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Marianne McGriff teaches a fourth-grade class at Bluff Park Elementary School.

Mind the Gap

PUTTING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN REACH

In classrooms across the nation, children started school for the first time this fall. In a perfect world, entering school would mark a fresh start for all of them, opening doors to opportunities, with no limits on what they might achieve. The reality, of course, is not so simple. Over the past 30 years, entire groups of people have achieved at lower levels on average than other groups.

Typically, middle- and upper-class white students achieve at the highest levels, yet most educators agree that race, gender, ethnicity, and handicap do not in themselves put limits on a child's ability to achieve. What, then, are the reasons for the achievement gap? Seeking answers, educators have

conducted countless studies, which have yielded copious and often conflicting statistics. The numbers, and differing interpretations of them, raise issues that are both complex and controversial.

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

"There are a lot of different issues and different ways in which people address the achievement gap, but to me, what it boils down to is an under-representation of particular groups at high levels of achievement," says UAB School of Education Dean Michael J. Froning, Ed.D. "In a whole school or town, if an entire racial, language, gender, or other group has an average grade-point average of 3.7 while

another one has a 3.2, then there is an achievement gap."

According to the 2000 Census, among 24-year-olds nationwide, 87 percent of African Americans graduated high school, and 16 percent went on to earn bachelor's or higher degrees. Among white students, 91 percent graduated high school, and 30 percent—nearly twice the percentage of African Americans—went on to obtain bachelor's or higher degrees. Latino students fared even worse, with just 62 percent graduating high school and 6 percent graduating college by age 24.

Those numbers don't represent a recent phenomenon, according to Kati Haycock, executive director of the Education Trust. In a lecture at the UAB School of Education last winter, Haycock explained that the gap between white and African American students was documented as far back as the late 1960s. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, much attention was paid to the gap, and for two decades the gap narrowed considerably.

That progress, she says, came to a sudden, inexplicable halt around 1988. "Although everybody had wanted to take credit for narrowing the gap earlier, nobody wanted to take responsibility for widening it after the late 1980s," Haycock says. "So, for a while, there was mostly silence."

During the 1990s, that silence led to further declines in achievement, as evidenced by falling scores on national reading and math tests. In 1999, one in 12 white 17-year-olds was able to read well enough to gain information from specialized texts, while only one of 50 Latinos and one of 100 African Americans of the same age demonstrated this ability. The same gap was evident in math test scores: One in 10 white students was able to "comfortably do multistep problem-solving and elementary algebra," while only one in every 30 Latinos and one in every 100 African Americans had this ability, according to the National Center for Education Statistics and the National Assessment of Education Progress.

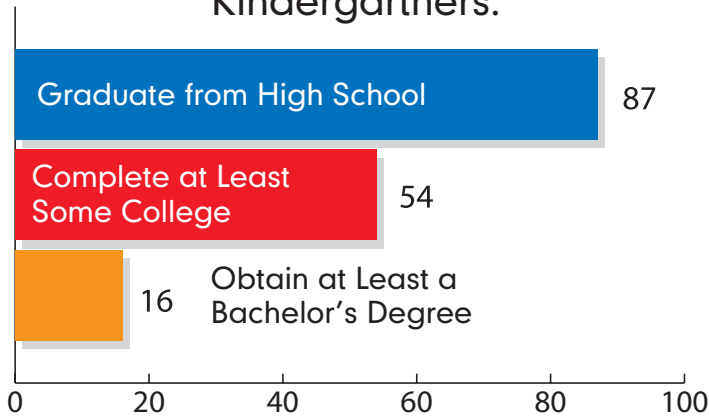
When confronted by those numbers, it is hard to deny that achievement gaps exist. Why they exist is less clear.



maximizing human potential



Of Every 100 African-American Kindergartners:



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, *Current Population Reports, Educational Attainment in the United States; March 2000, Detailed Tables No. 2*

A PROBLEM OF POVERTY?

As recently as 10 years ago, controversial publications such as *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, New York: The Free Press, 1994) asserted that intelligence is genetic—implying that achievement gaps exist because some groups are genetically less capable than others of academic achievement. That assertion, Froning says, flies in the face of ample evidence to the contrary.

“There have always been people who will argue that there are genetic differences that account for a person’s capability,” Froning says. “There is no question that from one family you get a Mozart and from another you get a child with Down syndrome, so you can’t rule genetics out entirely. But my belief is that across the spectrum of an entire population, talent and ability are distributed equally; so if there is an achievement gap between two whole populations, there must be another reason for it.”

Many researchers say a more likely culprit for the achievement gap is the gulf between low- and high-income students, schools, and school systems. The same Census that shows African-American and Latino students achieving at lower levels also reveals that 48 percent of 24-year-olds from high-income families, regardless of race, graduated from college, compared to just 7 percent from low-income families.

UAB School of Education Professor Kathleen Martin, Ph.D., recently received a \$2.5-million grant to help fund an Early Reading First program for Bessemer preschools—a program she hopes will tackle

achievement-gap issues at their core. “There’s evidence everywhere that the gaps have a great deal to do with economics,” Martin says. “In a low-income family, there might not be a single book in the house. The libraries in low-income communities tend to be smaller, with fewer programs and fewer books. If those kids enter kindergarten and first grade without the fundamental knowledge that comes from exposure to print, there are a lot of things they will have to learn before they can even begin to read. So they’re way behind from the day they start school.”

A SLANTED SURFACE

Other researchers agree. Eric Cooper, Ph.D., president of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, cites evidence from studies conducted by Brown University researcher Marilyn Adams, Ph.D., who says that in order for children to succeed academically, they need 3,000 to 4,000 hours of good preschool experiences. Children from low-income families, however, typically have only 300 to 400 hours of preschool, mostly in custodial care.

“We know that preschool is important and that full-day kindergarten is also necessary,” says Cooper. “But in many states in this country, poor children have only half-day kindergarten classes, so they enter elementary school lacking the prerequisites that come from good preschool experiences and good kindergarten.”

“What’s exciting about our research,” Cooper continues, “is that we’ve shown that in spite of this gap, which exists in the beginning, children in some school settings are

learning at similar rates. So it’s not a question of capacity; it’s a question of what we, as educators, can do to dissolve that initial disadvantage.

“You also have to acknowledge the effects of discriminatory practices,” Cooper continues. “You could go all the way back to the tradition of keeping slaves uneducated to keep them from becoming a threat, but what it all boils down to is a history of discrimination. And that history, especially when combined with poverty, has created an uneven playing field before some children ever set foot in the classroom.”

BREAKING THE MOLD

Perhaps the greatest challenge in responding to the achievement gap is the lack of conclusive statistics that can be applied to the search for solutions. Instead of definitive data, there are documented exceptions to every generalization researchers have drawn. For example, the widening of the gap during the 1990s between

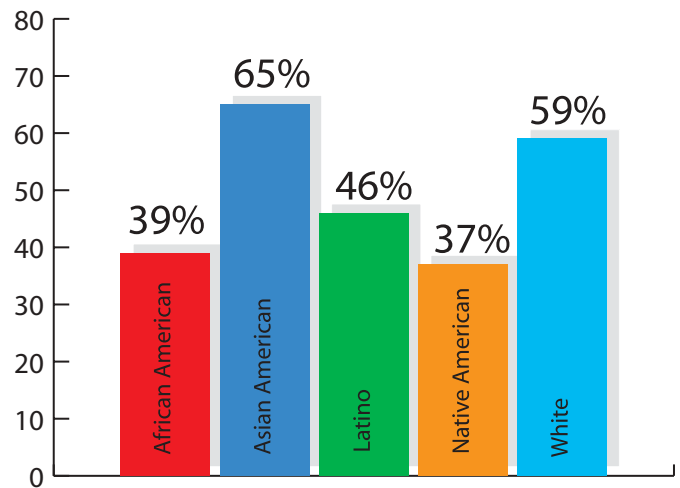
kids in general score lower than rich kids,” says Froning. “But research demonstrates through very rigorous data collection that there are many, many exceptions. There are some horribly underfunded schools that achieve at high levels. And there are affluent schools with what most consider good family environments where the gap is very evident.

“To me, that means that you can’t use poverty and you can’t use race as excuses for low achievement. There are just too many people in those demographic groups who do achieve. I truly believe that if educators are organized in their approach and focus on helping students reach higher levels of achievement, then many more students from all demographic groups will be achieving at higher levels.”

LIMITED BY LOW EXPECTATIONS

If commonly accepted barriers such as poverty do not in and of themselves limit achievement, then

College Freshmen Graduating Within Six Years (NCAA Division 1)



Source: 1999 NCAA Division I Graduation Rates Report, p. 636

whites and blacks nationwide was not evident in the reading scores of Alabama fourth-graders; instead, reading assessment tests showed that the gap actually narrowed by one point between 1992 and 1998. The black-white gap in eighth-grade math scores in Alabama from 1990 to 2000, however, widened by seven points. To lay blame on a single factor such as race or economics, then, would be difficult.

“The evidence shows that poor

clearly educators must try to identify barriers that might be present within the classroom itself, Froning says.

“We have created opportunities for whole groups of people to live ‘up’ to low expectations,” he says. “There is a long history of prejudice in this country that has brought us to the point where, at the core of it, many people don’t really believe that African Americans can achieve at high levels. I almost hate to say that out loud, but I honestly believe that is a problem we

have created. And unfortunately, I see evidence of it every day.”

However uncomfortable an opinion it may be to express, Froning’s interpretation of the problem is shared by many other educators. Cooper says the evidence, seen daily in classrooms across the nation, points to a pervasive, tenacious belief that intelligence is innate in certain groups. Cooper and Froning believe that this bias subtly colors expectations, which, in turn, influence achievement patterns.

This point was driven home dramatically last winter when noted Stanford University psychologist Claude Steele, Ph.D., presented UAB’s Ireland Lecture. Steele has written extensively on the achievement gap and is well known for an experiment he performed to test students’ susceptibility to stereotypical expectations.

In his experiment, Steele divided several fraternity brothers into four different groups—two groups of black men and two groups of white men. “He told one of the white groups and one of the black groups that the test they were about to take would evaluate their intellectual understanding of the game of golf,” Froning says, “and he stressed that golf is a very difficult game, hard to understand, and that you have to be really bright to do well at it. In that group, the white students outperformed the black students tremendously. He then brought out the other two groups and told them that the test would evaluate their physical ability; he stressed that golf is a game of pure athletic ability and that the best athletes always perform better on the test—and you can guess what happened.

“That was Steele’s way of demonstrating that our prejudices and beliefs about people’s abilities control their performance. I believe that is a fundamental truth about the achievement gap.”

THE IMPERATIVE TO INSPIRE

Regardless of which groups are identified as being at risk because of achievement gaps—whether they be African Americans, Latinos, special education students, or even females—there are examples of whole populations in which even the most severe gaps have been eliminated. For example, the National Urban Alliance (NUA) touts two Indiana schools where the performance of African-American third-graders is above the state average for the first time, thanks partly to the NUA and Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) Literacy Initiative. Math scores in IPS are also ahead of the state average. In

Seattle, Washington, similar results were found where teachers underwent special literacy training. In those schools, 26 percent of African-American students who spent two years with literacy-trained teachers passed the reading portion of the state’s Assessment of Student Learning, compared to a 12 percent pass rate by students without literacy-trained teachers. In the writing portion, 31 percent passed with literacy-trained teachers, compared to 22 percent without. Numbers like those illustrate why closing the achievement gap is widely recognized today as a national priority. And Froning says he believes that any discussion of achievement gaps, no matter how uncomfortable, is a good thing.

“Whatever we do, we can’t approach this from a negative point of view,” he says. “We can’t go around accusing people of being racist, because that’s just not productive. What we, as a school of education, have to do is build into our training a level of inspiration that will allow teachers to support students to achieve their best.”

Toward that end, Froning says that educators need to develop the ability to use data on an ongoing basis to analyze where their instruction is falling short, with regard to particular students. “This will allow them to fix the gaps as they go,” he says. “It used to be that teachers would give a test at the end of the year and find that some students had far outperformed others—but by then it was too late to do anything to correct the problem. If we can train teachers to analyze the data for themselves throughout the year, then they can continually look for ways to ensure that what they’re teaching is truly being learned.”

Thanks to the amount of national attention being paid to the achievement gap, Froning says he believes progress is being made, but unfortunately closing the gap won’t be a quick or easy process. As Cooper points out, even one good teacher per student cannot close the gap, since a child is guided by so many different teachers throughout his or her educational experience. And of course more than one poorly equipped teacher in succession can put a child several years behind his or her peers.

“Changing people’s expectations and behavior is not a science,” acknowledges Froning. “It’s an art. That’s why teaching cannot be reduced to a set of measurable objectives. In addition to extensive training, the very best teachers have an almost spiritual ability to inspire people—all people—to achieve their very best.”

In Search of Today’s Heroes



While thinking about a column that would fit with this issue, I came across a speech by Oklahoma newspaper editor Forrest “Frosty” Troy that has been making the rounds by e-mail in education circles.

In his speech, Troy refers to a radio talk show host who blames our education system for society’s shortcomings and asks the question, “Where are the heroes of today?”

“Too many people are looking for heroes in all the wrong places,” Frosty responds. “Movie stars and rock musicians, athletes and models aren’t heroes; they’re celebrities.”

You want heroes? Here are a few of Troy’s suggestions.

Consider Dave Sanders, the school teacher shot to death while trying to shield his students from two youths on a shooting rampage at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

Jane Smith, a teacher in Fayetteville, North Carolina, was moved by the plight of one of her students—a 14-year-old boy who was going to die if he didn’t receive a kidney transplant. This woman told his family that she would give him one of her kidneys. And she did.

When teacher Doris Dillon was stricken with Lou Gehrig’s Disease, she asked to stay on the job. When her voice was affected she communicated by computer. Did she go home? Absolutely not! She was running two elementary school libraries! When the disease was diagnosed, she wrote the staff and all the families that she had one last lesson to teach—that dying is part of living. Her colleagues named her Teacher of the Year.

Bob House, a teacher in Gay, Georgia, won a million dollars on the game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Months later, Bob House and his wife were still teaching. They explain that teaching is what they’ve always wanted to do with their lives and that will not change.

Last year the average school teacher spent \$468 of personal income to buy workbooks, pencils, and items kids had to have but could not afford. That’s a lot of money from the pockets of the most poorly paid teachers in the industrial world.

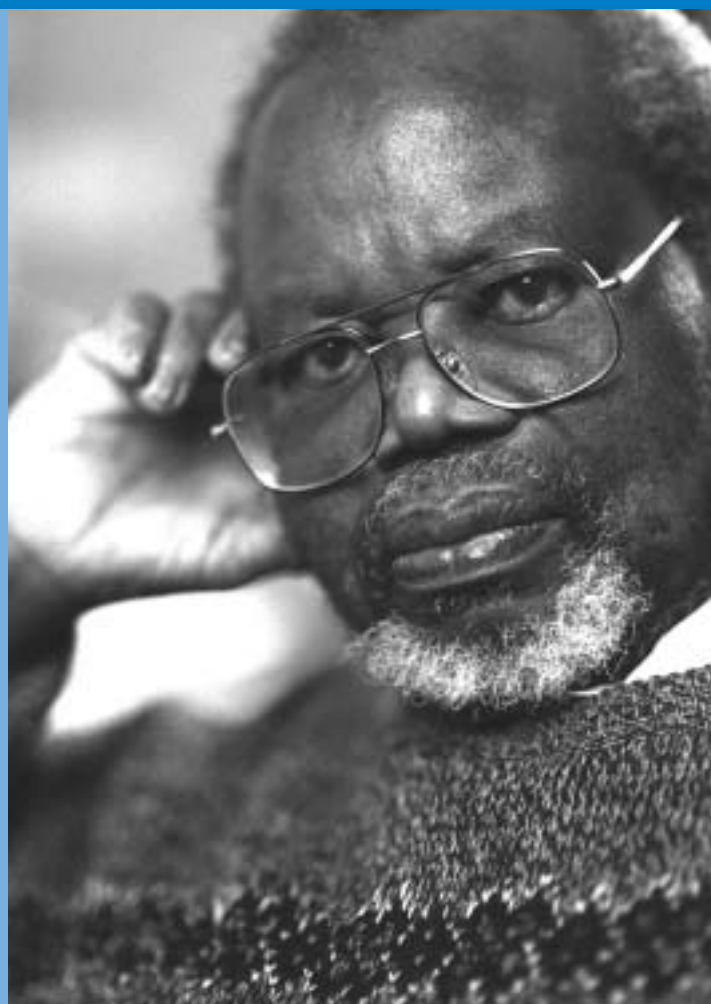
Troy concludes his speech with a quote from an unnamed source who says, “We have been so anxious to give our children what we didn’t have that we have neglected to give them what we did.” In summary, Troy says, “Math, science, history, and social studies are important, but children need love, confidence, encouragement, someone to talk to, someone to listen, standards to live by. Teachers provide upright examples, the faith and assurance of responsible people. You want heroes? Then go down to your local school and see our real live heroes—the ones changing lives for the better each and every day!”

Viewpoint: *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study in Academic Disengagement*, by John U. Ogbu (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003)

John Uzo Ogbu (1939-2003)

Editor's Note: Typically, this space is reserved for two opinion pieces, offering different perspectives on a given topic. In this issue, the topic was to be the new book by John U. Ogbu, Ph.D., a noted anthropologist at the University of California at Berkeley. Sadly, as we were preparing to go to press, we learned that Ogbu had suffered a fatal heart attack after a lengthy back operation at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Oakland, California. He was 64.

In the following review, Eric Cooper, Ph.D., president of the National Urban Alliance, offers an analysis of Ogbu's last book, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study in Academic Disengagement*. The book, published in January, drew much attention and created quite a bit of controversy in the weeks leading up to its publication and in the months since. We chose to include this discussion of Ogbu's work just as it was written prior to his death. While we acknowledge that the controversy surrounding his conclusions will not end with his passing, we include this review in hopes that debate over this issue will continue until achievement gaps are eliminated from our schools entirely.



A REVIEW

It is reported that every school day 3,000 middle and high school students drop out. National graduation rates of 69 percent in this country suggest that six million adolescents are at risk of not graduating. Recent estimates of urban men ages 16 to 24 suggest that 5.5 million are out of school, out of work, and out of hope. Those who are at risk are primarily children and youth of color who are challenged by family circumstances. This data set is anchored by the profile of a changing America—one which is increasingly non-white. The new demography portends a racial generation gap and life gap as well as an achievement gap.

In his new book, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb*, Professor John U. Ogbu, Ph.D., of the University of California at Berkeley, writes convincingly of the reasons for the achievement gap. Those reasons include perceived inadequate IQs, social-class status, segregation, teacher expectations, cultural differences, racism, socialized ambivalence, and language-dialect differences to the effects of negative self-fulfilling prophecies.

During the 1980s Ogbu and his colleagues first attracted national attention with their study that referred to “community factors” as a reason for underperformance. In 1997, Ogbu and his associates were invited to Shaker Heights, Ohio, to study and suggest what could be done to improve scholastic opportunities for African-American students. Parents wanted answers for why their children were underperforming (the average grade-point average for African-American high-school students was about 1.9, as compared to 3.45 for white students).

In the resulting analysis, Ogbu and his associates cover every known cause of the achievement gap before ending with a series of recommendations that can have far-reaching implications. The book raises the important question of what role parental involvement plays in the gap, but it also seems to beg the question: Do we, as a nation, have the will to eliminate the achievement gap between white and non-white students?

Jabiri Mahiri, an Ogbu colleague at the University of California, Berkeley, writes in

Shooting for Excellence (1998) that Ogbu argues that African-American “culture itself is oppositional to the culture of schools . . . that African Americans associate school knowledge and official school culture with ‘acting white’ and see this as a violation of their identification with fictive kinship norms (p. 2).” Mahiri feels Ogbu’s premise should allow for more flexibility, recognizing that school pedagogy, teacher attitude, and school curriculum to which these students are exposed might also be considered in the equation. In *Black American Students* . . . Ogbu does just that. He cites teacher expectations and programmatic interventions, as well as parent involvement in his recommendations for improvement. Clearly, he understands that students and parents themselves must not be isolated in the cause-and-effect paradigm related to low and underperformance achievement.

Joyce King, a researcher of African-American education, offers this statement on some of Ogbu’s work: “. . . research that focuses on the education of black students often emphasizes sociocultural deficits as an obstacle to assimilation or accultura-

tion (Ogbu, 1992; Steele, 1992). This research paradigm misses the point of a fundamental insight of black studies: Cultural and racial democracy requires pluralism, not cultural negation or absorption.” The question that King, Mahiri, and others may be suggesting in response to Ogbu’s work is that we may inadvertently be blaming the victim (African-American students and their parents) in our attempts to find causality. This is not to imply that students who bend to peer pressure or avoid “acting white” for peer acceptance are outside the factors to be considered when studying reasons for the achievement gap. Yet the core question remains: How do we learn to educate all children in a manner that does not deny the cultural, language, and race-specific experience that students bring to the school? Ogbu provides a partial answer: Regardless of whether students are served in increasingly segregated urban schools or whether students of color are enrolled in suburban schools, we can’t hide from the lack of success non-white children in America are experiencing. Ogbu reminds the reader that every child is worth educating and that we, as a nation, can not afford to write any student off.

Recent research by Bill Sanders and his colleagues at the University of Tennessee speaks to the impact educators have on student achievement. Sanders’s research suggests that of all the in-school factors that affect learning, the skills and attitudes of the teachers are paramount. Clearly teacher attitudes can result in “stereotype threat”—defined by noted researcher Claude Steele, Ph.D., as subtle exchanges between teacher and student that may convey the teacher’s low expectations in terms of the student’s ability to learn. And the concomitant underperformance of students demands significant attention if we are to see deep gains in the quest for the elimination of the achievement gap.

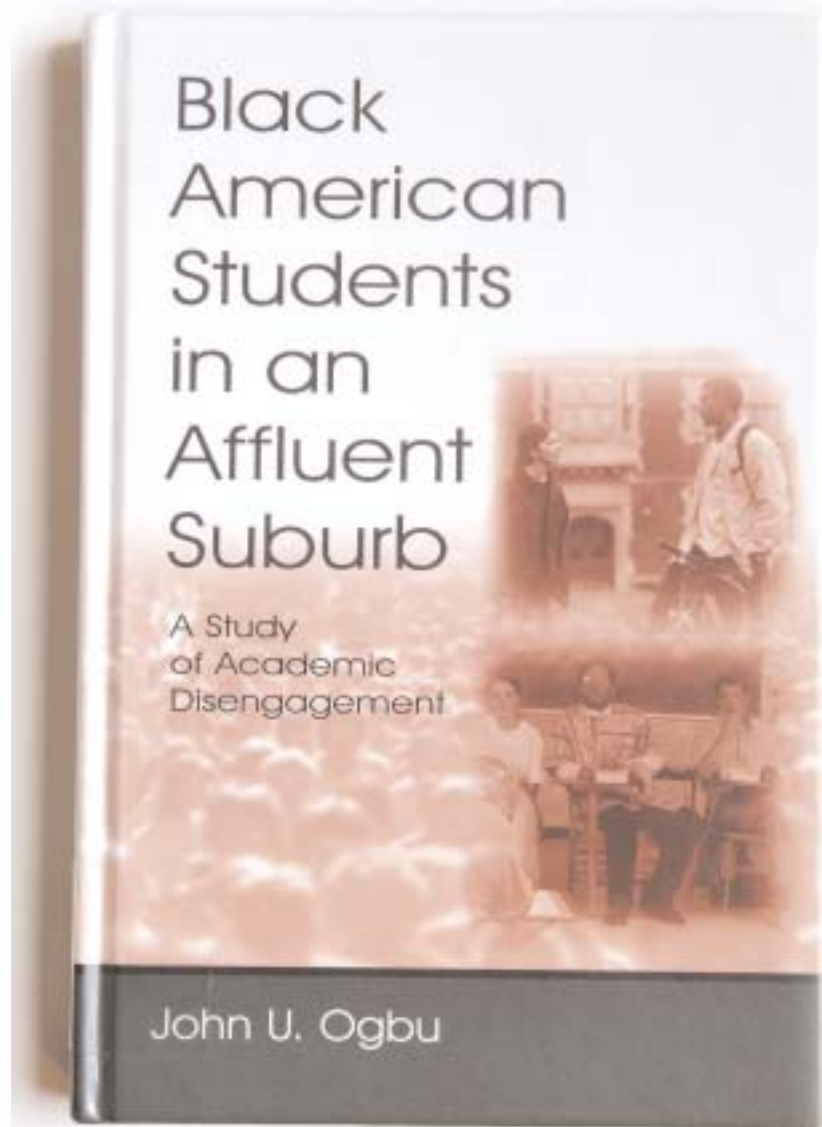
Ogbu stresses the need for workshops that address teacher expectations, but to recommend periodic one- or two-day workshops may miss the point. There will have to be sustained opportunities for appropriate professional development if educators are ever going to be expected to improve in terms of how they guide students to higher levels of achievement; and this professional development must teach strategies and skills ranging from highly specific approaches to broad ones. An enormous amount of learning occurs both formally and informally, through interactions among students of both sexes of different races and socio-economic backgrounds. Teaching opportunities that allow appropriate mediation and student-generated collaboration demand highly structured, but flexible, environments.

A concern I had upon completing the reading of *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb* was that discussion of African-American underperformance in a wealthy town might inadvertently lead some to suggest policy changes akin to those first recommended by W. E. DuBois—who suggested that the best hope for black American leadership is to focus resources on the elite 10 percent of the race. According to that argument, African Americans from wealthier families, lacking the constraints of poverty, are more likely to succeed than others. I am certain that this is not Ogbu’s intention, but I mention it as a cautionary note, stemming from my belief that students who are provided high-quality education recognize the inherent potential of all to be educated, and, in turn, serve others.

Discussion of this book should be geared toward using education to change the national educational experiences of children who are often locked out of the American dream. This is driven home by Martin Haberman, a researcher and writer on urban education, who has recently written that schools, rather than functioning as the great equalizer, tend to both reflect and replicate social-class structures and societal biases. The research conducted by Ogbu is excellent, and it addresses inequities in our nation, but ultimately, I believe that the spheres of influence that affect how we think, how we learn, and how we live are so varied and

complex that we must always be open to new possibilities in our quest for the keys to successful learning and achievement for everyone. As Idries Shah stresses in his books, the moment we are very sure about anything, we are almost assuredly suffering from self-deception.

This book brings up deep psychological and social questions that African Americans and the country will eventually have to face regarding the achievement gap. For example, Ogbu refers to the psychodynamics of a self-fulfilling prophecy, arguing that by not achieving, many of us continue to be stigmatized by racist policies and practices, whether past or present. By keeping the wounds alive, we maintain the hope that the cruelty will be seen and addressed. Or, put another way, if we as a race begin to achieve at higher levels, the achievement may more fully



rid us of our past; then, if the pain is jettisoned, will we continue to be able to validate our collective experience? These are topics that can be addressed in future articles and future books. For now, let’s celebrate John Ogbu’s new book by using the knowledge contained in his volume to continue the American journey toward social justice.

Eric J. Cooper is president of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education at the Council of Great City Schools & The University of Georgia, Athens. He can be reached through the Alliance’s Web site at www.nuafc.org.

Project Equal: LOCAL SCHOOLS TARGET CROSS-CULTURAL DISPARITY

If you think Alabama's only language problems involve Southern draws, you haven't visited Shelby County recently.

"We have more than 900 students with limited proficiency in English, and they speak 48 different languages," says Janet Smith, English as a Second Language (ESL) program specialist for the Shelby County school system. "This is a 444-percent increase since 1998."

To meet the needs of children whose primary languages range from Spanish to Arabic, Shelby County has joined forces with UAB in "Project Equal," which is funded through a five-year, \$1.3-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The program involves UAB's School of Education and Graduate School, which will work together to train teachers and other school employees to work with students who aren't proficient in English.



School of Education professors (left to right) Susan Spezzini, Janet Smith, and Julia Austin are putting a \$1.3-million grant to work training teachers and other school employees to work with students for whom English is a second language.

Project Equal isn't just for ESL teachers. Although teachers receiving training will be ESL-certified, the program also will reach other teachers, administrators, and school employees. "Very few mainstream teachers are prepared to work with English-language learners," says Julia Austin, Ph.D., director of educational services for the Graduate School. "Even after children make the transition from ESL classes to the regular classroom, many still won't be able to function completely without support. So it's important for all teachers to learn to work with English-language learners."

Austin, who is principal investigator for Project Equal, says many participating teachers will serve as mentors to other teachers at their schools. "Shelby County's situation has a lot of challenges," she says. "In addition to the variety of languages they speak, the county's ESL students include children of Honda executives and college faculty members as well as children of construction workers. So the educations and expectations of parents are as diverse as the languages spoken."

Gypsy Abbott, Ph.D., professor of education, is evaluating the project, and Susan Spezzini, Ph.D., who joined the UAB faculty in January, is program director. Spezzini knows the challenges of adjusting to a different culture. A Californian who joined the Peace Corps and moved to Paraguay after earning her master's degree, she married a Paraguayan and lived in Asuncion, the capital, for 26 years. In Asuncion, she coordinated a master's degree program for the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. Several years ago, she enrolled in a UA doctoral program, completing her doctorate in 2002.

"Now," she says, "I've returned to the States and my husband, who has retired from his work as an agronomist, has immigrated here. Our oldest son is a student at UA-Tuscaloosa, and our youngest son has been admitted to the University of Montevallo for the fall term."

Spezzini says that Project Equal has several components—all designed to help students successfully learn English.

"First," she says, "we're training teachers and those who work with teachers to better incorporate non-English-speaking students into their classes. We select 30 teachers annually; they take one graduate course per semester, plus two in the summer, and receive ESL certification in two years."

"Another component is working with teachers' assistants and aides who are bilingual and have been hired to help communicate with students and parents who don't speak English. We'll help them give one-on-one support in teaching English."

"A third aspect of Project Equal involves training Shelby County's principals and area specialists, giving them an overview of laws involving resident immigrants, how to interact with students and how to give them support. The county's school superintendent and assistant superintendent have already attended these sessions, and we'll work with counselors next year."

A fourth component of Project Equal extends to other colleges and universities. Workshops for area education faculty members will emphasize the need for future teachers to learn techniques for accommodating students whose English is limited. "For instance, we might suggest that instead of asking students to read an entire chapter, teachers ask them to read subtitles and summary," Spezzini says. "We want them to have successes while they're in the process of learning English."

Austin says Shelby County's school leaders have helped launch Project Equal successfully. "We're putting together a program that addresses immediate needs and helps build for the future," she says. "Everyone from the superintendent on down has been extremely helpful."

Special-Education Concerns ARE EXPECTATIONS TOO LOW?

Rebecca “Ricky” Deaver hadn’t planned to be a teacher. She had a perfectly good job in the business world. But on the day her son John was diagnosed with Reye’s syndrome, Deaver’s priorities changed.

Reye’s syndrome is a disease that sometimes occurs in children during recovery from a viral infection, and in John’s case, it resulted in mild brain damage. His school assigned him to special education classes, and Deaver became very involved in his schooling. She subsequently enrolled at UAB and earned a degree in special education, later returning to earn her master’s degree. She now teaches at Simmons Middle School in Hoover.

“From my perspective, she’s the best teacher I’ve ever seen,” says Lou Anne Worthington, Ph.D., associate professor of education. “What’s so special about her is that she’s done such a good job of getting classroom teachers to include students with learning disabilities. Most children with learning disabilities do better in a classroom, with support from trained special-ed teachers.”

Deaver spends her days rotating through classrooms, checking on the status of “her kids.” She says that teamwork, as well as training, is important. “We did away with self-contained (special-ed) classrooms completely two or three years ago,” says Deaver. “Out of 400 special-ed students, we only have 10 students in a resource-math class and about that many in a resource-English class. The others are assimilated into regular classrooms, and we share the responsibilities with the regular teachers. I do some of the grading and they do some.”

Having those students spread out through several classes and several grades expands Deaver’s job, as she has to become familiar with a wide range of curriculum and materials. “But the teachers teach me what I need to know, and I teach them what they need to know about students I work with.”

Simmons’s successes reinforce the idea that expectations for many special-ed students are too low. “For a long time there was the mindset that kids with disabilities belong in special education, not general education, and never the two shall meet,” Worthington says. “But evidence makes it pretty clear that kids achieve more in regular classrooms than they do in isolated special-ed programs. This may not be true of all disabilities, but it’s certainly true of learning disabilities involving the use of language or mathematical calculations.”

Contrary to the “Dark Ages” of special education, when isolation and minimal goals were the standard for many special-education students, the No Child Left Behind Act that was passed last year sets high progress and achievement goals for this group. It also holds local school systems accountable for results.

“The attitude of general-education teachers toward students with special needs is a key issue,” says Richard Gargiulo, Ph.D., professor of education. “I believe all kids can learn. But they learn differently. I tell students that if a child doesn’t learn the way you teach, you’d better teach the way the child learns. It all comes down to customizing the learning experience for each student. Learning is effective in different ways. Some want to be told. Others like to read instructions. Still others prefer demonstrations. If you expect mediocrity, you won’t be disappointed. But if you expect kids to learn and you raise the bar, they’ll try to live up to those expectations.”

While many special-ed students succeed without accommodation, others need some, according to Deborah Voltz, Ph.D., associate professor of education. Voltz joined the School of Education faculty this fall from the University of Louisville. She says that in Kentucky, accommodations frequently include allowing extended time on tests or non-reading versions of tests; school systems also sometimes employ scribes to write down answers dictated by students who have impaired writing skills.

“One of the major challenges in special education has been teachers’ unfamiliarity with the backgrounds and cultures of minority students. This may lead to placing minority students in special ed by mistake,” she says. In response to that concern, Voltz hopes to introduce a version of Kentucky’s CRISP (Culturally Responsive Instruction for Special Populations) to UAB. Through CRISP, she looks at cultural influences on special-ed placement, using that information for training teachers to better assess children.



School of Education professors Deborah Voltz and Lou Anne Worthington are committed to the idea that special-education students can achieve at high levels.

There is no question that general-education teachers play roles in both assessing children for special education and assimilating them into the classroom. Effective selection and assimilation are necessary to close the achievement gap. Unfortunately, many teachers may not have the training—a problem UAB is working to correct. “UAB has started requiring undergraduate education students to take more than one special-education course,” Worthington says. “I believe we’re doing more than any university in the state to require this training.”

Gargiulo recommends that future teachers evaluate students by asking, “How is the child smart?” rather than “How smart is the child?” Deaver wholeheartedly supports this approach. Her son John, the special-ed child who drew her into teaching, is now a teacher himself at Spain Park High School.

Inquiry LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR LITERACY

New Program Promotes Reading in Bessemer Preschools

Achievement gaps exist at every level of education, particularly with regard to high- and low-income students. One group of UAB educators is taking an innovative approach in its effort to eliminate such gaps before they even have a chance to form.

Thanks in part to a \$2.5-million federal grant, the UAB School of Education and the Bessemer city school system are working together on Early Reading First

pioneer ERF through funding made available by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Martin, whose past research has dealt extensively with early literacy, wrote the grant proposal and chose Bessemer as the location for the program.

“The original request for proposals calls for the creation of ‘centers of excellence in preschool education in low-income communities,’” Martin says. “We chose Bessemer

end of a process. Children who come into first grade and are successful learning how to read have had a rich beginning.”

That rich beginning has nothing to do with material wealth, but in too many cases, children from lower-income families enter school without the proper background knowledge to begin to learn how to read.

“In a low-income family, there might not be a single book,” Martin says. “The libraries in low-income communities tend to be smaller and have fewer books and fewer programs for young children. That means these children aren’t being exposed to the same things as children in families that share books, where parents read to their children.”

In those families, Martin says parents are teaching their children to read, often without even realizing it. “People aren’t born with an understanding of how print works. You have to learn how print works—that words are groups of letters with spaces on either side and that you read them from left to right. When a parent reads to a child, the child may learn at some point that the parent is relating to the words on the page and not the picture. People take for granted that a child will know those things, but that isn’t always the case.”

Another goal of the ERF program is to boost community involvement, creating programs and events at preschools and local libraries that will encourage community members to get involved with literacy. Teaching children the importance of books, as well as enhancing their vocabulary, will mean that when they do start learning to read, they will be familiar with the words they are being asked to read.

“To that end, we will be testing these children prior to beginning the program, and we will follow their progress after they begin kindergarten and first grade—at which point they will have started the Reading First program,” Martin says. “We hope to show that our treatment-group children will perform at a higher level than those in the control group. We also will be watching how the teachers grow in their practice of the profession and whether or not they improve in their skills and knowledge.

“The primary thing we’re looking at is whether or not we can change outcomes for children, and we have confidence that the methods we are implementing will do just that.”



School of Education professors Kathleen Martin and Kay Emfinger spent months compiling materials that will be used in the Early Reading First program.

(ERF), a program designed to give low-income preschoolers and their teachers the background they need to begin their formal education at the same level as their higher-income peers.

“There is a huge gap between low- and middle-income children in terms of how difficult it is for them to learn to read,” says Kathleen Martin, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the School of Education and principal investigator for the ERF program. “Children who score low in preschool on language measures are much more likely to have difficulty learning to read, so we believe a big key is to identify children who have low language achievement and start developing their language skills so that they’re not starting out at a disadvantage.”

UAB was one of 30 universities selected by the U.S. Department of Education to

because the School of Education has always had a good relationship with the Bessemer school district and because the community is relatively stable. It’s a compact community where the children who are in preschool are likely to also be in elementary school, so it will be easy to track children over several years.”

Even though Bessemer does have strong middle-class areas, it is considered a high-poverty system because 3,778 of its 4,342 students qualify for the free and reduced-cost lunch program.

Martin says it is imperative that teachers have an understanding of scientific-based literacy instruction if they hope to raise the achievement levels of their low-income students. “There is a lot that has to take place before a child can even begin to learn,” Martin says. “When we see children in the first grade learning to read, that is really the

Changing Focus

Redefining the Role of High-School Guidance Counselors



Lawrence Tyson (pictured at right) helps prepare future guidance counselors through the UAB School of Education's Counselor Education Program.

Educators nationwide are making the battle against the achievement gap a top priority, and many school guidance counselors have taken the lead in that fight.

Long recognized as the gatekeepers responsible for steering students toward more challenging courses, counselors are now being asked to redirect their focus. Stephanie Robinson, Ph.D., a principal partner of the Education Trust in Washington, D.C., says the new role of the counselor is defined in the Transforming School Counseling Initiative, which emphasizes advocacy on behalf of equitable education funding. "We are concerned about the financial gap between what most affluent school districts spend per pupil and what is spent per pupil in the lowest-income school districts," Robinson says.

Lawrence E. Tyson, Ph.D., school counseling advisor in the Counselor Education Program in the UAB School of Education, says the national initiative was the inspiration for the new Alabama State Guidance Plan, which was published last summer by the Alabama Department of Education. The



plan, he says, is a call to action for the state's school counselors.

"First, they need to be looking at existing data in their schools and asking why the data looks the way it does. They need to be raising the issue and raising the questions, especially if the numbers show that there are large gaps between groups in the school," Tyson says.

The new guidelines call for school counselors to point out these achievement gaps to public officials in an effort to make a difference in the way resources are allocated to schools and programs. "That may not sound like much, but we need to remember that school counselors haven't been charged with being these kinds of advocates before," Tyson says. Guidance counselors have traditionally been expected to deal individually with students and their needs, but their role is evolving into that of advocates who identify and address barriers, both personal and systemic, that impede students' academic progress. "Our job, even more so now than before, is to find out how to go around, go above, go beneath—or do away with—these barriers," Tyson says.

According to Robinson, the Transforming School Counseling Initiative was developed by the Education Trust in 1996 with the goal of revolutionizing the way school counselors work within their school systems. "The initiative is aimed at getting school counselors to stop sorting students and to work on reforming schools—changing the system to provide high-quality education for all students," she says. "This means counselors have to move away from the emphasis on

mental health—leave that to the school psychologists and social workers, who are better trained—and become brokers of services."

Robinson says the initiative calls for counselors to become community leaders in an effort to eliminate the



funding gaps that are often blamed for creating achievement gaps. "Counselors have skills in collaborating and forming teams and getting people to talk together to solve problems. For example, if a school is underfunded or there is a gap, the counselor can get those data, show them to people, and then help mobilize parents to say, 'We need better funding for our schools.'"

While the Transforming School Counseling Initiative is changing the way colleges are preparing the counselors of tomorrow, training is also being offered to current counselors to help them adapt to their new role. Tyson has led training workshops for counselors in Birmingham and Shelby and Jefferson Counties, and plans for the state Department of Education to offer similar training throughout Alabama. The state's counselors are being joined by others nationwide in this effort, says Robinson.

"If we can manage to get a critical mass of counselors out there, particularly in the districts that serve high concentrations of poor kids and students from low-income homes and students of color, then we will have accomplished some of our goals."

HELLOS AND FAREWELLS

The UAB School of Education faculty, staff, and students warmly welcome new faculty members Levi Ross, M.P.H., Human Studies; Andrew McKnight, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Tondra Loder, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Deborah Voltz, Ed.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Linda Houghton, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Kay Emfinger, Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction; Retta Evans, Ph.D., Human Studies.

Hellos

Levi Ross, M.P.H., Human Studies; Andrew McKnight, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Tondra Loder, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Deborah Voltz, Ed.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Linda Houghton, Ph.D., Leadership, Special Education, Foundations and Technology; Kay Emfinger, Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction; Retta Evans, Ph.D., Human Studies.

Farewells

Terry Conkle, Ed.D.; Eugene Golanda, Ph.D.; David Whittinghill, Ph.D.



In June, children had the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned at the Children's Creative Learning Center. The summer enrichment program is designed to enhance the academic skills of children ages 4-12 with a focus on the arts and literacy. The program features reading and math enrichment workshops and an early-childhood special-education program. Children also attended special workshops to learn art, photography, and creative writing. The center is sponsored by the UAB School of Education in partnership with the Hoover City Board of Education.

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ALUMNI NOTES

Susan Ronilo Caraway, an English teacher at Clay-Chalkville High School, has been named the first recipient of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) AP Teacher Award. The award will be presented to Caraway at the John J. Haggerty High School Articulation Conference on Friday, May 2 at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

The AP Teacher Awards, established this year, are designed to honor advanced-placement English teachers in Jefferson County. The award recognizes teachers who are dedicated to their students and who exhibit a passion for teaching literature and a commitment to developing good writing skills. Award winners are selected by the AP Teacher Award Committee, which is comprised of three UAB English Department faculty members and three members of the UAB English Advisory Committee. The committee consists of people from the Birmingham community.

Caraway will receive a certificate, a \$500 cash prize, and a \$200 gift certificate from The Alabama Booksmith. Caraway has taught advanced-placement English for seven of her 25 years as a high-school teacher. She teaches 80 advanced-placement students in three classes in addition to her composition classes.

Marlee A. E. Neel, a teacher at Hueytown High School, won second place. Neel will receive a certificate and a \$200 cash prize. She has been a high-school English literature teacher for two years. She teaches ninth-grade English and a 12th-grade honors class.

The AP Teacher Awards will be presented annually. The awards are made possible through donations from the UAB English Advisory Committee.

The John J. Haggerty High School Articulation Conference is the UAB English Department's longest running educational outreach program. The conference was established by Associate Professor Emeritus **John J. Haggerty, Ph.D.**, to promote communication and one-on-one interaction between UAB English faculty and teachers in the Birmingham city schools. This year, the conference has been expanded to include teachers in all public high schools in Jefferson County.

Chantay Walker, Ph.D., CHES, is the new director of health promotion for the Metropolitan Public Health Department in Nashville, Tennessee. She is also the project director for the Center of the Study of Spirituality and Health at the Association of Black Cardiologists Incorporated, located in Atlanta, Georgia and holds an adjunct faculty position with the

University of St. Francis located in Joliet, Illinois.

Walker received her bachelor of arts degree (cum laude) from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1991; a master's of education from UAB in 1994; and a doctorate of philosophy degree in health education/health promotion from both UAB and the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1998. She completed a postdoctoral study program in health promotion and chronic disease management at the Regenstrief Institute for Health Care (Indiana University Center for Aging Research) through Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) located in Indianapolis, Indiana. She received credentials as a certified health education specialist in 1996.

John Jernigan (MA '88) received the Professional of the Year Award from the Council of Organizations Serving Deaf Alabamians (COSDA) at a June 6 banquet at the Birmingham Hilton. The honor was "in appreciation of (your) dedicated service to Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals." Jernigan is director of student development at the Alabama School for the Deaf and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in deaf education.

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