

Achievement gap is deep, even in middle class

March 17 2010, By Hanna Roos

(PhysOrg.com) -- Several decades after racial integration legislation was passed, many African-American students still lag behind in school, said Travis Gosa, and the black-white achievement gap, he said, is greatest among middle-class and affluent students.

"The fact that middle-class black children lag behind their white and Asian peers" remains a mystery to many researchers, said Gosa, Cornell assistant professor of Africana studies, at a March 12 seminar called "Closing the [Achievement Gap](#)" in 224 Weill Hall.

People are aware of the achievement gap in the "black underclass," said Gosa, and a lot of research focuses on closing this gap, he said.

However, "The school performance of middle-class black children is closer to that of poor white children," he said. The gap is largest among the college-educated, he added.

Gosa used National Assessment of Educational Progress data and other research to argue that the education gap is due to environmental, not biological, factors.

African-American family life is "at the center of my analysis," said Gosa, noting that many black families are new to the middle class or still live close to the poverty line, and this may affect their children's [school performance](#).

Also, many black middle-class households are headed by a single parent,

who may not have the time or resources to devote to a child's education, said Gosa, who teaches three courses related to education and African-American youth.

Even though more people are becoming aware of this middle-class education gap, more research needs to be done and more questions need to be answered about the root causes, he said.

At the same time, Gosa said that African-American students are aware that racism still "exists in the labor market." "When I speak to [African-American] college [students](#) in particular, they seem to be very anxious" about whether their education will truly help them succeed, he said.

The middle class represents "what we consider the American dream in this country," said Ashon Bradford, a development sociology graduate student at Gosa's talk. For this reason, it is very important to address the middle-class black-white education gap, he said.

"I think [Gosa] put forth a lot of ideas that are sort of under the radar," added Kimberly Vallejo, a social policy graduate student in the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs. Many people are "focusing on the underclass," so it's helpful to hear Gosa's ideas, she said.

Provided by Cornell University

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