

INCREASING RACIAL AND GENDER EQUITY IN ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS



WORLD LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN THE US

THE ROLE OF WORLD LANGUAGE COURSES IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

World Language courses are considered academic electives and part of college preparatory curriculums across the U.S. At least twenty eight states have graduation requirements that specifically mention foreign language study (Dounay, 2007). Most four-year universities and degree programs require a minimum of two years high school credit for admission, and many recommend three or more years for admission to competitive programs (College Transitions, 2021). Beyond that, most Bachelor's degree programs also have world language study requirements. Since advanced world language study is a critical component of admission to college programs, it serves as a gatekeeper for student access to higher education. World language study benefits future employment and income, too. Research by Saiz and Zoido (2005) showed a nearly four percent wage increase for employees that spoke more than one language. Because of the important role of world language courses in access to higher education and employment, it is critical that these programs provide equitable opportunities for access and achievement to diverse students.

DIVERSITY IN WORLD LANGUAGE STUDENTS

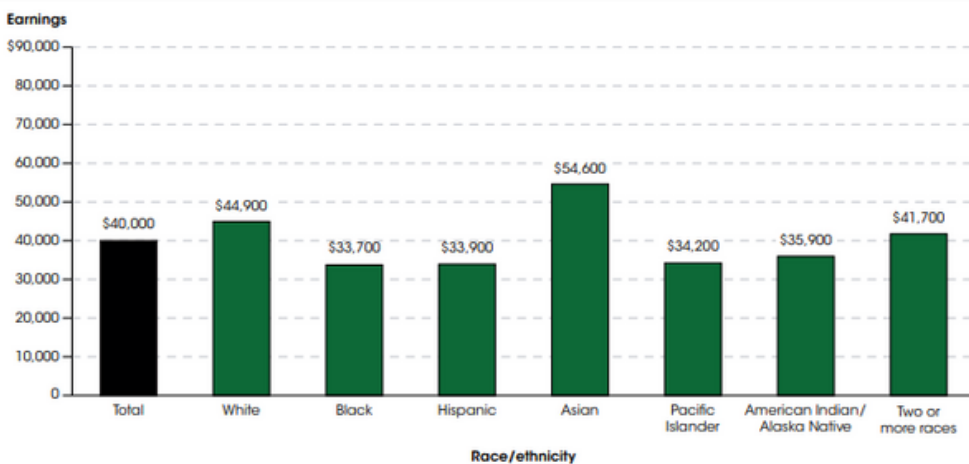
WHO STUDIES WORLD LANGUAGE AND TO WHAT OUTCOME?

Despite how essential world language courses are in preparing for and completing university study, Black students, especially Black males, are consistently underrepresented in K-12 world language programs (Baggett, 2016). Black students “are least likely to study a world language and to continue it through year three or beyond” (Glynn & Wassell, 2018). Data from Snyder et al. (2009) shows that Black students earn 14% fewer foreign language credits than white students, and male students earn 16% fewer foreign language credits than female students. According to College Board data from 2016, more than ten times as many white students completed an AP Exam in world languages than Black and Indigenous students combined (Glynn & Wassell, 2018). This trend continues at the university level with ten times more white graduates than Black graduates receiving a Bachelor's degree in foreign language (Snyder et al., 2019). Since Black students are discouraged from or pushed out of world language study, they miss out on opportunities for education and employment. By expanding opportunities, enrollment, and achievement in world language study for for students of color, particularly for Black students, we improve their long term outcomes in education and employment.



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(Glynn & Wassell, 2018)

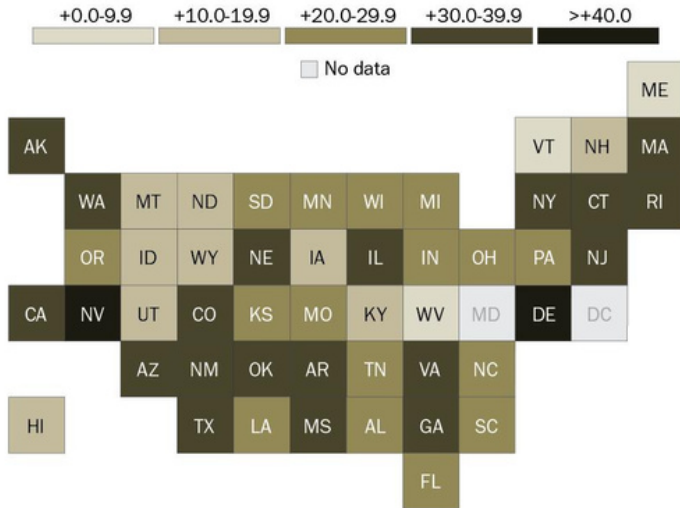
Figure 30.1. Median annual earnings of full-time year-round workers 25 to 34 years old, by race/ethnicity: 2016



NOTE: Full-time year-round workers are those who worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities); data include military personnel who live in households with civilians, but exclude those who live in military barracks. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), "Annual Social and Economic Supplement," 2017. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 502.30.

Throughout the U.S., public school teachers are more likely to be White than their students are

Percentage point difference in White teachers and students, based on the 2017-18 school year



Note: Percentage distribution based on students for whom race and ethnicity was reported, which may be less than the total number of students in the state. Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Schaeffer, 2021

HOW DOES IT IMPACT STUDENT OUTCOMES?

Because of the lack of Black teachers, and especially among programs for world language teaching, it is likely that many world language teachers are products of programs that center whiteness and fail to challenge white beliefs (Sleeter, 2017). Despite the push for culturally responsive pedagogy, many teachers retain a deficit lens that attributes academic underachievement to student or community deficits rather than recognize student performance as significantly reflective of teacher beliefs and biases (Sleeter, 2017). With clear data documenting the underachievement and underrepresentation of Black students in world language courses, it is necessary that teachers acknowledge the ways that race impacts which students have access to and achieve success in world language programs.



DIVERSITY IN WORLD LANGUAGE EDUCATORS

WHO TEACHES WORLD LANGUAGE COURSES?

At the same time that we see an imbalance in representation for Black (especially male) world language students, the demographics of world language teachers appears to be its inverse. Nationally around half of all public students are white, compared to "about eight-in-ten U.S. public school teachers (79%) identified as non-Hispanic White during the 2017-18 school year" and "fewer than one-in-ten teachers were either Black (7%), Hispanic (9%) or Asian American (2%)" (Schaeffer, 2021). When we look specifically at world language teachers, only 2.5% identify as Black (Digest of Education Statistics, 2020).

PATHS TOWARDS EQUITY

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO BLACK ACHIEVEMENT IN WORLD LANGUAGE STUDIES



Research by Gershenson et al. (2018) documents short and long term benefits for Black students who have Black teachers, such as improved "test scores, attendance, course grades, disciplinary outcomes," as well as higher rates of graduation and college enrollment. However, until schools can attract Black professionals with competitive pay, safe working conditions, and curriculum that affirms diverse identities, this is not a viable option for rapid impact on student outcomes.

In her analysis of African Americans in World Language study, Anya (2020) cites scholarly work from "every decade in the past century" that shows Black students consistently report reasons for not continuing in world language courses such as poor teaching, lack of affirming, engaging content, and racist practices by teachers and counselors who discouraged them. Particularly for the study of French and Spanish which boast more than 30% of global speakers of African descent, we would expect to see greater representation in teaching, curriculum, and resources, but that is not the case. Instead, students in those courses typically "see no explicit mention of race in the curriculum and complete erasure or stereotyped imagery of blacks in the learning materials with little representation of them as principals in the target language culture" (Anya, 2020). Further, when teachers embrace such narratives without question, the students in our classrooms learn to reproduce the same biases, resulting in further discriminatory practices (Nguyen, 2022).



***If Black children are the targets of a bias problem that originates at school, then educators logically bear the brunt of responsibility of antibias actions to remedy it.
(Halberstadt, et al., 2021)***



PATHS TOWARDS EQUITY

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO BLACK ACHIEVEMENT IN WORLD LANGUAGE STUDIES



In order to ensure that our world language classrooms are free from bias and provide quality learning opportunities for all students, we need to equip teachers to reflect on their curriculum and instructional practices, the ways they build relationships with students, and to consider how their work shapes the achievement and outcomes of their learners. By giving teachers the strategies and resources to engage in critical reflection and change, we interrupt patterns in which educators rebuff criticism regarding patterns of racial disparity or deflect blame to causes unrelated to racial bias and systemic racialized practices (Sleeter, 2016; Lareau &

Horvat, 1999). Sleeter (2016) suggests Milner's (2007) framework as a means for helping teachers develop a critical culturally responsive pedagogy that goes deeper than teacher empathy to teacher action and results in more equitable outcomes for minoritized students. The framework calls on teachers to consider their and others' identities through the lens of racial, cultural, and historical contexts, to seek out and reflect on narratives of underrepresented voices, and to consider how contexts and systems shape experiences and outcomes (Milner, 2007). As teachers begin to understand the contexts and systems that shape the experiences of students, they begin to understand "where racial differences in education exist, the reasons they exist, and what reforms might produce more equitable systems" (Triplet & Ford, 2019). Though work to combat the specifically racial bias affecting enrollment and advancement of Black students in world language programs is necessary, Milner's Framework is not limited to critical reflection on race alone. As teachers engage in the reflective process, it's important that their work consider how the intersections of their own and learners' identities impact classrooms.

"The avoidance of discussions of sensitive topics makes racism, racial discrimination, biases, and White ideologies go unnoticed, unchallenged, and eventually become the social norms in young children's perceptions" (Nguyen, 2022)

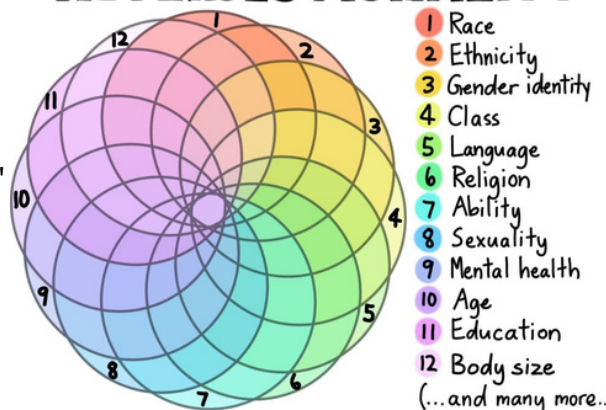


PATHS TOWARDS EQUITY

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO BLACK ACHIEVEMENT IN WORLD LANGUAGE STUDIES

Educators must consider an intersectional framework "to understand the complexity of social oppressions that operate across interrelated planes such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, and ability" (Nguyen, 2022). Boyd & Arnold (2000) note that antiracism education often "centres on the welfare of discrete individuals or, perhaps even more insidiously, reduced to a well-meaning and nice-sounding ethical perspective that focuses on the quality of interaction between/among individuals." The goal is for educators

INTERSECTIONALITY



Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

- Kimberlé Crenshaw -

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to understand that overcoming bias in their classrooms is a challenge that goes beyond how nice they are to students who are different from them.

This process is consistent with research by Carter et al. (2017) that suggests that educators

will only be able to alleviate racial disparities if they intentionally and critically monitor and reflect on data and craft targeted interventions. The study of world language is not simply a study of the language of others, but also a process through which students learn "to speak their material, ideological, and symbolic selves" in the target language, and in which "linguistic action reproduced or resisted power and inequity" (Anya, 2022). Until world language educators take action to empower students through their language of study, they will continue to be part of a system that systematically creates barriers to education and employment for their students. By using Milner's Framework to engage in a process of self examination and critical reflection focusing on experiences of Black and minoritized students, teachers can be equipped and empowered to take action to design learning experiences that increase the enrollment, retention, and achievement of Black students.

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