The Achievement Gap

Prerequisite: None

Course Description and Relationship to Program Goals: Focuses on achievement gap in schools. Students research and analyze gaps in student achievement related to race and ethnicity, limited English proficiency, family background, gender, poverty, and ableism, and practices designed 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


Brunner, H. (2013, January 29) Equal internet access is a K-12 must-have. Education Week, 32(19), 24-25


Sparks, S. (2013, July 29). Drop out indicators found for 1st graders. *Education Week, 32*(22), 37.


Theoharis, G. (2010). Disrupting injustice: Principals narrate the strategies they use to improve their schools and advance social justice. *Teachers College Record, 112*, 331-373


Yatvin, J. (2009, October 23). Rediscovering the 'Pygmalion Effect'. Education Week, 29(9), 24-25.


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


**Recommended Text:** Publication of the American Psychological Association. 6th ed. (2009).

Additional readings posted on [https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp](https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp)

**Additional Online Resources**
The Center for Education Policy. [http://www.cep-dc.org](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.


National Center for Education Statistics. [http://nces.ed.gov](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.

REL Midwest: http://www.relmidwest.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:

- **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. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me.

- **Honor Code**: Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/].

- **Exceptional Needs**: Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See http://ods.gmu.edu/].

- **Computing**: Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor. Cell phones, pagers, and other communicative devices are not allowed in this class. Please keep them stowed away and out of sight. Laptops or tablets (e.g. iPads) are permitted for the purpose of taking notes only. Engaging in activities not related to the course (e.g. gaming, email, chat, etc.) will result in a significant reduction in your participation grade.

- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/].

- **Email**: Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check
it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.

- **Dispositions**: Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

- **Core Values Commitment**: The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles. http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/

**Campus Resources**

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance [See http://caps.gmu.edu/].

- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/].

- For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See http://gse.gmu.edu/].

**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://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp) framework throughout the course; many of the examples are posted there for you to read in advance of our discussions.

**Assignment (Due date: December 11)**

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?);
4) a discussion of promising practices that might close this dimension of the gap with supporting evidence from research and evaluation studies.
Since this is a doctoral class, your entire grade rests on this paper. By no later than October 16, please provide me 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

28

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 Cookson on blackboard (course content)
Read “10 Ways School Reformers Get it Wrong” (course content)
Read “Demographic Change Amplifies…” (course content)

September

4

The Challenge
Read “The Writing on the Hall” (weblinks)
Read “Kid’s Count 2014” (course content)

11

Race? Poverty? Yes? No?
Read “The Income Gap” (course content)
Read “The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped” (cc)
Read “Education for Life and Work” (course content)
Race? Poverty? Yes? No?
Read “Families and Schools” on blackboard (course content)
Read “The Widening Achievement Gap between Rich and Poor” (cc)
Read “The Excellence Gap” (course content)
Read “Falling out of the lead” (course content)
Read: “Race for Results:” (course content)

Structured Inequality? Structuring Equality?
Read “Two Lives Diverged” on blackboard course content
Read “A Broader, Bolder Approach”
http://www.boldapproach.org/bold_approach_full_statement.pdf (weblink)
Read “Two Guys and a Dream” on blackboard (Course content)
Read “KIPP Middle Schools: Impact…” Executive Summary (Course content)

October

It’s the Parent’s(s’) fault!
Read Schecter and Sher on blackboard (course content)
Read “The Parent Gap” (weblinks)
Read “Invisible Inequality” (course content)
Read “Parental Involvement, Cultural Capital and the Achievement Gap” (cc)
Read “Family and School Social Capital” (course content)
Read “Bronx Partnership…” (course content)
Read New Hope Project
(http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=269 )

Thoughts on Overcoming Race and Poverty
Read “Reducing Stereotype Threat…” (course content)
Read Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master on blackboard (cc)
Read “Poverty and Potential” (course content)
Read “Parenting Practices, Teenage Lifestyles…” (course content)
Read “The Word Gap” (weblinks)
Read “Brookings: Improve Children’s Life Chances” (course content)

Maybe it’s the kids
Read “Dropping out of High School…” (course content)
Read “Drop out indicators…” (course content)
Read “Fordham and Ogbu” (course content)
Read “Early Warning Systems” fact sheet (course content)
Read “Upending Stereotypes” (course content)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H14bBuluwB8

Due no later than today: Final Paper Topic
Maybe it’s the teachers
Read “The Problem with Problem Teachers” (weblinks)
Read Welsh (2009) on blackboard (course content: “Parents”)
Read “Examining Teachers’ Beliefs… (course content)
Read “Teacher Effects and the Achievement Gap” (course content)
Read “Four Personae of Racism…” (course content)

Maybe it’s the teachers
Read Welsh (2010) on blackboard (course content: “Low-achieving”)
Read TFA and Teachers’ Expectations on blackboard (course content)
Read “The Irreplaceables” (Course content)
Read “Opportunity at the Top…” (weblink)
Read “Teachers Aren’t the Problem” (course content)
Read “How Mrs. Grady transformed Olly Neal” (course content)

November

6
An Expectations Gap?
Read “Pygmalion Effect” (course content)
Read “Expectations Gap” (weblink or course content)
Read “How Teachers and Schools Contribute to the Racial Differences in the Realization of Academic Potential” (on course content)

13
Technology as a gap closer
Read “Disrupting Class” on blackboard (course content)
Read “Are Personalized Learning…” (course content)
Read “An Issue with Technology as a Disruption” (course content)
Read “School of One Research Report” (course content)

20
Failure is not an option
Read “Failure is not an option” (course content)
Read “Expanding Learning Enriching Learning” (course content)
Read “100% in Kansas” (weblink)

27
No class: Thanksgiving

December

4
New Structures
Read “Disrupting Injustice” (course content)
Read “Small Schools = Good Results” (course content)
Read Fryer “Learning from Charters” (course content)
Opportunity by Design…(course content)
NAACP report (course content)
Conclusions from our authors and from you
Read “Is Expanded Learning Time an Idea whose Time has Come?” (cc)
Read “Learning gets Personal” (weblink)
Read “Let Kids Rule the School” (weblink)
Read Neuman & Celano “Tip the Scales” (course content)
Read Galluzzo (Course content)
Read “Excellent Teachers for Every Child” (course countent)
Read “Poverty and Education: The Way Forward” (course content)
Read “Why have we fallen short?” (course content)

*Final Paper Due*