adequate (letter grade = B). The paper describes the nature of the area as a “cause.” The student includes a general and abstract discussion of the research literature to date and identifies some policies enacted to close the gap, and lastly there is some discussion of the promising practices that is more perspective than critique.

1 = needs rewriting (letter grade = C). The literature and reads more like a “thought” paper than an analysis of the research literature, the policies enacted, and the effects of those promising practices to date.

Tentative Schedule

August

Topic

30
Introduction to the course
What causes the gaps? What is the best evidence?
Why are so many people poor? Why are so many kids underperforming?
Read Chenoweth, pp. v-40

September

6
Labor Day: No Class

13
The Black-White Test Score Gap
Read Coleman’s *Families and Schools* on blackboard (Course content)
Read A Broader, Bolder Approach
http://www.boldapproach.org/bold_approach_full_statement.pdf
Read the Executive Summary of the IES study of achievement gaps
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf>

20
The Black-White Test Score Gap
Read Ferguson, pp. 1-78
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. ix-28

27
Structured Inequality?
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 29-86
Read Ferguson, pp. 79-116
Read Chenoweth, pp. 93-108

October

4
Structured Inequality?
Read Ferguson, pp. 117-148
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 87-120
Read Chenoweth, pp. 41-51
Read “Two Guys and a Dream” on blackboard (Course content)

12 (note change)
Race? Poverty? Yes? No?
Read Ferguson, pp. 149-202
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 121-150
Read Chenoweth, pp. 141-160
Read Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master on blackboard (Web links)

- 18 Your initial perspectives
Presentation of your theories
- 25 Suburban gaps
Read Ferguson, pp. 203-236
Read Chenoweth, pp. 161-175
Read Welsh (2009) on blackboard (Course Content: “Parents”)

November

- 1 Maybe it’s the teachers
Read Ferguson, pp. 237-255
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 153-200
Read Welsh (2010) on blackboard (Course content: “Low-achieving”)
Read TFA and Teachers’ Expectations on blackboard (Course content)
- 8 An Expectations Gap?
Read “Expectations Gap” on blackboard web link (or
<http://www.achieve.org/files/50-state-2009.pdf>)
Read Pygmalion Effect on blackboard (Course content)
Read Chenoweth, pp. 53-76
Due Today: Final Paper Topic
- 15 Ready schools to be different
Read “An interview with Geoffrey Canada” on blackboard (Web links)
Read “David Brooks...” on blackboard (Course content)
Read Chenoweth, pp. 123-139
- 22 Technology as a gap closer
Read “Disrupting Class” on blackboard (Web links)
Read Chenoweth, pp. 77-92
- 29 Parents and the demand for change
Read Ferguson, pp. 255-282
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 201-246
Read Schecter and Sherri on blackboard (Course content)
Read “The Parent Gap” on blackboard (Web links)

December

- 6 New Structures
Read Noguera and Wing, pp. 247-280
Read Chenoweth, pp. 109-122
- 13 Conclusions from our authors and from you
Ferguson, pp. 283-304
Noguera and Wing, pp. 281-304
Chenoweth, pp. 177-206
Final Paper Due