

# The teacher's and student's role in the achievement gap

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



## Part 1: Introductory

“ The higher the social class of other students, the higher any given student’s achievement” says an American socialist, James S. Coleman. According to Sean Reardon’s UPenn paper, “ Rethinking the Achievement Gap,” “ The achievement gap is the persistent disparity in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts”(Reardon). But why does this gap exist though? Sitting in the same classroom consuming the same information that’s taught, yet only a handful of students get 90s and 100s, while others score below this range. Why? Are those students less smart? Not necessarily. This can be proven by the data that was collected during the administration of the NAEP 2011 Mathematics Grade 8 Assessment. The results of the test shows that “ Black students scored 31 points lower, on average, than did White students” (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). To sum up this data, one of the reasons that’s implied is that race is a problem that’s adding to this gap. To further explain, the achievement gap dates back to the beginning of the American history, where not all men were created equal. African Americans were put to work as slaves and only rich, white men were granted the opportunity to attend school and pursue an education. Due to this, an unfixable gap had been created between the majorities, white students, versus the minorities, students of other ethnic backgrounds in school; including African Americans, Asians, Hispanics etc. This already puts the different groups of students at different starting lines.

Speaking of race, this leads into one of the important causes of the achievement gap and one reason why this gap continues to widen: eurocentrism. Eurocentric teachings in schools, is where most of the spotlights are concentrated in white people history, while only a fraction of the time is used to cover materials related to other ethnic groups. At the same time, the race is also connected to another issue: how much a family earns base on their race. For instance, “ Fifty years ago, in contrast, the black-white gap was one and a half to two times as large as the income gap” (Reardon). This shows how as time progresses, inequality and discrimination is slowly healing, opening up several opportunities to the minorities. Hence, minority families also get rising income and living better lifestyle so that they can have the luxury of getting outside help in their children’s education. However, despite the improvements, there are still jobs that pay their workers differently base in their race and ethnicity. This example provided by Reardon covers the other reason for causing the gap to continue to exist: the income gap, in other words, it’s referring to the social-economic differences that lies between the rich and the poor.

The achievement gap is an important issue that remains within the American education and if this problem continues to expand, then the power and advantages will continue to be inherited in the hands of the white and rich generations while non-white minorities, that make up the low income majorities, will continue to suffer and be put at a disadvantage in any opportunities available.

## Part 2: Why is this problem happening

- Reason #1: The Income Gap
- White majorities come from wealthier families and are provided with better resources
- Many white majorities have connections that open up more opportunities for them

Family income plays a significant role in terms of students education.

According to the article, “ The Widening Income Achievement Gap” by Sean F. Reardon, he states “ Historically, low-income students as a group have performed less well than high-income students on most measures of academic success—including standardized test scores, grades, high school completion rates, and college enrollment and completion rates” (Reardon).

To explain this line a little more, the achievement gap continues to widen as the income gap grows because students who come from wealthier families tend to do better because their family can afford resources such as tutors and better study books and this would assist them along their educational path. In contrast. students who come from low income families are less privileged because like the example presented in the article, “ The Missing ‘ One-Offs’: The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving,” many colleges require the SAT and low income students usually only take the exam once. That’s because they only get one College Board SAT fee waiver. The price for the exam is too costly for them to afford, unlike the wealthy student, they can take the exam more than once because they can afford to pay for the exams multiple times which gives them the opportunity to improve and get better scores each time. To add on, not only having higher SAT score would

potentially increase their probability of getting accepted in top universities, but also many students from wealthy families are also in a better condition of attending elite universities because they had relatives or connections to aluminis who attended that university (Evan J, “ Mandery,” End College Legacy Preferences.”). Clearly, white people make a little less than half as much as other races. Although looking at the graph, the amount that the non-whites are making are growing at a faster rate than white people as the years progress, but then comparing their salaries at the end of 2012, the increase isn’t that obvious because white people are still earning a lot more than others, the ratio is still about the same.

As a result of this income gap, minorities such as black and Hispanic students would be less likely to afford better resources that would help them succeed in school. Where as the white people, they earn more and they can use their extra income on academic tools.

Reason #2: Eurocentrism and heritage months being a part of the curriculum and having unreliable teachers

Picking up a high school world history textbook and skim through the pages, most of the information from the book appears to be related to white people history. If students from grades K through 12 were asked the question, “ What do you recall from history class?” most likely they would reply, Christopher Columbus and slavery. This is because these two topics are pretty much covered, in history class, every year of their education from grades K-12. Columbus has been portrayed as a hero who found America while slaves, usually African Americans, are mentioned as free labourers that

the Europeans and Americans used to gain great profit, essentially, that's like the only time African Americans are mentioned in history. They're not presented as heroic and powerful like the whites. As a result of this, it pressures the minors to be demeaned by what they are taught in school and it may also impact the way others see African Americans base on their learnings about their past. To further explain, base on a NY Times article, it states that the McGraw Hill Education " refers to African Americans brought to American plantations as " works" rather than slave"(Fernandez and Hauser). This is a problem because the African Americans were put into forced labor and went through a lot of abuse and experienced a lot of inhumanly treatments, yet the textbook company, possibly made by white people, discredited their hard work and struggles using the term " worker." Then there was " another page from the textbook referred to Europeans coming to America as " indentured servants" but did not describe Africans the same way"(Fernandez and Hauser). The African American were seen as inferior due to their skin color and thus, they were nonsensically put to work as free workers, and sometimes labelled as slaves. However, for a white immigrant, like stated in the example, gets different and better treatments. They were put at a higher level and rank than the African Americans. The whites had a choice to be in the country and work as indentured servants who get paid and sometimes didn't have to do difficult tasks that the African American were forced in doing. The textbook's use of diction throughout clearly presents eurocentrism and bias toward the white people. Based on the titles that were given to each group, there already presents this existing inequality between the different treatments.

## **What about the other races?**

So little time was spent on them that people don't even remember information about them. When other races are brought up, they appear in the opium war, as Latin American immigrants, Germany being represented by Hitler. What is this saying about the US curriculum? Eurocentrism is an important issue in terms of causing the achievement gap because naturally, people would want to learn more about themselves and their origins. This keeps them interested and students tend to learn better because they can relate and make personal connections. This can be proven by a study that was done by scholars from Stanford University and "The researchers found that attendance for those encouraged to enroll in the class increased by 21 percentage points, GPA by 1.4 grade points and credits earned by 23." when ethnic study courses were incorporated into the system (Brooke Donald). What this is saying is that the problem lies within the education system. It's not that minority students aren't smart and that's why they're doing not as well as the white majorities, but eurocentrism is focusing so much on white people history that other students of different ethnicity start to lose interest in learning and as a result of this, it's reflected in their grades. On the other hand, white students are privileged because most of the education is focused on information that relates to them.

The data shows how when ethnic studies course were added into their curriculum, students show up to class more and also do better than before. Another way that eurocentrism shows up in the US education would be having heritage month celebrations. Heritage months were established to

celebrate cultures that were once “ ignored, stereotyped or unappreciated”(Tlow). This is a issue for many reasons. Firstly, one reason people argue to keep heritage months is because “ Celebrating Creates Awareness for All People”(Tisby). People may think that creating awareness for a certain heritage may help boost knowledge and create better bonds between our diversity in heritage, however, the downsides of this would be causing an uprise of fear because all of the sudden, one race or group is getting most of the attention, This may be troublesome because there may be potential bullying or jokes made targeting the minories and their background. As a result, this would create an unsafe and uncomfortable environment for the minorities to open themselves up in discussions and to the learn more about the topics. Secondly, some people who are concerned about heritage month will feel a little discriminated because it’s just one month.

Finally, the info may not get delivered properly or the way they expected because the teachers know very little about a certain groups or group. Most of the teachers tend to rely heavily on textbooks and other outside sources given to them for teaching. Meanwhile the teachers would have very little prior knowledge in the subject, therefore, it would cause misinterpretations of sources and miscommunications of the ideas. As a result, they might not be teaching the most accurate information. This would then add to the achievement gap because if the teachers, the ones who are responsible for distributing out the knowledge to their pupils don’t even know what they are teaching about, then the students won’t possibly know either. The minorities



would still be at a greater disadvantage because while one month is dedicated to the minorities, the white majorities, celebrate their heritage months using the remaining time of the school year. Not only do they have more time to learn about their heritage but also teachers are more expects in terms of teaching those materials since that's what they've been doing for the past years and there are more resources available(for example, eurocentric textbooks) to can further enrich the learning and knowledge. To answer the question, " What is this saying about the US curriculum," the US curriculum isn't fair and the resources that are use to teach aren't reliable enough to solve and lessen the achievement gap that separates the students academic wise. This leads to the next part of; How or what can be done to address the gap between students.

### **Part 3: What are some solutions?**

#### **Solutions to address:**

##### **Income gap causing SAT score differences**

The income gap that exist may not be healed but improvements can be put in place to reduce the effect that SATs and important college preparation exams can have on the achievement gap. For the SATs and ACTs, one reason why many low income students only take it once is because they weren't informed about other ways to take the test for a lower or waved price. As stated in the article, " When states pay for the SAT or ACT, more poor students go to college" it explains how " Both the SAT and ACT offer fee waivers to low-income students, but the study notes that the waivers are underused"(Barnum). This is saying that the states do offer fee waivers that allows the low income students to take the exams for free while it has been

proven that those waivers were never used up by the students. This can be assumed that this news about having fee waivers isn't very public known. To fix this issue, teachers and school counselors should inform all of their students about this opportunity. They can either make in class announcements, host workshops related to these exams and covering the payments or put up flyer with more information. This method has proven to work because “ the number of students taking the exam jumped from 56 percent statewide to 91 percent after the policy was implemented in 2007. College attendance in the state then increased by nearly 2 percentage points”(Barnum).

- Textbooks and eurocentric teachings in general
- Heritage teachings being a part of the curriculum

As for the eurocentric teachings that's holding back the minorities academic performances, one way to help treat the achievement gap would be to have more open conversation and class discussions. Due to this sudden shift in education, the DOE can't possibly produce efficient resources that can improve the learnings. Then, they won't have outside resources to use, and then the teachers won't have outside sources that they can rely on. They would have to teach based on their knowledge. But like mentioned earlier, most teachers don't know much about heritage and studies outside of the curriculum that they have been assigned. The teacher can be teaching something while knowing nothing about it, whereas a student of a certain race or ethnicity may be an expert in the topic base on their own experiences and thoughts. In this case, “ it is important to learn about

students' backgrounds rather than making assumptions, and learning about students' lived experiences is easier if you establish a partnership with each family"(David, Delgado, and Huerta. ) Obviously for this to work, it would require the students' corporations as well by showing respect for all and creating a comfortable learning environment. Additionally, ethnic study courses can be offered by the schools.

The paper, " Why Ethnic Studies Classes Improve Performance of At-Risk Students" by Nicki Lisa Cole, Ph. D mentioned a point made by Dee, " ethnic studies courses like this are effective because they combat the problem of " stereotype threat" experienced by the majority of non-white students in the nation's public schools"(Dee). Dee is claiming that ethnic study classes will help improve student performances because they discuss about the topics that connect with the minorities, boosting their interest in the class and this would bring up their attendances and grades to narrow down the achievement gap. As this was proven true because students with GPAs below 2. 0 were automatically enrolled in the course(Cole). Showing that those students with low grade performed bad and miss class not because that they aren't intelligent, but because they had lack of interest in what they were learning in class. Then incorporating these courses started to increase their engagements in learning and this may potentially narrow the gap.

**Conclusion:**

Eurocentrism, textbooks, standardized testing and the income gap all tends to favor majority students. Like stated in part two, most colleges and universities require their applicants to take the SAT, this entrance exam is a

barrier that's denying many intelligent individuals from closing the achievement gap. It was purposeful made to be hard to limit the amount of acceptances to a college/university, Particularly, students who tend to score higher are the ones coming from wealthier families. If the SAT informations aren't delivered properly, then this would impact the academic performances. Thus, college board and schools should notify the students about the SAT exam and some key tips that might help them(the low income students) and not let money and their family income be in their way of succeeding in school. This income gap that exist, can then be addressed as the achievement gap narrows. This is because as the door of opportunities open for the minorities in society, then they start to earn more in the future. Then as it expands nationwide over time, the nation becomes more wealthy, plus the lower class people would move up the socioeconomic ladder and become wealthy enough to provide their kids with academic assistances.

As for eurocentric teachings in the history classes and the celebration of heritage months, it would be impossible to implement new ideas and teachings into the curriculum in the short run. It would take time for the entire curriculum to rearrange and for many of the textbook companies to take back their productions and rewrite the curriculum. And if the teachers are the problem, it would be insane to fire all of the teachers and find better replacements for them. Thus minorities should come together and be more advocate about their ideas on their individual backgrounds. Therefore the most efficient way would be not rely so much on textbooks and what teachers teach in class but also take ethnic study courses and participate in

class discussions to help boost the student engagements first, then slowly, there would be a change in the achievement gap. To conclude, if no one acts on this issue, the issue would remain and the achievement gap would continue to stretch. As it stretches larger, it would become harder to heal and it would separate the minorities and majorities even further.