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# From Reduction to Empowerment: a Second Look at Access to World Language Education for the African American Student

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FROM REDUCTION TO EMPOWERMENT: A SECOND LOOK AT ACCESS TO WORLD  
LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT

by

Alicia Johnson

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2019

ABSTRACT  
FROM REDUCTION TO EMPOWERMENT: A SECOND LOOK AT ACCESS TO WORLD  
LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT

by

Alicia Johnson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor Barbara L. Bales, Ph.D.

College readiness policies dictate the number of credits of world language study a student ought to obtain by the time he / she graduates from high school (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). However, traditional schooling practices camouflaged by “neutral” education policies limit African American students’ access to quality curricular and instructional discourses (Apple, 1999; Gillborn, 2014; López, 2003). Limited access to enriching educational goods and resources, world language instruction in particular, causes them to question their self-worth and academic identities, decreases their classroom engagement and motivation to learn, and impacts their secondary and post-secondary learning outcomes (Fernández, 2002; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Therefore, this study used critical race theory to examine the high school world language experiences of 17 African American undergraduate students enrolled at a Midwestern four-year university. The participants in this study discussed the impact of school- and non-school-based adults as well as same-race peer networks on their secondary and post-secondary goals. Their counter-narratives not only provided evidence of how African American students break from traditional schooling structures to learn a needed world language, they also show how this particular population of students reject the dominant epistemologies that invalidate their academic experiences. Findings from this study suggest education policymakers critically

examine the policies that affect African American students' every day experiences as well as challenge teachers and school counselors to adopt culturally relevant practices that meet students where they are.

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In loving memory of  
Howard and Bernice Ross  
Forever in my heart.

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## Introduction

During my tenure as a college instructor, I noticed an alarming phenomenon. The first problem concerned the low enrollment patterns of African American students in the 100-level Spanish courses. Less than five students in these courses were African American. To further complicate this problem, several of them withdrew from Spanish and decided to study American Sign Language. To better understand this problem, I needed to investigate how public schools prepared African American students for post-secondary world language curriculum. Therefore, this dissertation for research critically examines the structural barriers that grant or deny African American students access to world language instruction and how these experiences affect students' post-secondary pathways. Although the geopolitical, economic, and social milieu of the 20<sup>th</sup> century raised questions regarding the role and place of world language education in the secondary and post-secondary curriculum, there is a growing body of research that highlights the advantages of learning a second language (Baker, 2011); benefits that align with the values and expectations of college admissions and graduation policies.

Learning a language is beneficial to students' academic trajectories, and in addition to the academic benefits, the field of world language education is slowly gaining momentum in the United States. In fact, several national, state, and local policies have been legislated to provide students opportunities to learn a language (e.g. the Elementary and Secondary Act, No Child Left Behind, Common Core State Standards, Every Student Succeeds Act, and the Wisconsin State Statutes). But, the salient features of these policies camouflage inequitable world language curriculum that has been (a) reserved for the "elite," (b) considered too difficult and a waste of time, and (c) deemed unnecessary (Levine, 2014). Therefore, juxtaposing the benefits of language learning with deficit narratives, colorblind policies, and competing ideologies,

particularly as they affect the secondary and post-secondary experiences of African American students offers opportunities to expose those historical and limiting structures found in public schools.

Competing ideologies influence curricular decision-making processes (Eisner, 2002) and in this situation, deficit thinking about African American students attending public schools penetrates discussions and debates regarding the role and value world languages play in education. Because district leaders filter policy initiatives through existing beliefs (Spillane, 2002), federal, state, and local policies often miss the mark on how to educate historically marginalized groups of children (Apple, 1999). Therefore, the tenets of critical race theory (CRT) are used to answer the central research question guiding this study:

*How do African American graduates of public-school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences?*

Additionally, there are two attending questions:

1. What aspects of the world language curriculum, if any, positively or negatively affected students' post-secondary world language experiences?
2. What aspects of the classroom instruction, if any, positively or negatively affected students' post-secondary world language experiences?

### **Purpose and Significance**

While state legislatures determine minimum education guidelines, school district leaders are charged with the task of interpreting these policies and communicating decisions to school leaders (Spillane, 2002). These school district leaders, however, may adopt their own policies (Hill, 2001). Whether school districts adopt state policies or establish new ones within state

guidelines, the direction school districts choose to take affects the curriculum-decision making process, and like state and local policies, the curriculum is often in a state of conflict and contestation (Eisner, 2002).

In a pluralist society, such as the United States, competing ideologies emerge about what schools should teach and for what ends (Eisner, 2002). A political process ensues and no matter what power an individual or group holds, it is seldom enough to determine what the school curriculum should look like (Eisner, 2002). In an era of increased accountability shaped by ESEA, ESSA, and CCSS mandates, public school districts often marginalize African American students' access to rigorous world language curricula (Kubota & Austin, 2007; Met, 2003, 2008). Thus, the purpose of this study is to unearth the issues of student access and college-readiness specific to world language education in public schools with the outcome of offering curricular and instructional changes for world language programs in public school districts.

This study of African American students' access to quality world language curriculum in public school districts is significant in two ways. First, it reexamines the importance of world language education as it relates to access, gatekeeping courses, and college-readiness for African American students. Second, my use of critical race theory (CRT), which has been undertheorized in world language education, helps readers understand African American students' experiences with high school world language curricula and the impact on their college-level world language experiences.

Although there are many structural and contextual factors that would shape African American public-school graduates' interpretation of how their high school world language instruction impacted their post-secondary world language experiences, I leave the study of these factors – tracking and detracking, staff perceptions of students' abilities, school funding, and all

federal, state, and local policies – to other researchers. These are not the focus of this study. This study looks at college students’ interpretation of their high school world language experiences, curricular and instructional practices in higher education.

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

Three terms guide the central argument of this study: gatekeeping courses, access, and college readiness. In this study, I define *gatekeeping courses* as those courses students need to take and pass to move to more advanced study (Atanda, 1999). I define *access* as the course-taking pathways school districts create to help students transition into institutions of higher education (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Roegman & Hatch, 2016). In this study, the term *access* is two-pronged: *access* to rigorous world language curricula and *access* to postsecondary institutions. Lastly, in this study *college readiness* is defined as the level of preparation a student needs to enroll in and succeed at a college or university (Conley, 2007). The relationships among these terms lay a foundation for understanding how African American students attending public high schools are granted or denied access to world language curricula and the impact of these experiences on their post-secondary course taking.

This dissertation has five chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss the extant literature that addresses the additive value of learning a world language. Specifically, I examine the cognitive, non-cognitive, and social values of language learning and the relationship of each to students’ access and preparation for post-secondary schooling. In chapter two, I lay out the tenets of CRT and discuss how I use them to understand the problem under investigation. Following this chapter, I share the research design and methodological tools used to examine the research question in chapter three. In chapter four, I share the research findings that emerged from the data and conclude with recommendations for policy, practice, and future research in chapter five.

## Chapter 1

### A Literature Review of the Cognitive, Non-Cognitive, and Social Benefits of Language

#### Learning

This literature review is divided into three major sections. In the first section, I examine the literature that answers the question: why do colleges and universities value language learning? I provide evidence of the cognitive and academic, non-cognitive, and social values of learning a world language and conclude with a discussion of the language learning values associated with access and college readiness. The second section examines those federal, state, and local policies that create the curricular and instructional pathways that grant or deny students access to quality world language programs. Therein, I discuss how these policies not only influence the outcomes of world language programs in public schools, but also how they impact African American students' college experiences. The historical and social contexts of these policies are discussed in chapter two. The third section of this literature review examines the hidden yet pervasive deficit narratives surrounding African American students and the impact on their access to a world language program.

#### Searching the Literature

I used several search engines to find peer reviewed journals, scholarly and academic research, and empirical evidence that support the central argument of this study. First, I conducted online searches of the two major academic journals in the field of world language education: the *Modern Language Journal* and the *Foreign Language Annals*. Much of the research I found was (a) outdated, a topic I develop below, (b) methodologically flawed because the researcher failed to detail the research and data collection processes, and (c) in support of learning English as a second or foreign language (ESL and EFL), a topic that lays outside the

scope of this study. In addition to conducting online searches through these two journals, I also used other search engines including JSTOR, ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Many of the sources used in this dissertation for research, however, come from bibliographic searches. After reading an article, I examined the author's list of references and requested an electronic version of the primary source through the institution's library system.

In order to find scholarly and academic research on world language education, I began by using a very broad term: world language education. This term yielded too many results, many of which related to the teaching and learning of the English language. After learning that the term "world language" includes English as a second language, I then conducted searches by using the term "foreign language." To gain insight into the historical and social nature of the field of foreign languages, I used three terms: foreign language education in public schools, foreign language education in high schools, and foreign language teaching. In addition to these terms, I also used a combination of terms that yielded literature related to the role language learning plays in public schools. Similar to the number of search terms I used to study the history of world language education in the United States, I also used three search terms to examine the attitudes and perspectives taken toward African Americans and world language education: African Americans and foreign language learning, African Americans in foreign language education, and foreign languages and African Americans, but these three combinations yielded the same results. Lastly, to demonstrate the cognitive, non-cognitive, and social values associated with learning a language, I used three more search terms: advantages of second language acquisition, persistence in foreign language education, and motivation toward language learning.

After using seven search engines and ten search terms, I gained a breadth of literature related to English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL) and bilingual education. Although these fields examine the teaching and learning of languages, they do not help us understand what is going on in the field of world language education. Thus, after removing the unrelated literature, I noticed something about the body of literature that characterizes the field of world language education. This is to say that the field of world language education is fragmented and outdated. Coupled with changes to education legislation, the geopolitical events of the two world wars (World War I and World War II), the launching of Sputnik in 1957, and the Cold War caused the federal government, applied linguists, and world language specialists to (re)examine the state of world languages in public schools. From the late 1930s through the 1960s, for example, scholars examined the entry of the world language curriculum in the general school curriculum. During the late 1980s / early 1990s, scholars began to take a closer look at the public-school curriculum and advocated changes to teacher preparation programs. Therefore, teacher education programs became the center of research efforts. Lastly, from the late 1990s through the 2000s, scholars began to advance the field by adding research that considered the affective variables (i.e. motivation, self-efficacy, perseverance, aptitude, etc.) that contribute to language learning.

Given the fragmented nature of the field of world language education, there is a dearth of literature where gaps in time exist. Therefore, this literature review reflects the fragmented nature of the field of world language education and considers the (a) cognitive, non-cognitive, and social benefits of learning a world language (Archibald, Roy, Harmel, & Jesney, 2006; Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Barnes, 2005; Bialystok & Craik, 2010; Cooper, 1987; Coronado-Aliegro, 2008; Dörnyei, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010; Eddy, 1981; Foster & Reeves, 1989; Gardner

& MacIntyre, 1992, 1993; Hilchey & Klein, 2011; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Hsieh, 2008; Jackson, 2014; Klee & Rogers, 1989; Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, & Nilsson, 2003; Lee, Therriault, & Linderholm, 2012; Lipton, 2004; MacIntyre, 2002; Peal & Lambert, 1962; Schwartz, 1985; Shedivy, 2004; Stewart, 2005; Stewart-Strobelt & Chen, 2003; Sykes, 2015; Tochon, 2009; Tochon, Kasperbauer, & Potter, 2007; Trimnell, 2005; Wherritt & Cleary, 1990), (b) federal, state, and local policies that impact African American students' access to world language programs (Allensworth, Nomi, Montgomery, & Lee, 2009; Almarza, 1996; Bittorf, 1998, 2011; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Rosenbusch, 2005; Watanabe, Nunes, Mebane, Scalise, & Claesgens, 2007), and (c) deficit narratives that marginalize African American students' world language experiences.

### **Benefits of Learning a World Language**

The acquisition of literacy, numeracy, and oracy skills are essential for secondary and post-secondary success, and learning a language enhances these skills for students (Tochon, 2009). From a neuropsychological perspective, the region in the brain responsible for language learning produces more synapses and greater plasticity that enables students to learn languages and transfer these skills to cognitive and non-academic tasks (Tochon, 2009). Despite a growing body of research underscoring the cognitive and non-cognitive advantages of second language acquisition (Baker, 2011), African American students are denied access to quality world language programs, a problem for students already struggling to gain entry into post-secondary institutions (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). In this section, I show how the cognitive, non-cognitive, and social benefits of learning a world language enhance the academic skills African American students need to acquire as they prepare for college.



**Cognitive benefits of learning a world language.** Before the 1950s, research in the field of world language education painted a negative picture of the effects of language learning on students' cognitive ability. According to these deficit narratives, second language acquisition was considered a "language handicap" (Diaz, 1983, p. 25) that negatively affected students' language and academic development. Many scholars believed the acquisition of diverse language skills interfered with students' ability to develop native competency in the mother tongue. Later research, however, rejected the epistemological ground on which these early theories rested and consistently showed benefits of language learning. Although the work conducted by Peal and Lambert (1962) is half a century old, more contemporary research paints much the same picture. After conducting a series of verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests, Peal and Lambert found that students who learned a world language exhibited greater mental and symbolic flexibility and outperformed their monolingual peers on tasks involving concept formation.

Although concept formation and mental flexibility are two important skills students need to acquire before they can succeed in a college setting, they are not the only skills needed for post-secondary success. Metacognitive skills (i.e. concrete and abstract reasoning) are also paramount to post-secondary success. Almost thirty years later, Foster and Reeves (1989) also demonstrated the positive effect of language learning. Building on the work conducted by Peal and Lambert, Foster and Reeves studied the effect of language learning on basic skills by studying the relationship between months of world language instruction and scores on tasks used to measure cognitive and metacognitive abilities. Their study consisted of sixty-seven students. The control group consisted of twenty-five students not exposed to language instruction, but received an additional thirty minutes of reading instruction. The other three groups of students

received thirty minutes of French instruction for different lengths of time (6.5 months, 15.5 months, and 24.5 months). After the instructional period, students in the experimental and control groups completed a series of standardized tests. After conducting statistical analyses of the data, Foster and Reeves reported that students in the experimental group significantly outperformed students in the control group on tasks involving reasoning and evaluation.

Comparable results were also found by Armstrong and Rogers (1997), who also demonstrated a positive correlation between world language study and increased cognitive ability. Similar to Foster and Reeves' study, the purpose of their study was to test the effect of world language instruction on basic literacy skills. The initial sample included one hundred students enrolled in two schools in the Unified School District (USD) in Pittsburg, Kansas. One of the schools contained three classrooms and the other contained two. Although the students completed a pretest in September, the final sample included ninety students. Fifty students were assigned to the control group and the other forty were placed in the experimental group. After completing statistical analyses of the data generated from the pre- and post-tests, Armstrong and Rogers found that students who received Spanish instruction performed better on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) than students in the control group.

Results from earlier studies were confirmed when Tochon, Kasperbauer, and Potter (2007) also examined the effect of language learning on increased cognitive ability. Tochon and associates found that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who learned Spanish applied better comprehension strategies in reading and could generate and organize ideas in writing. African American students in the program used more effective strategies for spelling compared to students in the control group.

In addition to enhanced literacy skills, the acquisition of a second language also has positive effects on memory skills. In 2003, Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, and Nilsson studied the positive effect of second language acquisition on memory. Kormi-Nouri and associates compared sixty language learners with sixty monolinguals and found a positive relationship between exposure to languages and greater performance on episodic, spatial, and semantic memory skills. Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, and Nilsson reported that students who learned world languages could integrate, process, and organize information in two languages.

Coupled with increased cognitive, metacognitive, and literacy skills, learning a world language also enhances creative and divergent thinking skills (Dörnyei, 2005; Lee, Therriault, & Linderholm, 2012; Stewart, 2005). Students who speak two or more languages think more flexibly and elaborately not just about words, but about everything (Tochon, 2009).

**Non-cognitive benefits of learning a world language.** The acquisition of non-academic skills such as critical thinking, creativity, self-motivation, and self-efficacy are also necessary for post-secondary success (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). Hodges and Welch (1992), for example, studied the relationship between self-efficacy and attitude toward language teaching and learning. The purpose of their study was to examine the effect of a college-preparatory program on students' level of preparation for college. Eleven college-bound sophomores from two inner-city high schools in Knoxville, Tennessee participated in the study. During the summer, participants engaged in classes that focused on English and world languages. The world language teachers made use of quizzes, written and oral assignments, weekly progress reports, and a final summary report. After analyzing student work, the teachers reported that students expressed positive attitudes toward second language learning and were optimistic about continuing their language studies. Hodges and Welch concluded that along with the academic

benefits of second language learning, a student's ability to assess his / her academic performance is an important skill to have in the college classroom.

The results from Hodges and Welch's study were confirmed in 2008 when Coronado-Aliegro also studied the relationship between self-efficacy and self-assessment in the world language environment. The study was designed to see if undergraduate students' self-efficacy beliefs positively correlated with self-assessment exercises after one semester of world language instruction. The study consisted of sixty-two White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian American undergraduate students from two Midwestern and Northeastern universities. To minimize the effect of previous language experience, the participants were enrolled in introductory Spanish courses. After a week of standardized world language curricula, the participants completed self-assessment instruments that focused on the language learner's needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Higher scores on the self-assessment instrument indicated that a student demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy. After completing statistical analyses of the data, Coronado-Aliegro reported that the participants' self-efficacy beliefs strengthened as their self-assessment ratings increased.

Similar findings also emerged from a study conducted by Hsieh (2008). The purpose of that study was to examine the relationship between attitude, interest, motivation, and world language achievement. The study consisted of two hundred and forty-nine undergraduate students learning Spanish, German, and French. To better understand the students' attitudes, interests, and motivation toward the language they were learning, the participants responded to questions on the Attitude / Motivation Battery Test (AMTB). Mid-term exam scores and final course grades were also used as indicators of student attitude and motivation toward language learning. After conducting multivariate analyses of the data, Hsieh reported that those

participants who demonstrated a positive attitude toward language learning were more likely to achieve academic success in the world language classroom.

A positive self-efficacy helps students acquire new skills, but this is not the only non-academic skill students need to succeed in the college classroom. Motivation (Dörnyei, 2003, 2009, 2010; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993; MacIntyre, 2002; Stewart-Strobelt & Chen, 2003; Syed, 2001) is another non-cognitive advantage that aligns with the non-academic guidelines set forth by college-readiness policies. Shedivy (2004), for example, conducted a case study with five students chosen through random sampling. The participants studied Spanish throughout high school and college. The primary method of data collection included face-to-face interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed. After analyzing the data, Shedivy found that integrative motivation, an individual's willingness to form positive social connections with members of the L2 group (Anya, 2011; Hsieh, 2008; Gardner, 2001; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, R, 2000; Pratt, 2010), emerged as the main theme. While residing in Mexico for example, one of the participants remembered the family with which he stayed and credited that "experience with inspiring him to continue studying Spanish throughout high school and college" (p. 110). While the desire to fit in and learn the target culture was important to another participant, another made positive social connections with non-native English speakers.

Similar results were confirmed by Sykes in 2015. To better understand the participant's motivation to learn diverse languages, Sykes conducted face-to-face interviews with him and learned that instrumental motivation more closely characterized his desire to learn multiple languages. Grammar books and cue cards served as sources of learning, and immediate communication served as the primary reason for his desire to learn other languages. Due to the

participant's high level of motivation toward language learning, he successfully acquired various diverse languages.

**Social capital acquired because of learning a world language.** Social capital refers to the accumulation of material and non-material resources through social or institutional relationships (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). These interpersonal ties “enhance individual functioning” (as cited in Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011, p. 89) and can improve one's life outcomes. At the school level, classroom teachers, school counselors, and other school personnel become purveyors of social capital for students, especially for African American and minority students whose parents may not possess the knowledge of traditional secondary and post-secondary processes students need to navigate. These school-based individuals can disseminate important information to students as they establish their post-secondary goals.

***Social benefits of learning a world language.*** Social capital is necessary for second language learning because it provides students with resources not readily available to them in their communities. Thus, in addition to increased cognitive and non-cognitive skills, students who learn a world language also develop acute social skills (Tochon, 2009). Primarily, they develop a sense of cultural pluralism, or an openness, sensitivity, and appreciation for diverse cultures (Lipton, 2004; Simmons, 2004). As students become culturally sensitive, they develop the ability to think freely, learn ways to bridge gaps between culturally diverse people, and build trust, respect, and understanding toward other people and their cultures (Simmons, 2004; Tochon, 2009).

Learning a world language also enhances a student's linguistic and metalinguistic language skills (Archibald, Roy, Harmel, & Jesney, 2006). When a student learns two or more

languages, he / she feels more competent in his / her linguistic abilities and learns to use his / her native language with more precision (Trimnell, 2005). His / her enhanced listening and memory skills not only increase his / her vocabulary causing him / her to possess a greater repertoire of words (Stewart, 2005), these skills also translate into greater control over grammatical representation in both languages, which leads to success in the college classroom (Bialystok & Craik, 2010; Hilchey & Klein, 2011; Jackson, 2014; Tochon, 2009).

***Social benefits of learning a world language for post-secondary experiences.***

Standardized tests (i.e. SAT and ACT) are part of a college or university's admissions process (Rothstein, 2004), and a growing body of research shows grades and performance on standardized tests are strong predictors of post-secondary success (Fleming, 2002; Kim, 2002; Tross, Harper, Osher, & Kneidinger, 2000; Zheng, Saunders, Shelley, Mack, & Whalen, 2002). Although there is evidence that standardized tests positively predict academic achievement for African American students (Fleming, 2002; Garcia & Fleming, 1998), contradictory evidence also suggests they present an unfair bias to students of color (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005). Scholars who subscribe to this latter belief argue that standardized tests predict academic success for white students (Zwick & Sklar, 2005). There is evidence, however, that learning a world language can improve student performance on standardized tests.

Students who learn a world language earn higher scores on the ACT and SAT (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). Although more than three decades old, Eddy (1981) showed the effect of world language instruction on SAT-verbal performance. The study was designed to measure the performance of students who studied a world language in high school compared to those who did not. The sample included four hundred and forty White, African American, Asian, and Hispanic 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in three high schools. After statistical analyses of students' median and

composite SAT scores, Eddy reported that students who studied a world language for at least one year performed better on the verbal reasoning section of the SAT than those who did not study a language at all.

Cooper (1987), who also conducted a study on the effect of world language study on standardized test performance, reported similar findings. The sample consisted of 1,778 students from the twenty-three high schools in the Southeast region of California. While four hundred and forty-five students had not taken a world language in high school, 1,333 had taken a year of German, French, or Spanish, and after a covariate analysis of the data, Cooper reported four major findings. First, students who took a world language performed better on the SAT. Second, similar to the findings reported by Eddy, Cooper also found a significant effect of time on the students' test performance. To realize the full benefits of language instruction, students must study a language for at least one year. Third, students who studied German achieved the highest scores on the SAT, and lastly, economic background did not affect students' test performance. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who studied a world language for a least one year, performed the same or better than their more fortunate peers. Although this and other research highlight the social capital benefits of learning a world language for a successful post-secondary experience, structural and institutional barriers often impede a student's process of acquiring the necessary social capital needed to have a positive post-secondary experience.

***Challenges to students' accumulation of social capital for a successful post-secondary experience.*** After being admitted into a college or university, students take a placement exam in English and mathematics (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Ngo & Kwon, 2015; Saxon & Morante, 2014; Scott-Clayton, 2012). Many students also take the placement exam in a world language.



Unfortunately, the homogeneous experience of the high school language curriculum is incongruent with the content on the placement exam (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). Placement exams measure proficiency, but the linear instruction and informal exposure to quality world language curricula provide pitfalls for college students (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). In other words, the lack of articulation between the high school world language curriculum and post-secondary language programs cause college students to falsely evaluate their progress in the target language.

The confluence of incongruent secondary and post-secondary world language content and teaching methods causes two major problems for world language programs at colleges and universities (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). In addition to administering placement exams, a significant number of colleges and universities also rely on seat-time equivalencies, or the number of language classes a student has taken in high school, to determine his / her proper placement in world language courses (Lam, 2010; LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). Evidence of this fact was confirmed by a study conducted in 1989 by Klee and Rogers. Although more than a quarter century old, Klee and Rogers found that 25% of the language departments they surveyed did not administer a placement exam. Similar results were confirmed by Wherritt and Cleary in 1990. In these cases, college instructors used seat-time equivalencies to make judgements about students' linguistic competence, aptitude, and ability in the target language (Lam, 2010).

In addition to incongruent secondary and post-secondary world language instruction, many students repeat the same language courses at the college level (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). In 1985, for example, Schwartz found 42% of students who studied a language for two or more years in high school studied the same language at the introductory level in college. Data collected in 1995 confirmed these results (see LeBlanc & Lally, 1997). Thus, the use of seat-time equivalencies and the repetition of introductory coursework strain resources from post-

secondary world language programs. In other words, universities and colleges “can no longer afford the luxury of teaching students the same subject matter twice” (LeBlanc & Lally, 1997, p. 125). To avoid the pitfall of seat-time equivalencies, students must be prepared for the rigor of college-level world language curricula (Moore, 2005; Pratt, 2010, 2012). Thus, any social benefits students acquire in their high school world language experiences are challenged by the expectations required in their post-secondary coursework. Education policies such as the ones mentioned above, however, create structures that limit African American students’ access to quality world language programs that prepare them for college-level world language instruction.

### **Policies that Shape Students’ Opportunities to Learn a World Language**

Education policies are never value-neutral, so some groups of students are included and others are left out (Apple, 1999; Hill, 2001; Young, 1999). In other words, “policies are constantly contested and the passing of legislation is neither the start nor the end of the process by which policy influences the everyday experiences and life chances of racially minoritized students and their families” (Gillborn, 2014, p. 28). Thus, I discuss those federal, state, and local policies responsive to enacting change for students in public schools. I begin three decades ago.

The road to college-readiness began with a 1983 report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, which called for increased attention to American public schools (Anyon, 2005; Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). The National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that American prosperity, security, and civility were in jeopardy because the educational foundation on which the United States was built was eroding and in desperate need of reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). According to the report, the course content decreased in rigor and secondary students abandoned college-preparatory courses in favor of general and vocational track programs, so the

recommendation was to strengthen graduation requirements to include a minimum of “(a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 70). Although grades improved, less time was spent on homework, so the recommendation was for schools, colleges, and universities to raise academic and admissions standards (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education believed more challenging and rigorous coursework would enhance learning and increase basic skills for secondary students, but the narrow focus on high-stakes testing and punitive accountability measures created pathways for the continuation of inequitable curricular and instructional practices in urban schools (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). Reform efforts did not stop with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, however. This report gave way to reform efforts that set out with a plan to ensure secondary students graduate high school ready for post-secondary options. Table 1 shares major secondary reforms after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

After the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, high schools continued to receive microscopic attention from federal, state, and local legislatures (see Table 1.1), and in 2008, the U. S. Department of Education issued another report: *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years after A Nation at Risk* (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). Findings in that report mirrored those in the 1983 report regarding the state of secondary education in the United States. In the report, the U. S. Department of Education stated student achievement in mathematics and reading had not changed in twenty-five years (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). Although policies and expectations for secondary and post-secondary schools had changed, barriers to quality

Table 1.1 – *Chronology of Secondary Reforms from 1994-2010*

Year	Secondary Reforms
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Goals 2000: Educate America Act</i> was signed into law to provide resources to states to ensure students meet their maximum potential.</li> <li>• <i>School-to-Work Opportunities Act</i> called for the integration of school-based learning with the real-world context of work.</li> <li>• <i>Improving America's School Act</i> was signed into law to provide extra help to disadvantaged students.</li> </ul>
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</i> was amended.</li> </ul>
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Need-Based Educational Aid Antitrust Protection Act</i> amended the <i>Improving America's Schools Act</i>.</li> </ul>
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Education Flexibility Partnership Act</i> allowed states to participate in the Education Flexibility Partnership program, which waives most requirements of ESEA Titles I, II, IV, VI, and VII.</li> </ul>
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Commission on the High School Senior Year was formed.</li> <li>• Carnegie Foundation focused major efforts and funds on urban high schools.</li> </ul>
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bridging the Gap</i> report examined the poor curricular alignment between high schools and colleges.</li> <li>• <i>Betraying the College Dream</i> demonstrated the lack of preparedness of high school graduates based on college expectations.</li> <li>• Alliance for Excellence in Schools was formed on behalf of “at-risk” students.</li> </ul>
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No Child Left Behind Act</i> focused on proficiency and high stakes accountability.</li> <li>• National High School Alliance was formed to promote equity and excellence in high schools.</li> </ul>
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school reforms were created to complement NCLB.</li> </ul>
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Department of Education funded the National High School Center to help states develop goals and guidelines to improve high school performance and college readiness.</li> </ul>
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission on NCLB released a report titled <i>NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise of our Nation's Children</i>, to recommend accountability in the form of a 12<sup>th</sup> grade assessment.</li> </ul>
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>America COMPETES Act</i> was signed into law to increase support for STEM majors and careers.</li> </ul>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Barack Obama introduced <i>Race to the Top</i> to improve graduation rates and wide achievement gaps.</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Barack Obama proposed significant changes to NCLB.</li> </ul>

Note: The information in Table 1.1 was synthesized from Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Clark, 2007

A little more than ten years after the publication of a *Nation at Risk*, President Clinton's Administration enacted the Improving America's School Act (IASA) of 1994. The IASA was responsible for promoting a comprehensive approach that would increase students' academic success. At the time of the act, it was reported that only one in five 12<sup>th</sup> grade students read at grade level and understood complex math problems (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). Therefore, the goal of IASA was to bolster support and funding for public schools so students would graduate high school "having mastered challenging subjects, including: English, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and geography" (as cited in Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010, p. 7). Although the intended goal of the new law was to increase student performance, high-stakes testing, and accountability, there was little effect on academic achievement (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). In response to the shortcomings of the IASA, President George Bush proposed a new law shortly after the start of the new millennium.

Signed into law in 2002, the purpose of NCLB was to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments" (Haas, Wilson, Cobb, & Rallis, 2005, p. 180). The intended goal of NCLB was to increase the academic achievement of all students, especially those students who historically have been poorly served by public education. Initially, the NCLB guidelines affected elementary schools. By law, elementary schools were required to establish and implement rigorous standardized tests to students in grades three through eight, but by the 2013-2014 school year, secondary schools were required to comply with NCLB guidelines and test students in grades 10,

11, and 12 in reading, mathematics, and science (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010). While schools were obligated to bring all students to 100% proficiency, education reformers were concerned with the “achievement gap” marked by race and ethnicity (Chappel & Cahmann-Taylor, 2013). The goal of NCLB was to identify those groups “at risk” and administer academic interventions that would bring them to 100% proficiency. Punitive sanctions were placed on schools for failing to meet yearly academic progress standards, so teacher evaluation processes, lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, and improved student learning were placed at the top of debates in education, but a closer look at the effect of NCLB on world language programs, however, revealed a fallacy in the law. In other words, the law had not fulfilled its promises to public schools (Rosenbusch, 2005).

In 2003, the Council for Basic Education (CBE) surveyed and conducted focus groups with 1,000 public school principals in Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, and New York (see Rosenbusch, 2005). Approximately three-quarters of the principals reported that more instructional time was given to reading, writing, and mathematics. Principals in high-minority schools reported significant decreases to instructional time in world languages.

Findings from the 2003 report by the Council for Basic Education were confirmed by Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) who conducted a survey of world language programs in public schools. The survey asked respondents if the NCLB act affected their world language programs. One-third of the public schools with world language programs had been affected by NCLB. Rural and urban schools were affected more than suburban schools, and schools with more students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more affected than schools with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools affected the most by the NCLB legislation reported that more time was spent in areas such as reading and mathematics. Some schools even

reported that students were pulled from world language instruction to receive instruction in reading and mathematics. In other cases, many schools lost world language programs completely. While the NCLB legislation was intended to provide students access to quality programs, schools with high minority populations continued to face cuts and declines to their world language programs; programs that would prepare them for the rigor of the college classroom.

As reform efforts continued to dominate the new millennium, the Common Core State Standards became the agenda for the day (CCSS). In 2010, the National Governors Association and Council for Chief State School Officers established a set of common guidelines for students in grades K-12 (Papola-Ellis, 2014). The common core state standards call for a specific focus on what students should learn in English Language Arts and mathematics with the purpose of preparing them, regardless of background or ethnicity, for post-secondary success (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). According to proponents of the Common Core State Standards, students cannot succeed in meeting the demands of a global economy if they are denied access to a rigorous and challenging curriculum in school (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Lleras, 2008; Papola-Ellis, 2014). Although the Improving America's Schools Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the Common Core State Standards purported to improve the academic success of all students, African American students continue to lag behind whites in measures of academic achievement (Guinier, 2004).

Due to the national focus on mathematics and English Language Arts, "policymakers failed to see the critical importance of foreign language competence for America's students" (Met, 1994, p. 151). In other words, policymakers rarely choose world languages above other curricular options, so while some schools and school districts fare better in the number of world

language options offered to students, others, often rural and urban areas are unable to adopt similar patterns and practices (Schoener, 2012). In Wisconsin, Wisconsin State Statute 121.02(1) (L) 5 states that school districts are to “Provide regular instruction in foreign language in grades 7 and 8 beginning in the 1996-97 school year.” Under Wisconsin State Statute 121.02(1) (L) 3, for students in grades 9-12, school districts must

provide access to an educational program that enables pupils each year to study English, social studies, mathematics, science, vocational education, foreign language, physical education, art and music. In this statute, “access” means an opportunity to study through school district course offerings, independent study, cooperative educational service agencies or cooperative arrangements between school boards and postsecondary educational institutions. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1996)

Simply stating that schools and school districts should provide access to world language instruction does not require school districts to offer it. The outcome of these policy efforts covertly and overtly omits some students from participating in a world language experience because it does not explicate the curriculum that should be taught leaving students vulnerable to individual teacher expertise or lack thereof.

The consequences of these types of curriculum policy gaps are also seen in the mandated college preparatory coursework in mathematics and English. Findings from a study conducted by Allensworth, Nomi, Montgomery, and Lee (2009), for example, provide evidence that policies affecting curricular and instructional practices in public schools carry negative consequences for African American students aspiring to gain access to college. The authors evaluated a policy that purported to end remedial coursework in English and mathematics and mandate college-preparatory coursework for all students. From the fall of 1994 to the fall of 2004, incoming



freshmen were placed in advanced Algebra and English courses. Although more students attained credits to advance to higher-level English and math courses, failure rates increased, grades declined, graduation rates did not improve, and the number of students entering college did not change. These types of egregious policy decisions make higher education inaccessible to African American students.

State and federal mandates also affect instructional practices, which carries negative consequences for African American students. During the 1990-1991 academic year, Almarza (1996) conducted a study with four student teachers. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into beginning teachers' professional knowledge of world language teaching. Almarza collected data over a nine-month period and used two methods to gain access to the teachers' knowledge of language teaching and learning: "At a theoretical level, they aimed to elicit student teachers' ideas about language and about teaching and learning languages. At a classroom level, they focused on the activities and learning experiences selected by the student teacher and how these were used within the teaching-learning process" (p. 52). Specifically, Almarza examined and analyzed student teachers' pre-training knowledge, knowledge gained during the teacher education program, the relationship between knowledge and practice, and the relationship between pre- and post-training knowledge. After collecting, transcribing, and analyzing the data, Almarza found student teachers' pre-existing beliefs about language teaching and learning did not change after they participated in a teacher education program. In fact, one of the student teachers "saw herself free from the constraints imposed by the context of the classroom, she was back in a position in which she could continue to explore the ideas she had about language prior to the beginning of the course" (p. 69). Almarza concluded that formal teacher education programs do not always alter teachers' prior cognitions and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Although the following study does not directly relate to world language instruction, we can apply the findings from the study to our understanding of gatekeeping practices in world language programs in public schools. In other words, science and world language serve as gatekeeping courses that limit students' access to higher education.

In their study, Watanabe, Nunes, Mebane, Scalise, & Claesgens (2007) found that although Highlander School adopted a detracked science curriculum, post-test outcomes were not statistically different from other schools in the district. The study revealed that the science teachers continued to uphold developmental beliefs about student learning. They believed if students did not acquire the scientific skills needed to successfully complete the course, then the opportunity for them to acquire them had passed. Consequently, the instructional methods used in these classrooms were unaltered, a problem that dictates the post-secondary paths students decide to take.

Coupled with federal and state policies, the confluence of state's minimum standards, the marginal position of world language teaching and learning (Pratt, 2012), and indirect language in various legislation leave room for local school districts to interpret and adopt their own requirements (Hill, 2001; Spillane, 2002). As a result, many school districts' world language policies give students the choice to study a world language beyond the two-year requirement. Offering additional coursework is important because during the first two years of world language study, the options to learn focus on the basic structures of any language (Shedivy, 2004). Colleges and universities, however, require more than a basic introduction of language structures (Shedivy, 2004). As such, having only two years of any language in high school significantly underprepares students for the rigor of college-level world language instruction (Pratt, 2010;

Shedivy, 2004). In fact, most comprehensive colleges and universities require students to take world language courses to fulfill graduation requirements (Bittorf, 1998, 2011).

Many Wisconsin colleges and universities require students to take intermediate and advanced language courses. Seven of the most selective / competitive public universities in the state of Wisconsin, for example, have established rigorous world language requirements for admissions and graduation. Table 1.2 shares the world language policies addressing admissions and graduation requirements at UW-Eau Claire, UW-LaCrosse, UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Oshkosh, UW-Stout, and UW-Whitewater (Bittorf, 1998, 2011).

Table 1.2 – *World Language Requirements for Admissions and Graduation from Wisconsin’s Universities*

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>Admissions Requirement</b>	<b>High School Courses Satisfying Requirements without Examination</b>	<b>Graduation Requirement</b>
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire	2 high school credits	No	8 credits in one language
University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse	No	No	16 credits in one language
University of Wisconsin-Madison	2 high school credits	No	BA: 16 credits in one language or 12 credits in one language and 6 credits in a different language  BS: 12 credits in one language
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	No	Yes	BA: 16 credits in one language or 9 credits in one language and 6 credits in a different language
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh	No	No	14 credits in one language
University of Wisconsin-Stout	No	No	2-16 credits (major specific)
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater	No	Yes	2 high school credits or completion of 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester university level or higher

These world language admissions and graduation policies are similar across the state.

For many African American students graduating from public school districts in the state, the lack of extensive access to high school world language curriculum limits their chance for admissions into many of the universities in Wisconsin. Deficit narratives, however, undermine the

cognitive, non-cognitive, social and postsecondary values associated with language learning, and continue to limit African American students' access to quality world language curricula.

### **Marginalization Effect for Students of Color**

In this chapter's introductory paragraph, I briefly mentioned several deficit narratives that continue to dictate African American students' access to world language curricula. In this section, I provide a historical and more detailed explanation of how these pervasive narratives continue to dictate the access African American students have to quality world language curricula in public schools, which in turn, impacts their access to many post-secondary opportunities.

Historically, the notion of elitism served as the primary reason for the denial of African Americans in world language education. The benefit of being granted access to world language curriculum was reserved for the academically gifted and talented, the high I.Q., college-bound student who fared well academically (Colangelo, 2001; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). In addition to possessing a strong academic repertoire, this student also possessed a positive self-identity (Block, 2007; Syed, 2001), self-efficacy (Graham, 2007) and self-motivation (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001) toward learning. World language specialists, teachers, and administrators believed the academically-skilled student deserved to study a world language because he / she possessed strong vocabulary skills in his / her native language, thereby possessing the ability to transfer cognitive and non-cognitive skills to the target language. On the other hand, second language learning remained closed for the disadvantaged minority student because he / she possessed academic and non-cognitive skills that remained untapped (Hodges & Welch, 1992). In other words, unlike the gifted and talented

student, who would naturally acquire a diverse language, the African American student would not fare well in a language setting because he / she typically failed in other academic disciplines.

The myth of elitism figured prominently in discussions around access to world language education until the 1960s. Although notions of elitism are implicit in today's "college and career ready" practices, the notion of privilege for the native speaker remains. Although privileges have nothing to do with birth, there are some privileges that have not been abolished (Kramsch, 1997). For example, native speakers enjoy a privilege that non-native speakers do not. Native speakers, according to Kramsch (1997), "enjoy a de facto authority and prestige that the nonnative lacks" (p. 251). From birth, the native speaker learns the utterances and grammatical intuitions of the mother tongue. By his / her birthright privilege, the native speaker sets the linguistic standard for the non-native speaker to emulate, has a deeper understanding and connection to the culture and history of the language, and arrives at different interpretations of culture-specific literature. As a result of not possessing native-like fluency in diverse languages, African American students are often excluded from world language curriculum (Hodges & Welch, 1992).

In addition to the dominant notion of elitism and birthright privilege, time has also contributed to the reasons African American students were denied access to quality world language curriculum. Central here was the identification of variations forms of Black English, which called African American students' grasp of the Standard English dialect into question. Administrators, teachers, and world language specialists believed African American students retained low academic skills in English and needed more time to develop these basic skills (Colangelo, 2001). Therefore, some linguists and teachers alike agreed that Black English and other non-standard dialects impeded African American students' acquisition of Standard English,

so instead of learning diverse languages, African American students were advised to devote more time to mastering the English language (Colangelo, 2001).

In addition to the above argument, it was a commonly held belief that acquiring a world language would be a waste of time for African American students. The purpose of studying a language was to become a world language specialist, a profession that which African American students had no knowledge. To further exacerbate this problem, options to use diverse languages outside the classroom were not shared with African American students. High school counselors and administrators believed world languages would not be of value to African American students if they studied subjects such as typing and business (Colangelo, 2001). Besides the singlehanded focus on “business subjects,” it was a common belief that world languages were of no value to the life and career trajectories of African American students.

The denial of world language options was further justified because whites believed African American students would not go to college or participate in immersion experiences. Due to dominant epistemologies, “students of the majority population have mastered a foreign language before being admitted to college and are able to show evidence of exposure and travel which black students cannot afford” (Sims, 1957, p. 291). Due to their limited social, cultural, and economic capital (Lewis, 2003), African American children are more likely to live in communities where adults have limited educational experiences (Lleras, 2008), which limit their exposure to rich cultural experiences. The need to supply the basic elements of survival (i.e. food and shelter) necessitate that these families allocate resources differently than middle-class, white families (Schmid, 2001).

## Conclusion

In this review of the literature on world language programs in public schools, I drew on empirical research that offered evidence of the (a) values associated with language learning, (b) federal, state, and local policies that influence curricular and instructional practices, and (c) deficit narratives that continue to impact African American students' educational experiences as they relate to access to world language curricula. Findings from the above studies yield two major insights regarding the role world languages play in the educational experience of students attending public schools. The first major implication of the studies discussed above is that learning a world language offers many advantages to students (Dörnyei, 2005; Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, & Nilsson, 2003; Lee, Therriault, & Linderholm, 2012; Stewart, 2005; Tochon, 2009; Tochon, Kasperbauer, & Potter, 2007). While enhancing basic literacy skills in mathematics, reading, and English Language Arts (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997), learning a world language also has the added benefit of increasing a student's self-efficacy and motivation toward language learning (Coronado-Aliegro, 2008; Shedivy, 2004; Sykes, 2015). The second major implication, as evidenced from the literature discussed above, concerns the gatekeeping policies and practices that systematically deny African American students access to quality world language programs (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Rosenbusch, 2005) undermining the goals of college-readiness policies, and rendering this particular group of students underprepared for a four-year post-secondary experience. In the next chapter, I offer a more detailed analysis of critical race theory; as application to world language education policy, to put forth nuanced understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. I specifically use the analytical and theoretical properties of critical race theory to examine the racial and discriminatory policies and practices that continue to impact African American students' educational experiences in public schools.



## Chapter 2

### Critical Race Theory as a Framework for this Study

This chapter lays out the theory I use to examine the research question: how do African American graduates of public-school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences? I begin by offering the socio-historical context of how dominant epistemologies, passed down through legal decisions, limit African American students' access to world language programs. I then discuss the history of critical race theory, and following this section, I examine the policies and practices that continue to impact the educational experiences of African American students attending public schools. I conclude this chapter by examining the intersectionality of critical race theory and world language education to uncover the ways public schools create hierarchies of differential access to quality world language programs.

I was invited to attend a recruitment workshop, and as the guest speakers were recruiting prospective teachers to teach in the local school district, one of the participants became concerned that she would be displaced after two years of teaching because the school district dictates a minimum of two years of world language study. The guest speakers attempted to allay this participant's concern by saying teachers would not be displaced if students continue studying world languages beyond the two-year requirement. One of the guest speakers further explained that it was her goal that all high school students study a world language for more than two years, but teachers must encourage them to choose world language courses throughout their high school careers. As the guest speakers shared their final comments, I remembered that participant's concern and wondered how this problem came about. In other words, how did we get here?

To better understand what is going on, it is important to examine the laws that denied African Americans and other communities of color access to a formal education. In the 1700s, for example, states such as South Carolina and Mississippi prevented the education of slaves. Throughout the 1800s, other states such as Virginia and Delaware passed harsh legislatures that prevented the spread of literacy among slaves; legislatures that resulted in a 95% illiteracy rate after the emancipation (Washington, 1913). While this number eventually decreased, at the time, 30% of free slaves could neither read nor write (Washington, 1913). In a few states, except for religious instruction, the education of slaves was deemed incompatible with slavery, and although changes were made to the ways African Americans were educated, elite white males classified education as belonging to whites (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008). This master script of white supremacy created a hierarchy of access, particularly as it relates to African Americans' access to equal educational conditions (Ladson-Billings, 1999a).

The exclusion of African Americans from quality educational programs in Southern states did not cease with the passing of federal legislation. One of the most prominent federal legislations of the United States was decided in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896. Under the “separate but equal” doctrine, the Supreme Court allowed the racialized segregation of public spaces, including public schoolhouses. While white children enjoyed curricular and instructional pleasures that prepared them for democratic citizenry and post-secondary success, African American children received instruction designed to prepare them for factory and manual labor (Duncan, 2005; Franklin & Johnson, 2008; Yosso, 2002).

Schools attended by African American children were located in abandoned buildings or churches (Washington, 1913). If the physical edifice was in ruin, a bench under a tree became the next best option for instruction (Washington, 1913). Although enrollments in public schools

inhabited by African American children soared throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the availability of funds and teaching staff did not meet the educational needs of the students (Washington, 1913).

In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* and ended the state-mandated segregation of public facilities (Guinier, 2004). The passing of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision allowed children of color to attend the same schoolhouses and receive the same educational resources as white children (Guinier, 2004). Despite the favorable ruling of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; however, many African American children still attend racially segregated schools where racial and discriminatory practices prevail (Lewis, 2003; Lleras, 2008; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012; Saddler, 2005); racially segregated schools with limited opportunities to access a college preparatory curriculum. To better understand how critical race theory emerged as a body of critical scholarship, it is important to look at the historical events that shaped the movement. Therefore, the next section examines the prominent scholars and key events that shaped the development of this theory that looks at the structural components that marginalize African American students' access to the same learning opportunities as their white peers, as in the case of learning a world language.

### **History of Critical Race Theory**

The United States has a long history of using the law, courts, and legal remedies to resolve racial injustices. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the law of the land. The “separate but equal” doctrine passed down by the Supreme Court reflected the racial and social temperament of the time (Tate, 1997). The belief in the superiority of whites made it impossible to see African Americans as holding an equal status in American society. Scholars such as Carter G. Woodson (1933) articulated the need for legal remedies to address the unequal

and subordinate position of African Americans, but the problem was that African American attorneys were unprepared to participate in the social fight for the equal treatment of the African American people (Tate, 1997). According to Woodson (1933):

The Negro lawyer has tended to follow in the footsteps of the average white practitioner and has not developed the power which he could acquire if he knew more about the people whom he should serve and the problems they have to confront. These things are not law in themselves, but they determine largely whether or not the Negro will practice law and the successes he will have in the profession. The failure to give attention to these things has often meant the downfall of many a Negro lawyer. (p. 174)

In the late 1920s, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis developed a new law school with the major goals of combating the miseducation of the African American lawyer and addressing the intersection of racism and the law. With the development of a new law school, leaders of the NAACP and the Civil Rights movement hired African American lawyers to challenge the law and legal injustices imposed on the African American community. As leader of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Thurgood Marshall met Derrick Bell, who at the time was a lawyer in training. Bell accepted Marshall's offer and began to influence academic writing in his new position. According to Tate (1997), Bell's "methods of writing about race and law were at the forefront of a new school of scholarly thought in law: critical race theory" (p. 206). Bell's scholarly contributions challenged the marginal role race and racism occupied in legal doctrine and called scholars to focus on the intersection of racism and the law.

The conception of critical race theory emerged from critical legal studies (CLS) during the 1970s. Bell (1995) states: "CRT is the heir to both CLS [Critical Legal Studies] and traditional civil rights scholarship" (p. 5). As critical legal studies gave way to more traditional

civil rights scholarship, African American epistemology became under attack. Multicultural education received considerable controversy because it “often framed racism as simply a struggle over representation, an imagistic battle which effectively serves to hide the social relations of domination in which racism is situated” (Kincheloe, 1993, p. 253). Therefore, a new body of critical scholarship that moved beyond traditional paradigmatic boundaries and grappled with the intersection of legal jurisprudence and race emerged. Although CRT has gained considerable attention, racial and discriminatory practices continue to dominate education discourse, which affect students at the secondary and post-secondary levels. In the next section, I discuss the foundational tenets that emerged from the history of CRT, and in the sections that follow, I use these tenets to analyze the reasons African American students are still denied access to world language curricula in public schools.

### **The Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical and analytical framework that decenters the epistemological ground on which deficit ideologies of racism stand (Bernal, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002). As a theoretical framework, CRT “draws from and extends a broad literature base of critical theory in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies and women’s studies” (Yosso, 2005, p. 71) and “allows scholars to interrogate social, educational, and political issues by prioritizing the voices of participants and respecting the multiple roles held by scholars of color when conducting research” (Chapman, 2007, p. 157).

Critical race scholars use counter-storytelling, one of the most essential and commonly used tenets of critical race theory, to prioritize the voices of marginalized groups of people. According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004), “Counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and

critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (p. 27). In a society where people of color are commonly thought to be incompetent, dangerous, highly sexed, and lazy, it is more efficient to rely on such generalizations than to understand individual members of the group (Davis, 1988), so counter-storytelling allows critical race scholars to flip the script (Conner & Rosen, 2013) and cast doubt on the validity of hegemonic discourse (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Since reality is socially constructed (Apple, 1999; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Lewis, 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Smedley & Smedley, 2005), counter-storytelling privileges the voices of subordinated groups of people and allows them to name their oppression with the goal of transforming those structures that produce and reproduce institutional and structural domination and subordination (Love, 2004).

Stories represent particular social positions (Bell, 2003). They either project images of social progress or of struggle. The majoritarian story, on one hand, depicts the history of the United States as progressive. This story projects the ideal that whites are good and operate within a meritocratic system. According to this story, considerable social and economic progress (Bell, 2003) is being made despite the problems we have faced in the past (Bell, 2003). On the other hand, stories from the voices at the bottom of the well (Bell, 1992), depict individual experience linked to systemic social patterns of racial, class, and gender subordination. Any story that claims to explain the lives of subordinated groups of people but fails to capture the essence of their lived experience is incomplete (Love, 2004).

Earlier, I shared how research in world language education puts forth the idea that world language instruction is enacted upon students without them expressing their interpretations of such practices. While early research marginalizes student voice, this study breaks from traditional theoretical boundaries in the field of world language education and helps us see

aspects of world language teaching and learning from students' perspectives. In this study, the counter-narrative moves African American students' experiences of high school world language instruction from the margins of education policy to the center of debates and decisions in this area. The tenets of critical race theory, such as those I continue to outline in the discussion below, provide insight into students' experiences of world language instruction in public schools and help answer the question I asked in the introduction of this chapter: how did we get here?

The permanence of racism in American society is another foundational tenet of critical race theory. Critical race scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and Keffrelyn Brown (2008) state: "CRT rests on the premise that racism is not an aberration, but rather is normal and natural in American society" (p. 154). To accept the permanent nature of racism in American society, one must, as Bell (1996) argues, adopt a realist view of American societal structure. A realist view "requires realizing the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27).

Whiteness as property also serves as a foundational tenet of CRT. According to Apple (1999), "racial forms and identities have been and are constitutive building blocks of the structures of our daily lives, imagined and real communities, and cultural processes and products" (p. 13). Initially, whiteness emerged as a form of racial identity, but over time, it has evolved into a form of property that has been and still is protected by the law (Harris, 1993). This protection by the law privileges whites because race as a category usually does not apply to them; a situation that speaks to the invisibility of power relations in ordinary discourse about whites (Apple, 1999; Bondi, 2012). To redress the maintenance of invisible power relations, critical race theory challenges the four levels on which property functions: the right of possession, the right to use, the right to enjoy, and the right to disposition (Harris, 1993). Given

the racially stratified conditions that permeate American society, African Americans and other communities of color do not gain full access to these rights.

Interest convergence, coined by Derrick Bell (1980), grants African Americans partial access to material, social, economic, and educational resources; resources that have been and continue to be reserved for a few. This concept rests on the premise that

Whites may agree in the abstract that blacks are citizens and are entitled to constitutional protection against racial discrimination, but few are willing to recognize that racial segregation is much more than a series of quaint customs that can be remedied effectively without altering the status of whites. (Bell, 1980, p. 522)

According to Bell and other scholars, compromises are made on both sides to prevent whites from fleeing the system. To prevent white flight, African Americans and other communities of color are only granted partial access to elite institutions and systems within society as not to alter their reputation or status. Thus, it seems that progress is made for both sides, but a critical examination of the issues African Americans continue to face helps us understand that the system maintains itself (Chapman, 2008).

Critical race theory also critiques liberalism. Critical race scholars maintain that liberal ideology rests on three major notions: the notion of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change. According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004), a colorblind ideology “fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as Other” (p. 29). Rather, colorblind ideologies justify racism and ignores the inequities, inopportunities, and inequalities that affect people of color. In the next section, I extend this argument by examining dominant discourses upheld in public schools.



## **The Intersectionality of CRT and Access to Quality Educational Programs**

The reasons discussed above alone do not account for the marginalization of African American students from quality educational programs. In this section, I examine issues related to residential segregation and tracking and the effect of these experiences on African American students' educational experiences.

Geographic location – of families and of schools – influences students' academic outcomes. While there has been an increasing concentration of families of color in suburban areas, poverty has accompanied minority suburbanization and has affected school financing and educational programs (Guinier, 2004; Lleras, 2008). Although the number of African American students attending suburban schools is increasing, the ethnic make-up of urban schools is still largely students of color. The segregation patterns in these schools contribute to the achievement gap.

Differential funding policies, a byproduct of residential segregation, also contribute to the achievement and opportunity gaps that exist between African American and white children. Issues of teacher supply and quality, emergency hiring practices, the assignment of teachers to content areas unrelated to their fields, and the lack of resources such as highly trained teacher mentors and school counselors also affect African American students' educational experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1995). While white students attending suburban schools benefit from enriching educational resources, African American students in public schools often come into contact with fewer quality teachers and school counselors (Darling-Hammond, 1995). This situation carries the consequence of underpreparing students for the rigor of college-level courses; courses such as rigorous world languages.

Whether a student of color attends a suburban or an urban school, tracking practices also

dictate the access they have to advanced curricula (Alvarez & Mehan, 2006; Burris & Welner, 2006; Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006). While proponents of tracking argue for its place in public schools, opponents offer different perspectives.

Proponents of tracking argue that tracking helps teachers differentiate instruction based on students' needs and allows students to make progress commensurate with their abilities (Becker, Lüdtke, Trautwein, Köller, & Baumert, 2012; Tieso, 2003). Proponents also argue that high achieving students should not be placed in courses with low achieving students. When high achieving students are exposed to the curriculum in honors and advanced courses, they are provided opportunities to enhance academic and non-academic skills. In advanced placement courses, high achieving students are "given opportunities to integrate ideas across fields of study. They have opportunities to think, write, create, and develop projects" (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 224). Moreover, they are challenged to critically engage with and explore the world around them, which are skills that align with the expectations set forth by college-readiness policies.

Opponents, on the other hand, believe tracking is the principal engine that maintains social inequality between classes and works against the ideals of democracy and egalitarianism by sorting students into specific categories that which they cannot escape (Rubin, 2006). Opponents also agree that schools should not strain resources on students that should only be reserved for a few (Rubin, 2006); a situation that sheds light on the hierarchy of access created in public schools. Although the tracking debate continues to receive considerable attention in education research, this practice remains commonplace in public schools and dictates the quality of African American students' educational experience.

In addition to pervasive tracking practices, the negative and low expectations teachers uphold also affect students' educational outcomes (Landsman, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Before

African American students enter the school, much has already been decided for them. The types of classes they will take, the type of instruction they will receive, and the pace at which the instruction will go has already been determined before the first day of instruction (Tatum, 2005).

Oversimplified curriculum and instruction most commonly characterizes classroom practices in public schools (Landsman, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Educational scholars categorize the oversimplification of classroom content and curriculum as “psychometric warfare” (Tatum, 2005, p. 33). These scholars posit that test-based data are used to reduce difficult content into simplistic terms to support the notion that differential learning capacities exist between African American and white students (Tatum, 2005). Although African American students benefit from academically challenging coursework, most often the cultivation of subjects taken by whites have a high value in American public education (Carter, 2008). This situation creates a major obstacle to students’ acquisition of academic, non-cognitive, and social skills necessary for post-secondary success (Yosso, 2002).

The creation of major obstacles set to obstruct a student’s language learning process emanates from the macro-level structures embedded within the organizational makeup of a school. This process refers to organizational habitus, or the way in which class-based dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations are organized and transmitted to individuals in an organization (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). In other words, schools establish a set of “organizationally embedded expectations” (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004, p. 76) for the students it serves. Although students are often unaware of hidden implicit biases, school counselors and classroom teachers uncritically accept such norms and expectations as a means to justify their attitudes and dispositions toward African American students. Hence, the

organizationally transmitted ideologies about African American students justify the hierarchy of access embedded in the white master script of public education (Ladson-Billings, 1999b).

Not only do a school's set of organizationally embedded ideas and practices dictate the access African American students have to enriching curricula in mathematics, science, and English / Language Arts, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the effect of these idiosyncratic beliefs also impacts students' access to rigorous world language instruction. The endemic racist epistemologies, such as those examined in first chapter of this dissertation, stratify this particular population of students out of a needed learning opportunity; a learning opportunity that will grant them admissions to most selective colleges and universities. When classroom teachers and school counselors acquiesce to the school's way of thinking and doing, they unequivocally accept the belief that African American student are unworthy of learning a world language (Colangelo, 2001; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Kramsch, 1997). To expand this discussion, particularly around African American students' access to world language programs in public schools, I draw the connection between critical race theory and world language education in the next section.

### **The Intersectionality of CRT in World Language Education**

Research in second language acquisition has made few attempts to address race, gender, ethnicity, and social class because it was assumed that they do not affect the cognitive and metacognitive processes of language learning (Anya, 2011; Block, 2007; Kubota, 2003). In this section, however, I use the tenets of CRT to move discussions on race and ethnicity in second language acquisition away from the margins, and in doing so, I uncover the deficit epistemologies that carry negative consequences for African American students attending public schools.

During World War I and II, the federal government believed the acquisition of world languages was important for American soldiers participating in the war, so government leaders sought the help of applied linguists and world language specialists (Pavlenko, 2002, 2003). After establishing language academies, the audiolingual method became the dominant method of instruction. World language specialists believed direct instruction was the best way to learn a language, but it was not until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that applied linguists began to revise theories of second language acquisition. During this time, the communicative language teaching method, which emphasizes the socio-cognitive nature of second language acquisition, became the dominant method of language instruction (Savignon, 2007). After receiving considerable attention, linguistic competence became the focus of language teaching and research efforts. This pedagogical approach, however, still raised questions regarding the role world languages played in a student's general education and preparation for a post-secondary experience.

Wartime efforts brought considerable attention to world language instruction in public schools, which prompted Americans to recognize "how shortsighted the policy of linguistic isolation had been" (Colangelo, 2001, p. 191). According to critical race scholars, this "all call" for world language instruction in public schools is one example, among many, of interest convergence. While the federal government cited language learning as an important skill for the American people, others questioned its usefulness. These debates caused white American people to look at the role languages played in other countries, and after a study of twenty-four nations in the Western world, the United States learned that languages were offered for a minimum of six years in other major countries (Colangelo, 2001). To uphold its prestige and status in the eye of countries such as Russia, the United States began to increase world language course offerings in public schools (Colangelo, 2001).

Questions regarding the role world language instruction played in the general curriculum were intimately tied to issues of power and became a test for exclusion, “an excuse to turn away, to refuse to recognize the other” (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 64). As world language education gained momentum in the United States, increasing concerns over language threat quickly spread throughout states such as Illinois and Wisconsin (Ovando, 2003; Pavlenko, 2002, 2003). As the two major world wars ended, the United States revisited the importance and function of world languages for students attending public schools, but xenophobic attitudes and fear of linguistic threat once again caused world languages to witness a period of linguistic isolationism (Ovando, 2003).

To white American people, world languages were foreign and held no place in the general curriculum (Reagan, 2002). As the public adopted intolerable attitudes toward the teaching and learning of world languages, German and French lost momentum in the public-school curriculum. Although German immigrants garnered support for the teaching and learning of the German language, the language was censored in public places, including public schools (Ovando, 2003). Despite the growing body of research underscoring the benefits of learning a second language, dominant and negative epistemologies surrounding the growth and sustainability of world language instruction in public schools led the American people to believe world language programs strained resources from other academic programs and therefore did not belong in the general curriculum (Huddy & Sears, 1995). As a result, these deficit narratives limited African American students’ access to varied world language curricular offerings.

As applied linguists and world language specialists attempted to define world languages for secondary and post-secondary institutions, the curriculum remained the focus of considerable controversy. As world language specialists grappled with what to include in the curriculum, it

seemed appropriate for teachers to ask students to respond to questions such as “Would you like Mexico City enough to marry and settle there? Would you build a fireplace in your home? What nationality of servants would you employ?” (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001, p. 10). While the federal government and world language specialists attempted to factor world language instruction in the general curriculum, questions such as these were considered appropriate.

Race-based curricular practices is not the only area critical race scholars challenge and seek to change for students attending public schools. Linguistic discrimination, or the unequal distribution of material and non-material resources based on the use of the mother tongue, such as native Spanish fluency (Barwell, 2003), is another area of focus for these scholars. Many world language teachers believed the structures of Black English interfered with the African American student’s ability to learn a second language, despite Black English not being a world language learned or taught in public schools. To make this point clear, Davis (1992) states:

some researchers have posited that African Americans, principally those from “culturally disadvantaged” environments, are linguistically deficient. According to the deficit theory, the language spoken by these African-American students is undeveloped and unstructured. The theory further posits that because of their language deficiency, speakers of Black English suffer a cognitive deficiency that renders them unable to excel in the study of Standard English and other academic subjects. (p. 3)

This deficit narrative called the cognitive and linguistic abilities of African Americans into question. Since world language teachers believed, among others, that the phonology of Black English prevented African American students from successfully acquiring world languages, African American students were excluded from reaping the cognitive, non-cognitive, and social

benefits of world language learning (Colangelo, 2001; Levine, 2014), a problem that persists today.

To further complicate this problem, whiteness as property also accounted for the limited access African American students had to quality world language programs. From this perspective, world languages were believed to only be learned and spoken by whites (Moore, 2005). The cognitive, non-cognitive, and social skills gained from learning a language were believed to enhance the skills white students acquired during their educational experiences. Since it was believed that African American students would not attend college or participate in immersion experiences, it was considered unnecessary for them to learn a world language (Colangelo, 2001).

The language rights and privileges ascribed to native speakers also contributed to the reasons African American students were denied access to world language curricula (Kramsch, 1997). As world language specialists tried to understand the role world languages played in the general curriculum, world language teachers often found difficulty in the way they facilitated the language learning process. Language laboratories, university radio broadcasts, and grammar textbooks were popular in the world language classroom (Colangelo, 2001). World language teachers challenged students to find songs and feature broadcasts in the target language, and although students approached language learning by using these instructional tools, these methods brought considerable defeat to the language teacher, who found students unable to produce the language. To combat this problem, native speakers were used to provide authentic speech and practice to language learners (Bangura, 1996; Colangelo, 2001). Since African American students did not possess native-like fluency in world languages, they were excluded from diverse language learning experiences (Hodges & Welch, 1992).



Instead of emphasizing the external role the federal government and world language specialists played in the denial of world language options for African American students, students themselves also became the blame for the limited world language exposure they received in school. Applied linguists and world language specialists believed language learning required a strong academic background and superior intelligence (Hodges & Welch, 1992). Since it was believed that African Americans internalized images of Black inferiority and avoided intellectual competition, dominant epistemologies put forth the argument that African American students were incapable of acquiescing the super intelligence needed to learn a second language (Hodges & Welch, 1992). In other words, the perceived low intelligence of African American students added to the reasons they were excluded from quality world language curricula.

In addition to blaming African American students for their low academic intelligence, scholars also believed their attitude toward the learning situation also accounted for the limited exposure they had to language learning. Although scholars reported African American students preferred teaching approaches that focused less on grammar and more on the development of speaking skills, “Learners have been found to have counterproductive views and unrealistic expectations that can inhibit learning” (Poza, 2013, p. 63). Despite the positive attitudes African American students held toward language learning, negative perspectives limited their access to quality world language programs and progress toward second language fluency (Poza, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

While education reformers attempt to address the “achievement gap,” they fail to take into account all of the areas that contribute to students’ educational experience. A critical examination of world language programs in public schools tells us that despite the “all call” for

college-readiness, African American students are still not being prepared to enter college. Resource differentials within and across urban, public schools, tracking, and limited quality instruction not only deny African American students true access to the cognitive, non-cognitive and social benefits of learning a world language, these deficit perspectives also justify their limited access to higher social classes such as world languages. Therefore, I used critical race theory to (a) deconstruct these deficit models that continue to justify the marginalization of African American students from quality educational programs and (b) critically examine those gatekeeping practices that continue to deny them true access to high-quality world language curricula in public schools.

My use of CRT in this study is important for two reasons. First, in the introduction of this dissertation, I stated that CRT has been untheorized in world language education. Expanding that discussion, I used the foundational tenets of CRT to bring race and racism in world language policies and practices to the center of debates in public education. Throughout the history of world language education, the world language curriculum and language pedagogy were of major concern for the federal government, world language specialists, applied linguists, and classroom teachers. Since the place and role world languages held in public schools dominated these debates, a critical examination of how race and racism filtrated curricular and instructional practices remained absent from these discussions and gave way to the deficit narrative that African American students are unworthy of world language learning.

I also used CRT to analyze the covert racist practices that occurred at the micro-analytic level of the classroom. In the discussion above, I highlighted the language, attitudes, and behaviors world language teachers often adopted and used in the world language classroom to marginalize African American students and deny them the opportunity to gain the cognitive,

non-cognitive, and social capital benefits needed to navigate post-secondary admissions processes. In the following chapter, I discuss the methodological tools I used to gather evidence to address the research question guiding this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter lays out the methods I used to answer the research question: how do African American graduates of public-school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences? I begin by discussing the research paradigm that shapes this study. Then, I justify the use of a qualitative research design for this study. Following this section, I explain the theoretical framework used to analyze the data. Next, I explain the context in which this study is situated, the methodological tools I used to gather the data, and the selection and protection of the research subjects. Then, I discuss the methods I used to ensure credible and trustworthy research findings and results. Following that section, I discuss the role researcher reflexivity plays in the research process. Next, I discuss the way I present the research findings in the next chapter of this dissertation. I conclude by discussing limitations of this study.

#### **Working within a Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Many of the findings reported in the literature review emerged from quantitative research instruments such as questionnaires, surveys, and large databases. This study, however, breaks from tradition and uses an interpretivist paradigm to study the impact of local and state policies on the experiences of African American students in world language programs in public schools. I begin this chapter by explaining how interpretivism shapes this study.

In qualitative research, qualitative researchers use a naturalistic approach where they seek to understand phenomena in a natural or “real” setting (Golafshani, 2003). They do not manipulate the phenomenon of interest, but instead they seek “illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Rather than imposing their

epistemological or ontological perspectives on the participants, qualitative researchers allow the knowledge shared to serve as the basis for further theoretical exploration (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). From an ontological perspective, the experienced or “real world” of the participants serves as the foundation of interpretivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Rather than focusing on the meaning of “reality,” the researcher hones in on the value attached to lived experience (Arghode, 2012). From an epistemological perspective, qualitative researchers seek a multitude of explanations that uncover the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Arghode, 2012).

With respect to this study, interpretivism served as the qualitative framework from which new understandings were gleaned. The African American participants in this study were provided the opportunity to name their experience through an interpretivist paradigm. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, which I explain in further detail below, participants had the opportunity to share their personal experiences taking a world language in high school and the effect of these experiences on their post-secondary experiences. Their counter-narratives decentered deficit epistemologies affecting world language programs in public schools.

In addition to paying attention to their counter-narratives, I also paid attention to and interpreted those stories that contradicted the emerging findings of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Mays and Pope (2000):

As well as exploration of alternative explanations for the data collected, a long established tactic for improving the quality of explanations in qualitative research is to search for, and discuss, elements in the data that contradict, or seem to contradict, the emerging explanation of the phenomena under study. Such “deviant case analysis” helps refine the analysis until it can explain all or the vast majority of the cases under scrutiny.  
(p. 51)

The participants' personal experiences were used to unearth the enduring nature of racial and discriminatory practices in world language programs. As such, the epistemological and ontological ground on which their stories stand unearthed the multiple truths surrounding the gatekeeping policies and practices that grant or deny African American students access to world language curricula in public schools. Although the emotional story told by members of the African American community calls the experiences of communities of color into question (Subotnik, 1998), I also unpacked those narratives that provided contradictory evidence of the problem.

Throughout the research process, I understood that the participants would come to the research setting possessing different sets of experiences. While some came to the research setting having had the opportunity to push pass those curricular and instructional structural barriers that were set to limit their access to quality world language curricula, others from the same or different public-school districts did not have similar experiences, so the impact of these differing experiences were different. Although interpretivism frames much of the studies conducted in qualitative research, this paradigm lends itself to major criticism.

A major limitation of interpretivism concerns the construction of multiple interpretations of reality. While both positivist and interpretivist researchers seek to understand reality, reality in qualitative research "is considered incomprehensible, fluid, and shaped and influenced by social interactions" (Arghode, 2012, p. 159). The socially-constructed nature of reality threatens the epistemological and ontological ground on which interpretivism stands (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), so the confluence of feelings, perceptions, and beliefs yield multiple realities that conflate the objective nature of experience (Arghode, 2012). Despite challenges to interpretivism, this study is shaped by an interpretivist paradigm. In the next section, I explain the qualitative

research framework chosen for this study.

### **Phenomenology as a Qualitative Research Framework**

To understand the participants' experiences of discriminatory practices in world language programs in public schools, I used a phenomenological line of inquiry. Edmund Husserl introduced phenomenology as a method and a movement during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Moran, 2001). According to Moran (2001):

Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer (p. 4).

Building on this definition, Patton (2015) states that phenomenology captures "...how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it and talk about it with others" (p. 115). In qualitative research, phenomenology requires the researcher to suspend judgment, reject external explanations of phenomena, and challenge notions of knowledge as absurd (Moran, 2001). To capture "real" experience, the researcher must engage with the real world and provide descriptions of the phenomenon as it is lived (Finlay, 2009). What sets phenomenology apart from other qualitative frameworks (i.e. social constructivism, narrative inquiry, etc.) is that it captures the essence of a shared experience among research subjects (Patton, 2015). After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher identifies the phenomena shared among the research subjects. There are major challenges, however, to phenomenology in qualitative research.

Divisive debates regarding how much a researcher's subjectivity should foreground the research process emerged (Finlay, 2009). While some phenomenologists argue that the

qualitative researcher must render him / herself neutral in the research process, others believe it is impossible for a researcher to camouflage personal experience (Finlay, 2009). Instead, the researcher must develop a critical awareness of self in the research process, grapple with those experiences that shape his / her epistemological and ontological perspectives, and separate what belongs in the research process and what does not (Van Manen, 2014).

The use of varied phenomenological methodology also raised concerns regarding the true phenomenological nature of these different methods. Historically, many researchers failed to draw the connection between phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological methodology, which did not differ from other philosophical movements (Finlay, 2009). Therefore, phenomenology emerged as a philosophical movement to describe an experience as lived by the experiencer (Gallagher, 2012). The philosophy and methods used in phenomenological qualitative research explains the experience as told by the person who lived and experienced it, which is what this study aims to do.

Much of the research shared in chapter one offered conclusions of world language instruction as an external practice enacted upon students. This study, however, used phenomenology to examine those gatekeeping policies and practices that grant or deny students access to curricula that prepares them for post-secondary options. The participants in this study espoused multiple, lived realities of inequitable and gatekeeping world language practices, so their stories, feelings, perspectives, and subjectivities provided insight into the ways students attending public schools are granted or denied access to enriching educational opportunities. As previously mentioned, I used critical race theory to capture the meaning the African American students attached to their experiences taking a world language in high school. In the next section, I explain the relationship between CRT and phenomenology.



## **Understanding the Intersectionality of CRT and Phenomenology**

In this study, I used critical race theory to examine those policies and practices responsive to the preparation of African American students for their post-secondary experiences. Using CRT provided a framework for understanding their experiences of high school world language curricula by allowing students to share their counter-stories; stories that push back on the policies that limit their preparation and access to a four-year institution of higher education. Such an examination opens opportunities to enact curricular and instructional changes to world language programs in public high schools.

To that end, counter-storytelling is “a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (as cited in DeCuir and Dixson, 2004, p. 27). In other words, the first-person narrative places marginalized voices in a position of power with the larger goal of exposing Eurocentric and Euro-racist values, beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions (Yosso, 2002). The first person-narrative not only allows the phenomenologist to study the phenomena under investigation through the eyes of those who experienced it (Gallagher, 2012), the use of CRT also helps us understand what life is like for disenfranchised groups of people (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Students’ counter-narratives also uncovered the implicit and hidden practices in public school districts’ world language policies. By using first-person accounts, I flipped the script (Conner & Rosen, 2013) and offered recommendations for changes to those policies responsive to student access to higher education. In the next section, I explain the context in which this study is situated as well as the tools I used to gather the data.

## **Research Context and Generation of Data**

To better understand the impact of schooling structures on students' everyday experiences, I conducted research with African American students who graduated from public school districts in Wisconsin and decided to study a world language at a four-year public university. In this section, I describe the institution and the institutional qualities in which this study is situated.

Data collection methods were employed with students who attended a large, Midwestern, public, four-year university that is ranked one of the highest research institutions in the United States. In the section below, I detail the recruitment activities I conducted to generate participants for this study.

**Selection of participants.** I recruited research participants for this study over the course of two academic semesters. I begin this section with a detailed account of the recruitment activities I did during the spring 2017 academic semester.

**Recruitment – Round 1.** There were fifteen weeks in the academic semester at the site where I conducted this study. The spring semester began on the last Monday in January and ended the second week in May. I did not conduct any research activities the first of class (the last week in January) for two reasons. The institution accepted students during the first week of a new semester and students who were already enrolled in their classes had the opportunity to make changes to their course schedules during that time. Given this situation, I decided not to conduct any recruitment activities during the first week of the semester. I began recruitment the second full week of classes and ended the first week in May. I ended at this particular time because the institution's final exam period began the following week.

Before I conducted any recruitment activities, I created a recruitment flyer. I did not use a template or any special computer programs to create this flyer. Instead, I used a traditional computer-based program to design this flyer.

I typed a brief summary of this study and placed it at the top of the flyer. I then added a bullet point list of the criteria I used to choose the participants for this study. I closed the flyer by leaving my full name and personal contact information — my personal phone number and university email address — for prospective research participants to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study.

After designing the recruitment flyer for this study, I then created a pre-screening survey, which is outlined in Appendix B, to see determine eligibility for participation in the study. I did not want to obtain skewed data from students, who for example, did not study Spanish for at least one year in high school. So, I used this pre-screening protocol to determine if prospective research participants fit the criteria outlined in the recruitment survey.

After completing the recruitment survey and pre-screening protocol, I identified the buildings on campus where I would post the recruitment flyers. I identified three campus buildings: the student union, the language and literature hall, and the building where the American Sign Language courses are held. I identified the two academic buildings because students take their language courses in these facilities. In addition to that reason, the writing center, a commonly used, university-wide resource is also located in the language and literature building, so there is a significant number of students who use this building to meet their academic needs. I also identified the non-academic building as a place to post recruitment flyers because it attracted a large number of students.

After identifying these three buildings, I created a list of the buildings in the notebook I designated for this study. My next goal was to identify the visible, high-traffic areas in each building to post my flyer. That same evening, I walked into each building and identified the spaces where I would post the recruitment flyer. I started with the student union and identified two public bulletin boards. I then walked to the building that houses the American Sign Language department and repeated the same actions I had just done in the student union. I ended by exploring the public spaces in the language and literature hall. In the end, I identified seven areas in these three buildings. These spaces included one bulletin board in the building that houses the American Sign Language department, two bulletin boards in the student union – one located near the entrance / exit doors and the other near the restaurant operations, and four different locations in the language and literatures building – two bulletin boards located on the first floor of the building, one in the basement, and an open wall space on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor near the elevator. I recorded these areas in my notebook.

The next day, I printed seven copies of the recruitment flyer and revisited those areas I had previously identified. Other flyers were already posted in these same areas, so in most cases I moved flyers to create space for me to post the flyer. I posted the flyer near the top or middle of each bulletin board so it could be visible to viewers.

Posting the recruitment flyer was not the only recruitment activity I did, however. While I waited for undergraduate students to respond to the flyer, I also posted a message to my social media account. In the body of the post, I briefly explained the study, listed the criteria of selection, and provided a way for prospective research participants to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study.

I also thought of other ways to recruit research participants for this study. At this time, there were eight sections of first semester Spanish and ten sections of second semester offered to students on campus. I already had access to these instructors' university email, so I created two group emails. I included the first semester instructors in one email and the second semester instructors in another email. Although the recipients of the emails differed, depending on the level the instructor taught, the body of the email was the same. I included a brief summary of the study, the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, and the ways interested students could contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. Two instructors emailed me confirming receipt of the message. I did not have access to the instructors in the American Sign Language program, so I did not contact them.

In addition to the above strategies, I also contacted the academic adviser for first year undergraduate students. I emailed him the same information as described above. This adviser acknowledged and confirmed receipt of the message and assured me that he would disseminate that information to his advisees.

In addition to the above strategies, I also conducted class visits. I was unable to attend a large number of classes due to the classes being offered at or around the same time. Therefore, I decided to focus on the first semester Spanish classes. I arrived at campus one morning and reviewed the schedule of classes to have an idea of the times each class met. I made a list of the times and locations. I did not need permission from the Spanish department to visit classes because I did not interrupt class. Instead, during the 10 minute transition period between classes, I requested permission from the instructor to briefly explain the study. Shortly before the class was started, I asked the instructor if all of the students were present and if I could talk about the study. I was granted permission by the instructor, so I briefly explained the purpose of the study

and the participants I needed to recruit. After spending a few hours on campus, I was able to conduct five brief classroom visits.

After sharing the details of the study with each of the classes I visited, I returned to my office on campus and waited until 45 minutes past the hour to repeat the same activity. As students transitioned to their next class, I returned to the floor (the basement) where the language classes were held and waited in the center of the hallway. This served two purposes. I wanted to connect with interested students and also be on time for the start of the next class. Although I was unable to repeat this activity, interested students expressed interest in the study.

*Results from the first round of recruitment activities.* After completing the first round of recruitment activities described above, I received the following responses from students:

- 0 students contacted me about seeing the flyer posted in the seven buildings on campus
- 2 students emailed me on social media
- 1 student emailed me because she received information about the study from her 100-level instructor
- 3 students emailed me because they received information about the study from their first-year adviser
- 7 students expressed interest in the study after the class visits

Since I had come into contact with the seven students after the class visits, I was able to record their contact information. I recorded their full name, campus and personal email address, and personal phone number in my notebook. Before the conversation ended, I assured these seven students that I would follow-up with them regarding the next steps in the recruitment process.

Later that day, I emailed each student individually to protect their identity. I included the questions from the pre-screening survey in the body of the email. Four of the seven students participated in the pre-screening process. The other three students did not respond to the email message. I emailed these three students at three different times during the semester. I emailed them on the same day of our initial contact, two weeks later, and the last week I conducted recruitment activities for the semester, but I was unsuccessful in reaching them.

The three students who emailed me after receiving the information about the study from their adviser also failed to maintain contact with me. Similar to the three students discussed above, I emailed these three students requesting their participation in the pre-screening survey, but never received a response. Again, I emailed these three students three times throughout the semester. First, I responded to the initial message where they expressed interest in the study. Then, I sent a follow-up message two weeks later and one last message the last week I conducted recruitment activities on campus this particular semester.

The other three students, the two students from social media and the other who received the information from her 100-level instructor, participated in the pre-screening process this semester. After conducting multiple research activities, seven students served as potential research subjects for this study. I highlighted their names in my notebook as potential research subjects. Given the low number of potential research subjects, I emailed each of the seven students individually and informed them that I would contact them during the fall semester to gauge their interest in continuing their participation in the research study.

**Recruitment – Round 2.** As shown above, the recruitment activities I conducted in the spring 2017 semester did not yield a sufficient pool of prospective research participants. Therefore, I conducted another round of recruitment activities during the fall 2017 semester.

I began recruitment the second week of September, for reasons I explained above, through the third week in October. First, I returned to those same seven buildings on campus to post flyers. I also visited the residence hall located on campus. I was not a resident, so I was unable to access the bulletin boards and classroom spaces. Therefore, I stopped at the information desk and inquired into the person responsible for posting flyers and information in the residence halls. I was given the contact's business card. I emailed that person the next day and asked him / her to post the flyer in the residence halls. I did not receive a response.

I also visited the five cultural academic centers on campus. These academic spaces were located on the same floor in a building centrally located on campus. When I entered the academic center, I spoke with the receptionist about the study and received a business card for the advisers I needed to contact. That same day, I emailed each adviser individually. In the body of the email, I provided my reasons for contacting him / her, offered a brief explanation of the study and asked him / her to share that information with their advisees. The next day, one of the advisers copied me on the message he sent to his student group.

Lastly, I attended an evening event on campus. This was a social event intended to allow students to meet and interact with members of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO). Before I arrived at campus, I printed copies of the recruitment survey and pre-screening protocol. I did not have permission to leave the surveys on the tables, so I took the opportunity to interact with students throughout the event.

Lastly, I emailed a personal contact on social media. This student did not participate in the study, but she was actively involved in a number of student clubs and organizations on campus. Therefore, I utilized my connection with her as a way to reach more African American students on campus.



In the body of the email to her (the personal contact), I shared the focus and criteria of this study and asked if she could disseminate the information to other students and student groups on campus. I received a response from her three weeks after sending the initial email. She assured me that she would share the information with other African American students on campus. In the following section, I lay out the results of the second round of recruitment activities.

*Results from the second round of recruitment activities.* After posting recruitment flyers on campus, emailing a personal contact, visiting campus cultural centers, and attending an evening event on campus, the following responses from students:

- 0 students contacted me about seeing the flyer posted in the seven buildings on campus
- 0 students contacted me about seeing the flyer posted in the residence hall
- 1 student emailed me stating that she received the flyer from a friend
- 8 students emailed me stating that they received the flyer from one of the advisers in the African American cultural center
- 3 students expressed interest in the study during the evening event on campus

After receiving individual emails from interested students, I immediately responded to their emails. I attached two things in each individual response: the recruitment survey and pre-screening protocol. I requested that each student email me their preferred method of contact and their responses to the questions on the recruitment survey and the pre-screening protocol. These twelve students responded to the questions on the surveys, emailed me their personal telephone number, and granted me permission to contact them by phone.

After contacting this group of twelve interested students, I also contacted the seven students from the spring semester. I emailed each student individually. Although the seven students from the spring 2017 semester participated in the pre-screening survey, I requested their participation in this survey in addition to the recruitment survey because I wanted to see if there were any changes to their previous responses.

Two of the seven students from the spring semester withdrew their participation from the study. I contacted one student (an African American female) every day by phone and email for two weeks. She participated in the pre-screening process but was unable to participate in the study. The other student (an African American male), who also participated in the pre-screening process informed that his schedule did not allow him time to participate in the study.

After posting flyers on campus, emailing Spanish instructors and academic advisers, conducting brief class visits, attending an event on campus and sharing information about the study on social media, seventeen African American undergraduate students participated in this study. Table 3.1 identifies the characteristics of these participants.

Table 3.1 – *The Language Course-Taking Patterns of the Research Participants*

Student's Name	Gender	Name of High School	Language and Level Taken in High School	Source of Information about World Language Courses in High School	Language and Level Taken in College
April	Female	Central City High School	Spanish 1, 2, 3	Mentor	Second Semester Spanish
Ashley	Female	E. J. West High School	Spanish 1, 2	Peers	First Semester Spanish
Christina	Female	Davis High School	Spanish 1, 3	Peers	First Semester Spanish
C. J.	Male	Daley High School	Spanish 1, 2	Peers	Second Semester Spanish
Crystal	Female	Springs Lake High School	Spanish 1, 2	School Counselor	First Semester Spanish
Jade	Female	Jackson North High School	Spanish 1, 2	School Counselor	First Semester Spanish
James	Male	Collegiate University High School	Spanish 1, 2, AP	Peers	Second Semester Spanish
Marcelle	Female	Crystal Lake High School	Spanish 1, 2, 3, 4	School Counselor	Second Semester Spanish
Michelle	Female	Mercy High School	Spanish 1, 2, AP	Grandmother	Second Semester Spanish
Mike	Male	M. C. Jackson High School	Spanish 1	School Counselor	First Semester Spanish
Shanice	Female	V. C. Carter Senior High School	Spanish 1, 2, 3	8 <sup>th</sup> grade orientation	First Semester Spanish ASL 1
Stephany	Female	Victory II High School	Spanish 1, 2	School Counselor	First Semester Spanish
Steve	Male	Clarksdale High School	Spanish 3, 4, 5	Peers	Second Semester Spanish ASL 1 ASL 2
Taylor	Female	H. C. South High School	Spanish 1, 2	School Counselor	First Semester Spanish
Tiffany	Female	Carter Southside High School	Spanish 1, 2	Peers	First Semester Spanish
Tina	Female	Riley Park High School	Spanish 1, 2	Mentor	First Semester Spanish
Valerie	Female	Collegiate University High School	Spanish 1, 4, AP	School Counselor	Second Semester Spanish

Table 3.1 details the varied course-taking patterns of the seventeen undergraduate students who participated in this study. This table does not give us insight into these students' experiences, so in the next chapter of this dissertation, I use their counter-narratives to describe the conditions in the high school world language courses listed above. In the next section, I provide a rationale for inclusion and exclusion.

**Rationale for inclusion and exclusion.** Although CRT seeks change for subordinated groups of people (African Americans, Native Americans / Alaskan Indians, Latino / a, Asian Americans, etc.), this study only included members of the African American community. Few scholars in the field of world language education examine African American students' experiences in world language education. Davis (1992), for example, first inquired into African American students' experiences in world language education. Expanding this early work, other scholars also examined the issues African American students face in world language education, but few shine light on the school-imposed policies and structures that impact these students' classroom-level experiences. This is not to say that the experiences of other groups of students are not important to examine. This study, however, highlighted the world language experiences of African American students.

Similarly, this study also focused on students' experiences studying Spanish at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Research cites the Spanish language as the most commonly studied world language in high school and college (Moore, 2005). Consistent with this line of research, this study included students who studied Spanish in high school and in college.

This study also included students who studied American Sign Language in college. Although K-12 and college-level Spanish courses tend to have larger enrollments compared to enrollments in other languages, there is a growing body of research that attempts to understand

the declining enrollment patterns, particularly among African American students, in Spanish classes at the college level. Consistent with this line of research, this study also attempted to understand the course-taking patterns among African American students. In other words, if African American students who have studied Spanish in high school are not continuing their studies of the Spanish language at the college level, are they choosing to study a non-spoken language such as American Sign Language to meet a university's world language requirement? Therefore, this study also included students who studied American Sign Language in college.

The research question designed for this study specifically honed in on African American students' experiences of world language instruction in high school and how their public-school experiences prepared them for college, so I used the students' answers to the questions on the recruitment and pre-screening surveys as the criteria for selection in this study. For the purposes of inclusion in this study, I looked for affirmative responses to the survey questions. Given this criteria of inclusion, the seventeen participants provided affirmative answers to all of the questions asked on the recruitment and pre-screening surveys. After I reviewed the students' answers to the questions and followed-up with them by phone and email, they expressed excitement to participate in a study as such. In fact, two of the five students recruited in the spring semester anxiously waited to provide their counter-narratives about their Spanish classes in high school and college.

**Interviews as a data generation tool.** To capture the counter-narratives of the African American students, I conducted seventeen individual interviews and two focus group interviews. According to Merriam (2009), "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Given the nature of the

research design, I could not analyze human behavior directly, so I conducted interviews to gain insight into the research participants' thoughts and perceptions (Merriam, 2009).

**Individual interviews.** There are different structures for interviews (i.e. highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured / informal). In a highly structured interview, the researcher determines the wording and order of the interview questions (Merriam, 2009). With this type of interview structure, the researcher elicits specific information from the participants, which carries the consequence of limiting the data the researcher gathers. The unstructured / informal interview structure, on the other hand, is the opposite of the highly structured interview. Unlike the highly structured interview, the researcher does not create a predetermined set of questions in an unstructured / informal interview. Instead, questions are open-ended, flexible, and exploratory (Merriam, 2009). The problem with the latter type of interview structure is that conversations can move in a variety of directions with the potential of yielding little to no useful data for the researcher. Without guiding questions, participants are likely to share experiences unrelated to the researcher's interest. After conducting an unstructured / informal interview, the researcher must sift through the data to find those parts related to his / her study. This study, however, focused on the semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009) as a means of collecting data.

Before recruiting participants for this study, I developed a set of questions, backed by research in critical race theory and world language education that served as a guide during the interview process (see Appendix C). These questions were flexible and elicited the participants' opinions, emotions, and perceptions about their high school and college world language experiences. In addition to invoking their feelings, the questions also invoked sensory experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Since I wanted the participants to explain what

it was like taking Spanish in high school, I asked questions such as: walk me through a typical day in your high school Spanish class. What was the curriculum like? What did your teacher do during instruction? Although I developed a predetermined set of questions, that did not change during the interview process, I allowed each participant to discuss topics related to the phenomenon under investigation (Glesne, 2011).

**Focus group interviews.** The focus group interview, on the other hand, is “an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 93). Before conducting the two focus group interviews, I completed the seventeen individual semi-structured, face-to-face interviews first. I recorded each interview with my telephone and a personal tape recorder. I then listened to the completed interviews and typed each by hand. As I listened to the students’ stories, I then created a set of questions to use during the focus group interviews.

After conducting and transcribing the individual interviews, I then conducted the focus group interviews. I listened to each individual interview, reviewed the individual interview protocol outlined in Appendix C, and recorded reflective thoughts in my notebook. Now that the individual interview process was completed, I needed to reflect on what I heard while the conversations were fresh in my mind. I listened to each individual interview one at a time. As I replayed each recording on my telephone or personal tape recorder, I paused the recording to think about what the interviewee was telling me at that time. As I listened to each recording, I recorded reflective notes in my notebook and returned to them as I designed the questions for the focus group; questions that are outlined in Appendix D.

As I examined my reflective notes, I reviewed the individual interview protocol in Appendix C and developed a set of focus group questions. This set of questions, as outlined in

Appendix D, emerged from my reflection on the individual focus group interview protocol in Appendix C and the conversations I had with the participants.

While CRT seeks to understand the systemic issues that affect historically marginalized groups of people, phenomenology captures the essence of shared experience, so I designed the focus group questions with this in mind. The focus group questions in Appendix D moved the individual from lamenting on his / her personal experiences to discussing the issues that affect African American students as a whole. Taken together with CRT and phenomenology, I developed a set of ten questions, as shown in Appendix D, to ask the participants during the focus group interviews.

*Selection of focus group participants.* At the end of each individual interview, I informed the participants of the focus group interview process. After sharing this information with one of the participants, she informed me that she was unable to participate in the focus group interview, so I ended up with sixteen participants for the focus groups. These sixteen participants shared their work and class schedules with me at the end of the individual interview. Once I had their schedules, I grouped four participants together based on their availability. After assigning each participant to a group, I labeled each group with the letters A-D and recorded this information in my notebook. I then sent group messages by phone to the members in a particular group. After sending multiple phone messages to the members of one group, each participant reported having conflicts in their schedules, which prevented them from participating in the focus group. However, I was able to schedule three focus group interviews. But after scheduling one of these three focus group interviews and sending a confirmation message to the participants in this particular group, all four participants canceled citing schedule conflicts. I offered other alternatives such as allowing the participants to participate in the interview by phone, but due to



schedule conflicts and multiple cancellations, only eight participants participated in the focus group interview. Each focus group consisted of four participants. During the focus group interviews, the participants had an opportunity to their share feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of how African American talk about and experience world language instruction in public schools.

The interpersonal interactions shared within the individual and focus group interviews afforded me the opportunity to observe the behaviors I could not observe by using quantitative instruments such as surveys and questionnaires. As I interviewed the participants, I observed their facial expressions and paid attention to their body language and other nonverbal gestures. I labeled each nonverbal gesture under the participants' pseudonym and recorded these observations in the same journal that contained the participants' personal identifiable information.

Individual interviewing techniques, however, are limited in their usefulness. The credibility of the interviewee's story raises major concerns for the researcher (Merriam, 2009). As previously mentioned, speakers tell stories from their subjective position, which calls the researcher's findings into question (Subotnik, 1998). Additionally, time raises concerns for researchers. As time passes, it is less likely that personal experiences will be vivid in the speaker's memory. A lapse in time may cause the speaker to forget or falsify events to the extent that he / she provides inaccurate data to the researcher (Glesne, 2011). To avoid the pitfall of lapsed time, I asked questions that invoked sensory experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This questioning technique allowed the interviewee the opportunity to critically reflect on his / her experience and share useful information with me during the interview process.

The focus group interview also presents challenges to the research process. Although the focus group interview brings groups of people together to discuss similar experiences, this type of interview does not allow for confidentiality or ease of conversation (Glesne, 2011). In this situation, depth, clarity, and intensity are often hard to reach (Glesne, 2011), which was the case throughout the focus group sessions I conducted with small groups of students. In one of the focus group sessions, two of the participants were friends who shared the same post-secondary aspirations. The participants in the other focus group interview did not know one another before participating in the group conversation. To capture all perspectives, I asked the participants to share responses to the comments offered by the other members of the group. There were moments of tension as the participants shared their opinions, so I asked questions that maintained the group's focus on the topic. In the end, the verbal and nonverbal gestures provided rich sources of data. Thus, I describe how I analyzed the data I collected in the next section.

### **Data Analysis**

To hone in on the human experience that characterizes interpretivist research, I employed content analysis procedures to analyze the data. In this section, I detail the data analysis process I took to extract data that answered the research question mentioned in the first chapter of this proposal for dissertation research.

**Coding students' experiences.** After collecting the data, I typed each individual interview and focus group interview. I labeled each interview by the participant's first name, which made it easier to identify as I moved through the coding and analysis processes. As I transcribed the interviews, I listened to the participants share their experiences and began to answer a series of questions:

- What is going on here?

- Who are the main characters?
- Where is the action taking place?
- When is the action taking place?
- How do students describe their high school experiences?
- How do different students talk about their experiences?

**Using CRT as an analytic lens.** The participants did not possess the language to identify the school-imposed structures they described, so I used the tenets of CRT to organize and analyze the data. I searched within the data to find answers to the questions above. As I found excerpts within the data, I extracted them from the transcripts and cross referenced the literature to identify the structure the participants described. As I identified and read excerpts from the data, I began to identify the appropriate tenet of CRT to use as I moved through the coding process.

Answering the six questions listed above and using CRT as an analytical tool gave me a preliminary set of ideas from which I started to understand students' actual experience. I did not code the data at this preliminary or preparation stage in the data analysis process. Instead, I labeled and categorized passages large enough to extract meaning from the speaker's words and that answered each question. Labeling and categorizing the data helped me decide what to analyze. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008):

A unit of meaning can consist of more than one sentence and contain several meanings.

On that account, using it as a unit of analysis makes the analysis process difficult and challenging. On the other hand, an analysis unit that is too narrow, for example, one word may result in fragmentation. (p. 109)

After fragmenting the data into categories, I made decisions regarding the type of content I wanted to analyze. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), “When starting the analysis, the researcher must also decide whether to analyse only the manifest content or the latent content as well” (p. 109). As previously mentioned, the participants’ feelings, emotions, and perceptions shaped this study, so I began by studying the manifest content. As I looked at the passages I chose, I recorded notes about the speaker’s intended message. I kept those notes in a binder and used them as I moved from the pre-analysis process to the coding phase.

After making several pre-analysis decisions, I then reread the transcripts and embarked on a process of inductive analysis. During first cycle coding, I conducted open coding, creating categories, and abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). I used a color-coded system to highlight words and phrases that appeared across cases. For example, as I read one passage, I highlighted important words in different colors. As I read the other passages, I used the same process of open coding to identify important words and phrases. These words became descriptors, and as I continued to code the transcripts, I created a coding manual where I listed the thirteen codes that emerged during first cycle coding.

After conducting open coding, I then grouped the descriptors into higher order categories through the process of axial coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To classify themes accordingly, I analyzed the relationship among the thirteen codes and collapsed them into main categories. As I answered the question “what is going on,” I regrouped categories as they related to one another and five main categories emerged.

Lastly, I examined the thirteen descriptors and five main categories and regrouped the themes one last time. As I returned to the questions listed above, I cross examined all of the cases and collapsed the themes into three major findings.

Content analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion nor does it follow a specific set of rules (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), so one of its major methodological challenges concerns the complex methods a researcher must undertake to analyze large sets of data. After collecting the data, I was responsible, as I mentioned above, for making decisions regarding how to approach the data analysis process. Before analyzing the data, I had to make a number of pre-analysis decisions to address the problem being studied. This less standard and formulaic way of analyzing large sets of data calls for excessive interpretation to ensure authentic research findings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Due to content analysis' unconventional approach to data analysis, it is often a challenge to develop a complete understanding of the context in which the problem is situated (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As the researcher organizes the data and tries to understand "what is going on," it is often easy to incorrectly label categories or inappropriately assign data (i.e. excerpts from interviews) to existing categories. In the section above, I discussed the procedures I followed to guard against improperly labeling categories and inappropriately assigning data to existing categories.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility in the Research Process**

Establishing trustworthy and credible research is an integral part of the qualitative research process. In this section, I discuss the ways I established trustworthy and credible research findings.

Establishing credible qualitative research, however, is often subject to considerable scrutiny. In fact, in more recent years, establishing credibility in qualitative research remains a topic under investigation. Under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, for example, the application of rigorous, scientifically-based procedures was used to gain reliable and valid knowledge (Cho &

Trent, 2006). Reliability, hypothesis testing, and scientific procedures are not terms used to establish credible qualitative research, so two methods – transactional validity and transformational validity – have been established to ensure credible qualitative research (Cho & Trent, 2006). According to Cho and Trent (2006):

The *transactional* approach – is grounded in active interaction between the inquiry and the research participants...Second, a more radical approach challenges the very notion of validity, even a constructed one. This challenge to, or, in extreme cases, rejection of validity judges work to be valid only if it signals that validity achieves an eventual ideal. We call this *transformational* validity. (p. 320)

Based on Cho and Trent’s definition, establishing credibility through the transactional approach is best suited for this study because the interaction between the inquiry and the participants is important to answering the question “what is going on?” Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I grappled with moments of tension by recording comments, nonverbal gestures, and other observations in a journal. I used those notes and interactions with the research process and research participants to understand the alternative and negative stories that presented a complete picture of what is going on in world language programs in public schools.

I took several steps to establish trustworthy and credible research. First, I fully immersed myself in the data. I read and reread the transcripts before making coding decisions. As I made coding decisions, I kept track of the themes that emerged from the data and continued to review the transcripts to allow for the emergence of new themes. Not only was this latter process representative of the participants’ personal experiences, it also helped me create alignment between the themes and codes that emerged from the data.

In addition to fully immersing myself in the data, I also conducted member checks. Conducting member checks not only ensures internal validity, it also gives the participants a chance to see their names and stories reproduced just as they told them (Glesne, 2011). So to conduct member checks, I shared preliminary findings with the participants during the focus group interviews. Before the group conversation began, I asked if what I found “rings true” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) and if there were inconsistencies in the data. No discrepancies or inconsistencies were reported. In the next section, I describe the steps I will take to protect the participants’ personal identities.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This research study involved little to no risks to the research subjects. During the informed consent process (see Appendix E), I informed the participants of their option to withdraw from the study. I also informed them of ensured confidentiality and privacy through the use of pseudonyms. I asked each participant to share a name they wanted to see used in the final write-up. If no name was provided, I then chose one appropriate for the study. Throughout the process of selecting pseudonyms, I also told the participants that no personal identifiable information (i.e. name, age, major in school, grade point average) would be linked to them or included in the final write-up.

I requested permission from each participant to tape record all conversations. After receiving written consent, I then proceeded with the data collection process. After gathering the data, I encrypted the recordings and stored them on my personal hard drive. After encrypting the data, I assigned codes and pseudonyms to each interview. To maintain confidentiality, I developed a key that included the participants’ personal identifiable information (i.e. name, gender, and major in school). The key to the recordings has been stored in my personal files. No

one else will have access to the data, and after one year, I will discard all files. In addition to the various procedures the qualitative researcher uses to establish credible research findings and protect the research participants, he / she must also grapple with his / her own biases and subjectivities. In the next section, I discuss the role researcher reflexivity plays in the research process.

### **The Role of Reflexivity in the Research Process**

The researcher comes to the research process with his / her own biases and assumptions. In this section, I discuss how my reflexive position influences the research process.

Researcher reflexivity is “used as a vehicle for making the research process visible” (as cited in Berger, 2013, p. 10) because it makes the researcher come clean about who they are, where they come from, and their relationship to the research study (Gilgun, 2010). Recall the opening paragraph at the beginning of this dissertation where I briefly described my experience teaching Spanish at the college-level. In addition to my years as a student in a public-school system, this experience shaped how I arrived at this study. As a student, I was unaware of the top-down policies that influenced the curricular and instructional decisions taken by former teachers, but when I attended college, I noticed how my educational success was adversely affected by my high school experience. So, as the researcher, I had to be open about my experiences, who I am, how I come to this study, how my positionality as an African American graduate of a public-school district, world language learner and teacher influenced the research process. As I entered the research process, I kept my experiences before me and maintained an awareness of self in the research process (Van Manen, 2014).

I also had to grapple with my privileged position as the researcher. The participants regarded me as the one with the power and authority because I conducted the research. Since I



wanted them to feel comfortable sharing information about their everyday experiences, I had to come clean with those I invited into the research process (Gilgun, 2010). As I shared my personal experiences, I cautioned not to share more than the participants. So I listened carefully, avoided judgements, and established empathy and rapport with the research subjects (Partington, 2001).

As an African American woman living in a racially stratified society, I have first-hand experiences of racist discourses and practices, so I was careful not to impose my experiences on the participants. My racialized experiences have crystallized over time and have shaped my epistemological and ontological perspectives of educational processes, so during the research process, I did not camouflage my experiences with those of the research participants. In grappling with my ideological stance and epistemological perspective, I critically reflected on my experiences by keeping a journal of my feelings and emotions. Instead of suppressing my feelings, I used them to inquire into my own assumptions, perceptions, and biases (Merriam, 2009).

With respect to the use of interviews as the primary method of data collection for this study, I did not push the interviewees into certain directions (Berger, 2013). I refrained from making insinuations (Berger, 2013) and allowed the informants to share their stories free of judgement. Carefully listening to their stories gave me the opportunity to authentically represent them and their experiences.

Epistemology also informs qualitative research because it defines the nature of the relationship between the knower and what is to be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The answer to the question of what is to be known is constrained in the researcher's ontological perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To understand the participants' racialized experiences, I captured the

essence of their transformative epistemological perspectives. Grounded in the realities of subjugation and visions of justice (Sleeter, 2005), transformative epistemology enables historically marginalized communities to acquire new ways to conceptualize the world (Banks, 2004). The alternative conceptualizations advanced by marginalized voices differ from mainstream epistemologies. In order to move beyond the dichotomous binaries of “researcher versus participant to researcher-as-participant-as-listener-as-learner-as-advocate” (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p. 28) and allow the participants the opportunity to share their experiences, I denounced my privileged position as researcher and allowed their counter-narratives to inform and shape the research process. After grappling with his / her subjectivities and epistemological positions, the researcher must also decide how to present the research findings. The following section describes the way I presented the findings that emerged from this study.

### **The Playwright’s Opening Commentary on the Development of a School-Based Play**

I present the findings from this study in a non-traditional narrative format. In the next chapter, I present this study’s findings in the format of a play. This school-based play captures the 17 African American undergraduate students’ experiences of their high school world language instruction. In the discussion that follows, I first offer a brief critique of performance plays. I then describe the process I used to develop the play outlined in the next chapter of this dissertation.

The power of a play lies in a playwright’s ability to invoke an in the gut feeling for the reader (Taylor, 2003). This feeling, as Taylor (2003) argues, can move from one that begins in the gut to one that ends in the head; a feeling that embodies intellectual knowledge (Taylor, 2003). While a playwright uses an artistic mode of expression to recreate the lived experiences of the actors, the purpose of a play is to call the readers into action (Taylor, 2003). Therefore, the

play you will read in the next chapter calls members of the educational community into action, particularly as it relates to enacting structural change to world language programs and course offerings for African American students attending public high schools.

The problem, however, lies in a playwright's inability to help readers transfer their in the gut knowledge to head knowledge (Taylor, 2003). This situation causes the reader to rely on his / her personal feelings to assess the problem being presented in the play. To safeguard against the invocation of one sensory experience over the other — in the gut or intellectual — I created a play that captures the high school experiences of undergraduate students who studied a world language before attending college. Below, I detail the process I undertook to construct the play presented in the next chapter.

**The playwright's commentary about the process of designing a play.** The actions that unfold in the next chapter are based on “real” events as told by real actors. I extrapolated major patterns from the data to create a traditional, virtual high school. These patterns yielded insight into the individuals and resources responsive to these students' access or lack thereof, to quality educational programs and institutions of higher education. This play was not designed to create a monolithic or homogeneous high school world language experience but used phenomenology and CRT to invite the reader into these students' experiences of racialized school-imposed policies and practices.

The intersection of phenomenology and CRT revealed the essence of a shared educational experience among the students. With my understandings of their high school experiences, I placed them in one classroom with one language teacher. This does not imply that all African American students experience the effect of world language instruction in much the

same. However, the goal of the play is to privilege the African American student voice, while also exposing those school-imposed structures that impact their future and learning goals.

The school's physical presence marked by banners, hallways, classrooms, a gymnasium, and cafeteria are evident throughout the play. But deeply engrained in the fabric of this school are also the endemic racist structures — gatekeeping policies about taking a world language course, the courses and curriculum offered, and teachers' instruction — that marginalize the African American students.

I listened to the students' counter-narratives to highlight the marginalization effect for these African American students, and their stories revealed three major forms of conflict — inner conflict, inter-personal conflict, and extra-personal conflict. Critical race theory moves these forms of conflict from the individual level to the societal level where dominant structures limit African Americans from achieving full access to material goods and resources.

**Inner conflict.** The play reveals an inner conflict. According to Fountain (2007), inner conflict is “Conflict between the person and themselves” (p. 10). As I listened to the undergraduate students' stories and analyzed the data that emerged from the semi-structured individual interviews, self-blame was an emotional process by which the students subconsciously accepted the responsibility for their lack of motivation and engagement in the high school learning environment. Some students blamed themselves for mentally withdrawing from their high school Spanish courses and others accepted the responsibility for their withdrawal from a needed learning opportunity. Critical race theory, however, does not blame students for their learning outcomes. Instead, critical race scholars seek to uncover, unpack, and challenge those school-imposed policies and structures that traditionally and historically have undervalued and marginalized the educational experiences of African Americans students in public schools

(Ladson-Billings, 1999b, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is from this theoretical position that I did not hone in on the undergraduate students' inner conflicts. Instead, I extrapolated excerpts from the data (undergraduate students' stories) to provide evidence of how African American high schools live, process, and experience dominant school policies and practices.

***Inter-personal conflict.*** The play also reveals an inter-personal conflict. Fountain (2007) says inter-personal conflict is "Conflict between people and others" (p. 10). There are key players that comprise a school system. These individuals are responsible for creating and influencing the educational experiences of the students the school system serves. They have the power to shape students' learning and future outcomes. As I listened to the undergraduate students' stories of their high school world language experiences, it became clear to me that there was an inter-personal conflict between the students and other individuals in their high schools. This form of conflict in the students' high schools emerged from color-blind epistemologies of African American students as well as their families, cultures and backgrounds (Blaisdell, 2005). Although critical race theory recognizes African American students as holders of knowledge (Bernal, 2002), high school policies and practices enacted by school leaders and officials, as demonstrated in the play, carry grave consequences for African American students and their learning outcomes.

***Extra-personal conflict.*** In addition to the two other forms of conflict, extra-personal conflict is also illustrated throughout the play. According to Fountain (2007), extra-personal conflict is "Conflict between people and their world" (p. 11). The micro-analytic environment of the high school classroom and school environment are a replica of society. In other words, the school environment represents the social order present in society (Darling-Hammond, 2004). As the undergraduate students shared their experiences taking world language courses in high

school, they often questioned the existential nature of things. Although not fully aware of the policies that dictated their high school educational experiences, they questioned their place in their high schools. Their stories, nonetheless, point to larger societal issues; issues that call our attention to the enduring nature of racism in the public spaces of American society, including public schools.

In sum, I suspended my role as a researcher and adopted one as a playwright to create a play in three acts that answers the research question guiding this study. In the last section of this dissertation, I discuss the limitations of this study.

### **Limitations of this Study**

This study lends itself to specific methodological tools, knowledge, and information, and therefore, is limited in scope. This section discusses the limitations of this study.

The methodological tool used in this study presents challenges to the credibility of the research findings. Although a major tenet of critical race theory, counter-storytelling lends itself to considerable critique in qualitative research (Bell, 2003; Chapman, 2007; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Love, 2004). Stories serve an important role in American culture (Bell, 2003), but opponents challenge this methodological tool because they believe stories serve a rhetoric of victimization, which pacifies the speaker's emotional state (Subotnik, 1998). Instead of lamenting a complete picture of events, the subjective position of the storyteller lies at the forefront of the researcher's claims and calls the research findings into question (Subotnik, 1998).

Besides the emotional state of the storyteller, another problem emerges with the use of counter-storytelling as a method of data collection in qualitative research. According to opponents of critical race theory, "first-person agony stories" (as cited in Subotnik, 1998, p. 697)

hinders the reader's ability to challenge the accuracy of the researcher's account. Due to the subjective position of the speaker's account, the reader finds difficulty in questioning the emotional stability and veracity (Subotnik, 1998) of the author's account. While the goal of critical race theory is to expose those macro and microstructures that oppress communities of color, this situation puts the researcher's claims in jeopardy and may cause the public to reject any claims made by him / her (Subotnik, 1998).

Opponents of critical race theory also believe that "we must get beyond the stage of halting conversations filled with the superficialities of hurt feelings" (Subotnik, 1998, p. 698) and look at the holistic picture of human experience. The problem, however, is that people of color also project stereotypical accounts of communities of color by buying into and reconstructing majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, African American scholar Thomas Sowell claimed that the goals and values of Mexican Americans have never centered on education. According to Sowell, Mexican Americans find education distasteful and invaluable to the goals they wish to attain (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Similarly, former United States Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos believed that Mexican American parents are much to blame as their children for the high dropout rates among Mexican American students. Lastly, former United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas expressed angst against the Civil Rights movement (see Higginbotham, 1992) of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the movement marked a major shift in the ways African American communities were treated, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas critiqued the major shortcomings of Civil Rights leaders. Based on the argument presented by opponents of critical race theory, we should be careful to accept the scholarly work of critical race theorists because they reject majoritarian stories told by people of color and project stultifying self-righteous (Subotnik, 1998) accounts of human experience.

Due to the subjective nature of human experience, opponents of critical race theory also question claims critical race scholars make concerning the presence of racism in America. They point out that many whites strongly supported minority rights and believed that more scholars of color would profoundly influence the academy, but minority writers lost interest in compromise and collaboration (Subotnik, 1998). As critical race theory gained momentum, Latino and Asian American scholars joined the conversation, leaving the scholarly influence of whites out. When whites attempted to participate in the conversation, they were considered interlopers and imperialists (Subotnik, 1998). Statements such as “It’s a black-or race-thing; you wouldn’t understand” (Subotnik, 1998, p. 685) became commonplace in everyday discussions. Therefore, opponents of critical race theory question the validity of arguments put forth by critical race scholars. They believe that critical race scholars fail to capture a complete picture of human experience by single-handedly focusing on those aspects that affect them and other communities of color.

Opponents of critical race theory also critique critical race scholars’ attack on liberalism. According to critical race scholars, the promises of liberalism have been and continue to be empty for people of color. They believe that liberalism is the primary instrument that offers protection of the law and legal remedies for whites. Opponents, however, believe that while critical race theorists have lost patience with equality theories and legal reasoning that uphold white supremacy, they fail to offer replacements for liberalism’s core values (Pyle, 1999). According to opponents of critical race theory, critical race scholars fail to (a) demonstrate how African Americans are disadvantaged by liberalism and (b) acknowledge the progress African American communities have made. In sum, opponents believe that critical race scholars



intentionally mask their participation in their own social conditions by revealing the cruel treatment whites confer upon communities of color.

By their critical cohesiveness, critical race scholars emphasize the subordination and domination conferred on communities of color, but opponents of critical race theory reject the theoretical, epistemological, and philosophical ground on which critical race theory stands. They believe that critical race scholars do not provide empirical evidence to support claims made about the deplorable conditions communities of color face. Opponents also believe critical race scholars do not provide alternative explanations to the problems they uncover because they do not have a grip on reality (Pyle, 1999).

In addition to the major criticisms offered against the counter-storytelling method used in critical race theory, this study is also limited in other ways. Although students are the beneficiaries of school-imposed structures and practices, they are often unaware of how educational policies directly affect them and their educational trajectories. Throughout the individual and focus group interview processes, I asked questions to elicit the participants' understanding of the policies responsive to world language education options in high school. These questions were confronted with uncertain responses. Thus, as student voice helps us see the world through students' eyes, it also limits our access to information about school- and district-wide policies that impact their access to quality curricular and instructional practices.

Additionally, I conducted this research study at one site, so access to one site also serves as a limitation to this study. My lack of access to other sites compounded my lack of access to a larger pool of participants and their experiences with world language education in high school.

Lastly, this study is also limited in scope as it did not explore every issue — i.e. tracking and detracking, parent and staff interpretations of students' abilities, differential funding patterns

between suburban and urban school districts, and all of the federal, state, and local policies — that directly and indirectly impact students’ secondary experiences. This study only examined one group of students’ experiences of world language education in high school.

### **Conclusion**

Although major critiques question the theoretical power of critical race theory, this study shows that racial and discriminatory practices continue to dominate public-school policies. By using counter-storytelling, I show education policymakers that limited access to world language curricula undermines college-readiness policies. In other words, failure to provide African American students access to rigorous world language curricula underprepares them for post-secondary options. In the following chapter, I share this study’s finding and offer critical analyzes that addresses the phenomenon under investigation.

## Chapter 4

### Research Findings

In the previous chapter, I discussed the methods I used to gather data to answer the research question: how do African American graduates of public-school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences? In this chapter, I used excerpts from the interviews I conducted to discuss the major themes that emerged: the role of school- and non-school based adults, the impact and influence of peer social networks, and the intrinsic motivators the participants used to push pass those “hidden” forces that seek to deny African American students access to a rigorous world language education.

Drawing on Wolcott (2009), this chapter presents the findings from this research in the form of a three-act play titled *Secrets, Barriers and the Hidden World Language Curriculum*. I introduce this play by first providing contextual and background information on the school in which the action takes place. This exposition describes the community that surrounds the school, student and staff demographics, contextual features of classrooms, academic programs, changes to world language programs, and graduation policies. The exposition’s second section provides background information on the cast, the African American participants, who fill the role of students in this school-based play. In this second section, I share information about the students’ educational and socioeconomic status, academic background including number of years studying a world language, relationship to the members of the cast, and post-secondary aspirations.

*Secrets, Barriers and the Hidden World Language Curriculum* is divided into three acts. This presentation style showcases the personal experiences of African American students in high school world language contexts. Act I highlights the impact of school- and non-school based

adults – classroom teachers, school counselors, mentors, and home-based caregivers (i.e. parents) – on the participants’ educational experiences. Act II spotlights the importance of peer social networks, and Act III points to the intrinsic motivators – e.g., passion, love for languages, and desire to participate in linguistic communities of native and heritage speakers – that helped the participants overcome obstacles in their pursuit of secondary and post-secondary options.

In this play, the tenets of critical race theory are used to understand the participants’ racialized experiences in public schools. Due to the covert and overt policies and practices in teaching and counseling, many participants decided to discontinue their studies of a world language. Others, however, discovered ways to push pass those structural barriers that sought to limit their educational opportunities. Each scene is followed by my analysis and findings. This chapter closes with a discussion of all the findings and offers responses to the research questions.

## **SECRETS, BARRIERS AND THE HIDDEN WORLD LANGUAGE CURRICULUM**

### **Exposition**

Westside High School, which opened in the fall of 1995, is the only high school in a predominantly African American neighborhood in a large, urban Midwest City. Many of the students that attend Westside High come from single-parent homes where the mother, who works full-time and raises multiple children, is the primary caregiver. Their families lack the insurance needed to cover vision, dental, and health care. Due to limited transportation, these students are unable to participate in open enrollment practices that allow inner-city students access to the more affluent high schools in the suburbs.

Although Westside High sits in a low-income neighborhood, members of the community find economic resources for families. For example, there are two childcare centers in the community. Both centers find resources to help families cover the cost of day and evening

childcare services. Adjacent to the school is a community church. The church offers free tutoring and literacy services to children and adults. Several members of the church also volunteer at Westside High. They serve as mentors and provide academic support to students.

### **Setting**

There are five academic floors in Westside High: the basement, the first, second, third, and fourth floors. Each floor houses a different academic department. Due to the materials and supplies needed, the engineering, construction, and vocational / technical education classes and departments are in the basement. The physical education and health classes are located on the first floor. On the second floor, one can find the fine arts, music and world language departments and classes. The third floor comprises the English / Language Arts and social studies classes and departments while the math and science classes are held on the fourth floor.

Although banners that promote diversity hang on the walls in the auditorium, cafeteria hallways, offices, classrooms, rest and locker rooms, and computer labs, diversity is far from a reality at Westside High. There are 965 students at Westside High: 350 new and incoming freshmen, 250 sophomores, 200 juniors, and 165 seniors. Approximately 56% of the student body identifies as African American, 24% Hispanic / Latino, 13% White / Caucasian, and 7% Asian American. While 15% of the student population qualifies for ESL / ELL services, 26% are students with disabilities and designated to special education classes. Nearly 70% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged and qualify for free or reduced lunch plans.

The ethnic makeup of the teaching staff does not mirror the diverse student population. More than 100 adults comprise the teaching, administrative, secretarial, counseling, janitorial / custodial, and kitchen staff, and of this total, 65 are instructional staff. Of the 65 teachers, only

seven are teachers of color. Three identify as African American, two Hispanic and two Southeast Asian.

Teachers carry a full-time teaching load where they teach 4-85-minute classes a day. To prepare lesson plans and other instructional material, teachers are given an 80-minute prep period every day. Teachers collaborate with the other teachers in their content-specific areas by attending district-mandated professional development meetings once a week.

In addition to the instructional staff, Westside High also employs two full-time school counselors. One of the counselors provides academic, social, and emotional support to new freshmen and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. The other school counselor shares the same responsibilities of providing academic support to students in addition to coordinating on- and off-campus college visits for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. It should also be mentioned that the ethnic makeup of the counseling staff does not mirror the student body at Westside High either.

### **Academic Programs, Graduation Policies, and the World Language Program**

During its first years in operation, Westside High offered many academic programs. The world language program was one of these programs. Although the study of a world language was an elective not required for graduation (see Table 4.1), students had the opportunity to study French, Spanish, German, Latin, or Mandarin Chinese. Due to significant budget cuts, French, Spanish, and German are now the only language options offered to students. Although the world language program has lost momentum over the years, other academic programs – e.g., English / Language Arts, math, science, and social studies – have not been heavily affected by budget cuts.

Table 4.1 – *High School Graduation Requirements*

Course	Number of Units
English / Language Arts	4.0 units
Mathematics (courses at or above algebra level)	3.0 units
Science (content with laboratory studies in the life and physical sciences)	3.0 units
Social Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.0 unit of US History</li> <li>• 1.0 unit of World History, World Geography, or World studies</li> <li>• 1.0 unit of Citizenship (grades 9-10) or</li> <li>• 0.5 unit of American Government (grades 11-12) and 0.5 unit of Economics (grades 11-12)</li> </ul>	3.0 units
Physical Education (over a 3-year period)	1.5 units
Health	0.5 unit
Fine Arts (Art, Music, Dance, or Theater)	1.0 unit
Electives	6.0 units
	<b>Total: 22 units</b>

Although the number of credits needed to graduate has not changed, the graduation policy has changed. This change reflects the addition of world language and college and career readiness programming. To graduate from Westside High, students need a minimum of two credits of a world language and one credit in college and career readiness instruction (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 – Revised High School Graduation Requirements

Course	Number of Units
English / Language Arts	4.0 units
Mathematics (courses at or above algebra level)	3.0 units
Science (content with laboratory studies in the life and physical sciences)	3.0 units
Social Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.0 unit of US History</li> <li>• 1.0 unit of World History, World Geography, or World studies</li> <li>• 1.0 unit of Citizenship (grades 9-10) or</li> <li>• 0.5 unit of American Government (grades 11-12) and 0.5 unit of Economics (grades 11-12)</li> </ul>	3.0 units
Physical Education (over a 3-year period)	1.5 units
Health	0.5 unit
Fine Arts (Art, Music, Dance, or Theater)	1.0 unit
World Language	2.0 units
College and Career Readiness	1.0 unit
Electives	3.0 units
	<b>Total: 22 units</b>

While new academic programs have been added to the graduation policy, the greater number of credits required in math and English imply that boosting achievement in these areas remains the focus of the school’s curricular policies. The implication of these policies and programming suggests that second language acquisition is not an important skill for students’ social and academic development, and as a result, limits students’ educational opportunities.



## Cast of Characters

The table below illustrates the participants' experiences with world languages in middle school.

Table 4.3 – *Students' Background Information and Experiences with World Languages*

Student Name	Gender	Exposed to World Language in Middle School	Participated in Immersion Experience before High School
Valerie	Female	No	No
Michelle	Female	Yes	No
Stephany	Female	No	No
Steve	Male	Yes	Yes
C.J. <sup>*1</sup>	Male	Yes	No
Crystal	Female	No	No
Tina	Female	No	Yes
April	Female	No	No
Marcelle	Female	Yes	No
James	Male	No	No
Shanice <sup>*3</sup>	Female	Yes	No

**Valerie:** an outspoken African American female, who comes from a low-income family. Although her mother did not attend college, she takes advanced courses and stays on the honor roll. She started studying Spanish in middle school and met James, another character in the play, who shares the same post-secondary aspirations of studying Spanish and Economics at Lakeside State College.

**Michelle:** an African American female, who also comes from a low-income family. She lives with her grandmother, who attended a college preparatory elementary school. Although she does not know the other characters in the play, her Spanish-speaking friends and relatives influenced her decision to

<sup>1</sup> C. J. and Shanice have been learning world languages since kindergarten. Although C. J. has not participated in an immersion experience, he speaks English, French, and Spanish. His family speaks English and French.

study Spanish, which she started learning in middle school. After high school, Michelle wants to study Psychology at a 4-year university.

**Stephany:** an African American female, who comes from a low-income family. Her mother graduated from high school but did not attend college. Stephany misses a significant number of instructional days because she is caring for her ill mother. Although teachers give her the opportunity to complete missing assessments and assignments, she still struggles academically. Despite not having studied a world language in middle school, Stephany's Hispanic friend influenced her to study Spanish in high school. In Spanish class, Stephany meets Crystal, another member of the cast described below, and they become friends fast. Despite her academic challenges, Stephany aspires to attend Lakeside State College after graduation.

**Crystal:** an African American female, who comes from a low-income family. She did not take language courses before attending high school, but wants to learn Spanish because she is interested in the language and culture. Although she and Stephany become friends, she studies with classmates and teammates to pass the Spanish class she takes. After graduating from high school, she wants to study Business at Lakeside State College.

**Steve:** an African American male, who comes from a middle-class family and like Michelle and Tina does not know the other cast members. He does, however, have friends who speak and teach him Spanish, which he has been learning since middle school. Unlike the other characters, he had the opportunity to travel to Spain with his 8<sup>th</sup> grade class. He wants to study

Spanish, American Sign Language, and International Studies at a 4-year university. He also wants to obtain a master's degree from State Island Grant University.

**C. J.:** an African American male, who comes from a low-income family. Unlike Steve and some of the other characters, who have been studying Spanish since middle school, C. J. has been exposed to French and Spanish since kindergarten. C. J. does not know the other members of the cast and wants to study Criminal Justice at a 4-year university. Upon graduation, his goal is to work in law enforcement as a police officer.

**Tina:** an African American female, who lives with both of her parents. She struggles academically, but has participated in a language immersion experience in middle school. Coupled with her passion and interest in the language, her Spanish-speaking friends influenced her to study Spanish in high school. After completing high school, she too desires to continue her education at Lakeside State College.

**April:** an African American female, who also comes from a low-income family. Although she has not studied a world language in middle school, her sister who has a language background, influenced her decision to study Spanish. April did not know or have a relationship with the other students prior to attending high school. She also wants to continue her education at Lakeside State College.

**Marcelle:** an outspoken African American female, who comes from a middle-class family. She started studying Spanish in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and takes college

preparatory classes. Marcelle excels in language classes and takes Spanish throughout high school. Like April, she did not know the other students prior to attending high school. She, too, desires to further her education at the Lakeside State College.

**James:** an African American male, who comes from a low-income family and lives with both of his parents. Although the relationship he has with his father is unclear, his mother is supportive of his academic pursuits. He was not exposed to a world language prior to attending high school, so he begins studying Spanish in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He and Valerie are friends and share the same post-secondary aspirations of studying Spanish and Economics at Lakeside State College.

**Shanice:** an African American female, who comes from a single-family household. Although she was exposed to Spanish in elementary school, instruction was basic with a focus on colors and numbers. She is uninterested in learning German, so continues to study Spanish. She desires to study biology and American Sign Language with the goal of attending medical school.

## Act I

### **School- and Non-school-based Adults: Gatekeepers and Purveyors of Social Capital**

Classroom teachers, school counselors, mentors, and home-based caregivers such as parents and grandparents, transmit implicit and explicit messages to students about their secondary and post-secondary options. Students, then, are charged with the task of interpreting the messages they receive. African American students use school- and non-school-based

resources to decode these messages and navigate the educational structures that seek to limit their learning opportunities based on their social status (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

## Act I

### Scene I: Classroom Teachers as Gatekeepers and Purveyors of Social Capital

**Setting:** After Spanish class, Valerie, C. J., April, Tina, Crystal, Steve, Stephany, and Michelle go to the cafeteria for lunch. While sitting at their table, C. J. receives an alert on his phone. As he looks at the screen, he notices that his grade in Spanish has just been updated. Valerie looks at him and sees the somber look on his face.

Valerie: What are your thoughts about taking Spanish here?

C. J.: I study, take the tests, and still get Cs, which is terrible. The class is boring, so it gets to the point where I just don't do anything.

April: I agree. All we do is watch videos and read short stories. We read pages out of the textbook and have short assignments for homework, but we end up doing them in class.

Michelle: We do a lot of readings, but for the most part, we get busy work. It's more like fill out the worksheet and try to understand it. We just go over the same things.

April: Well, we did learn the Spanish alphabet. We also learned how to introduce ourselves, talk about how we are doing and the pleasantries and all of that, but that comes from the textbook, so it's very, very basic.

C. J.: I mean, I want to take Spanish all 4 years, but there is nothing about it that makes me say yes, I want to do this, I'm supposed to do this. I wish it wasn't this way, but it is.

April: At least she's very involved. We have fiestas to celebrate the Spanish traditions, and she also tries to make sure we don't use English in the classroom.

Tina: No, there is a lot of English used in class.

Crystal: She teaches us Spanglish.

Steve: Who cares what language she uses to teach. Anyway, listen C. J., I know everybody thinks I'm smart because I went to Spain, but honestly, I know how you feel, man. I mean, I'm kind of a slacker, kind of just do what I need to do to get by, but our teacher told me that I could really do this. She told me that I was one of the best writers in the class and that she didn't know why I didn't try harder. I take that for what it's worth, but it's not enough to push me.

Stephany: That's because she wasn't trying to push you. I remember being stuck on a lesson, like verb conjugations and she didn't help me, so I was sitting in class and had to figure it out on my own.

Michelle: It's like if you don't understand something, it's your fault because you should have learned it.

Valerie: That's because she is white. Look at us, we don't look like her. She's in a classroom with a bunch of black and brown kids, and she is controlling our future. I mean, we got all of these black and brown kids with maybe

one or two students that look like her and who come from the same background as her. The rest of us really busted our balls to get in this school and really take this stuff serious and yet, she has the power and knows it.

Michelle: She is very rude. She makes snarky comments and says I don't speak proper Spanish. She's like well, that's not real Spanish, that's the way Dominicans talk. That's not real Spanish, that's Puerto Rican language. I don't know why, but she doesn't particularly care for me. She always says that my compositions are below average and do not make sense. Unlike you, Steve, she told me that I am not going to do well. I mean she didn't outright say it, but a lot of her phrases were like well, you shouldn't do it because you're not going to be put in a higher-level Spanish class, so there's no point.

Valerie: Like why are you playing into my worst fear when I'm 17? I've got a million other things to worry about. I'm enrolling in classes and applying to schools. I have big dreams and you're talking about I'm going to fail out of a school that I had to test into. My friends can't come here and I'm going to be a failure because you want to fail me. You're making me feel like I'm less than I am. How dare she? How could she? Why would she?

Michelle: Well, the rest of the students are Hispanic or white. The two that are white do their own thing. They listen to what she has to say, but for the most part they don't. I don't know if it is a race thing or not. I actually think it is

more so favoritism. I don't want to jump to conclusions, but it does seem that way.

Valerie: Now that you put it that way, she does pick favorites and insult kids. I remember telling her that my printer was broken, but I saved my work to a flash drive and needed to print it for her. If I were one of the white kids, she would have said yes, but she said no, you're late, you're going to fail. This is not just our teacher though. Some of the teachers here are liked more by students and others not so much because they pick favorites.

Stephany: My brother had her too and he felt the same way. He felt like he had to drop Spanish because he wasn't getting the help he needed. I think they pick their favorites and choose who they want to help.

C. J.: So what do you think is going on here?

Stephany: Some of these teachers don't care. There are even English teachers that don't care if you pass or not. They're just here for the money. You can tell because of their attitude every single day. But you do have teachers who know you are falling behind, so they will be like come see me. Let's sit down and talk. Then there are the ones that say here's your test, you did bad. They don't really care.

Valerie: I remember crying when I got accepted into this school. Now I have teachers who know they have power but are wielding it in a way that is hurting us.

Crystal: Well, we only need two years of a language, right?

April: Yeah. The first two years meet the graduation requirement.



Crystal: Well, I'm done taking Spanish after these two years.

Steve: Have you talked to the teacher about this?

Crystal: I sure did.

Steve: What was her reaction when you said that you wanted to stop studying Spanish?

Crystal: She was okay with it. She wasn't pushing me to continue studying the language.

Tina: Agreed! I also feel like they didn't expect me to take a language either. Maybe if they put effort into each student and told us we could continue, I probably would try harder and actually stick to learning Spanish.

Valerie: This is a real power complex thing that some people have, but what can you do? There's really nothing a parent can do. You can have as many conversations as you want, but if you want to say my rule is my rule, what can we say? What can the principal say? What can administration say? Who has the time and energy to take that to the superintendent?

As the conversation ends, silence falls over the group. They clean up their table and exit the cafeteria.

### **Act I – Scene I: Analysis and Findings**

Scene I, through the students' conversation, details the impact of racialized patterns of behavior on African American students' achievement, motivation, and engagement. In a study on the intersection of whiteness and diversity in public schools, Castagno (2014) found that district leaders and teachers worked from deficit models of students of color causing them to accept the belief that African American and other students of color were the blame for their low academic

achievement. By tacitly accepting the stereotypical images of African Americans (King, 1991), teachers construct mental models of the African American students they serve (see Warren, 2002). Although these mental models have a deleterious effect on African American students, the idiosyncratic ideologies formed by dominant epistemologies (Picower, 2009; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005) and shaped within deficit paradigms are seldom investigated (Solórzano, 1997), causing African American students to feel the impact of their teachers' implicit and explicit words and actions. Consistent with this line of research, the participants in this study also believed their world language teacher held negative perceptions of them and other African American students, committed microaggressions in speech, showed favoritism in the world language classroom, failed to motivate and encourage them to continue studying a world language, displayed uncaring attitudes toward them and their academic abilities, established and maintained low academic expectations of them and their peers, relied on deficit-based curriculum, and used basic instructional practices to teach them a world language. The summary that follows discusses each of these themes.

**Use of deficit-based world language curriculum.** The first theme in this scene is the world language teacher's use of basic curricular and instructional practices. Research asserts that the possession of requisite skills and knowledge is necessary for the preparation, matriculation, and success at a selective college or university (Rodrigues & Le, 2011). Critical race scholars, however, challenge the ways public school districts purport to assist African American students in the acquisition of these skills. They argue that African American students attend public schools that offer a less rigorous curriculum (Ford & Moore, 2013; Gorski, 2008; Jennings & Lynn, 2005).

Evidence of a basic world language curriculum can be found in this scene. While Stephany reported basic grammatical functions such as “verb conjugations” as the focus of their Spanish curriculum, April told C. J. that the “Spanish alphabet,” greetings, introductions, and pleasantries served as the main curricular aspects of their Spanish class. This curriculum, as the students reported, did not enhance their critical thinking, cognitive, or metacognitive skills. Nor did it grant them the opportunity to accumulate the non-cognitive and social benefits associated with learning a world language.

**Use of basic instructional world language teaching practices.** In addition to challenging curricular inequities in public-school districts, critical race theory also challenges the instructional practices classroom teachers use to teach African American students. According to Ladson-Billings (1999b), “CRT suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient.... and this deficit perspective sees deficiency as an individual phenomenon” (p. 19). This presumption can be damaging to African American students’ literacy skills. This scene also provides evidence of basic instructional practices used in the Spanish class at Westside High.

Although April described the Spanish teacher as being “very involved” because she planned “fiestas” to celebrate “Spanish traditions” and made sure the students did not “use English in the classroom,” she also offered “very, very basic” instruction. According to April, “videos,” “short stories” and “worksheets” supplemented the course textbook, the main source of instructional material for the teacher and students. The use of basic curricular and instructional practices, however, was not the only theme to emerge from this scene. The students also discussed how the effects of basic instructional classroom practices translated into reduced

extrinsic motivation from the teacher; a type of motivation necessary to engage students in the language-learning context.

**Failure to motivate students.** In this lunchroom scene, C. J., Crystal, Steve, Tina, Michelle, Valerie, and Stephany believed their Spanish teacher failed to motivate them to learn Spanish. Consistent with models and psychological theories of motivation, a student's basic psychological (Connell & Wellborn, 1991) and academic needs are met when teachers adopt specific behaviors that influence their goal orientations (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Although the teacher highlighted Steve's academic strengths, he believed her comments did not provide him the external stimuli he needed to continue studying the language. Although he had been exposed to the language since middle school, he believed the teacher failed to optimize his motivation toward language learning. According to Steve, the teacher's words were not enough to motivate him in the classroom. Although Steve did not abandon the pursuit of second language acquisition, for reasons I discuss later in this chapter, he still believed something in the teacher's discourse was missing. This something, as C. J. shared, was the teacher's lack of extrinsic motivation in the classroom.

Unlike Steve, who received positive feedback from the teacher, C. J. felt mediocre, a situation that decreased his motivation and interest in language learning. According to C. J., the "boring" instructional approaches used to teach the Spanish language did not peak his interest or cause him to "say yes, I want to do this, I'm supposed to do this." Instead, the teacher's unmotivating pedagogical approaches led him to question the value, purpose, and importance of language learning. In addition to failing to motivate students, the students also believed their teacher failed to encourage their pursuit of this second language.

**Failure to encourage students.** In addition to not fully understanding how their teacher's motivation would help them acquire a world language, the students also believed their teacher failed to provide what they needed to excel in the world language context. Crystal, for example, recognized the Spanish teacher's role in her decision-making process. As Crystal shared her language learning experience, she made it clear that her thought process was validated by this Spanish teacher who did not push or provide her the encouragement she needed to continue studying Spanish. The effects of this situation caused Crystal to withdraw from this learning opportunity, one that is necessary for the successful completion of a 2- or 4- year degree. African American students like Crystal attribute teachers' actions to the biases, attitudes, perceptions, and prejudices they have of communities of color.

**Holding negative attitudes, bias, and perceptions.** Scene I also reveals the negative perceptions the teacher had of the African American students, and is reflected in the comments shared by Michelle and Valerie. Michelle said the teacher shared important test information with the Hispanic students and allowed the white students to "do their own thing."

Valerie, on the other hand, used two pronouns "we" and "she." This "we" is not a homogenized "we" that celebrates diversity (Ladson-Billings, 1999b). Instead, it creates a sense of peoplehood and collective social identity that reflects the collective struggle of a marginalized group of people (Carter, 2007). The "we" Valerie used reveals the racialized experiences of her and the other African American students in the Spanish class. She made it clear that she and the other African American students experienced the same mistreatment by a single "she," the Spanish teacher. Not only did these students rely on the teacher for their language learning needs, they also viewed her as a source of necessary social capital to accumulate information about secondary and post-secondary processes.

The problem, however, was the teacher's use of authoritative power against the students. Although Valerie and the other "black and brown kids" worked hard to gain admittance into the high school they had been "dreaming about," Valerie believed the teacher's actions negatively affected their learning outcomes. The students believed the teacher held negative attitudes, biases, prejudices, and assumptions of them based on their race because she viewed them from the majoritarian standard.

**Use of majoritarian standard to compare African American students.** Given the cultural mismatch that occurs in many public-school classrooms, teachers often view African American students from the majoritarian standard (Lou Fuller, 1992; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005), treat them and their culture as aberrant to the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and would rather not teach them (Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006; Picower, 2009). According to Dyer (1997), "Race as a category is usually applied to 'non-white' peoples. White people are usually not seen and named. They are centered as the human norm" (p. 1). In Dyer's words, whiteness becomes the unacknowledged norm by which dominant educational practices are judged (Aggarwal, 2016; Apple, 1999).

The comments shared by Stephany and Valerie substantiate this point. Stephany's comment regarding the teacher's refusal to help her understand grammatical functions such as "verb conjugations" causing her to be "stuck" and have to "figure it out on her own" reflects the philosophy of bootstrapping. Although not clearly defined in the literature, bootstrap, as a metaphor, puts forth the idea that obstacles can be overcome by personal heroic or unaided efforts (Lewis, 2010). According to Aggarwal (2016), bootstraps are "indicative of what is supposed to be the post-racial, democracy of the United States, with education being the ultimate "great equalizer"" (p. 136). This meritocratic philosophy assumes a one-size-fits-all approach

that denies the educability of all students regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, and socioeconomic status (Barnes & Slate, 2013). Because members of the dominant group conceive instruction “as a generic set of teaching skills that should work for all students” (Ladson-Billings, 1999b, p. 19), critical race theory recognizes the oppressive structures, not students, as lacking. Therefore, critical race theory points to the teacher’s lack of responsiveness as one of the reasons Stephany stops studying the Spanish language.

Although not explicitly stated, Valerie also perceived the Spanish teacher viewed African American students from the majoritarian standard. In this scene, the teacher’s actions reflected the school and society’s claim to equality that rests on the principles of egalitarianism, which surmise that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities (Vinnik, Garvey, & Traitor, 2008). Carter (2008), however, asserts that the values placed on public education are consistent with those of white students and their families. Therefore, when Valerie told the teacher her printer at home was broken, the teacher did not allow her access to the school printer. In Valerie’s words: “If I were one of the white kids, she would have said yes, but she said no, you’re late, you’re going to fail.” The teacher’s inequitable practices imply that school policies, and structures do not deem African American and white students equal.

Critical race theory, however, challenges traditional claims to equality, neutrality, and colorblindness as their pervasive effects are deleterious to the academic functioning of African American students (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). In other words, the teacher’s race-based, color-divided practices contradicted the founding principles of the United States. According to Dovidio and Gaertner (2000), “...many people who explicitly support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be nonprejudiced also unconsciously harbor negative feelings and beliefs about blacks and other historically disadvantaged groups” (p. 315). Dovidio and Gaertner

suggest the Spanish teacher unconsciously holds negative feelings and beliefs of African American communities, which causes her to mistreat the African American students and marginalize them in the academic space they share with white and Hispanic students. Critical race scholars also use the experiences shared by African American students like Stephany and Valerie to understand and unpack racialized microaggressions in educational spaces.

**Use of racial microaggressions in speech.** In addition to the above discussion, the students also believed the Spanish teacher committed microaggressions through speech. When teachers accept the negative and stereotypical images of African Americans, these images filter through their subconscious (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016) and their unconscious words and actions, situated in white supremacy, constitute a verification of black inferiority (Davis, 1988). In the school environment, the imprecise interpretation of African Americans translates into “sources of unequal educational attainment” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 465). Evidence of this argument can also be heard in the stories shared by Michelle and Valerie, which reflect the power of language used to perpetuate racism, cultural hegemony, and marginalization (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

According to Valerie and Michelle, the Spanish teacher subscribed to the belief that they and the other African American students in this Spanish class were incapable of achieving academic success. Although Michelle and Valerie did not explicitly state it, they recognized the hidden message in the teacher’s words, and that message was of failure (Allen, 2010). The teacher’s destructively color-coded language and “insults” conveyed the message that the African American students “shouldn’t do it” [study a world language] because they were not “going to do well,” were “going to fail” or would not “be put in a higher-level” language course



so there was “no point” in continuing to study the language. Consequently, these racialized messages led Michelle and Valerie to believe that the teacher did not believe in them.

Michelle’s comment also reflects linguicism, a topic I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. When teachers commit racial microaggressions against African American students, there is a lasting impact on students’ academic success and emotional state (Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004). The racially-charged language not only carries the consequence of stifling African American students’ academic growth, it also causes them to question their value and self-worth (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003); non-cognitive skills students need as they move through high school and consider options for college.

Michelle believed the teacher did not accept her choice of dialect because she chose to speak with a “Dominican” or “Puerto Rican” accent; accents that, according to the teacher, did not constitute “real Spanish.” Michelle believed her choice of dialect caused the teacher to become very rude and make snarky comments. These racialized microaggressions marginalized Michelle in the learning space where she should have had the opportunity to participate to fulfill her academic needs.

This teacher’s comment and attitude toward Michelle’s choice of dialect reveal yet another process. Similar to linguicism, the process of categorization through language often leads to stereotyping (Wildman & Davis, 1994). According to Wildman and Davis (1994), teachers “have to ensure that everyone is part of the educational process” (p. 904). But this teacher’s linguistic juxtaposition or covert racist discourse (Hill, 1998) toward “Dominican and Puerto Rican Spanish” unabashedly gave her the authority to censor any use of Spanish she deemed unworthy of use in this Spanish classroom. In other words, the ““elevation of whiteness” and the pejorative racialization of members of historically Spanish-speaking populations” (Hill, 1998, p.

683) endowed her with the power to judge these dialects as “grossly nonstandard and ungrammatical” (Hill, 1998, p. 682). From Michelle’s perspective, this teacher positioned these two dialects as alternatives to the norm; a norm to which Michelle was forced to conform without question. The construction and perpetuation of stereotypical images through racialized microaggressions, however, are not the only areas to which the students shared experiences of discriminatory treatment. Students also believed their teacher advantaged certain groups of students and left “Other” groups out.

**Displays of preferential treatment.** In a study on the effects of teacher perceptions and the academic success of African American students, Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) reported that African American students believed their teachers advantaged certain groups of students, which negatively affected their academic progress. Similar to the findings in the study conducted by Pringle et al. (2010), the students in this study also believed their teacher showed preferential treatment toward certain groups of students.

According to Michelle, Valerie, and Stephany, the Spanish teacher “played favorites” based on race. They believed the white and Hispanic students received better treatment in the classroom and the African American students were invisible to the teacher (Carter, 2007). According to these girls, the teacher offered more academic assistance to the Hispanic and white students causing the African American students to withdraw from the course; an egregious situation that makes them less prepared for the curriculum at prestigious colleges and universities (Howard, 2003).

Although displays of favoritism in the classroom limit African American students’ achievement goals and access to higher education (Bae, Holloway, Li, & Bempechat, 2008), African American students still hold to the supposition that their teachers favor white students

over them (Castro Atwater, 2008; Fernández, 2002; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Critical race theory argues that world language teachers “pick their favorites” because access to a rigorous world language curriculum has been reserved for elite whites. Consequently, “playing” or “picking” favorites leads to decreased motivation among African American students and causes them to feel their teachers do not care for them.

**Displays of uncaring attitudes.** Many teachers fail to recognize the impact of their attitudes on student achievement. These teachers are “convinced that poor kids can’t learn at the same rate as their suburban counterparts. Teachers want to teach well, but their attitudes about the capacity of all children to learn at high levels keep poor children out of the loop of quality education” (Blanchett & Wynne, 2007, p. 190). Thus, a teacher’s pathological preoccupation with capacity (Hilliard, 2000) causes African American students to question if their teachers care about them and their academic success.

A term first coined by Noddings (1984, 1988), the politics or ethics of caring rests on the premise that acts are done out of love and natural inclination. When one cares for another, he / she instinctively responds “to the needs, wants, and initiations of the second” (Noddings, 1988, p. 219). In education, “caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity” (Gay, 2002). Valenzuela (1999) argues that students are invested in school if their teachers are invested in them. Students also rate the school more positively if their teachers care about them. Throughout her study, however, Valenzuela found that U.S.-Mexican youth did not have positive classroom-based experiences with their teachers. Similarly, studies conducted by Fernández (2002) and Rosenbloom and Way (2004) reported similar findings. The students in these studies reported experiences with uncaring teachers, reports that are congruent with the findings in this study.

Stephany's comment that "some of these teachers don't really care" reflects the notion of inauthentic care. According to Stephany, the uncaring teachers knew the students who were passing and the ones who were not in good academic standing. But because of their pathological preoccupation with capacity (Hilliard, 2000), these teachers did not put forth the effort to help the struggling students achieve academic success. Stephany's words – "They're just there for the money" – affirms her belief that teachers are more concerned with the economic value of their profession than assuring all students learn. Thus, uncaring attitudes also contribute to the reasons African American students discontinue the study of a world language. In addition to uncaring teacher attitudes, the students also believed the teacher established and maintained low academic expectations of them.

**Establishment and maintenance of low academic expectations.** As previously mentioned, students recognize and understand the expectations teachers explicitly and implicitly place on them (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). When teachers establish and maintain low expectations of African American students, they fail to acknowledge them as creators and holders of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). The teachers in the study conducted by Blaisdell (2005) and Cross (2003), for example, held low expectations of their students. In his study, Blaisdell shared personal experiences as a teacher of Latino/a students learning English as a second language. During his tenure as a classroom teacher, he worked with students of diverse linguistic backgrounds, but failed to value, accept, acknowledge, and honor the cultural contributions in their lives causing him to feel he needed to "help" them. As a white teacher, Blaisdell struggled to understand how his practices further marginalized these students of color.

The teachers in Cross' (2003) study also failed to connect with the students' lives. In that study, the teachers viewed their students from a "White telescopic lens" (p. 207). Instead of

moving the students toward greater academic achievement, the teachers inhibited their academic growth by establishing and maintaining low academic expectations of them. Evidence from this study also demonstrates that many classroom teachers consistently hold low expectations of African American students.

Tina stated that the Spanish teacher should “put effort” into helping her realize her potential as a language learner. Here, she rightfully placed the responsibility of a lost opportunity in the hands of the teacher. Tina believed the teacher should push her to “try harder” and “stick with the language.” But, according to Tina, the teacher’s low expectations caused her to disconnect and disengage from her language studies, a situation that carries the consequence of limiting her chances of matriculation and success at a selective college or university.

### **Summary Analysis of Act I – Scene I**

As previously mentioned, the teacher is a key player in a school environment and in a student’s life (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). However, there is evidence of the fact that “teachers play a limited role in providing college counseling to students” (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008, p. 148). Much of this happens when teachers adopt colorblind and gatekeeping practices that marginalize students. When public-school teachers construct African Americans within the deficit paradigm (Ladson-Billings, 2000), depictions of welfare, crime, drugs, and immigration are not only used to rationalize African Americans’ subordinate position in society, these labels are also used to justify the marginal treatment African American students receive in the classroom (Solórzano, 1997, 1998). Instead of recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting the knowledge and values African American students bring into the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2000), teachers often blame them for lacking ability and their families for inadequately supporting them (Castagno, 2014; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Warren, 2002).

Given that cultural and racial mismatch (Cross, 2003) occur in many classrooms, as discussed earlier, African American students feel the impact of their teacher's racialized patterns of behavior. Since racism and systems of oppression go uninvestigated (Solórzano, 1997) in the business-as-usual context of the classroom (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Davis, 1995; Grant & Koskela, 1986; Parker & Hood, 1995; Weiner, 1990), African American students turn to other school personnel for information and support.

## Act I

### Scene II: School Counselors as Gatekeepers of Social Capital

**Setting:** After the final bell rings, Valerie, James, Marcelle, April, and Shanice meet near Valerie's locker. As they exit the school building, Valerie tells James and Marcelle about the conversation regarding their Spanish class.

Valerie: We had an awesome conversation at lunch today.

Marcelle: What happened?

Valerie: You know how we've been upset with our Spanish teacher and the way she treats us? Well, we let it all out today. The conversation got really intense.

James: You know what? My problem is not with her. My problem is with my counselor. She is not very helpful. She is never there, and when she is, she never wants to talk about anything. It's kind of like you should do this for this and that's it.

Marcelle: I agree because my relationship with my counselor is real passive too. She is like, alright, go for it. She doesn't fight me on anything because I am

doing well. She's like taking a language in high school is going to look really good on a college application.

Valerie: The same is true for me too. My counselor just checks my grades. She makes sure that my grades are good because she knows I would do well on the AP test and then would be able to test out of Spanish or test into a higher level. She also makes sure I'm on track to meeting the language requirement. We don't have conversations about being an English teacher in another country. We never talk about career paths.

April: I don't think there is much of a role with my counselor. She encourages me to do a lot of different things, but I think because Spanish is viewed as an elective here and not really supported as a foundation or core course, those conversations are not really driven by my counselor. Unless I explicitly express interest on my own, she may try to help me figure out what could work towards meeting graduation requirements, but because I don't express interest to her, the conversations just don't come up.

Shanice: I agree, April. My counselor always motivates me to do better in general, but there is no strong emphasis on language learning here. It's more like you are a very smart person, these are your grades, but they could be even better, so take higher-level courses. It's more like you are a smart girl, focus and take higher-level courses, so I take a few AP courses, but there is no emphasis on languages at all.

Marcelle: That's because it's predominantly black kids in our school, so they're not going to do in-depth counseling sessions with us.

James: True...

Valerie: You been quiet for the last 10 minutes. Where you come from?

Valerie, James, Marcelle, April, and Shanice giggle and continue walking home.

### **Act I – Scene II: Analysis and Findings**

Scene II reveals the nature of counselor-to-student interactions in public schools. While some of the students believed the counseling sessions with their school counselors were passive, others described their counselor as inactive or absent from their decision-making processes. This situation resulted in these students receiving information from other purveyors of social capital. In the discussion below, I analyze the counseling services provided to these students.

**Passive counselor-to-student relationship.** Scene II provides evidence that African American students attending public schools interact with school counselors, but these interactions, as the students revealed, do not assist in the discovery of post-secondary options. James' comment, for example, demonstrated a passive counselor-to-student relationship. James believed the counselor's absence shaped their relationship. When James' counselor was present and available for individualized counseling sessions, she did not want to "talk about anything" with him. In other words, James' counselor served as a gatekeeper that, like the world language teacher discussed in Scene I, created inequitable access to learning opportunities.

**Counseling sessions centered on general curriculum, not world languages.** In addition to the passive counselor-to-student relationship noted above, the students also believed their school counselors did not play a significant role in their decisions to study a world language. According to April and Shanice, world language options were peripheral to the general curriculum. Shanice stated: "there is no emphasis on languages at all" because as April reported, "Spanish" and other world language courses were "viewed as an elective." April and Shanice



believed their counselors did not initiate conversations or help students set goals around language learning, and since April did not express interest in learning a language, the conversation did not come up in her counseling sessions. Similar to James' counselor who, as I discussed above, served as a gatekeeper to his learning opportunities, April and Shanice's counselors also acted as gatekeepers that failed to connect them with diverse learning opportunities; opportunities that have the power to affect their learning outcomes.

**Counseling sessions centered on grades, not careers.** In this scene, we also find evidence of counseling relationships centered on students' academic progress to the point that other options are not explored during counseling sessions. In other words, while the focus of many K-12 institutions is getting students into college, these institutions fail to help students develop backup or alternative plans (Ahearn, Rosenbaum, & Rosenbaum, 2016). Evidence of this argument can be found in the comments shared by Marcelle and Valerie.

Marcelle believed her school counselor chose not to "fight her" decision to continue studying Spanish because she was "doing well" academically. While this counselor encouraged Marcelle to take a world language because it would "look really good on a college application," she failed to provide her the quality and "in-depth" assistance she needed to fully understand the college application process.

Similarly, Valerie said her counselor checked her grades and ensured she made progress toward graduation by fulfilling the "language requirement" (see Table 4.2). According to Valerie, the counselor knew she "would do well on the AP test" or would "test into a higher level" language course. But conversations in which the counselor highlighted career opportunities such as becoming a "teacher in another country" were absent from the counseling sessions. In sum, seeing a school counselor is not only reflective of post-secondary application

patterns (Robinson & Roksa, 2016), it also helps African American students monitor their academic progress, which is “only a piece of the college preparatory process of the student” (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012, p. 50). When school counselors focus on one aspect of students’ lives, they demonstrate a lack of concern for their social and economic mobility (Duncan, 2005).

### **Summary Analysis of Act I – Scene II**

Similar to the teacher’s role, discussed above, the school counselor also serves as “a source of school-based social capital” (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011, p. 191). He / she holds the key to students’ dreams and aspirations (House & Hayes, 2002). As a key player in a school system, the school counselor can advocate for rigorous academic preparation and make high achievement a reality for all students, especially for those students who have been underserved by the traditional schooling system (Field & Baker, 2004; House & Martin, 1998). However, structural constraints confound the school counselor’s role in providing quality counseling services to students (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008), and as we have seen in this scene, these structural inequalities prove to be problematic for African American students.

The structural constraints that prevent school counselors from providing adequate counseling services to students are a function of institutional and systemic racism. While it is true that “Counselors may be an especially important source of assistance and information for Blacks, Latinos, low-income students, and students whose parents do not have direct experience with college” (as cited in Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008, p. 132), contrary evidence shows that these students are often confronted with the “on-demand” strategy of counseling. According to Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, and Li (2008),

“The “on-demand” strategy may ensure that students’ information requests are met, but it also limits the extent to which counselors may proactively provide college- and other counseling services” (p. 144). Counselors are unable to provide students in-depth, individualized services because disproportionate counselor-to-student ratios cause them to be overloaded with the basic tasks of placing students in classes and checking their academic records (DeLany, 1991). Insufficient training and role ambiguity (Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994) also account for the reasons systemic and institutional racism cause school counselors to act as gatekeepers to African American students’ academic success.

Additionally, low and scarce resources that result from inequitable funding also constitute the reasons school counselors are unable to properly assist African American students in their academic pursuits. Critical race scholars argue that inequality in school funding is also a function of institutional and structural racism. Taken together with Harris’ (1993) notion of whiteness as property, school funding becomes a function of property. Although school funds are administered by state legislatures, Ladson-Billings (1995) reports: “Almost every state funds schools based on property taxes. Those areas with property of greater wealth typically have better funded schools” (p. 20). The monetary allocations afforded to suburban schools allow white students to enjoy special programs while African American students have access to fewer enriching educational resources (Darling-Hammond, 1995). In the counseling area, fiscal constraints brought on by differential funding prevent public schools from expanding resources and hiring more counselors (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). In other words, counseling services in public schools are at the expense of other non-counseling priorities.

In addition to the macro-organizational structures that compound African American students' lack of access to quality counseling services as they relate to world language requirements and post-secondary options, counselors themselves also create inequitable educational opportunities for students. Institutional and personal resistance cause school counselors to serve as gatekeepers who affect students' learning and future outcomes. According to Bemak (2000), "Institutional barriers may emerge as discrepancies between what is publicly espoused by the organization and the "real" unofficial policy" (p. 329). In Bemak's words, the hidden curriculum or the discrepancy between what is stated and what is done produces confusion about the information students and families can receive from counselors. Furthermore, the complacency in the business-as-usual aspect of counseling also produces barriers.

Accepting and implementing curricular and program change, such as that outlined in the new graduation policy (see Table 4.2), requires school counselors to "significantly alter their traditional ways of thinking" (Bemak & Chung, 2005, p. 372). Many counselors, however, resist organizational change. Bemak (2000) calls this personal resistance, which is "the individual's rejection of the new ideas and the change process. Many individuals are comfortable with the work as it is" (p. 329). The fact that world language courses are still viewed as electives, according to April and Shanice, implies that school counselors are hesitant to adopt the new graduation policy that grants all students access to world language curricula. In this case, school counselors perpetuate and maintain the educational status quo by tacitly accepting the former graduation policy that contributes to African American students' lack of access to world language curricula. Thus, when African American students are confronted with personal and institutional resistance and are rendered inadequate counseling services, they seek other sources

of social capital to gain the tools, knowledge, and resources they need to understand the educational options available to them.

## Act I

### Scene III: Mentors as Purveyors of Social Capital

**Setting:** After school, C. J. and Tina meet on the school's outdoor basketball court.

C. J.: Did you ever talk to the teacher about studying Spanish next year?

Tina: No.

C. J.: Why not?

Tina: Well, she always recommends other students in the class to keep going, but me specifically, no. My mentor encourages me to continue taking a foreign language. I rely on her for that kind of support and encouragement.

C. J.: Word? Now I see why Crystal wants to be done with Spanish after she gets the two credits.

C. J. and Tina continue talking and exit the basketball court.

### Act I – Scene III: Analysis and Findings

The literature on the role of non-parental influences on students' social and academic development suggests that non-parental adults (mentors) provide supportive and interpersonally rich environments conducive for academic, emotional, and social development (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002). Consistent with that research, I also found that the African American students in this study relied on their mentors when they were unable to find the support and resources they needed from classroom teachers and school counselors.

In this scene, Tina described a supportive mentor relationship. Earlier, I discussed how the actions displayed by classroom teachers marginalized the African American students, and in

this scene, we return to the notion of lack of responsiveness. While the teacher recommended other students continue in their pursuit of second language acquisition, she did not provide Tina the same encouragement. This situation caused Tina to rely on her mentor for information and encouragement regarding language continuation.

Tina's educational experience is consistent with critical race scholars' understandings of reputation and status in education discourse. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state: "In the case of schooling, to identify a school or program as nonwhite in any way is to diminish its reputation or status" (p. 60). This is to say that when African American students take advanced world language courses, the courses lose their reputation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In an earlier chapter, I discussed the reasons African American students are counseled away from the study of world languages. One of these reasons, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, puts forth the idea that the study of a world language is reserved for elite whites, especially elite white males. Since Tina was not an elite white member of dominant society, she did not receive the same encouragement the other students in the class received (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Instead of receiving the encouragement she needed from the Spanish teacher, Tina was forced to rely on other people, who can offer the social capital needed to guide her academic decisions.

### **Summary Analysis of Act I – Scene III**

Non-parental adults serve as positive role models for African American students. They have the power to influence the decisions students make in school and about their futures (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002). In addition to relying on non-parental adults for support, African American students also turn to home-based adults to guide their decision-making processes. When classroom teachers and school counselors act as gatekeepers to African American students' success, home-based caregivers become purveyors of social capital.

## Act I

### Scene IV: Home-based Caregivers as Purveyors of Social Capital

**Setting:** Later that evening, C. J. sends Michelle a message on Facebook asking her to share the reasons why she decided to study Spanish.

C. J.: Hey, Michelle. It's C. J. from school. I'm still trying to figure out if I want to continue studying Spanish. You said the teacher is pretty rude to you. Do you want to keep learning the language? If so, why?

Michelle: Hey C. J. My grandmother was like well, you want to learn Spanish because the majority of the population in our area speaks Spanish, so it will help work wise. Her main focus was helping me get a job and getting paid more money.

C. J.: That makes sense. Thanks for responding. I'll see you at school tomorrow.

Michelle: Sure thing. Goodnight.

### Act I – Scene IV: Analysis and Findings

In an earlier section, I discussed the pivotal role the family plays in the development of a child, and as previously stated, the family serves as an important resource for student learning (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). When teachers and school counselors act in ways that prohibit African American students from gaining access to the information they need, they [African American students] seek support and advice from the adult members in their families.

After sharing her feelings about the treatment she received from the Spanish teacher, Michelle explained how her grandmother counteracted the negative messages she received.

Michelle's comment illustrates the supportive familial influence on students' goal orientations.

Michelle made it clear that her grandmother helped her understand the non-cognitive benefits of second language acquisition. Her grandmother encouraged her to study Spanish to increase her employability skills and participate in the linguistic community of native and heritage speakers. In this scene, Michelle shared how her grandmother became a source of information and support as she maneuvered through the racialized patterns of behavior that marked the Spanish teacher's actions.

### **Summary Analysis of Act I – Scene IV**

Although the education level of home-based family members has been found to be indicative of students' post-secondary attainment and success (Choy, 2001; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), students often rely on familial adults to provide non-cognitive forms of support. Poor and minority parents and caregivers, however, often lack the knowledge of higher education, so they encourage students to seek help while maneuvering academic tasks (Nelson-Le Gall, 2006).

### **Summary Analysis of Act I**

The participants in this study discussed the impact of school- and non-school-based adults on their secondary and post-secondary goals. As shown in the discussion above, school-based adults such as classroom teachers and school counselors adopt gatekeeping policies and practices that hinder the academic outcomes of African American students. To gain the support they need, African American students turn to mentors and parents. In addition to the support they receive from non-school-based adults, African American students also form positive peer networks; another major finding from this study. In the next act, I discuss how the African American participants constructed race-based peer networks to help them navigate the school process.



## Act II

### Social Peer Networks as a Source of Social Capital

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), African American students often receive their formal education in racially segregated school contexts. In these spaces, they are “othered” and rendered invisible by professional staff such as classroom teachers and school counselors, as demonstrated in Act I, Scene I and Scene II. When African American students feel devalued in the academic environment, they form race-based peer networks. In these “...racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism. Joining with one’s peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy” (Tatum, 1997, p. 62). This act explores the ways African American students become purveyors of social capital to support one another through the day-to-day covert and overt forms of oppression embedded in the “White learning environment” (Carter, 2007, p. 542).

## Act II

### Scene I: The Construction of Same-race Peer Counter-spaces

- Setting:** While studying for a test in the school library, James, Shanice, Steve, Tina, and Michelle return to the conversation about their Spanish class.
- James:** This is not the first test we’ve taken in this class, but I feel like this one is going to be hard.
- Shanice:** Studying past homework assignments usually helps me get ready for tests.
- James:** I don’t understand any of it, so nothing will help me.
- Shanice:** Some of my friends are in the class, so we do our homework together. We are in multiple classes together, so we meet after soccer or swim practice to finish our homework.

Steve: Same here. My friends and I feel more comfortable talking to each other. We seem to hang out more and work on group projects. The majority of the time 2 or 3 of us hang out or work on things together. I mean we have to kind of work together.

James: That's because we don't get help from anyone else. The other day I talked about how I'm so turned off by my counselor that I have to talk about things with my friend. I thought about quitting, but then I was like maybe I will keep taking Spanish because you never know when you might need it. I mean it won't hurt because it's not like it's costing me anything to do it.

Tina: I agree. I started studying Spanish because I knew a lot of people who speak the language, so I felt that learning a language where other people would be able to support me would be easier than learning a language without any support.

Michelle: Same here. My best friend is Mexican, so whenever we're around each other, her family speaks Spanish. They speak Spanish to me and I understand them, so I learn more that way than being in school, and I find that the conversations I have with them helps me a lot.

Shanice: This is why we need friends!

They laugh and continue studying.

### **Act II – Scene I: Analysis and Findings**

In the traditional school context, African American students often form same-race counter-spaces, spaces where dominant, hegemonic forces do not exist (Carter, 2007). They construct these spaces as a positive resistance strategy to buffer and cope with their experiences

of racism (Carter, 2007). In a study on the formation of same race peer networks, Carter (2007) found that African American students in a predominantly white high school formed formal and informal counter-spaces to positively resist the hegemonic forces of the school that devalued their cultures and everyday experiences. As the African American students congregated on the steps of the school, they displayed behaviors respective of their ethnic culture, used words and expressions to affirm and validate one another, and assisted one another in the completion of academic tasks. Findings from this study are consistent with that line of research. The students in this study also constructed same-race counter-spaces. Their peers – those who shared common identities and experiences – affirmed and reaffirmed their educational experiences and supported their language learning goals and orientations.

**Counter-space as a site for peer support.** In the previous section, James reported that his counselor’s frequent absences and lack of responsiveness discouraged him from talking with her about his language learning goals. In this section, however, James’ comment illustrates the power of support through peer networks. Although James did not mention his friend’s language background, he helped us understand that he / she played an important role in his decision-making process. Due to his counselor’s passive role, the communicative exchange between James and his friend helped him think through his language learning goals. In other words, because James’ counselor demonstrated behaviors that “turned him off,” he participated in a network in which he sought advice and support from a friend. In addition to same-race peers providing support around language learning goals, the students also discussed how their peers served as a source of academic support.

**Counter-space as a site for academic-oriented behaviors.** Steve and Shanice’s comments illuminate the sense of community and collaboration created and shared between the

African American students. To cope with the burden of “otherness” and alienation, the African American students provided academic support to one another. By assisting one another with homework and “group projects,” Steve and Shanice’s peer groups participated in cooperative learning structures where they worked toward the completion of a shared goal (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1988, 1994, 1999, 2009; Lopata, Miller, & Miller, 2003). According to Nelson-Le Gall (2006), students participate in cooperative learning structures as a “...way of fostering a sense of belonging and establishing or of reinforcing a communalistic value orientation” (p. 11). When the encouragement provided by the Spanish teacher “wasn’t enough” to push Steve, he received “the necessary psychological, social, and cultural support” (Carter, 2007, p. 548) from his same-race peers who shared his ethnic identity and educational background.

### **Summary Analysis of Act II – Scene I**

Participation in social peer networks is one way African American students push pass structural barriers set forth by dominant teaching and counseling practices and continue learning world languages beyond the minimum 2-year requirement. As discussed in the scene above, they bring students together to share life and educational experiences (Carter, 2007). When African American students participate in same-race counter spaces, they freely adjust to the school and classroom environments that seek to suppress them and their ethnic identities. In addition to relying on same-race peers for academic support, African American students also rely on their peers for information about post-secondary processes.

## Act II

### Scene II: Peer Networks as a Site of Information Sharing

**Setting:** The next day, Valerie sees Michelle in the hallway and talks to her about the AP test in Spanish.

Valerie: Hi, Michelle. I wanted to ask you something about Spanish. You plan to continue studying Spanish throughout high school, right?

Michelle: Yeah.

Valerie: So do you plan to take the AP test?

Michelle: I wanted to, but I didn't know much about it because our teacher didn't tell me about it. She told the Hispanic students about it, but not me. After my friend and I talked, I asked her about it and she outright told me that I wasn't going to do well.

### Act II – Scene II: Analysis and Findings

Earlier, Michelle discussed the negative and insulting language the Spanish teacher used toward her, and in this scene, she explained how the teacher intentionally withheld important standardized test information from her. Here, Michelle described a missed, highly valued, academic opportunity. Although she was enrolled in the Spanish class, the teacher failed to inform her of the “AP test for Spanish” because, as Michelle reported, she believed Michelle would not perform well on the assessment. As part of her counter-narrative, Michelle received information about the test from her peers since the teacher advantaged the Hispanic (and white) students.

Michelle's report of the missed opportunity to take the Spanish AP test provides evidence interest convergence (Bell, 1980). Although I discussed this concept in the second chapter of this

dissertation, I return to it here to demonstrate that whites will grant African Americans certain privileges, just as long as these privileges do not converge with their status. In other words, the school granted Michelle access to the Spanish courses offered at Westside High, but her identification with a community of color, a community that has been traditionally and historically marginalized within society, has denied her access to the AP test. According to Bell (1980), true equality for African Americans and other communities of color requires whites to surrender the privileges that uphold a system of white supremacy.

### **Summary Analysis of Act II – Scene II**

Although adults are ambivalent about peer networks, research provides evidence that students rely on these networks to assist them in social development and school integration efforts (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Since the teacher was “unavailable or appears to be indifferent” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005, p. 380) to Michelle taking the AP test in Spanish, Michelle’s friends intimated counsel and helped her realize the opportunity before her. They helped her navigate the emotionally challenging and stressful situation inflicted upon her by the teacher. Although Michelle did not possess all the information she needed, she was able to rely on her peers for information sharing and support.

### **Summary Analysis of Act II**

Research states that the construction of race-based counter-spaces is African American students’ response to their position of marginality within traditional school contexts (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). When African American students participate in social peer networks, they feel a sense of belonging they do not otherwise feel in the white space of the school. In these peer-affirming contexts, African American students empower one another to navigate the academic and non-academic domains of the school environment. They assist one another in

information seeking and goal completion processes and provide social, academic, and emotional support to each other. In this study, the African American students fostered their own learning, validated each other's educational experiences, and viewed one another as a source of information (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) to “successfully negotiate primary and dominant cultural codes in school” (Carter, 2008, p. 469). In the final act of this play, I illuminate the intrinsic motivators African American students used to successfully acquire world languages and navigate the secondary process.

### **Act III**

#### **The Counter-story: How Intrinsic Motivators led Participants to Pursue a World**

##### **Language beyond the Minimum 2-year Requirement**

In an earlier section, I drew on early models of motivation in language learning put forth by Gardner and Lambert (1972), who differentiated between instrumental and integrative motivation. As mentioned earlier, motivation is “a key factor in achievement” (Hsieh, 2008, p. 76). Instrumentally motivated language learners acquire languages for practical purposes such as advances in employment, and integratively motivated language learners desire to learn a language to integrate themselves into the target culture (Hsieh, 2008). Findings from this research study are consistent with early models of research. While some of the participants withdrew from their language studies, intrinsic motivation played a major role in other participants' decision to study a world language beyond the minimum 2-year requirement.

## Act III

### Scene I: Instrumental Motivation

**Setting:** As the school year comes to a close and the summer draws near, Steve and Valerie sit in the cafeteria and share reasons why they continued studying Spanish.

**Valerie:** Overall, how would you describe your experience taking Spanish here? How do you feel about it?

**Steve:** I feel like if I would have dropped Spanish, it would have hindered me. I wouldn't have the opportunities I have now. This summer, I'll have an internship at a company where I literally speak Spanish 95% of the time every day. It's a German company, but I'll work with the Latin American companies. I feel like I have an up because I know Spanish. The interview and everything was in Spanish. They were like you speak really good Spanish, so we can teach you everything else. Not many Black people have opportunities like this, so I feel really good about this new experience.

**Valerie:** I mean we're in situations where we are sought out if we're bilingual. I can work anywhere in the city. My friends can't say the same. They can't go to the south side. They can't cover 80<sup>th</sup> and Austin. They can't cover South Parkway. But I can make money because I can communicate in two languages.

**Steve:** I agree. There are good jobs where you can make good money knowing a foreign language.



Steve and Valerie continue talking, and as they look up, they see April and Tina enter the cafeteria.

### **Act III – Scene I: Analysis and Findings**

The students' desire to communicate with native speakers in employment situations and settings served as the most common form of instrumental motivation. Consistent with the literature cited above, Steve and Valerie acquired a world language for practical purposes. While Valerie said her friends were unable to travel to parts of the city where a high concentration of Spanish language speakers reside, Steve has learned the Spanish language to the point that he can use it "95% of the time" at work. Utilitarian purposes, however, do not account for the only reasons participants continued the pursuit of a world language.

### **Summary Analysis of Act III – Scene I**

Instrumental motivation enables language learners to complete a task or pursue a specific path. As previously mentioned, these tasks serve pragmatic or utilitarian purposes. Instrumental motivation, however, does not carry a significant personal meaning for language learners (Hsieh, 2008). As such, integrative motivation also helps language learners acquire a world language.

## **Act III**

### **Scene II: Integrative Motivation**

**Setting:** After completing their final exams, Tina and April enter the cafeteria and join Valerie and Steve's conversation.

**Steve:** How do you feel about taking Spanish this year?

**April:** I still love the language. I still love the culture. I still want to visit Spain. It's not necessarily the birthplace of Spanish, but it has so much history that I just want to be able to immerse myself in. It changes your

perspective. It offers you a different worldview, and I think that is important for everybody because I think without knowing it, we all grow a little bit selfish because we are trapped inside of this bubble of what we have been taught. Then you have to start looking at the world for what it really is. I think it's important to look at those big picture things and where you are in society, so I think everyone should take a language. I'm biased to Spanish because that's the language I have fallen in love with.

Tina: I agree. Earlier in the year, I didn't care until I actually took the time to study it. Now I love the language. I had the chance to visit a Spanish-speaking country in middle school and that made me love the language even more. If I didn't do any of that or have the experience of visiting a country where people speak the language, I probably would have continued to not embrace the culture as much as I do now.

As their conversation ends, Tina, April, Valerie, and Steve embrace one another and exit the school building.

### **Act III – Scene II: Analysis and Findings**

In an early study, Speiller (1988) found that students cited travel as one of the most influential factors that contributed to their continuation of a world language. Consistent with that line of research, the students in this study also cited immersion experiences as a factor that increased their integrative motivation toward second language acquisition. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the idea that African Americans do not participate in immersion experiences accounts for one of the reasons African American students are denied access to an advanced world language curriculum in high school. Tina's comment, however, rejects the epistemological

ground on which this argument rests. Earlier in Act I, Scene I, Tina shared her experiences with teachers who held low academic expectations of her, which caused her to question whether she wanted to continue learning Spanish. Here, she told us that she did not allow the teacher's behaviors to serve as a barrier to her language learning goals. She stated that her immersion experience sparked her interest in language study and believed her participation in the target culture supported the development of her love for the Spanish language.

These participants also discussed the political reasons that propelled them to continue studying a world language. Similar to Tina, who came to love the Spanish language, April's increased intercultural awareness helped her develop a passion for the Spanish language. Here, April connected language learning with a change in her perspective and worldview. She believed learning a second language could cause one to have a shift in ideology and question the epistemological ground on which he / she stands. In other words, April believed language learning carries the dual task of allowing one to understand the "big picture" while identifying his / her "place" in society.

### **Summary Analysis of Act III – Scene II**

According to research, integrative motivation is the most important motivating factor that leads learners to acquire diverse languages (Stewart-Strobelt & Chen, 2003). While Steve and Valerie identified utilitarian reasons for studying the Spanish language, Tina and April shared how they became passionate language learners. These integrative and instrumental motivators encouraged these students to study a world language beyond the minimum 2-year requirement.

### **Summary Analysis of Act III**

Research lauds the importance of integrative and instrumental attitudes and orientations toward second language learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). While integrative motivation helps

language learners adopt “a favorable attitude toward the language community” (Shedivy, 2004, p. 105), instrumental motivation adds the benefit of allowing him / her to develop social and economic goals for which they can demonstrate their linguistic competence.

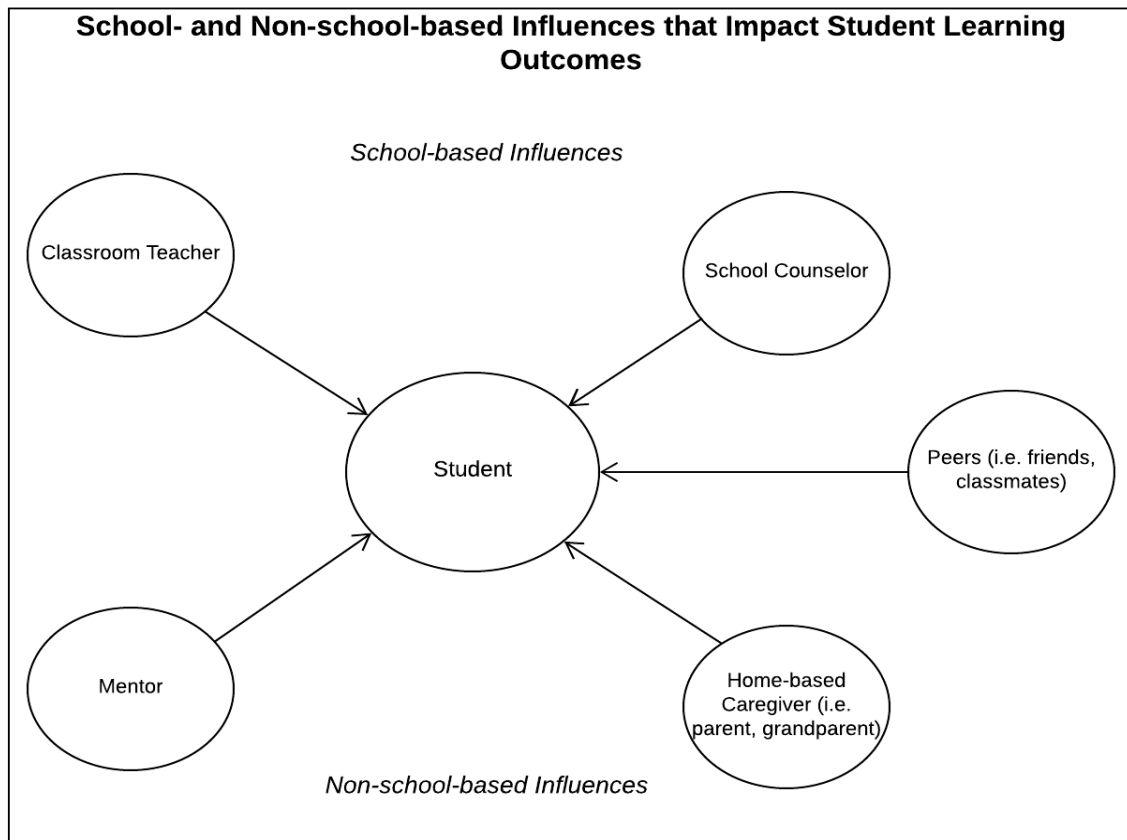
### **Introduction to the Talkback Discussion**

In the analyses above, I used African American students’ counter-narratives to call our attention to the racialized curricular, instructional, and counseling practices upheld at Westside High. In the following section, I allow members of the audience to participate in a talkback discussion that ties this dissertation together. Since curriculum informs instruction, I begin the discussion by answering the first attending question. Then, I offer an analysis to the second attending question. Finally, I leave the audience with an answer to the major research question that guides this study.

### ***Secrets, Barriers, and the Hidden World Language Curriculum***

#### **The Talkback Discussion**

According to McKillip, Rawls, and Barry (2012), “...students do not exist in isolation, but rather interact in and with a larger social environment” (p. 50). Figure 1 illustrates the individuals internal and external to the school environment who impact students’ educational experiences.



*Figure 4.1. School- and non-school-based individuals that impact students and their learning outcomes.*

Located near the top of Figure 4.1 are those individuals internal to the school environment who have the greatest impact on students, the classroom teacher and school counselor. Near the bottom of the figure are those individuals external to the school, who also have the power to influence the decisions students make about their futures. The students in this study made it clear that classroom teachers and school counselors carried the greatest negative impact on their educational trajectories and decision-making processes when they needed to make decisions better aligned with their educational outcomes and interests. However, the non-school-based individuals – mentors, peers, and guardians – counteracted the hegemonic forces that served as

barriers to these students' educational mobility despite being less knowledgeable of educational structures and systems.

There are two attending questions that inform the central research question guiding this study. Since curriculum is the impetus behind classroom instruction, I begin this section by offering an analysis that answers the first attending question - what aspects of the world language curriculum, if any, positively or negatively affected students' post-secondary world language experiences? In the analysis that follows, I use critical race theory's intellectual property embedded in whiteness as property to explicate the African American students' interpretations of their high school world language experiences.

### **Access to a Deficit-based World Language Curriculum**

Access to a rigorous world language curriculum is a form of intellectual property; property to which the African American students at Westside High did not have full access. According to critical race scholars, intellectual property refers to the right to exclude, the right to enjoy, and the ability to draw advantage from these rights (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999b; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Historically, property rights were ascribed to whites because as Lawrence (1987) asserted, "To be thought of as a Negro is to be thought of as less than human" (p. 313). Following this line of thought, deficit and colorblind education discourse deems African American students underserving of the same educational rights as white students to access, use, and enjoy an enriching world language curriculum (Harris, 1993). Each facet of this form of racism is discussed and supported with evidence from the students' experiences at Westside High.

In Act I, Scene I, Valerie, C. J., April, and Michelle discussed the curriculum offered to them in their Spanish class. As Valerie, C. J., and Michelle discussed the "short readings" that

accompanied the “textbook,” April stated that the “Spanish alphabet,” “greetings and pleasantries,” and “verb conjugations” constituted the curricular aspects of this particular Spanish class. As April concluded her statement, she referred to the Spanish curriculum as “very, very basic.”

Critical race theory challenges this type of curriculum in various ways. First, the unchallenging, deficit-based curriculum offered to African Americans in public schools differs from the one white students receive in suburban schools. In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) describes the public-school curriculum as such:

The curriculum [the white school] follows “emphasizes critical thinking, reasoning and logic.” The planetarium, for instance, is employed not simply for the study of the universe as it exists. Children also are designing their own galaxies,” the teacher says. (p. 96)

According to Kozol, the curriculum suburban schools offer white students equips them with the advanced cognitive functions needed for higher social processes of colleges and careers. The world language curriculum at Westside High, on the other hand, supports the argument that the public-school curriculum prepares African American students for factory and menial labor (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Consequently, deficit-based curricular structures deny African American students access to “college bound” knowledge (Yosso, 2002); knowledge they need for matriculation and success at selective colleges and universities.

Racialized structures in the public-school curriculum also reveal a commonplace practice customary to public schools. Although not readily apparent to students, curriculum inclusion vs. curriculum exclusion dominates public-school classrooms. Evidence of this exclusionary practice can be found in Act I, Scene I.

In Act I, Scene I, the students discussed how their Spanish teacher “picked favorites.” Michelle validated this point by stating that the teacher privileged the academic and learning needs of the white and Hispanic students; a situation that points to a stratified world language curriculum. While the Hispanic students could use their native language skills to navigate the curriculum, the African American students were unable to use their language skills to learn the material. This caused Stephany to feel “stuck” as she tried to understand the grammar. Hence, the racialized world language curriculum at Westside High excluded the African American students from the same learning opportunities the white and Hispanic students enjoyed.

Duncan (2005) calls this type of curriculum allochronic or primitive. Although the revised graduation policy grants students access to a world language curriculum, the curriculum itself has not changed. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the shift in pedagogical approaches used to teach language learners. Before the communicative language teaching method became the focus of world language instruction, the audiolingual method and direct instruction were commonplace in world language classrooms. This implied that grammar served as the main source of the language curriculum, and in Act I, Scene I, the students’ stories reveal the primitive world language curriculum offered at Westside High.

**Implications of deficit-based curriculum.** The inferior curriculum offered at Westside High implies two things. The first implication of this “basic” curriculum rests on the premise that African American students are intellectually inferior to their white counterparts (Bell, 1975; Burrell, 2010; Lawrence, 1983; Museus, 2008). Dominant epistemologies put forth the idea that African American students lag behind their white counterparts in school because they are academically inferior to white students (Guinier, 2004; Hyland, 2005). However, the fallacy in this myth lies in the underestimated assertions of what African American students can do. For



instance, Ladson-Billings (1999b) shares how a math teacher repeatedly told a 10-year old African American girl that she was poor at math. The math teacher did not know the girl handled the household budget and finances. Although the girl did not excel at academic math, she possessed the knowledge of adult-like processes.

Critical race scholars also challenge the public-school curriculum as the byproduct of white domination of public schools (Duncan, 2005). These scholars argue that deficit-based curricular structures do not prepare African American students for power (Yosso, 2002). Instead, the basic curricular offerings in world languages, science and mathematics, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, imply that African American students will occupy low-skill ranks where they uncritically accept things as they are (Yosso, 2002). This form of curriculum is designed to make them more proficient “or skilled, at the same menial tasks to which they had been previously relegated to performing and to which white communities would seek to restrict them to carrying out in the future” (Duncan, 2005, pp. 97-98). Thus, this analysis of the Spanish curriculum at Westside High puts into perspective the students’ interpretations of their Spanish teacher’s instructional practices. Therefore, I continue to discuss the students’ experiences of world language education by examining the instructional aspects of this world language class. The following section answers the second attending question guiding this study - what aspects of the classroom instruction, if any, positively or negatively affected students’ post-secondary world language experiences?

### **Access to Basic World Language Instruction**

The African American students at Westside High were also denied the opportunity to enjoy a rigorous world language instruction. In Act I, Scene I, the students discussed the instructional approaches the Spanish teacher used in the classroom. They mentioned the use of

worksheets as “busy work,” an overreliance on the course textbook for in-class assignments and homework, and videos that often supplemented instruction. In this scene, C. J. described the class as “boring” because the instruction was weak and lacked rigor.

Additionally, this teacher’s use of English as the medium of instruction is also of major concern for this analysis. Act I, Scene I provides evidence that the Spanish teacher did not teach in the target language. Here, April, Tina, and Crystal shared their perspectives about the language used during instruction. Although the three girls expressed disagreement about the language used in the classroom, the truth lies in the fact that the African American students were not fully immersed in the target language.

This situation undermines second language acquisition research that emphasizes the importance of L2 usage in the world language classroom (Cook, 2001). Since the Spanish teacher at Westside High failed to use the target language during instruction, the African American students were not granted the opportunity to use the target language in and out of the classroom. The issues responsive to the curricular and instructional differentials between African American and white students speak to a larger issue in public education – the enduring nature of institutional racism in public schools. Therefore, I expand the above discussion by answering the central question guiding this study.

### **The Impact of Institutional Racism on African American Students**

In *Secrets, Barriers and the Hidden World Language Curriculum*, the students revealed how white privilege, a culture of meritocracy, and racialized segregation, rooted in a system of institutional and systemic racism in their high school, impacted their academic outcomes. In this section, I examine each of these areas as they explain the situation for African American students and answer the major research question designed for this study: how do African American

graduates of public-school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences?

Although the students did not explicitly name their educational experiences as acts of institutional racism, their perceptions of mistreatment highlight the role racism and other forms of subordination played in their educational experiences (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Lawrence and Keleher (2004):

Institutional racism is “discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions (schools, mass media, etc.). Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people based on race.

(p. 1)

While early research puts forth the idea that institutional racism exists in situations where whites are often unaware they are discriminating against African Americans and people of color (Feagin, 1977; Feagin & Feagin, 1996), more contemporary research (e.g. Lawrence & Keleher, 2004) rejects dysconscious racism whereby whites tacitly and uncritically accept white norms (King, 1991) and recognizes the intentional nature of institutional racism in institutions such as schools. Institutional racism persists in the United States because “there is a deliberate intent in this nation to maintain sharecropper education for the descendants of slaves; that we know how to educate our poor children in rural places or inner cities, we simply have no intent to do so” (Blanchett & Wynne, 2007, p. 191).

In this study, Valerie stated that the Spanish teacher “wielded her power in such a way that hurts the black and brown kids” to deliberately deny them quality educational opportunities to a world language. By virtue of the teacher’s privileged position as an educator and member of

dominant society, she is removed from acknowledging and accepting the impact her words and actions have on the lives of African American students (Leonardo, 2007). In other words, the teacher's power of privilege within the school became a tool she used to "hurt" and exclude the "black and brown kids" from the intellectual benefits a world language offers to their future lives. This power of privilege became a form of property masked by the salient forms of institutional and systemic systems of oppression.

Similarly, in Act II, Scene II, Michelle discussed the privileging of information related to the AP Spanish test. In this scene, Michelle said the teacher shared pertinent test information with the other students, but failed to include her in these same discussions. These patterns of interaction, between the school personnel and African American students, opened the space for white privilege to exclude students like Michelle from the same benefits the white students acquired.

### **White Privilege and African American Students' World Language Experiences**

In addition to the topics discussed above, the students also reported experiences of preferential treatment in the classroom. The teacher's display of favoritism toward the white and Hispanic students is a function of white privilege. According to Wildman and Davis (1994), "White privilege derives from the race power system of white supremacy" (p. 893). Although this concept carries multiple definitions, its underlying implications are the same.

Hossain (2015), for example, defines white privilege as the "unearned advantages enjoyed consciously or subconsciously by people of White skin" (p. 52). Tim Wise (2014), on the other hand, defines white privilege as "any advantage, opportunity, benefit, head start, or general protection from negative societal mistreatment which persons deemed White will typically enjoy, but which others will generally not enjoy" (para. 10). Although scholars such as

Hossain and Wise put forth different definitions of white privilege, critical race theory decenters white privilege as it “is very much intertwined with racism” (Hossain, 2015, p. 52). Harris (1993), for example, puts it this way:

The court refused to extend continued legal protection to white privilege, yet it simultaneously declined to guarantee that white privilege would be dismantled, or even to direct that the continued existence of institutionalized privilege violated the equal protection rights of Blacks. (p. 1751)

In other words, the distribution and protection of rights are conferred to “the beneficiaries of enclaves of accumulated wealth and resources” (Aggarwal, 2016, p. 130) who seldom require any loss.

In *Secrets, Barriers and the Hidden World Language Curriculum*, white privilege gave the Spanish teacher the power to determine the students to include in the nexus of the classroom community (Wildman & Davis, 1994). With this power, she created a monolithic whiteness that privileged the learning needs of the white and Hispanic students and ignored those of the African American students. Through such privileging, she made clear her privileged position in the classroom and school environment.

Act I, Scene I also provides evidence of white privilege at Westside High. While allowing the white students to “do their own thing,” the teacher insulted the African American students and used language laced with failure to hinder their academic progress. The needs of the African American students differed from those of the Hispanic and white students, but the teacher’s lack of responsiveness to them translated into an understanding that their academic, social, and emotional needs were at the expense of the white students’ needs. The harmful effects of white privilege caused the African American students to question their self-value and self-

worth, withdraw academically, approach the language-learning situation with decreased motivation, and discontinue the study of a world language.

The African American students were also marginalized within the counseling practices of the school; a situation that also reflects the superior status of white privilege. Unlike white students who gain information about educational opportunities from their parents and family members, African American, poor, and minority students rely on school personnel for the information not readily available to them in the home environment (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). But their socially constructed, subordinated position in society and in a school, does not grant them the right to obtain information from school personnel. This information is reserved for a few, typically not those who are persons of color (McIntosh, 1988).

Examples of the right to exclude can be found in Act I, Scene II and in Act II, Scene II. Recall Act I, Scene II where the students discussed the patterns of interaction between them and their counselors. Although their academic needs differed, each counselor excluded them from information respective to career pathways and world language options and opportunities.

The Declaration of Independence endows United States citizens with certain rights, and drawing on this declaration, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., advocated for equality among races. In his prominent *I Have a Dream Speech*, Dr. King (1963) subscribed to the belief that one day the nation will “live out the true meaning of its creed” (p. 4). Although Dr. King and Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, advocated for equality, critical race theory rejects the notion of equality. Critical race scholars argue that “skin colour has always played out in this country in ways that maintain an unequal distribution of economic, social, and political resources that privileges white people over people of colour in the US” (Duncan, 2005, p. 95).

The advantages and privileges afforded to whites create an us versus them mentality by which groups of people compete for goods and resources. The negative effects of white privilege do not stop at the micro-analytic level of the classroom, however. *Secrets, Barriers and the Hidden World Language Curriculum* also illustrates how white privilege gives way to racial segregation within the larger context of the school environment.

### **Racial Segregation and African American Students' World Language Experiences**

In the introduction of this chapter, I provided demographic information on the professional staff, who makes up Westside High. I showed that majority of the staff are members of the dominant community. I also discussed how the banners and posters that hang along the walls of the hallways share messages that promote diversity. However, these colorblind, race-neutral banners camouflage the racialized segregation practices that lie beneath the surface.

In Act I, Scene I, Michelle said when she and other African American students posed questions about subject-specific content, the teacher reacted in a way that casted blame on the student who “should have learned it.” Similarly, James told us his counselor failed to communicate with him in Act II, Scene II. From these situations (and others), the African American students felt as if they occupied little meaningful space in the school (Carter, 2007).

In addition to the racial segregation embedded in the school environment, patterns of racial segregation are also evident in the community-at-large, patterns I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. In Act III, Scene I, for example, Valerie decided to continue studying Spanish because she wanted to communicate with native Spanish speakers. Since she has acquired a second language, she has the ability to work in employment settings where diverse languages are preferred job qualifications. In her comment, she told us that she could work in specific areas of the city, areas where her monolingual friends are unwelcomed. The restricted

access and limited employment opportunities that affect Valerie's friends are the result of residential segregation. Due to the sequestering of ethnic groups to specific areas of a city, members of other groups are denied access to those same areas. Given their outsider status, members of different ethnic groups are not allowed to obtain the good and services of the areas to which they do not belong. The rights and privileges of the area are granted to the members of the insider group (Glaeser & Vigdor, 2000). As previously mentioned, the ability to speak a world language affords some privileges, but denies others access to these same privileges (Ortega, 1999; Shannon, 1999). In sum, the problem at Westside High is one of the color line; a line that segregates and creates a culture of mediocrity that upholds the advantages and privileges of whites (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

### **Cultural Meritocracy and African American Students' World Language Experiences**

The ideology of meritocracy starts from the premise that the United States is the land of opportunity, and regardless of race, gender, class, and socioeconomic status, individuals can work toward economic and social mobility and claim a piece of the American Dream by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps (Carter, 2008). This myth operates on a system of individual merit, and in schools, it rests on the belief that if students work hard, they will achieve academic success that will lead to greater future opportunities (Carter, 2008). This myth, however, is connected to the beliefs and attitudes white, middle-class students and families hold about the value of school (Carter, 2007). This is not to say that African American families do not value education. The values these and other families of color hold about education, however, differ from those of white families (Mungo, 2013). Additionally, this myth does not consider the structural conditions that constrain or impede a student's ability to achieve their goals. Instead, it requires students to take ownership of their own achievement and future goals (Carter, 2008).



In two studies on the pervasive effects of unexamined whiteness in education, Picower (2009) and Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005) found that white teachers subscribed to the myth of meritocracy. The participants used “their White ethnic backgrounds to create a hegemonic story about how people of color should be able pick themselves up by their bootstraps” (Picower, 2009, p. 201). One of the participants, for example, shared how her father worked hard and achieved success without the assistance from others. Given the nature of her father’s unaided, heroic efforts (Lewis, 2010), this teacher (and others) subscribed to the belief that if students worked hard, they, too, could also achieve the same level of success. The comments shared by the participants in this study also revealed the culture of meritocracy that resonated within the school.

Throughout the play, the students shared experiences that provided evidence of the meritocratic ideals upheld at Westside High. As previously mentioned, the Spanish teacher responded to the academic and language learning needs of the white students by refusing to explain grammatical concepts to the African American students, withheld information from them, and adopted the attitude that if they struggled to understand a concept, it was because they failed to learn it. Their school counselors also provided limited information about post-secondary options and pathways. Although Stephany said she was “left to figure things out on her own,” the same culture existed for all of the African American students in the school. As the students interacted with the Spanish teacher and their school counselors, they were put in positions where they were expected to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. As Carter (2008) asserts, when African American students become responsible for their academic achievement and future goals, it creates a situation that undeniably carries negative consequences for their educational experiences. The teachers and school counselors, however, were not alone in carrying the

responsibility for students' learning and academic progress. Other professional staff in the school organization also has the power to change students' lives.

### **Organizational Habitus and African American Students' World Language Experiences**

As mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation, the students' stories pointed to the structures within their high school that impacted their academic achievement. Although they did not possess the language needed to label these structures, they placed the culpability of a missed learning opportunity in the hands of the organization responsible for their learning outcomes. Although Valerie's statement: "You can have as many conversations as you want, but if you want to say my rule is my rule, what can we say? What can the principal say? What can administration say?," implies she believed school leaders such as principals and administrators did not possess the power to impact a teacher's practice, school and district leaders can help teachers and school counselors accept their individual and collective responsibility for the learning and academic growth of all students. Deliberate action can cause a teacher to change his / her practice (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). When school and district leaders do not or confront the norms and patterns of behavior in a school, the academic, emotional, and psychological toll on African American students is great.

### **The Talkback Summary**

This study has revealed four major findings. First, the inferior curricular aspects of their world language experiences in high school limit African American students' access to the requisite knowledge needed for the successful admission to most four-year colleges and universities. Second, students' access to mediocre instructional practices do not prepare them for the rigor of college-level world language curriculum. Third, their interactions with their school counselors compound their lack of access, particularly as it relates to the world language

requirements for admission to many colleges and universities. Lastly, students seek out and utilize support from mentors and family members to navigate traditional schooling structures that marginalize them and construct their counter-narratives to these school-imposed constraints. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings from this study and their implications for policy, practice, and future research.

## Chapter 5

### **Secrets, Barriers, and the Hidden World Language Curriculum:**

#### **Implications for Educational Policy, Practice, and Future Research**

I recently attended a professional development workshop and throughout the presentation, the speaker referred to African American students as “special love students.” He characterized them in this manner because schools have designated them academically inferior based on their ethnic identities, socioeconomic status, and intellectual capacities, which have been deemed incompatible with white educational structures (Chapman, 2014; Goodwin, 1997; Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006; Leonardo, 2007). Although critical race theory seeks to reject dominant epistemologies that project myths of black inferiority (Bell, 1975; Burrell, 2010; Lawrence, 1983; Museus, 2008), many attempts have been made to identify and label students who lie outside mainstream education (Goodwin, 1997). In this perpetual state of otherness (Burrell, 2010), the African American participants in this study became responsible for their academic success as well as the educational success of other African American students at Westside High.

In this study, the African American participants’ stories of classroom teachers’ and school counselors’ colorblind practices highlighted discriminatory and race-based educational practices, shedding light on the pervasive effects of institutional racism in this particular public school. As a result, students sought out mentors, parents, and peers, who became purveyors of the social capital that guided their secondary and post-secondary decision-making processes. Through their personal, academic, and social networks, students discovered ways to navigate the educational structures that limited their access to better curricular and instructional learning opportunities, quality school counselors, and out of school resources.

Four major findings emerged from the participants' stories about unequal educational conditions. Act I shed light on the curricular, instructional, and counseling structures that impacted the students' academic achievement and language learning goals. These structures became a form of property that white and Hispanic students enjoyed when coupled with the classroom teacher and school counselor's lack of responsiveness to their academic and non-academic needs. Act II illuminated the students' use of race-based counter-spaces as a positive resistance strategy to counteract these hegemonic forces impacting their learning and future outcomes. These counter-spaces served as sites for academic assistance and information seeking, as well as, emotional and psychological support for the African American students in this study. In the end, these students discovered ways to accomplish their learning goals and acquire a second language despite the challenges and obstacles imposed on them by traditional school structures. Their counter-narratives in Act III highlighted the intrinsic motivators that helped them acquire a second language beyond the minimum 2-year graduation requirement.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation discusses the implications of these findings for educational policy, teacher education programs, world language teachers, and school counselors, as well as mentors, families, and community members so students have access to better curricular and instructional discourses. Having this access in high school, in turn, expands their post-secondary options and college readiness.

### **Policy Recommendations**

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the major curricular changes put forth by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in *A Nation at Risk*. According to Ladson-Billings (1999a), that report served as a wake-up call to the nation regarding the state of public education because it “underscored how we were all in jeopardy because of the poor

performance of our schools” (p. 18). In other words, the report served as the impetus for the establishment of local, state, and federal mandates such as ESEA, ESSA, the Common Core State Standards, and other secondary reforms (see Table 1.1). Changes to the secondary curriculum was the goal of that report; however, notions of racialized inferiority thwarted its progress and “tiered citizenship in education” (Aggarwal, 2016, p. 132) not qualified as whiteness as property, became normalized and understood as natural (Aggarwal, 2016).

Nowhere is it truer than in educational policy that there is a hiddenness of power (Apple, 1999; Gillborn, 2014; López, 2003). Although often unseen and immutable, its natural claims at “leveling the playing field” (Apple, 1999, p. 10) ignore questions such as “who gets what, when and how” (as cited in López, 2003, p. 72). To center discussions of race and racism in the politics of education, critical race theory challenges the mechanisms that influence decision-making processes and policy outcomes (López, 2003). Thus, the first major finding in this study pointed to the mediocre curricular aspects of African American students’ world language experiences and how these structures limited their access to the requisite knowledge needed for admissions and success at selective four-year universities. Taken together with critical race theory, I offer recommendations for state and district world language policies, curricular and instructional policies for world language teacher preparation programs, and world language teacher professional development opportunities.

**Policy recommendations for changes to world language curriculum in public schools.** In his 1990 article titled “After We’re Gone: Prudent Speculations on America in a Postracial Epoch,” Derrick A. Bell Jr., states: “It is time—as a colloquialism puts it—to “get real” about race and the persistence of racism in America” (p. 9). Following Bell’s (1990) assertion, it is time to get real about the racialized discourses that continue to dominate the public-school

curriculum. Color-blind ideologies and claims to meritocracy, however, ignore the structures and processes that irrevocably marginalize African American students in the same learning spaces they share with white students (Yosso, 2002). While these curricular discourses continue to maintain the white master script that upholds a system of white privilege (Ladson-Billings, 1999b), critical race theory reveals the multiple layers hidden in these curricular processes. While public schools such as Westside High project images of diversity, the endemic racist structures embedded in the curriculum systematically under-prepare African American students for college (Yosso, 2002).

In Act I, Scene I, for example, the students discussed the weak curriculum offered to them in their Spanish class at Westside High. This unchallenging curriculum focused on the basic grammatical function of “verb conjugations” and denied these students access to higher cognitive and metacognitive functions in the Spanish language; functions needed to access institutions of higher education. Moreover, this deficit-based curriculum created a hierarchal structure of a classroom within a classroom that privileged the learning needs of the white and Hispanic students. As a result of the curricular aspects of this Spanish class, C. J. questioned what he learned and Stephany and Crystal abandoned their studies of the Spanish language.

Given the unequal curricular conditions that continue to plague public schools, critical race scholars challenge education policymakers to critically “examine the past as part of the present contexts” (Chapman, 2008, p. 61). According to Chapman, it is important that educators and education policymakers dismantle and deconstruct the deficit ideologies that continue to deny African American students access to quality educational programs public schools. Doing this can help those individuals who carry the greatest impact on students’ learning outcomes understand how past inequities are still commonplace in present-day, public school structures.

With respect to the policies responsive to world language curriculum offerings in public schools, this study also suggests the need for culturally responsive world language curriculum. Not only does this type of curriculum decenter the white master script of the public-school curriculum, it also gives African American students the opportunity to engage in a curriculum that accepts and values their learning experiences as valid in the world language context. Changes to the world language curriculum can carry the benefit of allowing students to gain the social capital needed to obtain admissions into institutions of higher education. As education policymakers enact changes to the world language curriculum, it is also important that they also engage in discussions about the instruction students receive in the world language classroom.

**Policy recommendations for changes to world language instruction in public schools.** In the second chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the deficit thinking that shaped African American students' lack of access to better curricular and instructional discourses, and in the preceding chapter, the students' stories validated the claims that attempted to justify African American students' unequal educational conditions. In Act I, Scene II, for example, April said: "I think because Spanish is viewed as an elective here and not really supported as a foundation or core course, those conversations are not really driven by my counselor," which points to an issue of access. In other words, April and the other African American students at Westside High were denied participation in quality world language programs because state and local policies influenced classroom teachers' beliefs and practices and denied these students access to the enriching courses the white students enjoyed (Gillborn, 2014; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

To ensure African American students enjoy the benefits educational policy affords, critical race theory challenges education policymakers to examine how policies perpetuate



systematic inequalities for African American students (López, 2003). According to Gillborn (2014):

CRT views policy not as a mechanism that delivers progressively greater degrees of equity, but a process that is shaped by the interests of the dominant white population—a situation where genuine progress is won through political protest and where apparent gains are quickly cut back. (p. 28)

The gains that Gillborn mentions refer to the process of interest-convergence (Bell, 1980) discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. Thus, to ensure African American students have access to quality educational opportunities, I offer recommendations for state and local policy.

First, it is important state and local school leaders grapple with the tensions underlying competing values and beliefs about the education of racially minoritized populations of students (López, 2003). Doing this will help them understand how traditional schooling structures remain the dominion of white, middle and upper-class families (Carter, 2008; Marshall, 1997). Embarking on such a process will also help them understand how power is intimately tied to the policies that dictate and influence African American students' everyday experiences and life outcomes (Gillborn, 2014).

With respect to the policies specific to world language instruction, this study also suggests the need for deep second-order changes where world language instruction is not peripheral to the general curriculum but recognized as important to the cognitive and non-cognitive development of African American students (Warren, 2002); a topic discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Evidence of the need for this change is found in the State of Wisconsin's world language policy. Although Westside High's current graduation policy grants

students access to two years of world language study, the state policy simply notes students “should have access.” This language does not require school districts offer the sufficient world language offerings that help students matriculate into college (Hill, 2001). Changing the language could aid school districts in the development of world language policies that offer academic and non-academic benefits to all students. For example, changes to the state policies that directly affect students should leverage changes in world language teacher programs so teachers execute these changes in the classroom.

**Policy recommendations for changes to world language teacher preparation programs.** I discussed the additive benefits of learning a world language in the first chapter of this dissertation. Although the acquisition of a second language was viewed as a handicap that interfered with a student’s ability to process, organize, and store information (Diaz, 1983), research reported evidence on the positive advantages associated with language learning. Researchers reported increases in students’ cognitive and metacognitive abilities as a result of them learning a language (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Baker, 2011; Foster & Reeves, 1989; Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, & Nilsson, 2003; Peal & Lambert, 1962; Tochon, Kasperbauer, & Potter, 2007). Building on this work, other researchers illuminated the non-cognitive benefits of language learning (Coronado-Aliegro, 2008; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Hsieh, 2008; Shedivy, 2004; Sykes, 2015) despite differential notions of black inferiority (Bell, 1975; Burrell, 2010; Lawrence, 1983; Museus, 2008).

Racialized stereotypes characterized by color-blind curricular and instructional practices; however, function to justify classroom teachers’ behaviors and attitudes toward students of color (Castro Atwater, 2008; Hanssen, 1998; Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Johnson, 2002; Picower, 2009; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Sleeter, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Racialized

stereotypes remain at the center of public-school classrooms because the “culturally deprived / disadvantaged” and “at risk student,” who has come to be synonymous with students of color, have been the focus of teacher preparation initiatives (Ladson-Billings, 1999a). Therefore, “critical race theory in teacher education seeks to identify, analyze, and transform subtle and overt forms of racism in education in order to transform society” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 4).

Critical race scholars challenge teachers to raise their expectations of students of color (Blaisdell, 2005; Bondi, 2012; Castro Atwater, 1999; Chapman, 2007, 2014; Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Fernández, 2002; Hayes & Juárez, 2012; Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006; Kohli, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Landsman, 2004; McKinley, 2010; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Terrill & Mark, 2000; Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Warren, 2002) as well as adopt and use culturally responsive teaching practices that “attend to the specific cultural characteristics that make students different from one another and from the teacher” (Rychly & Graves, 2012, p. 44).

Some researchers believe that “institutions such as slavery and separate and unequal school systems fostered persistently low expectations among teachers for their black students” (as cited in McKinley, 2010, p. 17), and in Act I, Scene I, Valerie, C. J., April, Tina, Crystal, Steve, Stephany, and Michelle believed their Spanish teacher subscribed to a “intellectually inferior paradigm,” which presupposes that African American students are intellectually inferior to white students (Bell, 1975; Burrell, 2010; Lawrence, 1983; Museus, 2008). Michelle, for example, believed this teacher’s “snarky comments” and beliefs, rooted in a system of white privilege, caused her to believe she “would not do well in higher-level language courses” and

“would fail” the AP Spanish test because she did not possess the written or oral skills needed to advance in the language.

Also in Act I, Scene I, Valerie said the teacher did not assist the African American students in the Spanish class because they “did not look like her.” This cultural mismatch resulted in the teacher failing to “push them” academically, a situation that decreased C. J. and Crystal’s motivation toward language learning. Thus, to create better curricular and instructional opportunities that maximize African American students’ in-school learning experiences, world language teacher educators should design courses and field experiences that challenge pre-service teachers to raise their expectations and check their belief systems about learners and learning, particularly around students of color (Sleeter, 2005).

For world language teachers, checking their belief system means critically reflecting on the “apprenticeship of observation,” — those 13,000 hours of reflection on their own early language learning experiences (Lortie, 1975). Thirteen thousand hours, then, should become a de facto guide to help pre-service world language teachers develop pedagogical practices that make learning more meaningful for students like Steve and C. J. (Warren, 2002). Providing opportunities for teachers to critically reflect on their early language learning experiences could be combined with activities that challenge students like Valerie and Michelle.

Likewise, culturally responsive teaching transcends traditional pedagogical practices and allows teachers to get to know their students. In Act I, Scene I, the Spanish teacher responded to the learning needs of the white and Hispanic students. But culturally responsive teaching allows her to meet the students where they are and respond to their academic needs. Within this pedagogical approach, she empowers her students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using knowledge representative of their ethnic and diverse cultures. As she adopts

culturally responsive teaching practices, she connects the information students need to learn with their natural ways of learning, becomes empowered to question her own understandings of diversity, develops transformative relationships with students such as C. J., Valerie, Crystal, and Michelle, no longer acts as a gatekeeper, who inhibits learning opportunities for students, but becomes a source of social capital, who provides them the resources and information they need to move through high school, understands how her attitude is situated in whiteness, does not focus on “basic” and remedial instruction, but uses authentic, real-world connections in the classroom, rejects her uncritical understanding of cultural deficiency, and acknowledges the importance of cultural competency (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Santamaria, 2009; Sleeter, 2012). In other words, she sees Valerie, C. J., Crystal, and Michelle’s culture as an asset rather than a deficit (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013).

While culturally responsive teaching benefits classroom teachers, it also helps students like Tina, Michelle, and C. J. feel positive about what they are learning (Haviland, 2008). This form of transformative pedagogy allows them to develop a positive self-identity and self-concept and increases their cognitive and non-cognitive abilities that make learning more meaningful (Warren, 2002). In sum, culturally responsive teaching helps teachers like the Spanish teacher at Westside High see the diverse backgrounds of her students as resources and not as barriers to learning (Santamaria, 2009). When teachers adopt culturally responsive teaching practices, they are also more likely to care about the students they serve (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

In the previous chapter, the students also believed the maltreatment they received in their Spanish class was due to their teachers’ lack of care for them and their academic progress. For teachers, culturally responsive care moves teaching from “business as usual” (Cannella & Reiff,

1994; Davis, 1995; Grant & Koskela, 1986; Parker & Hood, 1995; Weiner, 1990) to an understanding that teaching is “an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2000, p. 52). Instead of forcing African American students to make their own decisions and “figure things out on their own” as in Stephany’s experience, culturally responsive care places the responsibility of teaching in the hands of the Spanish teacher, who is unwilling to accept or tolerate the underachievement of students of color (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Culturally responsive care helps her decide how to act and treat students of diverse backgrounds. In sum, culturally responsive care helps her redesign her pedagogical practice and restructure her thinking to best meet the needs of all students, not just a few. Embarking on these transformative pedagogical processes of how students acquire a world language does not stop with completion of teacher preparation programs, but should extend to their in-service professional development.

**Policy recommendations for changes world language teacher professional development.** Much of the literature on professional development states that teacher professional development remains decontextualized (Webster-Wright, 2009) because the training model that divides theory from practice remains the focus of these experiences (Little, 1993). The findings of this study, however, advocate for continuous and active professional development opportunities related to world language teacher practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Wilson, & Berne, 1999). Traditional second language teaching patterns can be difficult to alter or change (Kennedy, 1990) leading students to believe the teaching methods they experience in the world language classroom are less than memorable (Bailey, Bergthold, Braunstein, Fleischman, Holbrook, Tuman, Waissbluth, & Zambo, 1996). Therefore, it is

important world language professional development provide in-service teachers access to ongoing opportunities that support the development of innovative instructional practices.

In Act I, Scene I, C. J. said the Spanish teacher failed to use innovative practices, which created a “boring” Spanish class. Likewise, April and Michelle said “videos,” “worksheets,” “short readings,” and activities from the course textbook dominated instruction. So to enhance African American students’ language learning experiences and help teachers move from assigning “basic” and “busy work,” world language teacher professional development should help them develop strategies that focus on “...relevant, and interesting exchanges of information, rather than on the presentation of grammatical form” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 25). Research suggests the use of differentiated, authentic, and innovative instructional approaches that help students develop communicative competence for use in the world language classroom (Bailey, Bergthold, Braunstein, Fleischman, Holbrook, Tuman, Waissbluth, & Zambo, 1996; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

April, Crystal, and Michelle also expressed disagreement about the language used in their Spanish class. While April said the Spanish teacher did not use English during instruction, Tina said English was the primary language of instruction, and Crystal mentioned “Spanglish” as the language used by the teacher. Yet, second language acquisition research points to the importance of target language use in the world language classroom. Research in this area also says it is often unsuitable or difficult for world language teachers to stay in the target language 100% of the time during instruction (Grim, 2010). To this end, world language teacher professional development should provide teachers the opportunity to reflect on the consequences of their linguistic behaviors, observe experienced world language teachers and analyze their language practices, and accentuate discussions that will aid in their development of practical tactics to increase target

language use and production during instruction (Almarza, 1996; Borg, 2003; Crandall, 2000).

Participating in these professional learning opportunities help them acquire the language learning strategies that can support African American students' acquisition of a second language.

Throughout this study, students stated their Spanish teacher often ignored their academic and language learning needs. Stephany, for example, said the teacher did not help her understand new concepts, so she had to "figure things out on her own." Although research provided evidence that African American students effectively used different strategies to learn a second language (Tochon, Kasperbauer, & Potter, 2007), the teacher failed to use the appropriate language learning strategies when Stephany did not understand grammatical functions such as "verb conjugations." Since learning "does not reside solely with the teacher," (Bailey, Bergthold, Braunstein, Fleischman, Holbrook, Tuman, Waissbluth, & Zambo, 1996, p. 18), world language professional development should offer opportunities for teachers to hone specific language learning strategies, so students can better understand grammatical processes in a second language (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Chamot & Kupper, 1989). When world language teachers teach and employ language learning strategies, they allow for greater metacognitive processes (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015) and ensure students, such as Stephany, work toward mastery learning at their own pace (Mansfield, 2015). As world language teachers check for comprehension and understanding, they cannot blame students for what "they should have learned." Instead they ought to teach what students do not know or understand. These changes in teacher learning will not happen overnight. As such, it is important that schools also offer opportunities for student to maximize their interactions with out of school networks.



## **Recommendations that Maximize Students' Interactions with Out of School Networks**

In chapter 1, I discussed the cultural connections associated with learning a language. These connections and resources often lie outside the school context. Research suggests that when students come into contact with native-language speakers, they develop a sensitivity to other cultures and enhance their linguistic and metalinguistic skills; skills that are transferable to the college classroom (Lipton, 2004; Simmons, 2004; Tochon, 2009). However, several models project theoretical perspectives that blame students, their families, and their cultures for low student performance (Castagno, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). While the genetic determinist perspective contends that the genetic makeup of minority students accounts for their low academic performance, the cultural determinist model supposes that their culture is deficient; therefore, their cultural values alone are responsible for their academic capabilities and behaviors (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

To validate the latter argument, cultural determinist John Ogbu (2003) states:

In practice, children may observe very little cultural emphasis on striving to do well in school or to get good credentials. The emphasis may, in fact, be on breaking the barriers in education and in the opportunity structure rather than on practicing the behavior and attitudes that are conducive to school success. Under these circumstances, minority children do not see their parents and other adults in their community as role models for professional and other jobs or positions as being based on school success or school credentials; rather, they see them as role models in the collective struggle against the system. (pp. 147-148)

In this quote, Ogbu (2003) puts forth the argument that minority children internalize the cultural skepticism that pervades their communities, which accounts for their low motivation and

academic performance. According to Ogbu, this skepticism not only denigrates the value of schooling for African American students, it also undermines their achievement. Critical race theory, however, values the knowledge and experiences students of color bring into the learning environment. Following this line of thought, this study found students' out of school networks exerted a great influence over their learning outcomes. In this section, I offer recommendations to support the development of strong district connections with students' out of school networks.

**Recommendations to support parental engagement in a school's curricular and instructional decision-making processes.** Although a growing body of research has found the significant, positive impact of parental involvement on student learning, other influences have also been examined with reference to adolescent outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In this study parents and other caregivers created positive outcomes for African American students. Michelle's grandmother, for example, helped her understand the benefits associated with second language acquisition despite the Spanish teacher's "snarky comments" about her choice of dialect. As a result, she helped shape Michelle's language learning goals. She could do so because she understood many traditional school processes. Therefore, it is important school districts recognize how parents impact student success.

To maximize students' connections with familial resources, districts should invite parents into the formal and informal spaces of schools — i.e. parent advisory groups, individual counseling sessions. There, they can participate in the curricular and instructional decision-making processes that affect students like Michelle. As districts form these partnerships, there ought to be clear expectations that allow parents to voice their concerns about inequities in curricular and counseling practices and let them advocate for changes to educational policies that

dictate their child's future outcomes. Parents, however, are not the only influence on student learning. Mentors also play an important role in a child's academic and social development.

**Recommendations that support active mentorship programs in public schools.** The findings in this study also support the argument that “mentors represent a potentially important resource for youths during the transition to adulthood and beyond” (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009, p. 346). In Act I, Scene III. Tina's mentor, for example, became a source of information as she grappled with the decision to continue or discontinue her language studies. In the end, her mentor encouraged Tina's continued pursuit of second language even though the Spanish teacher engaged in discriminatory practices that denied her access to the same information the white students received. To that end, school districts should establish formal mentoring programs to help students, especially low-income and disadvantaged students, develop positive, meaningful relationships with non-teaching and counseling staff.

Although this chapter offers recommendations for world language teachers, it is also important that future research explore additional ways schools can create better learning conditions for students as they pursue another language and options beyond completion of their high school education.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

World language teacher preparation programs and pre-service world language teachers' beliefs about the nature of world language teaching and learning (Borg, 2003; Lortie, 1975) lie at the center of world language education research. The professional development of in-service world language teachers, however, remains absent from many research efforts. In other words, much of the current research examines how world language teachers' backgrounds, beliefs, and prior experiences shape and impact their instructional decisions. Few undertakings offer

recommendations for the professional learning of in-service world language teachers and how this impacts student achievement and classroom practice. Therefore, it is important future research moves beyond pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills, and preparation to an examination of how situated, active, and ongoing world language teacher professional learning opportunities shape student learning.

That said, this study and other research undertakings took a broad approach to understanding the impact of curricular practices and policies on student learning outcomes. Therefore, it is important that future research critically examines the curricular processes characteristic of world language programs. Research in this area is important for two reasons. First, few studies in the field of world language education examine the curricular process that impact students' language learning experiences. For this reason, it is important to bring the world language curriculum into view. Second, research studies in this area can also challenge and question the decisions educators and education policymakers make about the world language curriculum. This will allow scholars to question the inequities engrained in the fabric of the world language curriculum.

It is also important that future research captures the ethnographic data (field observations) that reveals the day-to-day interactions between teachers and students. This type of research has the potential to show how micro-political contexts and classroom practices directly impact African American students' world language experiences. Such research also has the potential to demonstrate how patterns of interaction and modes of behavior in the micro-analytic environment of the classroom interact with students' background and socioeconomic status and affect their academic achievement (Hargreaves, 1997; Lipman, 1998).

Similarly, in this study, the African American students believed the Spanish teacher used her white privilege to reify a racial hierarchy in which Hispanic students received curricular and instructional favors denied them. The students commented on this hierarchy multiple times throughout this study. Analyzing how African American and Hispanic students are ‘categorized’ and ‘ranked’ by others is important work. In fact, the body of literature on that phenomenon is deep as are the methodologies for examining it (see for example Lee, 2005, 2009). While that important work is beyond the scope of this study, other researchers with questions specifically examine the sociological nuances of how this hierarchy becomes manifest are encouraged to pursue such work.

This study only offered a glimpse on how school counselors directly impact students’ opportunities to learn. Thus, further research should explore school counseling practices in public schools, with particular attention to the implicit and explicit policies that grant or deny students access to in- and out of school resources that prepare them for post-secondary success. Research that moves from a descriptive to ethnographic analyses would capture student-to-counselor interactions and the impact these relationships have on student behavior and academic achievement. In this study, school counselors failed to provide students access to the quality counseling services they needed to make future decisions. As a result, many of the participants they relied on their out of school networks to help them maneuver the traditional schooling process. While their out of school networks proved to be beneficial, there is a need for more research that examines how counseling structures impact students’ course-taking behavior.

Although there is considerable research on the role formal mentoring programs play in the lives of students, few studies have examined their impact on education (Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009, p. 346). The need is not for psychologically-centered research that examines the

impact of these programs on student behavior, but for how these programs influence students' educational trajectories, aspirations, and goals.

Additionally, a family's influence on a student's decision to continue or discontinue the study of a world language, although small, had major implications for how students preserved in the world language context. Therefore, it is important future research reject deficit-based theories of family involvement and demonstrate the positive contributions parents make to student success in schools.

### **Remarks on Improving Students' Access to, and Interactions with, School Counselors**

As previously mentioned, school counselors also help shape students' educational trajectories (Bemak & Chung, 2005, 2008; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). But "School counselor training and practice has been in a position of perpetuating the status quo and maintaining the inequities that currently exist in our schools" (Bemak & Chung, 2005, p. 197). Hence, in addition to the curricular and instructional structures that inhibited student learning, this study also found structures in school counseling to have a significant impact on students' educational outcomes. Students' limited interactions with quality school counselors compounded their lack of access to the world language requirements many colleges and universities use to determine admissions eligibility. Although this study did not purposefully probe the details of these interactions, this finding is difficult to ignore. As Bemak and Chung (2005) noted, "For school counselors to ignore the impact of inherent power structures that contribute to the achievement gap is to participate in the insidious cycle of low performance and failure for poor students and students of color" (p. 197). Thus, I offer a few recommendations to support students' access to quality school counselors.

In Act I, Scene II, for example, Valerie said her school counselor simply focused on her grades limiting the amount of time she had to discover the range of career options available to her. This situation calls for a redefinition of school counselors' traditional roles of "Maintaining student records, assisting with transcript requests, and collecting and organizing program material..." (as cited in Fitch & Marshall, 2004, p. 173). School counselors should be advocates of student academic achievement and the opportunities it affords.

In this study, the students also reported that their counselors did not share information about college application processes. In fact, none of them reported counseling interactions that focused on increasing their understanding of college application and financial aid processes. Marcelle, in particular, said her counselor encouraged her to take Spanish classes because the successful completion of coursework in world languages would "look good on a college application." But her counselor failed to also give her information about how to complete a college application. Thus, this study also suggests school counselors provide comprehensive college counseling information, supports, and resources to students and their families.

Similarly, counselors ought to help students develop realistic post-secondary goals while in high school (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). In the study, Valerie said her counselor did not initiate conversations about the connection between her language skills and potential career pathways. Lastly, students looked to counselors to boost their engagement and motivation in the classroom. C. J.'s counselor, for example, could have helped motivate his engagement in Spanish class to supplement the teachers' absence thereof. Like teachers, it is important that school counselors use culturally responsive practices in their interactions with African American students. According to Bemak (2000), "School counselors can assist teachers in understanding cultural learning styles..." (p. 327). Through the development of strong school partnerships,

school counselors can help classroom teachers establish academic-support programs and adopt culturally relevant teaching practices. Regardless of their position within the school, classroom teachers and school counselors must adopt culturally responsive teaching and counseling practices to better support those students who have been overlooked by traditional schooling practices.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As an African American learning a second language, I, too, experienced much of the same treatment as the participants in the play. Similar to Michelle’s experience of the Spanish teacher telling her that she was not going to do well in higher level Spanish courses, some of my former Spanish teachers said similar things to me. Some even questioned my linguistic competence in Spanish with questions such as “are you sure you are ready for the next level?” While the stories and experiences shared in the previous chapter are not mine, my experiences as a language learner parallel those of the participants, all of which reflect larger institutional and systemic issues that continue to plague public education.

This study highlights the one-size-fits-all approach to education, which produces and maintains a system of institutional racism (Barnes & Slate, 2013). This system perpetuates educational inequalities for African American students, decreases the opportunities they have to enhance their learning (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006), and produces few opportunities for them to redress their racial, social, and economic disadvantage (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). Within the white spaces of public schools, the status quo is maintained and white superiority is re-instantiated (Chapman, 2014). The situation that is created is one that produces intellectual property, intellectual inferiority, and stereotype threat causing African American students to feel disconnected from the school (Steele, 1997, 2011). This study,



however, showed us that we can take a second look at the world language curriculum for African American students attending public schools.

This study demonstrates that for African American students to be college ready, states and school districts must change the policies affecting their access to rigorous world language instruction. As previously mentioned, second language study does not only carry the benefit of helping students meet the graduation requirement, it also helps them gain the knowledge needed to successfully move through college courses. Research, as pointed out in the first chapter of this dissertation, highlights the cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of learning a second language (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Baker, 2011; Coronado-Aliegro, 2008; Foster & Reeves, 1989; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Hsieh, 2008; Kormi-Nouri, Moniri, & Nilsson, 2003; Peal & Lambert, 1962; Shedivy, 2004; Sykes, 2015; Tochon, Kasperbauer, & Potter, 2007). Given that, state and district policies and practices should uphold the additive value of second language learning.

This study also illuminates the positive role of mentors, community members, and family in students' lives. To maximize student learning outcomes and create equitable educational conditions for students, it is important schools and districts understand the importance of garnering support from their out of school networks. In the end, this study points to the importance of a world language education for African American students. The inequitable policies and structures that once denied them access to a quality world language education can create better opportunities for them to learn a second language and be college ready.

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Survey

My name is Alicia Johnson, and I am a doctoral student. I am conducting a study to examine African American students' experiences studying Spanish in high school and how this experience has influenced their decision to continue or discontinue their studies of the Spanish language at the college level. The purpose of this study is to use African American students' experience studying a world language in high school to enact educational change for world language programs in public schools. The survey below will only be used to recruit research participants for the study. Please answer the questions below.

1. In what year did you graduate from high school?
2. Did you study Spanish for at least one year in high school?
3. Have you taken or are you currently enrolled in a college-level Spanish course?
4. If you are not enrolled in a Spanish course, have you taken or are currently enrolled in American Sign Language at the university?
5. If you have not yet taken Spanish or American Sign Language at the university, when do you plan to study either language?
6. What is your race/ethnicity?

To share your experiences studying a world language in high school and college, please contact Alicia Johnson via email at [johns922@uwm.edu](mailto:johns922@uwm.edu).

## Appendix B

### Pre-Screening Protocol

Hello. My name is Alicia Johnson, and I am a graduate student. As a part of my studies, I am looking for students who have studied Spanish in a public-school district and are currently enrolled in a college-level Spanish course or American Sign Language. Before determining your eligibility in the research study, I would like to ask you a few questions. Your information and responses will remain confidential. Participation in this pre-screening process is completely voluntary, so you may stop at any time.

1. Are you a graduate of a public high school?
2. Are you of African American descent?
3. Are you currently enrolled in a college-level Spanish course or American Sign Language?
4. While in high school, did you study Spanish for a least one year?

This completes the pre-screening process. Within 48 hours, you will be notified if you have been chosen to participate in this research study. Thank you for your time.



## Appendix C

### Individual Interview Protocol

Research Question	Interview Question	Research Base
Background Questions	1. Where did you attend high school? 2. When did you start studying Spanish? 3. How long have you been studying the language? 4. Why did you decide to study Spanish?	
How do African American graduates of urban school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their post-secondary world language experiences?	5. Why did you take the Spanish courses you took in high school? Were any of these courses advanced language courses?	Poza, 2013; Pratt 2010
	6. What role did your high school Spanish teachers play in your decision to study Spanish? Did they encourage you to take higher-level courses? Why or why not?	Davis, 1992; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006
	7. How influential were the Spanish teachers in other African American students' decision to continue/discontinue their studies of the Spanish language?	Davis, 1992; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006
	8. What role did your school counselor play in your decision to study Spanish? Did they encourage you to take higher-level courses? Why or why not?	Bemak & Chung, 2005; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; House & Hayes, 2002; House & Martin, 1998
	9. How influential were the school counselors in other African American students' decision to continue/discontinue their studies of the Spanish language?	Bemak & Chung, 2005; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; House & Hayes, 2002; House & Martin, 1998
	10. When did you learn about the high school	Met, 1994

	world language graduation policy?	
	11. How did your high school Spanish teachers prepare you for the university's placement exam?	Lam, 2010; LeBlanc & Lally, 1997
	12. What have you heard from your peers and/or other African American students about the language courses they take to fulfill the university's graduation requirement?	Moore, 2005; Poza, 2013
	13. What reasons do they provide for taking (or not taking) Spanish at the university?	Moore, 2005; Poza, 2013
	14. How do you respond to your experiences studying Spanish in high school and Spanish in college?	Anya, 2011
What aspects of the world language curriculum, if any, positively or negatively affected your post-secondary world language experiences?	15. How was the grammar sequenced in the high school Spanish courses you took?	Pratt, 2010
	16. Describe the textbook(s) chosen for the high school Spanish courses you took.	Macian, 1986; Pratt, 2010
What aspects of the classroom instruction, if any, positively or negatively affected your post-secondary world language experiences?	17. Describe the lessons and activities used during instruction.	Grim, 2010; Pratt, 2010
	18. Describe a typical day of instruction in one of your Spanish classes.	Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Interview Protocol

Research Question	Interview Question	Research Base
How do African American graduates of urban school districts interpret the impact of their high school world language instruction on their postsecondary world language experience?	1. How do your peers and other African American students respond to their experiences learning Spanish in high school?	Pratt, 2012; Speiller, 1988; Stewart-Strobel & Chen, 2003
	2. How do your peers and other African American students respond to their experiences learning Spanish in college?	Anya, 2011; Hodges & Welch, 1992; Hsieh, 2008
	3. Many public-school districts require 2-years of world language study in high school. How do you respond to this situation?	Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014
	4. What do you think is the impact of this situation on African American students' post-secondary language experience?	LeBlanc & Lally, 1997; Pratt, 2010
	5. What do you think contributes to the low enrollment of African American students in college-level Spanish courses? How do you respond to this situation?	Moore, 2005; Poza, 2013
	6. Why do you think African American students study Spanish in high school and American Sign Language in college? How do you respond to this situation?	Pratt, 2010
What aspects of the world language curriculum, if any, positively or negatively affected your postsecondary world language experience?	7. How do African American students feel about the Spanish curriculum they received in high school?	Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014
	8. In what ways does the high school Spanish curriculum prepare African American students for post-secondary language curricula?	LeBlanc & Lally, 1997
What aspects of the classroom instruction, if any, positively or negatively affected your postsecondary world language experience?	9. How do your peers and other African American students describe the Spanish instruction they received in high school?	Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014

	10. How does the Spanish instruction African American students receive in high school impact their level of preparation for college-level Spanish?	LeBlanc & Lally 1997; Pratt, 2010
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## Appendix E

### Consent to Participate in Interview Research

**Study Title:** From Reduction to Empowerment: A Second Look at World Language Education for the African American Student

**Persons Responsible for Research:** Dr. Barbara Bales, PhD and Alicia Johnson, Study Staff

**Study Description:** The purpose of this study is to enact policy, curricular, and instructional change for world language programs in urban school districts. Approximately 10 subjects from UWM will participate in this study. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal experience taking Spanish in high school and in college. Each interview (individual and focus group) will last 1-hour in length. The interview will take place in a location of your choice (i.e. coffee shop, campus library, etc.) and will be audio recorded.

**Risks / Benefits:** The risks you may experience from participating in this study are considered minimal. Additionally, there are no costs or benefits for participating in the study.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses will be confidential and your personal identifiable information will not be included in the final write-up. All study results will be reported without identifying information so that no one viewing them will ever be able to match you with your responses. Direct quotes may be used in publications and/or presentations. Data from this study will be saved on a non-networked, password-protected computer that is stored in a secure, off-campus office. Only PI and study staff will have access to your information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records. Audio recordings will be destroyed after a year.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to participate, however, you can withdraw from the study at any time. You are free to disclose the information you would like to share or withdraw at any time. The decision you make will not alter your student status at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

**Who do I contact for questions about the study:** For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Alicia Johnson at [johns922@uwm.edu](mailto:johns922@uwm.edu).

**Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?** If you have problems with the study, please contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu).

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

In order to participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project.

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Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

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Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

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Date

**CURRICULUM VITAE**  
**ALICIA RENEE JOHNSON**

- 2013-2018 School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Conferred: May 2019. Program: Urban Education. Emphasis: World Language Education. Chair: Dr. Barbara Bales, Ph.D.
- 2009-2011 College of Letters and Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. M.A. in Spanish Language and Literature with an emphasis on Latin American female authors. Adviser: Dr. Nancy Bird Soto, Ph.D.
- 2004-2008 College of Letters and Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI. B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature with an emphasis on Latin American literature.
- 2000-2004 Rufus King High School, Milwaukee, WI. High school diploma.

**EDUCATION AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

- Winter 2007 Advanced Spanish, Instituto Cultural de Oaxaca, Oaxaca, Mexico.

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

- 2017-2019 Spanish Teacher, Brown Deer Middle and High School, Brown Deer, WI. Prepare daily lessons and instructional activities for middle and high school students. Teach Spanish grammar and culture. Communicate with families. Maintain accurate attendance and grade records. Participated in school-related events. Organized a day exchange experience for a group of students from Costa Rica. Teacher leader for school district's equity district collaborative work team. Developed middle school Spanish curriculum.
- 2009-2019 Lecturer, Spanish, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Teach beginning and intermediate Spanish grammar, history and culture to undergraduate students. Prepare lesson plans, daily teaching material and content-related activities. Design tests and quizzes for student assessment and evaluation. Maintain accurate attendance and grade records. Advocated changes for 100-level course curriculum. Designed online learning material.
- 2014-2016 Instructor, TRIO & Pre-College Programs, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. The class focused on college admissions and financial aid

processes for graduating high school seniors. Designed 6-week curriculum for the course.

2012-2013 Bilingual Social Studies Teacher, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Taught United States History, World History, Citizenship, and English to students in grades 9-12.

2011-2013 Lecturer, Spanish, Carthage College, Kenosha, WI. Designed and developed lessons for K4-12th grade educators and administrators in the Racine and Kenosha Unified School districts. Taught Spanish grammar, language, and syntax in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

2014-2017 Parent and Family Engagement Coordinator, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Led a parent and community outreach group. Developed monthly activities and events to increase parental engagement and involvement. Planned, organized, and effectively operated a parent center. Served as the liaison between school personnel and parents. Maintained accurate data records and completed monthly reports. Attended professional development workshops. Developed a literacy partnership between an elementary and high school. Coached extracurricular activities.

Summer 2017 Program Specialist, Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Programmed and implemented activities for youth. Led youth activities.

2015-2016 Graduate Assistant, Center for Community-Based Learning, Leadership, and Research, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Organized meetings between educators in the Milwaukee Public Schools district, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and Milwaukee Area Technical College. Created new and maintained existing partnerships between the Milwaukee Public Schools district and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Completed the Art and Humanities Grant for Deliberative Dialogues project with Milwaukee Public Schools.

2005-2016 Residence Life Counselor for TRIO & Pre-College Programs. Department of Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

2005-2014 Academic tutor of Spanish, English / Language Arts and History for TRIO & Pre-College Programs. Department of Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.



## **PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS**

Winter 2019 Culturally Responsive World Language Classrooms. Teaching and Learning Symposium at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee, WI. Presented on January 10, 2019.

## **INVITED LECTURES**

2016 “The Importance of World Language Education.” Back Packs and Boots Mentoring Program, Chicago, IL. Presented on March 26, 2016. Drs. Jeffrey Rogers and Martel Perkins.

2014 “Subtractive Schooling: U. S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring.” Urban Education Doctoral Seminar, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Presented on November 3, 2014. Dr. Alfonso Thurman, Ph.D.

## **COMMITTEES**

2016-2017 Urban Education Doctoral Committee, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI. Adviser: Dr. Aaron Schutz.

2014-2017 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Milwaukee Public Schools District, Milwaukee, WI. Parent and Community Engagement Coordinator.

2012-2013 Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Milwaukee Public Schools District, Milwaukee, WI. Tier 1 Support.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Spring 2016 “Customer Service II,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on April 12, 2016.

Winter 2014 “Academic Staff with Teaching Responsibilities Retreat,” Center for Instructional and Professional Development, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Attended on January 17, 2014.

Fall 2014 “Customer Service I,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on October 29, 2014.

Spring 2014 “Job Application Process 101,” School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Attended on March 28, 2014.

- Spring 2014 “Developing Your Statement of Teaching Philosophy,” Center for Instructional and Professional Development, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Attended on April 3, 2014.
- Spring 2014 “Creating a Teaching Portfolio,” Center for Instructional and Professional Development, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Attended on April 22, 2014.
- Spring 2013 “Top 10 Effects for Student Learning,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on May 7, 2013.
- Spring 2013 “Differentiation by Content,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on April 16, 2016.
- Spring 2013 “Differentiation and Student Engagement,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on April 16, 2013.
- Spring 2013 “Differentiation Improvement,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on March 26, 2013.
- Spring 2013 “Content Differentiation,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on March 13, 2013.
- Spring 2013 “Creativity and Differentiation,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on March 5, 2013.
- Winter 2012 “Differentiation,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on December 4, 2012.
- Fall 2012 “Writing Across the Curriculum 2,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on November 13, 2012.
- Fall 2012 “Writing Across the Curriculum 1,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on November 12, 2012.
- Fall 2012 “Enhancing Student Learning,” Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI. Attended on September 25, 2012.

## **AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

- 2015-2017 Chancellor’s Graduate Student Award, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

- 2015-2016 Amy Tessmer Boening Scholarship, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2015-2016 Kuehnsiesen Scholarship, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- 2004-2008 PEOPLE Program Scholar, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### **ACADEMIC HONOR SOCIETIES**

- Spring 2015 Pi Lambda Theta, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- Spring 2010 Sigma Delta Pi International Hispanic Honor Society, Department of Spanish and Portuguese University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

### **RESEARCH INTEREST**

Second Language Acquisition  
Critical Race Theory  
Multicultural Education Theory  
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy  
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

### **AREAS OF EXPERTISE**

Lesson planning  
Examination design  
Grammar instruction  
Effective interpersonal communication

### **LANGUAGES SPOKEN**

English – native language  
Spanish – advanced  
Portuguese – novice level proficiency