EDUC 874
The Achievement Gap (3 credits)
Spring, 2016
Monday, 4:30 – 7:10, 324 Founders Hall
Arlington, VA

Instructor: Linda J. Mann, Ph.D.
Phone: 703.593.2754
Email: lmann4@gmu.edu
Office hours: by appointment
Meeting location: Arlington or Fairfax Campus

Prerequisite: None

EDUC 874. The Achievement Gap. In this class students consider “the achievement gap” as a popularized mainstream narrative in U.S. education research, policy, and practice. Grounded in research documenting the legacy of inequalities in America’s schools and the achievement gap’s conceptualization as a problem to be studied and solved, the course considers the historical roots and reproduction of school inequities by race, class, culture, ability, language, ableism, and other forms of difference. Students engage in cross-disciplinary research studies, perspectives, and frameworks to interrogate the historical, political, and structural dimensions of the achievement gap and what might be done to close it. Instructor: Dr. Linda Mann.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
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.

LEARNER OUTCOMES or OBJECTIVES:
This course is designed to enable students to:

- 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.
DELIVERY METHOD:
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.

REQUIRED TEXTS:


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


Butrymowicz, S. (2012, March 19). The little district that could: How one Kansas district keeps a


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


Welsh, P. (2010, March 21). At T.C. Williams High School, a 'low achieving' label is a wake-up

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. 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.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:**

**Assignment Due date: May 2, 2016.** 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 February 15 please provide me with a one-paragraph description of your topic as well as an abbreviated reference list. These submissions are mandatory and are a way for me to assist you in defining the dimension of the achievement gap you will explore.

**All assignments must be completed in MSWord and submitted to BB in the assignments page.** Paper must be formatted according to APA Publication Manual, 6th edition. Late assignments will not be accepted without making prior arrangements with me. See Assessment Rubrics for more detail. However, in general the following outlines the expectations of your final paper.

**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.

**TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:**
To participate in this course, students will need the following resources:
- High-speed Internet access with a standard up-to-date browser, either Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. Opera and Safari are not compatible with Blackboard;
- Consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of the course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for Pcs and Macs respectively, available for free downloading by clicking on the link next to each plug-in:

**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/ ].

• **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. [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/

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

**GMU RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS**

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

b. 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/].

c. 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/].

d. **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/].

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

PROFESSIONAL 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/.

PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE:

Tentative Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Introduction to the course&lt;br&gt;What causes the gaps? What is the best evidence?&lt;br&gt;Why are so many people poor? Why are so many kids underperforming?&lt;br&gt;Read Cookson on blackboard (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read “10 Ways School Reformers Get it Wrong” (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read “Demographic Change Amplifies…” (Course content)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>February</th>
<th>Assignment Due: Description of your paper and abbreviated bibliography due. Upload on BB in assignments.&lt;br&gt;Race? Poverty? Yes? No?&lt;br&gt;Read “Families and Schools” on blackboard (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read “The Widening Achievement Gap between Rich and Poor” (cc)&lt;br&gt;Read “The Excellence Gap” (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read “Falling out of the lead” (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read: “Race for Results: (course content)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Race? Poverty? Yes? No?&lt;br&gt;Read “The Income Gap” (course content)&lt;br&gt;Read “The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped” (cc)&lt;br&gt;Read “Education for Life and Work” (course content)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Challenge&lt;br&gt;Read “The Writing on the Hall” (weblinks)&lt;br&gt;Read “Kid’s Count 2014” (course content)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22
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)

29
It’s the Parent’s(s’) fault!
Read Schecter and Sherri on blackboard (course content)
Read “The Parent Gap” (weblinks)
Read “Invisible Inequality” (course content)
Read “Parental Involvement, Cultural Capital and the Achievement Gap”

March
7
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)

14
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

21
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)

28
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)

April

4
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)

11
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)

18
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)

25
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)

May

2
Final Paper Due
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 content)
Read “Poverty and Education: The Way Forward” (course content)
Read “Why have we fallen short?” (course content)
ASSESSMENT RUBRIC(S):

Class Participation Reflection
(due last day of class)

Name: ______________________________________________________________________

Number of absences _____ Reason(s) ___________________________________________

Number of tardies _______ Reason(s) ___________________________________________

Based on the Class Participation Rubric and instructor expectations for participation, how many points (out of 10 possible) would you grant yourself for class participation and why?

How would you describe the quality and effort associated with your contributions to in-class interactions and discussions?

Class Participation Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>Below Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplary attendance, no tardies.</td>
<td>Near perfect attendance, few tardies.</td>
<td>Occasional (1-3) absences or tardies.</td>
<td>Frequent (&gt;3) absences or tardies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Questions, Interaction</td>
<td>Most queries are specific and on point. Deeply involved in class dialogue. Challenges ideas, seeks meaning.</td>
<td>Often has specific queries, stays involved in class dialogue, though sometimes tentative or off base.</td>
<td>Asks questions about deadlines, procedures, and directions or for help with little specificity. Little discussion of ideas.</td>
<td>Rarely asks questions of any quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Enthusiastically initiates discussion. Personalizes and takes ownership of activities. Always knows where class or group is.</td>
<td>Sometimes initiates discussion and always works well with direction. Generally knows what's going on.</td>
<td>Seeks direction, but does not initiate discussion. May know where class or group is.</td>
<td>Waits for direction. Knows little of what is going on. Cannot describe where class or group is.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Performance</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Basic (C)</th>
<th>Proficient (B)</th>
<th>Distinguished (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Work</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completeness of Work</td>
<td>Difficult to recognize as the assigned task.</td>
<td>Insufficient evidence of understanding and application; important elements missing or difficult to find. References are not correctly cited. APA is not adhered to.</td>
<td>Moderate shortcomings; minor elements missing that distract the instructor’s ability to see the product as a whole. Evidence of effort, but one or more significant points are missed or not addressed. Some references are missing or APA is not always adhered to.</td>
<td>100 % complete and error free. Accurate and seamless writing; virtually a complete product. Adheres to APA 6th ed. All references are correctly cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Assignments missed or not submitted. Incompletes not made up.</td>
<td>Assignments excessively or repeatedly late.</td>
<td>Assignments late more than once without prior conversation with instructor. Not necessarily chronic.</td>
<td>100% on time. Almost always on time; rare but forgivable tardiness (such a serious or personal family illness). Instructor is notified in advance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>