The Role of Ethnicity in the Foreign Language Classroom: Perspectives on African-American Students' Enrollment, Experiences, and Identity

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Dedication

My grandparents, Mildred and Vern Merriman, were always extremely proud and supportive of my education and graduate work. When I was accepted to the doctoral program, my first call was to my nana and grandpa. My grandpa was very excited and enthusiastic about his granddaughter working toward a Ph.D; due to unfortunate circumstances, he passed away before I graduated. I know that he would have loved to come to graduation and he would be proud of what I have accomplished. In his memory, I dedicate this dissertation to kindest and most positive man I have ever known, Vern Merriman.

Abstract

This evaluative comparative case study focuses on the foreign language enrollment and experiences of African-American students in both a suburban and an urban context. Given the pervasiveness of inequity in education coupled with the benefits of foreign language study, it is important to examine the low enrollment and retention of African-American students in foreign language classes. The main objective of this study was to compare and contrast lower and upper level foreign language students' perceptions of foreign language study within two different school contexts in order to gain a better understanding of African-American students' enrollment and experiences.

This study involved 79 students in total: 42 suburban students and 37 urban students. All 79 completed a questionnaire about their ethnic background, family, and previous and current experiences learning a language. 15 suburban and 32 urban students also participated in focus groups, group interviews, or individual interviews during which they were asked to describe their enrollment decisions, experiences in foreign language study, and their perceptions of the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language classes. Data analysis procedures included both a within-in case and a cross-case analysis of the questionnaire, focus group, and interview data from each school.

This study illuminated that students of all ethnic backgrounds in two very different educational contexts shared similar perceptions of foreign language study, particularly that it is grammar and textbook-driven. Additionally, many of the students,

regardless of their ethnicity or SES, embodied similar motivation for enrolling in and opting out of foreign language classes. In regard to African-American students, however, this study provided evidence of a low enrollment and retention among African-American students. Furthermore, findings reflected that teachers and fellow students harbored negative perceptions and stereotypes of African-American students, pointing to the pervasiveness of institutional and social racism in the students' schools and communities. Other findings in this study pointed to the difference between male and female African-American students' persistence in foreign language study and several issues related to identity and SES.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The United States can be considered to be one of the most unequal school systems in the industrialized world due the disparities that exist between Whites and minorities concerning their access to academic coursework and programs (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In racially mixed schools, it is particularly common to see an overrepresentation of White students and an absence of students of color in college-preparatory courses (Farkas, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Foreign language study is not exempt from this phenomenon as foreign language classes, especially year three and beyond, are comprised of predominantly White students (NCES, 2007; Peters, 1994). More specifically, when compared with other ethnic groups, African-American students are least likely to learn a foreign language and continue it through year three or beyond at the secondary level (NCES, 2007). At the college level, these numbers are even more staggering. Between 2007 and 2008, 20,977 U.S. students graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in foreign languages or linguistics; 14,865 of those students were White compared to just 874 Black students (NCES, 2009). According to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* which has routinely examined the most popular majors of Bachelor's Degree recipients, data provide evidence that few African-American students opt to earn a degree in foreign languages. The most recent data available indicate that the number of African-American students who completed a foreign language major increased from 484 in 1995 to 799 in 2006 (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2008). In

other words, of the 142,420 African-American students who graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in 2006, only .06% majored in a foreign language.

These differences between White and African-American students' study of foreign language can also be examined through a comparison of urban and suburban schools in the United States. A higher percentage of White students tend to be enrolled in suburban schools while urban schools tend to attract a higher percentage of students of color. Besides differences in ethnicity among the student populations in suburban and urban schools, there can also be differences in math, science, and foreign language offerings (Pelavin & Klane, 1990, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2000; Oakes, 1990). According to Darling-Hammond (1998), schools that are comprised of predominantly students of color, which are most often urban schools, struggle to offer the necessary college preparatory math and science courses, let alone foreign language courses. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provide the example of two high school African-American boys, one opting to attend a predominantly White, middle-class suburban school and the other opting to attend an urban, mostly African-American urban school. The boy attending the suburban school had seven foreign language choices, a variety of math and science courses, and opportunities for challenging, advanced coursework. Meanwhile, the boy attending the urban school had sparse foreign language offerings and only a few math and science courses. Ultimately, as Garza (2001) points out, public schools magnify the socioeconomic and ethnic differences in students more than they work to overcome these differences.

Although it is clear that African-American students' enrollment in foreign language is lagging behind that of White students, little research concerning African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language coursework exists. The present body of research on this topic does, however, provide some background and a basis for understanding.

African-American Students in Foreign Language Study

In a scholarly article, Davis (1992) examines some of the original studies that were conducted about African-American students' performance and attitudes in foreign language classes. Both studies from the 1940s provided evidence that African-American students at Black colleges performed poorly in comparison with foreign language students at other institutions (Worthington & Carter, 1941; Nyabongo, 1946). In 1981, a study of African-American students at Indiana University was published (Brigman & Jacobs, 1981). Like the studies from the 1940s, this study revealed that African-American students were not keeping pace academically with other students in foreign language courses. In an attempt to explain this gap in performance, Davis (1992) examined research about African-American students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language. In general, their attitudes were positive and Hubbard (1975) pointed out that African-American students' attitudes varied little from those of other North American students: "Black students in the past were usually counseled out of the foreign language field with the reasoning that the subject would be too difficult and that they would never need it. As the choice today becomes theirs to make, Black students become a part of the

mainstream America that sees no benefits in academic study of a foreign language" (p. 563, as cited in Davis, 1992).

Although the research on African-American students' attitudes suggested that they were not opposed to studying another language and culture, Davis (1992) asserts that it is still extremely important to provide relevancy in foreign language classes by allowing African-American students to explore their own culture and language through the target culture and language. By doing so, they may find more success in the course. A case study conducted at the junior high level experimented with this notion (Moore & English, 1998). Eight African-American junior high boys were chosen to participate in the study to demonstrate that African-American English (AAE) does not hinder students linguistically, but rather can be used to aid the students in learning the target language of Arabic. The Arabic language was chosen because these young students were aware that it was a language used by many of the Africans in their school from Egypt, Sudan, and Chad. The outcomes of this study showed that a.) the use of AAE and the students' slang was helpful in teaching them the L2, b.) although several of the students had some L1 deficiencies, they did not interfere with their ability to learn the L2, c.) the students made great strides in learning a difficult language such as Arabic, and d.) the students greatly enjoyed connecting with a language and culture spoken by people of color.

Despite research that shows that African-American students are not opposed to learning a foreign language and in fact have been shown to succeed in FL learning, it seems that they are also not willingly enrolling in foreign language courses at the same rate as other students. Moore (2005) found in her study of 128 African-American

freshmen at the University of Texas that 100% of the students had completed the requisite two years of high school foreign language for acceptance to the university. Once there, 45% of the 128 students enrolled in a foreign language because it was a requirement for certain programs. Only eight of the 128 students enrolled in a foreign language when not required to do so. The remaining 55% opted out of foreign language courses completely. A quantitative study of 7, 069 high school students in an ethnically diverse school district in Texas examined students' enrollment and motivation in foreign language study. Through survey data, Pratt (2012) found that African-American students who enrolled in a foreign language had the same initial motivation as students from other ethnic backgrounds. But, the African-American students' continued motivation in foreign language courses and interest in post-secondary study of the language was lower than that of other ethnicities. Furthermore, African-American students indicated in surveys less than students of other ethnicities that "class was fun" (p. 123). In another study that compared the foreign language enrollment and experiences of students with varied ethnic backgrounds, the decision to remain in foreign language study appeared to be more complicated among African-American students. Glynn (2008) conducted a small scale study using questionnaires and interviews with White, Somali, Latino and African-American students in a suburban high school Spanish I course. She found that the African-American students were the most hesitant about continuing study of the language. Although each of the African-American students reported that they enjoyed studying Spanish and felt as though they were successful in the course, they were convinced that they would perform poorly in level II (Glynn, 2008). This study, like

some of the previous studies, shows that the students have a positive attitude toward foreign language study, but reticence about beginning and continuing with foreign language classes is somehow triggered. The disparity between African-American and White students' enrollment in foreign language study is problematic as it means that African-American students are also much less likely to reap the benefits of foreign language study.

Why Is It Important To Examine This Issue? The Benefits of Foreign Language Study

Research has demonstrated that the study of a foreign language can benefit students cognitively, academically, and personally. Studies of children at the elementary level in both FLES and immersion programs demonstrate that they have more cognitive flexibility and a better ability to problem solve (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Foster & Reeves, 1989; Landry, 1973). Meanwhile, students in traditional foreign language programs who achieve a threshold level of a language also have been found to have greater cognitive flexibility which appears to be related to their ability to outperform monolingual students in core subjects such as mathematics, reading, and writing (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Masciantonio, 1977; Rafferty, 1986). These cognitive benefits are thought to lead to better achievement on standardized tests from the elementary level through college entrance examinations. In fact, a study of 13, 200 third and fifth graders in Louisiana showed that students taking foreign language classes performed better on the English section of the Louisiana Basic Skills Test, regardless of the students' race or gender (Dumas, 1999). College-bound students who take the SAT

also experience these benefits. The College Board revealed that students who had studied four or more years of a foreign language performed better than other students on the verbal and math sections of the SAT (2003). Overall, students with at least four years of foreign language experience were able to score at least 100 points higher on each section of the exam when compared to students who had taken a semester or less of a language (College Board, 2004).

Furthermore, foreign language study can allow underprivileged and/or struggling students to make academic gains. A study of 122 English-speaking elementary students from both low socioeconomic and middle class backgrounds demonstrated that the students benefited equally from a partial immersion program in kindergarten (Holobow, et al., 1987). Foreign language study at the elementary level tends to be less dependent on prior verbal learning, thus, students who have struggled academically in the past may find success in foreign language learning (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). In addition, there is a positive correlation between foreign language study and reading skills of average to below average readers (Garfinkel & Tabor, 1991) and foreign language learners also seem to develop stronger listening and memorization skills when compared to monolingual students (Lapkin, et al, 1990; Ratte, 1968). Given that much research shows that African-American students lag behind White students in academic achievement[1], these benefits of foreign language could be helpful in narrowing the achievement gap and allowing African-American students to keep pace with White students.

[1] At the time of this study, Minnesota, the state in which the study took place, was found to have one of the highest achievement gaps in the United States (Minnesota Department of Education, retrieved online June 11, 2012).

Studying a foreign language also affords students the opportunity to study abroad. Minority students, in general, tend to be more reluctant about travel and study abroad (Brown, 2002, p. 28). However, through the use of interviews and surveys, researchers have found that studying a language and spending time abroad can greatly increase African-American students' confidence and academic achievement (Hayes, 1996; Wilbershied & Dassier, 1995). Lori Tharps describes her own dreams as an African-American teenager studying Spanish in a predominantly White setting: "I wrote in my diary one day, 'Spain is going to change my life,' and I believed in it forever. Something about the way I felt in Spanish class made me feel so good about myself and my own potential…I wasn't just studying Spanish because I had to learn a language; I wanted access into another world when this one got to be too much" (2008, p. 13).

Scholars also argue that students grow personally through the study of a foreign language. Foreign language study allows students to learn about their own values and responsibilities as a citizen of the world (Cutshall, 2004/2005; Morales-Jones, 2001; Weatherford, 1986). Countries are much more interdependent and in need of citizens who can speak multiple languages, are culturally competent, and can function more easily in a global society, all of which can be achieved through the study of a foreign language (Christian, Pufahl & Rhodes, 2005; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Jackson & Malone, 2009; Morales-Jones, 2001). According to Jackson and Malone (2009) and the Modern Language Association (2012), ensuring that students learn a foreign language is vital for the success of diplomacy, national security and economic development in the United States. Furthermore, due to a large influx of immigrants in the United States, 48% of

Americans encounter someone on a daily basis whose first language is not English (Bagnato, 2005; Hood, 2005). This points to a need to ensure that American schools are preparing all students for a world in which people do not share a common language.

> As more languages are used in the United States, it is critical that we are able to communicate with our residents across domains, including medicine, business, education, science and technology, and law enforcement and the law, where one of the fastest growing professions is court interpreting. (Jackson & Malone, 2009, p. 4)

Bilingual Americans are better poised to work positively with immigrants to assist in learning English and providing support, which strengthens the United States. If students have the opportunity to develop cultural sensitivity and an understanding of other cultures, they will be able to compete at the post-secondary level and beyond.

One of the main pipelines to colleges and universities is academic preparation that includes foreign language study (College Entrance Examination Board, 2005; NCES, 2003). Many colleges and universities across the United States have a college entrance requirement of two to three years of foreign language, while some post-secondary institutions state that they have a preference for three years or more of foreign language study. Foreign language study gives students a competitive edge not only in the college application process, but also in today's workforce (Ezarik, 2001; Weatherford, 1986). Workers who speak more than one language tend to earn up to $10,000 more per year (Bagnato, 2005). In challenging economic times when the job market becomes highly competitive, language skills can give job-seekers an edge.

Foreign language study affords students many academic, cognitive, and personal benefits. It also opens doors for students to travel and study abroad, has the potential to give students more confidence and cultural sensitivity, and provides access to more post-secondary options. Due to these benefits, it is important to explore African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language to better understand possible reasons for the disparity between White and African-American students' foreign language enrollment. It is necessary to examine how more African-American students could be encouraged to study a foreign language. Every student should feel welcome in foreign language classes and feel that they have equal access to each level of language study.

The Present Study

The objective of the present study was to examine students' experiences and enrollment in secondary school foreign language classes. The study took place in two ethnically diverse high schools: East High School[1], an urban environment, and West High School, a suburban environment. Within each school, the study was situated in one upper level and one lower level foreign language class. Comparative case study methodology was utilized to provide a thorough description of the phenomenon and to allow for comparison and contrast between both educational contexts (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Haberman, 1994). The theoretical framework guiding this study is critical theory, which can be used to question and disrupt the status quo (Giroux, 2001;

[1] Pseudonyms were used to protect the names of both high schools and all participants in this study.

Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). When critical theory was developed in the 1930s, the objective was to examine hegemonic relationships and the need for social change, an objective that is important to the current study, as I examined African-American students' access to foreign language coursework and their experiences in language classes. Calhoun states, "At the heart of critical theory lay the notion of 'imminent critique,' a critique that worked from within the categories of existing thought, radicalized them, and showed in varying degrees both their problems and their unrecognized possibilities" (Calhoun, 1995, p. 23). The focus of critical theory is on the study of discourse as a means for creating understanding of social issues. The critical theory movement aims to draw attention to topics of race, class and gender in educational research (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). The focus on discourse in critical theory research is another reason I chose critical theory as a framework. In order to explore the topic of African-American students in foreign language study, it was important to engage in discourse with the students themselves. As a result, student voice is a central component of the study.

African-American students' foreign language enrollment in suburban and urban environments is complicated by issues related to, but not limited to ethnicity, racism, and socioeconomic status, making it difficult to uncover possible reasons for the low enrollment. By giving the students an opportunity to share their perceptions of foreign language study and enrollment, it may be possible to explore this topic in depth. The inclusion of student voice in educational research also has the potential to disrupt the status quo as students become active rather than passive participants (Bullough & Gitlin,

2001; Cook-Sather, 2003, cited in Cook-Sather, 2006). Rarely in traditional education are students allowed to play a dominant role, one reason why scholars argue that student voice should be a vital part of discussions about school reform (Cook-Sather, 2006; Rudduck, et al., 1996). "'Student voice,' in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also the presence and power of students" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 364). The students' voices are most dominant in this study and provide the best understanding of their foreign language enrollment and experiences while also raising questions about reform in foreign language education that must be considered.

Research Questions

In order to gain an understanding of African-American students' enrollment and experiences in a variety of settings, it is useful to examine the similarities and differences between beginning and advanced foreign language students at both an urban and a suburban school. The research questions are as follows:

1. Which factors influence students' enrollment and retention in foreign language study?
    a. How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her enrollment and retention in foreign language classes?
2. How do teachers and students describe their foreign language classes?
    a. How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her experiences in foreign language study?

3. How do teachers and students perceive the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study?
4. What suggestions do teachers and students have in regard to improving students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language classes?

Description of the Study

Data were collected at the suburban school in the spring and the urban school in the fall of 2011. At both schools, the same procedures were followed in the same order to ensure that data were collected as similarly as possible. One teacher served as the point person to administer questionnaires to an upper level and a lower level foreign language classroom in each school. Participation was voluntary and questionnaires asked students to describe their backgrounds, prior foreign language experiences, present enrollment, and experiences in the foreign language classroom. On the questionnaire, students could volunteer to participate in a focus group during which they had the opportunity to share their opinions and perceptions of not only their own enrollment and experiences, but also the enrollment and experiences of students of other ethnic backgrounds. The objective of the focus group was to explore possible factors that may or may not contribute to the low enrollment of students of color in foreign language. In addition to the students, foreign language teachers at both schools were invited to participate in group interviews. This was an important piece of the study that provided contrasting perspectives through a discussion of topics such as tracking, perceptions of African-American students and their enrollment in foreign language classes, and strategies for increasing the enrollment of students of color in foreign language.

Significance of the Study

The low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language classes has not escaped the attention of national organizations. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has a special interest group dedicated to improving the enrollment and experiences of African-American students in foreign language classes. In addition, the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) began an organization entitled *Alle Lernen Deutsch* (Everyone Learns German) whose committee is comprised of German speakers of varied ethnicities and backgrounds. The objective of *Alle Lernen Deutsch* is to promote the study of German among students of varied ethnicities, recognizing that there is a need to increase the study of German among students of color. Finally, the lack of African-American students majoring in foreign language was the impetus behind the establishment of the Organization of African-American Linguists (OAAL) whose website contains materials for teachers and support for African-Americans learning a foreign language. While it is important that these organizations demonstrate a commitment to improve the situation, there is little concrete evidence that points to why this issue exists in the area of foreign language study.

Although some researchers have examined African-American students in foreign language classes, only two published studies, in particular, addressed African-Americans' enrollment in foreign language (Moore, 2005; Pratt, 2012). However, Moore's (2005) study took place at the post-secondary level and was comprised solely of survey data. Unlike Moore's study, Pratt's (2012) study was focused on the secondary level and examined African-American enrollment and motivation in foreign language study. This

study utilized solely surveys and quantitative data to examine the issue. The current comparative case study differs from this previous research in that it takes place at the secondary level, which is important because secondary foreign language programs feed the post-secondary programs. This study also includes focus group and interview data from students at multiple levels of foreign language study and from secondary foreign language teachers. No other known published study has incorporated both student voice and teachers' perceptions at the high school level. The use of focus group and interview data lends itself to gaining a richer, more detailed analysis of this issue, which also sets this study apart from previous scholarly research. One of the main objectives of this study was to address a need in the foreign language research community; thus, the student and adult voices in this study may add a different perspective to the present body of research.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 2 of the thesis reviews previous literature related to the historical background of foreign language learning and African-American education, institutional racism in schools, identity construction, stereotype threat and possible issues within the classroom that could affect enrollment numbers of African-American students. Chapter 3 explains in detail the methodology used to conduct the study. This chapter includes information pertaining to the theoretical framework, participant selection, data collection methods and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data obtained from students and teachers at both schools as they relate to each research question. Chapter 5

provides the conclusion, implications of the study and suggestions for future research and teacher development.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

A great deal of scholarly work exists on the topic of language and identity and has demonstrated how language can both connect and divide people. A language has the ability to bring people together and allow them to understand each other in a way that others who do not speak that language cannot. For a percentage of American citizens, that language is African-American English (AAE) which Toni Morrison (1981) describes as follows:

> It's a love, a passion. Its function is like a preacher's: to make you stand up out of your seat, make you lose yourself and hear yourself. The worst of all possible things that could happen would be to lose that language. There are certain things I cannot say without recourse to my language. (as cited in Perry & Delpit, 1998, p. 66)

A colleague, Krishauna Hines, often gives the example of "stop signifyin,'" a phrase that primarily African-Americans raised in the South understand. Whenever she uses this phrase in a professional presentation, other African-Americans from the South in the audience immediately respond to her and they begin to exchange stories of loved ones who used that phrase to chide them as children. African-Americans raised in other parts of the United States and individuals having other ethnicities are not as likely to understand that "stop signifyin" means "get your nose out of my business," and for a moment, as we, the audience, watch the exchange of stories and excitement take place, we feel as though we are on the outside. Thus, language has the power to exclude, no

matter if it is African-American English (AAE), Standard English or a language other than English.

As stated in Chapter 1, research has shown that when students study a foreign language, it impacts their identity and their confidence as students, giving them an added sense of achievement (Hayes, 1996; Wilbershied & Dassier, 1995). In both studies leading up to this dissertation, students of all ethnicities enrolled in a foreign language stated that they were extremely proud of themselves and felt as though they had an edge over students who had not studied a foreign language (Glynn, 2007; Glynn, 2008). As a foreign language teacher, I always felt as though my upper level students had become a family. They had experienced the highs and lows of language learning together, supporting and encouraging one another. Just as Krishauna and her audience members feel connected to one another through AAE, my students felt connected to one another through the German language. Yet in schools across the United States, many African-American students do not experience that extra connection to a language other than English at the same rate that White students do. Foreign language classes are comprised of predominantly White students, connecting these students in a common goal of language learning, while non-White students remain disconnected as they are less likely to join language courses (NCES, 2007; Peters, 1994).

Unfortunately, little evidence exists that identifies reasons for the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study; therefore, it is necessary to examine scholarly work and research focused on a variety of topics. As reflected in her quote above, Morrison points out that many African-Americans share a language that

connects them to one another and allows them to express themselves in ways that Standard English does not. Historically, however, African-American students' educational experiences in regard to their language and culture have often been negative. Thus, in order to better understand possible reasons for the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study, it is important to explore historical events that have shaped foreign language education and African-American students' school experiences. In this chapter I begin with a synthesis of two histories: This history of foreign language education in the United States and the history of African-American education in the United States. Both historical narratives have given way to the perceptions of foreign language study today. Next, I will explore additional themes related to Whiteness in schools, students' cultural identity and stereotype threat. Finally, I will bring the chapter to close with an examination of literature pertaining to critical theory, the theoretical framework of my study.

A Brief History of Foreign Language Programs in the United States

Reagan and Osborn (2002): "The United States, regardless of how one personally feels about it, is in fact a profoundly monolingual society ideologically if not empirically, and relatively few students (or parents, teachers, or policy-makers) really believe that second language skills are really necessary for the marketplace" (p. 5).

During the first 100 years of democracy in the United States people of various cultural backgrounds coexisted; immigrants retained their native language while learning English, and native English speakers hired tutors to learn foreign languages (Panetta, 1999). School-based bilingual education commenced when immigrants asserted that their children should be allowed to learn both their native language and English in the

schools, preserving their own heritage while assimilating into the American way of life (Fishman, 1966; Tyack, 1974). In 1840 German citizens persuaded the state legislature of Ohio to pass a law that allowed German to be taught side-by-side with English in elementary schools. What resulted was bilingual education that split the students' classroom time evenly between English and German (Tyack, 1974). Then, between 1854 and 1877, eight states in the Midwest allowed instruction of German, Polish, Italian and French in the common schools. In 1864, San Francisco opened a "cosmopolitan school" which taught students in French, German, and English, aiming for students to be able to participate in all of their lessons in both English and a foreign language (Tyack, 1974). During this bilingual movement, modern languages were viewed as a skill, while classical languages were reserved for those who were on an academic track for college (Panetta, 1999). However, foreign language programs, unlike many other academic courses, found themselves at the mercy of trends of educational policy and the political climate, causing enrollment to fluctuate (Panetta, 1999). Several trends caused the downfall of foreign language study at the turn of the century.

The Decline of Foreign Language Study

The first major cause for the decline of foreign language study was the rise of imperialism and ethnocentrism among native English speakers who felt that foreign language instruction should not be integrated into the regular school curriculum. This was during the beginning of World War I when many in the country felt that Americans should unify. Thus, English-only was enforced among immigrants and in schools, causing the disappearance of foreign language instruction from elementary schools

(Panetta, 1999; Tyack, 1974). At the secondary level, classical languages, along with modern language study, declined significantly in enrollment (Kliebard, 2004). The second major cause of the decline of foreign language study during the beginning of the 20th century was due to the "social efficiency" philosophy of education during the years of 1910 to 1920. During this time, an anti-intellectual movement was promoted, and schools were run with a business mentality. "Practical" classes such as typewriting or household arts were favored over courses such as foreign language, for which, it was assumed, the majority of students would have no use (Colangelo, 2001; Kliebard, 2004). These educational and political movements had a detrimental impact on foreign language enrollment, giving way to just one eighth of all 11th grade high school students opting to pursue foreign language by 1934 (Kliebard, 2004).

The necessity of foreign language study continued to be debated in educational journals in the early 1940s, during WWII. Philip Blumberg of Central High School in New Jersey stated in the journal *School and Society* that the study of foreign language was a waste of time for 90% of students, while Edward Sisson made the argument in the same journal that Europeans spoke several foreign languages and it had not improved their situation given their involvement in the war (Colangelo, 2001). In essence, foreign language was touted as an unnecessary course of study that should be sacrificed for more practical coursework. However, the United States found themselves at a great disadvantage during this time because they were waging war on multiple fronts, yet were unable to communicate in other languages (Colangelo, 2001; Panetta, 1999). *The*

Modern Language Journal asserted in 1943 that "the war caught us short in many things, but in none more completely than in languages" (Colangelo, 2001, pg. 191).

The Russian space program, Sputnik, launched in 1957, proved to the United States that it would require effort to compete intellectually with countries around the world. The Cold War caused the government to revise school curriculum (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Panetta, 1999; Symcox, 2002), and languages were funded by the National Defense Education Act (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). Unfortunately, it was common for foreign language programs to be implemented in schools without the creation of rationales or objectives (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). As a result, much money was spent on ineffective programming and funding for foreign language programs waned in the 1960s and early 1970s, leading many districts with tight budgets to cut foreign language from the curriculum (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Panetta, 1999). By the 1970s, due to the Vietnam war and other events in the United States, student apathy and a lack of motivation were on the rise, leaving fewer students to apply to post-secondary institutions and causing colleges and universities to drop the entrance requirement for foreign language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010). The events of the 1970s had a great impact on junior high and high school foreign language enrollment (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Smith, 2002), and by 1979, just eight percent of all secondary students in the United States opted to enroll in a foreign language (Smith, 2002).

While improvement has certainly been made in increasing enrollment in foreign language study from the 1970s until today, just 40-50% of secondary students enroll in a foreign language at the high school level (Draper & Hicks, 2002; NCES, 2007; Reagan &

Osborn, 2002; Smith, 2002). In addition, attrition from one level to the next is common, especially from level two to three (Draper & Hicks, 2002; NCES, 2007; Panetta, 1999). According to the National Center for Education Statistics in a 2007 Special Analysis of High School Coursetaking, approximately 35% of high school graduates had completed year three or higher of a foreign language in 2004. Of that 35%, Black graduates were the least likely of any other ethnic group to have completed advanced foreign language study (NCES, 2007). J. David Edwards, Executive Director of the Joint National Committee for Languages stated that foreign language education in the United States has evolved from "scandalous" in 1979 to "mediocre" today (Smith, 2002, p. 39). Given the course of history surrounding foreign language education in this country, today's statistics are not surprising. As can be witnessed by our history, foreign language study has been left at the mercy of funding, the political climate, world events and ineffective curricula and approaches to foreign language pedagogy. While this mainstream account of foreign language education can explain, in part, students' enrollment decisions in foreign language, it is impossible to fully understand minority student enrollment in foreign language without examining the history of minority education. As African-American student enrollment in foreign language is the lowest of any ethnic group (NCES, 2007), this review of scholarly work focuses mostly on the history of African-American education.

A Brief History of Non-White Education

Watkins (2001): "Much was at stake in the discourse on Black education in the early twentieth century. Programs, curriculum, and practices to be established would

influence a century of American education. Educational practices adopted at this time determined the social and political future of Black Americans." (p.14)

In the 19th century, while White groups, such as the Germans, won the battle to include language instruction in the schools, "Blacks had to fight for crumbs" (Tyack, 1974, p. 110). For African-Americans, especially after the Civil War, no issue was of greater importance to them than developing opportunities for obtaining an education and joining mainstream society, but they quickly discovered that White leaders across the United States had no intention of allowing that to happen (Tyack, 1974; Watkins, 2001). Moreover, it became clear to African-Americans that if they did succeed in obtaining an education, it would not increase their employment opportunities, unlike for Whites. One Black graduate made the following comment: "Why should I strive hard, and acquire all of the constituents of a man, if the prevailing genius of the land admit me not as such, or but in an inferior degree!" (Tyack, 1974, p.123). James Baldwin (1962) echoes this graduate's sentiments in *The Fire Next Time*:

> In the same way that the girls were destined to gain as much weight as their mothers, the boys, it was clear, would rise no higher than their fathers. School began to reveal itself, therefore, as a child's game that one could not win, and boys dropped out of school and went to work. (p. 18)

Access to language classes such as those that appeared in public schools across the United States during the 1800s were out of the question for African-American students. Rather, African-Americans were exposed to manual training in their education, not intellectual training. In such manual training during the early 1900s, academic subject

matter such as foreign languages, science, and upper-level math were eliminated from their curriculum. Instead of acquiring an education, their purpose was to bolster society in the industrial age by providing cheap labor to keep fields and factories in functioning order (Kliebard, 2004; Watkins, 2001).

Carter G. Woodson and Du Bois laid the ground-work in the early 20th century for scholarly discussion of the inequalities in education due to race. Woodson stated in *The Miseducation of the Negro*:

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. (1933, in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 50)

Not only did African-Americans suffer at the hands of Whites, but Mexican-Americans were also segregated from White students and sent to separate schools where there was a lack of commitment toward educating the students. That led to a low motivation on the part of Mexican-Americans to succeed in school, as it became clear that it would do little good (Garza, 2001). Meanwhile, Native American children were placed in boarding schools in the late 1800s through the 1920s where they were often physically and sexually abused, particularly as a punishment for speaking their native language (King, 2008). Du Bois' prediction that "the problem of the color line" would plague the twentieth century was a reality (Jones, 1997, p. 2). The inequalities in the United States school system began when African-American, Latino and Native-American students were

segregated from White students, educated in schools that were funded at rates much lower than those of White schools and excluded from post-secondary education (Darling-Hammond, 1998). In addition to a prevailing attitude about their potential for success in schools, Blacks had to contend with "research" in the field of scientific racism which "proved" that Whites were more capable of success than Blacks.

Eugenics Movement

Scientists in the 18th century aimed to demonstrate that Whites were the superior race and that they were further evolved from apes than Blacks, thus, "proving" that Whites were the more intelligent race (Watkins, 2001). Samuel George Morton, a biologist and physician even went so far as to measure skull sizes of Caucasians, Asians, Native Americans, and Blacks. With each skull he was able to "prove" that Whites had larger skulls and more brain capacity than Blacks (Watkins, 2001). This research was followed by social Darwinism and the theory of the survival of the fittest, which was used to fuel the eugenics movement in education, politics, race relations, business and the economy (Watkins, 2001). The eugenics movement began in 1870 and continued through 1930. The purpose was to decipher differences in people that pointed to genetic inferiority, and while not related solely to racial differences, this movement greatly impacted educational opportunities for African-Americans, including access to academic coursework such as foreign language study. Eugenicists compiled their data to point to their belief that Blacks were intellectually deficient (Watkins, 2001). This scientific data was the rationale needed to contain and segregate Blacks so that they would not contaminate White intelligence. Although scientific racism was deemed invalid by

Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, “hereditarian views of intelligence” have continued through subsequent decades (Watkins, 2001). Most notably was the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994 in which the authors, Herrnstein and Murray, suggested that IQ differences between Whites and Blacks could be attributed to genetic differences. Unfortunately, this best-selling book was read by many educators across the United States, and continues to be used to explain the disparity between White and Black success by pointing to students’ genes, culture, or lack of effort and will (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Watkins, 2001). These attitudes impacted the curriculum and the school environment that African-Americans experienced.

Although many White educators believed that all people, regardless of ethnicity, should be educated in order to be responsible citizens in the United States, they adopted philosophies and designed curriculum in such a way that non-White students would not be allowed to progress as much White students, including denying them access to foreign language coursework (Kliebard, 2004; Watkins, 2001). For example, while social efficiency education impacted all students, African-American students were routinely exposed to topics pertaining to manual labor instead of academics (Kliebard, 2004; Watkins, 2001). This caused W.E.B. Du Bois to indict the injustice and oppression which held African-Americans back from the mainstream: “Blacks were being denied the intellectual training and professional skills that a twentieth-century economy demanded, and therefore being denied a chance at true equality” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 114). Given that foreign language was offered as part of an academic curriculum for college-bound White students, African-American students had few opportunities to engage in foreign language

study. These policies also influenced the manner in which schools viewed the cultures and languages of students of color.

The Devaluation of A Cultural Identity and Language

Throughout the course of history, people of color have been stripped of their cultural identity by Whites who wanted them to adopt an adherence to White standards and traditions. Du Bois asserted that African-Americans became the "other" due to slavery, which robbed them of their cultural consciousness (Kincheloe, 2004). Similarly, the boarding schools into which Native American children were forced emphasized an Anglo-centric curriculum that contained patriotic propaganda and forced labor. This curriculum promoted "de-indianizing" the children in an attempt to wipe out their culture and train them to think White (Grande, 2004). In addition to culture, students' languages have historically been a point of contention.

Baldwin (1979), who often focused in his writing on the importance and beauty of language, believed that language is exploited as a "political instrument" in the United States, turning something that connects people to their culture and identity into something sinister. hooks (1994) describes the attitude about learning English that was imposed on slaves brought to the United States and how that attitude is maintained today. During slavery, if they wanted to survive, they were forced to learn the "oppressors' language." Continued lack of recognition on the part of schools of the beauty of students' native languages and reluctance to create opportunities for students to use both Standard English as well as non-standard forms of English and indeed other languages, the mantra of "this is the oppressors' language, yet I need it to talk to you" will continue (p. 172).

In the United States, the hegemony of Standard English continues to subordinate other cultures and languages (Delpit, 1995; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999). In 1996, the Ebonics Debate in Oakland, California sparked outrage across the United States within not only White communities, but also African-American communities. African-American students comprised 53% of the student body in Oakland, yet they represented 80% of the suspensions and 71% of students labeled with special needs and their average GPA was significantly below that of White or Asian-American students (Perry & Delpit, 1998). In one particular elementary school in Oakland, the majority of the teachers voluntarily participated in the Standard English Proficiency program, which used African-American English to help students read and write in Standard English; these students performed above average when compared to students in other schools (Perry & Delpit, 1998). Therefore, the school board passed the Ebonics resolution requiring all schools to participate in the Standard English Proficiency program. What ensued from this resolution was a great deal of discrimination surrounding African-American English. For White Americans, it seemed preposterous that AAE could be considered a legitimate language, and they argued that if others could learn Standard English, African-Americans could as well. Meanwhile, for African-Americans the resolution was equally frustrating because AAE had become misunderstood in the media and reinforced the perception that it was a second-class dialect (Perry & Delpit, 1998). The attitudes of schools toward AAE and languages other than English demonstrated a lack of respect toward the students. If their own language and culture have been disrespected by the school, it could

create a lack of motivation and a difficult environment in which to learn about an additional language and culture.

In regard to language, Freire (1993) stated that our class position, character, and relationships with others are part of the language and thought process. "We experience ourselves in language, we socially create language, and finally we become linguistically competent" (as cited in Darder, 2002, p. 129). In other words, language is a part of students' identity and how they make sense of the world. If students perceive that their language has been devalued by schools, they may form resistance mechanisms which result in negative reactions toward learning and teachers, and ultimately, the students will pull away from school (Delpit, 1995; Macedo & Bartolome, 1999). Nieto (2010) asks educators to consider what would happen if African-American English and not Standard English were highly valued in schools. Only teachers with a strong appreciation of AAE would be hired and students who entered the school without a knowledge of AAE would be considered "culturally deprived" because they were lacking the cultural capital of the language (p. 142). Although Nieto recognizes that this is a far-fetched scenario, she offers it as an example of the "capricious nature of determining whose culture becomes highly valued" (p. 142). Unfortunately, correction and negative reactions to students' use of language can marginalize students, decreasing their desire to learn. Often students find that their culture and language have no place in schools if they want to succeed. This can have two results: (1) students who have no linguistic or cultural knowledge of their own, allowing them to function in their own communities or (2) students who have withdrawn from school without learning the power codes, Standard English, necessary to

succeed (Delpit, 1995; Fecho, 2004; hooks, 1994; Perry & Delpit, 1998). One of the African-American students in a study of a private urban school stated, "But before they expect us to learn about their culture, I think first Black people as a whole have to learn more about themselves before they begin to learn about other cultures" (El Haj, 2006, p. 157). It begs the question of what kind of relationship may exist between the cultural identity among African-American students and their enrollment or success in a foreign language course. One has to consider that if African-American students' own language and cultural identities have been undervalued in schools, perhaps it would discourage them from opting to enroll in a foreign language course in which they may or may not find a connection to yet another language and culture.

As illustrated by this history, few opportunities have existed for non-White students to learn foreign languages and to develop an appreciation for their own culture and that of the target culture and language. This ability to understand one's own values better by comparing and contrasting one's own culture to that of the language being studied is one of the main benefits of foreign language study (Cutshall, 2004/2005; Morales-Jones, 2001; Weatherford, 1986). This is one reason why it is important to examine the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study.

The Reality of Foreign Language Study Today

Reagan and Osborn (2002): "Even today, only roughly half of the students in the American public schools are likely to study a language other than English at some point in their education, and relatively few of those who do are likely to develop even a minimal level of competency in the target language." (p. 2)

Language study in its present state is not a cumulative experience for students, but rather an unarticulated system in which "the learning experience of individual students has as many side steps as it has steps forward" (Panetta, 1999, p. 5). As described in detail above, foreign language enrollment has been influenced by many events throughout history, including the ban of African-American students from courses with academic rigor such as foreign languages. These various historical events have led to two particular characterizations of foreign language: that it is disposable and elitist. Both characterizations may have an influence on students' enrollment in foreign language coursework and can be useful in understanding the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language coursework.

The Disposability of Foreign Language Study and Curriculum in Schools

Due to the dependency of foreign language study on outside factors, enrollment numbers have often been negatively impacted. In the past, foreign language study has been vulnerable to waves of imperialism and xenophobia, educational movements such as social efficiency, cuts in funding, and even widespread apathy caused by an unsavory political climate. These issues have impacted foreign language education in a variety of ways, often negatively. Because of the elective nature of FL, it has often been one of the first courses to be cut as a method of addressing these persistent issues (Panetta, 1999; Reagan & Osborn, 2002).

Unfortunately, conventional foreign language study does not produce results quickly; often administrators and parents do not understand that it takes time to acquire another language (Panetta, 1999; Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Even in the 1930s, parents

held a misperception of language study and unrealistic expectations of what students could accomplish within one year of study (Thompson, 1936, as cited in Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). In two years of study, students have "survival levels of competence in the target language," but are often lucky to even have that much (Reagan & Osborn, 2002, p. 3), and Tse's study (2000) of 51 college students' reflections of their language learning experiences revealed that although students had achieved A's, they did not gain "any functional fluency" (p. 78). A study conducted in 2010 of students in 30 states across the United States provided evidence of students' low proficiency in the target language by year four of study. The Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon examined benchmark proficiency levels of students based on 16,556 students' reading scores, 14,330 students' writing scores and 12,908 students' speaking scores. The results indicated that the majority of the students achieved only a benchmark level of three or four by the fourth year of foreign language study (CASLS, 2010, p. 1). According to CASLS, a benchmark level of three is similar to ACTFL level Novice-High while a benchmark level of four can be compared to ACTFL level Intermediate-Low, which states that students are unable to communicate in the target language by using more than predictable, memorized phrases. The lack of high proficiency levels among students in foreign language classes, coupled with the lack of a national curriculum or national language policy and a pervasive cultural apathy toward foreign language study, makes foreign language, which is an elective in most school districts across the country, a more logical choice for elimination when districts are faced with tighter budgets. Unlike many other disciplines, the field of foreign language

education is often forced into the position of defending itself. Reagan and Osborn (2002) ask how people might react to the following statement:

> It's pretty clear that most Americans know almost nothing about geography. Many can't even name the state capitals! Because we seem to do such a poor job teaching geography, maybe we'd be better off just not offering it at all, except to those students really interested in it. (p. 11)

Schools and the public would likely find such a statement about an area of social studies ludicrous, but similar perceptions about foreign language study persist.

Unfortunately, these attitudes about foreign language study are often passed on to students. Osborn (2000) found the following to impact students' enrollment:

> If a student has a bad experience in high school biology, s/he may well not like science for the remainder of life…s/he may think that frogs are disgusting, insects appalling, and botanical studies quite boring. S/he may even think that biologists are strange individuals. But it is quite likely that the experience will not translate into some sociologically relevant bias. This assurance is much weaker if one has negative experiences in a foreign language class. (p. 134)

In other words, a negative experience in science class manifests itself differently than a negative experience in foreign language class. A negative experience in foreign language may impact students' flexibility in exploring and appreciating other languages and cultures, which has a more detrimental impact on students' abilities to function in an increasingly multilingual, multicultural society and the ever-increasing globalization of business and commerce. Unfortunately, students have been taught by society and school

districts that they are able to disregard foreign language study as part of their education. If they do not care for the course, they can opt to remove it from their schedule, unlike math or science. This precedent hinders students from viewing foreign language as an important course of study.

The Elitist Nature of Foreign Language Study

Throughout the many decades of the American history of education, foreign language has been reserved for a small percentage of college-bound students. Even the early wave of pro-bilingualism in the 19th century led to "cosmopolitan" schools that were considered elite (Tyack, 1974). At the time of WWII when foreign language abilities on the part of the soldiers would have been useful, foreign language teachers commented that 90% of students have no use for the study of a foreign language, leaving an elite number of 10% who should study a foreign language (Colangelo, 2001). As mentioned previously, by the 1970s just 8% of all American students opted to enroll in foreign languages (Smith, 2002). Given that low enrollment permeated schools in the 1970s, foreign language may have been perceived as selective. Throughout the decades, the study of both classical and modern languages has attracted mainly White college-bound students. Add to that, discrimination that African-American students faced in education contributed to the fact that they were not included in that elite group of college-bound students. After legislation was passed to prohibit segregation, a majority of non-White students entered minority schools that were funded at a lower rate than predominantly White schools, greatly impacting the kind of curricular opportunities students received (Darling-Hammond, 1998). From the very beginning of American

education, foreign language courses were designed for White students deemed to be highly intelligent and academically capable. These practices and attitudes paved the way for foreign language to retain its elitist reputation.

Additionally, Reagan and Osborn (2002) argue that foreign language in its current form is not meant to be a successful course for all students; rather it is to designed to weed out the academically weak students and act as a tracking mechanism to ensure that only the best and brightest are left in the class. Their argument is plausible considering that the first year of foreign language study attracts 40-45% of students (Draper & Hicks, 2002; NCES, 2003), but that percentage drops from one level to the next, especially from level two to three (Draper & Hicks, 2002; NCES, 2007). Those students remaining in levels three and beyond are in the minority; this is problematic because one might assume that those students are more academically successful, perpetuating the elitist reputation of foreign language study.

Sparks, Ganschow and Javorsky (1994) utilized questionnaire data to examine the impact of students' native language skills on their ability and motivation to learn a foreign language. The students were categorized into three groups based on standardized test scores in their native language: low-risk learners, high-risk learners and learning disabled. The low-risk learners achieved high scores while high-risk learners scored poorly. The findings of this study demonstrated that although the low-risk learners did obtain higher grades in foreign language classes, the high-risk learners and learning disabled students maintained positive attitudes and a desire to learn the language. However, one issue with this study is that it took place at the college level, not secondary;

one could argue that students in college, regardless of their native language skills, possess a greater ability to persevere and are, generally, more motivated students. Had this study taken place at the high school level, there may have been a greater difference between low-risk and high-risk learners' attitudes toward learning a foreign language. Despite the fact that this study did point to the importance of creating an environment in which various types of students can succeed and pursue foreign language study, Reagan and Osborn (2002) argue that tracking practices in foreign language programs persist. Sparks and Ganschow (1996) also found in a study of 168 students and their foreign language teachers that the teachers' perceptions of students' ability and motivation to learn a language are greatly influenced by students' abilities in their native language. This study demonstrated the way in which foreign language teachers develop assumptions about students' capabilities and motivation/attitudes, and it points to the need of foreign teachers to recognize the differences in their students so that he/she may respond more supportively toward all students, allowing more students to be successful (Sparks & Ganschow, 1996). In regard to shifting from teaching the elite foreign language students and weeding out the weaker students, Verzasconi (1995) states:

> Teaching all students, it turns out, is much more difficult and time consuming than teaching those who are our own mirror-images. But, if we really want languages to be at the center of the curriculum, do we have a choice – and particularly when we are public servants? (p. 2)

Weeding out students and making assumptions about their abilities or attitudes in the foreign language classroom is harmful to both White and non-White students, but may

have a more detrimental impact on students of color as they are often subjected to tracking in schools.

Tracking is not a new topic in the field of education as can be witnessed by the practices in United States schools throughout the last two centuries. Even today, in racially mixed schools, it is common to see an overrepresentation of White students in college-preparatory courses or programs such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate, while few students of color are present in such courses (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Farkas, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Foreign language study is not exempt from tracking practices, especially on the part of school counselors who advise students in their academic undertakings. In a study done by Moore (2005) of 128 African-American students at the University of Texas, students reported that their high school counselors suggested to them that their time would be better spent in coursework less challenging than foreign language. This finding was supported in a study of African-American students' foreign language enrollment in a large, Minnesota suburban high school. During interviews, school counselors admitted that they do not encourage African-American students as much as they do White students to take courses such as foreign language (Glynn, 2007). Furthermore, administrators and teachers revealed that a policy at the junior high level prohibited students placed in remedial reading classes from enrolling in foreign language study. This policy was detrimental to the enrollment of students of color in foreign language because many of the students in the remedial reading classes were African-American, a fact about which the administrators and teachers were aware (Glynn, 2007). Such practices are likely to have a negative impact

on the students' enrollment in foreign language study. In a group interview with several African-American students who had never studied a foreign language, Glynn found that none of the students were opposed to such coursework and they possessed a desire to learn a foreign language. When asked why they had not pursued language courses, the students responded simply that nobody in the school encouraged them or told them that they could study a foreign language (Glynn, 2007). Had the counselors taken initiative to encourage these students, perhaps their enrollment in foreign language would have been different. Unfortunately, the view of foreign language as a challenging course impacts the opinions held by counselors about the type of student who can succeed in foreign language courses. But, the grammar and textbook-driven, Eurocentric curriculum that pervades foreign language classrooms also likely acts as a gate-keeping tool for many non-White students.

Krashen (1999) acknowledges that students tend to anticipate that foreign language curriculum will include grammar instruction. However, students in multiple case studies expressed frustration with the grammar focus and the difficulty that is often accompanies learning grammar (Glynn, 2007; Glynn, 2008; Moore, 2005; Tse, 2000). Krashen and Dupuy (1998) reported on a study of 104 university students in upper level courses provided evidence that the difficulty of the material hinders students from reaching the upper level courses unless they gain experience with the language outside of the classroom. Of the 104 students, 84.5% of the students had studied abroad and felt confident in their ability to succeed in the class. The remaining 15.5% of the students, in comparison, were at a significant disadvantage (Dupuy & Krashen, 1998). Studying

abroad is not realistic for all students, especially because such experiences may be dependent upon financial resources. Thus, it is vital to provide meaningful experiences in the classroom that allow students to progress and succeed in the language. Otherwise, students unable to participate in experiences abroad, for example, are likely to continue to opt out of upper level foreign language courses. Additionally, Chavez (2007) found in a study of university students learning German that teachers' and students' perceptions of the focus of the curriculum were not in alignment. Questionnaires given to 23 teachers and 369 students in four levels of German showed that the teachers believed the course objective was to become "pleasant and comprehensible" to native speakers, yet the students believed the grading criteria was weighted more heavily on grammatical accuracy. Again, this study was conducted at the college level, not secondary. It would be useful to examine secondary teachers' and students' perceptions of the course objectives in traditional foreign language classrooms. An additional issue that compounds the emphasis on grammar in language classes is that foreign language teachers tend to rely heavily on textbooks, which focus on vocabulary memorization and grammar drills. Kleinsasser's (1993) study of 37 high school teachers that included surveys, interviews and observation pointed to teachers' heavy dependency on the textbook. Kleinsasser asserted that this is problematic as textbooks often lack authentic language. Osborn (2006) offers the following depiction of the contrived language found in textbooks:

> Who cares what my school schedule would look like in Germany? – U.S. students do not go to school there! They do not receive daily weather reports in French,

> and they do not normally inquire of their Spanish-speaking classmates as to what hobbies they have. (p. 59)

Toth (2004) acknowledges that contextualizing grammar is perceived as a large challenge by teachers and this is compounded by Kleinsasser's (1993) finding that foreign language teachers receive little feedback from others knowledgeable in their content area. As a result, the textbook becomes the "nucleus of the classroom" (Kleinsasser, 1993, p. 5). This is a major issue in foreign language education because curriculum that is grammar and textbook driven does not allow for development of critical thinking skills or connections that students form between themselves and the target culture through relevant and authentic materials.

Finally, many foreign language courses have a Eurocentric bias as a focus of the language being studied, which can make it difficult for non-White students to relate to the curriculum (Dahl, 2002; Guillaume, 1994; Moore, 2005; Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Guillaume (1994) asserts that it is necessary to demonstrate to non-White students that the experience of people of color is not just an American experience, but rather people of color have diverse cultures and experiences around the world. A curriculum that includes diverse perspectives tends to be lacking in foreign language classrooms as the majority of foreign language teachers are White and have little understanding of the diversity of the culture and language which they are teaching (Guillaume, 1994; Huber, 1990; Wilberschied & Dassier, 1995). If it is difficult for students of color to connect with the curriculum, they could miss the opportunity to connect with stories and perspectives that may be similar to their own and to draw parallels between their own people, language and

culture and that of the target language and culture. The historical narratives of foreign language education and African-American education in the U.S. create an opportunity to see how historical events have influenced today's foreign language programs and students. However, the way in which students of color have historically been educated in the U.S. has created deeper consequences that can influence students' perceptions of their own abilities and their identities. It is important to explore empirical research and scholarly work related to the daily experiences of students of color in today's schools in order to better understand their enrollment and experiences in foreign language classes.

The Experiences of Students of Color in Schools

Singleton and Linton (2006): "Racism becomes institutionalized when organizations - such as a school or a school district – remain unconscious of issues related to race or more actively perpetuate and enforce a dominant racial perspective or belief, for example, that racism is not a problem worthy of attention or redress." (p. 41)

In today's schools, institutional racism persists, putting all African-American students at risk of encountering racism in education (Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000). Racism can be so engrained in daily practices that it may be not be immediately recognized. One common example of institutional racism is often found in the assumptions that employees of schools make about the abilities of students of color to succeed, despite students' own levels of desire to succeed (Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000; Fordham, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 1997). In a quantitative study, Pino and Smith (2004) compared African-American and White students' GPAs and academic ethic, defined as students' academic engagement. "The academic ethic is learned behavior and those who possess it 'place their studies above

leisure activities; study on a daily basis or near-daily basis; and study in a disciplined, intense, and sober fashion'" (Rau & Durand, 2000, as cited in Pino & Smith, 2004, p. 116). A four-page survey was administered to 446 White students and 182 African-American students at Georgia Southern University and asked students questions related to four categories of academic ethic such as class attendance and students' agency in their own education. Regression models showed that the GPA is more strongly associated with academic ethic for White students and less so for African-American students. When Pino and Smith compared White and African-American students who possessed a strong academic ethic, African-American students tended to have lower GPAs than White students, yet they were more likely to retain an academic ethic, despite the lower GPA (Pino & Smith, 2004). While this study demonstrates the desire and drive of African-American students to succeed academically, one could argue that these African-American students at Georgia Southern already possessed a stronger academic ethic because of their post-secondary status. It would be interesting to replicate this study at the high school level, as there may be a stronger correlation between African-American students' GPA and their academic ethic at that level of education. Given that in 2009 only 14.3% of all students enrolled in degree-granting institutions were Black (NCES, 2011) and only one in ten low income Kindergarten students graduates college (Douglass, 2006; OECD, 2008, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2010), it may be useful to examine African-American students' academic ethic at the high school. Ogbu points out that African-American students with academic ethic are still much more likely to be found in general courses rather than in advanced placement or honors courses where students hone critical

thinking skills that lead to success in college (2003). This is detrimental to African-American students who may, for example, unconsciously start to believe that Whites are intellectually superior when they experience an under-representation of other students of color in advanced placement or college preparatory courses, (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Oakes (2005) examined the way in which students and teachers of different tracks describe their classes. Her findings indicated that the high track classes focus on higher-order thinking, independent learning and expressing oneself. Meanwhile, the low track classes focused on punctuality, self-discipline, behavior and following directions correctly. Oakes' research also pointed to a practice of denying African-American and Latino students the opportunity to enroll in college preparatory classes, even though they had the same standardized test scores as Whites and Asian-Americans. In another example of institutional racism, Darling-Hammond (2010) described her visits to an elementary school in a mostly African-American community that used a magnet program to attract White students to the school. However, the majority of the classes were comprised of predominantly African-American students except for gifted and talented classes which were predominantly White. Additionally, it is not uncommon in racially-mixed classes, children of color tend to be more susceptible to unfair treatment in the classroom and are also more likely to be disciplined for behavior that when committed by White students goes unpunished (Carter & Goodwin, 1994, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fine, 1991; Nieto, 1992). Finally, institutionalized racism even impacts students outside of the classroom. In Mount Vernon, Georgia, school dances were segregated until 2009 (Sun, 2012). Tatum refers to institutional racism, such as

the examples described above, as smog: "Sometimes it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in" (1997, p. 8). This smog can be viewed through a manifestation of White privilege, students' identity and cultural consciousness, and stereotype threat that impact students of color on a daily basis in today's schools.

Whiteness in Education

As the majority of teachers in schools are White, White privilege dominates, putting Whiteness at the core of what is considered to be the norm (Fordham, 1996; Tatum, 1997; Singleton & Linton, 2006). White teachers comprise 83% of the teaching force in the U.S. and many states have large gaps between the diversity of the teacher and student populations (Boser, 2011). Boser (2011) explains that the student population in California, for example, is comprised of 72% student of color, yet only 29% of teachers are non-White, leaving a teacher diversity gap of 43%, one of the largest in the country. In regard to Minnesota where my study was conducted, a state with one of the highest achievement gaps in the United States, Boser (2011) calculated that 97% of Minnesota teachers are White, causing a teacher diversity gap of 21%, because approximately 24% of students in the state's schools are students of color (Growth and Justice, 2007). Furthermore, the number of African-American foreign language teachers in schools is very small, as evidenced the fact that only .06% of African-American students receiving a Bachelor's Degree majored in foreign language in recent years (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). One issue that can arise is that White teachers sometimes struggle to understand their students of color (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Ladson-

Billings, 2001). Part of this can be attributed to the notion that the White middle class has written certain rules that students of color do not know how to follow (Delpit, 1995). Instead of looking inward to examine how their teaching practices impact students, teachers tend to blame outside factors such as parents, socio-economic status or politics (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Singleton & Linton, 2006). In addition, because White teachers may expect students to respond to schooling and academic achievement in a similar manner as they did (Fordham, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2001), this could cause misunderstanding between teachers and the students of color in their classrooms. As Delpit points out, “The key here is not the kind of instruction, but the attitude underlying it. When teachers do not understand the potential of the students they teach, they will under teach them no matter what the methodology” (1995, p. 175).

Often, White teachers and White students do not understand what it means to be White. They have had very few opportunities to explore their own racial identity. In an ethnographic study at two urban schools that included observations and interviews with administrators, teachers and students, one of the African-American teachers at the predominantly White school reported that White teachers in the school did not deal with their own identities and did not have the knowledge or language to be able to explore their own racial identity (El-Haj, 2006). This finding supports other evidence that Whites rarely consider the significance of their own ethnicity (Nieto, 2010; Tatum, 1997; Thandeka, 2005). Tatum (1997) points out that when teachers do not recognize their racial identity and the power and privilege that are synonymous with Whiteness, they are unable to see the inequalities that exist in education. Whites often state that race does not

matter because, for them, race seems insignificant (El-Haj, 2006). Whites tend to view their way of life as the norm and anything else is considered “ethnic and exotic” (Nieto, 2010, p. 74).

It is not uncommon for Whites to claim “colorblindness” and many Whites believe that it is a racist act to acknowledge racial differences (Reason, 2007; Tatum, 1997; Thandeka, 2005). Often Whites also feel guilt or shame when discussing their own racial identity and privilege (Reason, 2007; Thandeka, 2005). However, White privilege exists, thus Whites must use that power to act as support for achieving racial justice (Owen, 2009, as cited in Cabrera, 2012). “Thus, the development of a White racial identity based on the pursuit of racial justice becomes a means by which racially privileged people can move beyond racial guilt paralysis and become allies in the movement toward racial equality” (Cabrera, 2012, p. 380). Several studies illustrate the manner in which Whites can progress beyond colorblindness and shame to become allies for people of color. In a study of the relationship between Whiteness and racial justice actions, 15 White students who were interviewed described their understanding of the power of privilege and their role in resisting racism (Reason et al, 2005). This understanding of Whiteness also led to greater personal growth among the students. Reason (2007) asserts that the development of agency is a vital component of the capacity of Whites to work for racial justice. Cabrera (2012) also examined the manner in which White students can disrupt racism and distributed questionnaires to 43 White students at two different universities. The majority of the students normalized their Whiteness, but 15 of the students were “working through Whiteness.” Twelve of the 15

students grew up in neighborhoods/schools where Whites were the minority; therefore they confronted their Whiteness in prior experiences. In interviews, the 15 students revealed that relationships that they had formed with African-American students at their university allowed them to listen to and understand the experiences of people of color. A few of the students also expressed that their first realization of others' racial identities was influential, but also demonstrated to them that additional learning and personal growth were necessary (Cabrera, 2012). Both of these studies point to the need for White students to be confronted and challenged with topics of ethnicity and racism in classes while also pointing to the great potential for White students to use their identities to create understanding. Finally, a critical ethnography of teachers in a graduate level course based on critical pedagogy and social justice illustrated the need for teachers to understand their own racial identity in order to care more authentically for their students (Pennington, et al, 2012). The 18 participants were videotaped and observed in class and two teachers participated in reflective interviews. At the beginning of the course, the teachers were largely unable to name their own racial identity and exhibited false empathy for their students. However, later in the course, after the teachers had developed relationships with each other, the teachers participated in a privilege walk. The lead facilitator of the graduate course named various privileges that Americans should be allowed on a daily basis; if it was the privilege that the teachers had, they could take one step forward. The privileges ranged from finding hair products easily to being called names or discriminated against because of skin color. As each of the 18 teachers could step forward due to each privilege allowed to them because of their Whiteness, they left

their one African-American colleague standing at the beginning point, unable to move forward with her White colleagues. For the White teachers, this was a turning point in their understanding of Whiteness as they heard and saw the experiences of an African-American colleague who lived and worked in the same community as them. In order to truly care, it requires "stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's" (Noddings, 1984/2003, as cited in Pennington et al, 2012, p. 768). This study is useful in examining the importance of teachers' awareness of their racial identity and the importance of placing the needs of the students above the needs of the privileged White teacher (Pennington, et al, 2012).

In addition, education perpetuates the status quo, meaning that students tend to be instructed in a White, middle class manner, leaving the power in the hands of those who already have it (Freire, 1993; Delpit, 1995). In general, education can be characterized by a banking model of education in which teachers "fill" students with information as though they are receptacles. Teachers assume that the better they fill the receptacles, the more successful their students will be (Freire, 1993). "The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate the credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed, nor to see it transformed (Freire, 1993, p. 73). If education does not allow students to question systems of oppression and explore their role in creating equity, students do not have the opportunity to develop the knowledge they need to interact with and change the world. By maintaining the status quo, teachers may harm the hearts, minds and bodies of their students (Darder, 2002). When teachers do not understand how African-American

students, for example, may approach curriculum differently than White students, teachers will not be able to adequately reach these students. Delpit (1995) suggests that although educators say that they believe all students can achieve, few educator truly believe that students of all races and backgrounds can follow through on success. Indeed this attitude is even prevalent in foreign language study as many foreign language educators believe that only certain students will be successful in second language acquisition (Reagan & Osborn, 2002; Sparks & Ganschow, 1996). This is a significant issue with which students must contend.

Students' Cultural Identity and Identity Construction

Due to the policies that have historically surrounded the education of students of color in regard to their culture and language, it may be difficult for students to retain a strong cultural consciousness. Furthermore, in the context of a school and classroom, teachers may not allow room for cultural differences or deviation from the "norm." Every student enters the classroom with cultural capital that varies based on the students' backgrounds, languages and ethnicities, providing unique views of the world; it is vital to recognize the importance of students' cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Nieto, 2010). Yet teachers tend to assign a low status to cultural or folk knowledge while assigning a higher status to knowledge learned through formal situations (Bowers, 2004; Freire, 1993; Nieto, 2010). Formal/academic knowledge is perceived to be more complicated and difficult to learn, which may be why it is valued more highly than knowledge learned through tradition (Bowers, 2004). El Haj (2006) found in her study of a private urban school of predominantly White students that although the administration had a desire to

increase the number of students of color and briefly considered offering Afro-centric courses, they ultimately decided such coursework would not allow students to access elite colleges. Again, academic/formal knowledge was more highly valued. Freire (1998) equates this to an example of a young boy flying a kite who could use math and science formulas flawlessly in that informal context, yet failed math in a formal setting. Growing up as a child of Puerto Rican immigrants, Nieto (2010) describes how she was in awe of her father's ability to add columns of numbers without a calculator as he ran his own bodega while her mother sewed intricate patterns on materials purchased by expensive department stores. Yet she states, "These skills, however, were never called on by my teachers; my parents were thought of as culturally deprived and disadvantaged, another segment of the urban poor with no discernible competencies" (p. 2). Freire (1998) argued that schools must account for students' contextual and cultural realities in order to better teach and make connections between their own unique knowledge and the material of the classroom.

A great deal of scholarly work and research has focused on "funds of knowledge," defined as strategies and skills that students acquire in their homes and communities (CAL, 1994). "Funds of knowledge" is a term that has been used to describe the breadth of knowledge that contributes to students' development, well-being and approach to learning. This breadth of knowledge can be utilized by teachers to better reach their students in the classroom, and it can even include car or appliance repair, household budgeting, painting or music (Moll et al., 1992). Darling-Hammond (2010) asserts that the funds of knowledge must be an integral part of teacher development and teachers

must gain the tools necessary for learning about students' lives and contexts. Recent studies demonstrate the way in which funds of knowledge have been used to tap into students' lives and transform curriculum and classrooms. A case study using think-alouds was conducted at the university level with nine students; the objective was to examine how teachers can resist deficit thinking in regard to Latino students by accessing students' cultural knowledge so as to lead them to greater success in social studies (Ramirez, 2012). During a think-aloud of a Cesar Chavez reading all of the students accessed cultural knowledge about family bonds, respect for elders, religion, bilingualism, migration and Latin American politics to make sense of the reading. Most were also able to make connections to immigration, racial discrimination, and poverty and class by citing examples of Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lennon and United Farm Workers. Ramirez (2012) also found that students' reading level did not impact the number of cultural connections they could make. Funds of knowledge were also revealed in early childhood education and a qualitative study in two early childhood settings examined "what mattered most" to the children (Hedges et al., 2011, p. 191). The findings illustrated the powerful influence that families provide for children's funds of knowledge and that students' knowledge of math, literacy and science begin to develop early as a result of the knowledge children gain from their families. Finally, Baeder (2010) described the way in which teachers in a high school with a student population of 95% students of color tapped into students' contexts by making home visits throughout one school year. Although many of the teachers were nervous at the beginning, they learned of dreams, talents and traditions held by the parents, grandparents and students,

and gained access to information that would likely have not been shared in conferences. The teachers, then, utilized that information to develop curriculum and classroom activities that addressed their students' unique knowledge (Baeder, 2010). This research and scholarly work conducted at three different levels of education indicate the necessity of learning about students' lives and accessing their cultural knowledge to transform students' educational experiences.

An existing and complicated issue in schools is the way in which culture is defined. Often, it is defined in such a manner that forces people to choose one identity or another, not allowing for a great deal of middle ground (Nieto, 2010). The fact is that culture is complicated and multi-faceted, thus students' cultural identities are also complicated and multi-faceted.

> Culture is complex and intricate; it cannot be reduced to holidays, foods, or dances, although these are of course elements of culture. Everyone has a culture because all people participate in the world through social and political relationships informed by history as well as by race, ethnicity, language, social class, sexual orientation, gender, and other circumstances related to identity and experience. (Nieto, 2010, p. 9)

In interviews with high school students, Nieto found their identities to be very complex. A Puerto Rican girl, Marisol, enjoyed rap music and pizza, never mentioning Puerto Rican food or traditional Puerto Rican music. Yet, she described other aspects of culture that are less transparent such as the importance of family and respect for her elders, both of which were valuable to her cultural identity. Furthermore, people of the same

ethnicity often self-identify differently. For example, a wealthy, light-skinned lesbian Mexican-American and a dark-skinned working class Mexican-American may identify first and foremost as lesbian or working class instead of Mexican-American. Because culture is not comprised of just ethnicity, it is necessary to consider that students' cultural identities may vary a great deal. When educators change their view of culture and identity and view them as socially-constructed and fluid, education has the potential to become transformative for students (Nieto, 2010).

Given these typical definitions of culture and cultural identity, African-American students may feel as though they must choose between an identity that keeps them connected to Black culture or an identity that allows them to conform to White culture. If they choose the White culture, they must give up part of their identity – their Blackness (Fordham, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2001). In an ethnographic study of a diverse group of students in a racially mixed high school, Yon (2000) found that adolescents and teenagers were acutely aware of the stereotypes through which they formed or were expected to form their cultural identities. He stated, "In the process of claiming who one is, one is also announcing who one is not" (p. 102). Meanwhile, African-American students who choose to succeed academically often feel "different" from other African-American students, thus, they do not fit with either the White culture or their own African-American culture (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Tatum, 1997). Wilson (2006) also found that African-American parents are sometimes afraid that if their child succeeds academically, he/she will lose their identity and connection with their neighborhood, their family, and the memory of their ancestors, who served 250 years as slaves. They harbor a fear that

their academically successful children will forget that "Blacks have not yet overcome" (p. 16).

Several studies have pointed to the role of students' identities in their academic success. Hubbard's (2005) ethnographic study in a public high school in California illustrated differences in academic achievement among male and female African-American students in the Advancement Via Individual Development (AVID) program. Observations and interviews with students led Hubbard to conclude that females seemed to possess a stronger sense of efficacy and willingness to persevere academically in the face of discrimination. Males, on the other hand, appeared more resigned to accept the status quo and their perceived role in society. Meanwhile in another ethnographic study of African-American students in a predominantly White suburb, peer pressure had a significant impact on Black achievement. "It was not merely a matter of ability, bad teaching or low teacher expectations [that led] to academic disengagement. It was peer pressure against acting 'White'" (Ogbu, 2004). Fryer (2006) gathered similar findings in his survey study related to peer pressure among African-American students, the correlation between students' GPA and popularity, and the concept of acting White. While White students with a 4.0 were at the top of the popularity pyramid, the same was not true for all students. African-American students with a 4.0 had on average 1.5 fewer friends of the same ethnicity in comparison with African-American students with a lower GPA. This was more pronounced for African-American males as African-American females' popularity fell after a GPA of 3.5 while African-American males' popularity dropped after a GPA of 3.25. The issue with this study is that Fryer provides few details

about the data collection methods and participants. It is impossible to know how many students of each ethnicity participated and without more information, it is difficult to fully understand whether African-American students' GPAs are linked to acting White or protecting their own identities. Finally, in the ethnographic study conducted by El Haj (2006) at the private urban school, an African-American shared in an interview that it was a difficult decision to remain at the school and struggled to maintain her friendships outside of school as people in her community teased her for "talking White" (Fordham, 1996). If African-American students struggle to define their cultural identity and balance who they are with who they are expected to be, it may be difficult to make the decision to join a foreign language class that is dominated by White students.

Stereotype Threat and Mechanisms of Resistance

Claude Steele (1999) introduced the theory of stereotype threat in 1995 to explain discrepancies between African-American and White achievement. He defines it as the following: "This is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 46). In relation to enrolling in courses that are viewed as being filled by predominantly White students, students of color may harbor a fear of trying the course and failing, only to live up to the stereotypes that already exist (Hubbard & Mehan, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Steele describes how students of color can feel intimidated by certain academic coursework, something with which White middle class students do not have to contend (1999). However, a major caveat of Steele's theory is that it only affects students of color who have a desire to succeed academically. Therefore, Steele uses the term

"disidentification," psychological withdrawal from the institution that is causing anxiety, to identify those students of color who cope with racism and negative experiences in school by giving up academically (Jones, 1997; Osbourne & Walker, 2006). On the other hand, Tatum (1997) argues that academic achievement may not be dependent on stereotypes, but rather on the perception that success is associated with acting White.

Students who are negatively stereotyped are not the only students who are impacted by stereotype threat. Walton and Cohen (2003) documented a "stereotype lift effect" that takes place when members of a group who are not negatively stereotyped themselves are aware of stereotypes that exist for comparison groups. The result is a boost in performance. While this is not as detrimental as the effects of stereotype threat Steele describes, this lift occurs most often when people believe the stereotypes about the comparison group to be true. For example, White students may perform better if they believe their group is regarded more favorably (Walton & Cohen, 2003). Therefore, stereotype threat can be quite complex and manifest itself in different manners.

In a study of the effect of stereotypes on Asian-Americans, Lee (1994) found that Korean students were aware of the existing stereotypes of Asian students and felt they needed to meet those expectations. One student made the following comment, "American kids have this stereotype, like, we're smart. We are smarter. I mean, I don't think it's a stereotype – look at our report cards. We are better, and we have to show it" (p. 417). Although Lee was not examining stereotype threat, this study illuminates the manner in which stereotypes can both negatively and positively impact students. However, Ogbu (1989) asserts that in comparing Asian-American students' achievement,

for example, and African-American students' achievement, it is important to recognize the difference between voluntary and involuntary minorities. Voluntary immigrants are immigrants who opted to emigrate to the United States while involuntary immigrants were brought to the United States for the purpose of slavery. According to Ogbu, voluntary minorities, such as the Korean students, do well in school because it is viewed as a step toward social mobility. These students typically arrive in the United States with a strong cultural identity and self-esteem that was developed in their country of origin. Meanwhile, involuntary minorities, such as African-American students, may struggle more due to perceptions of their ability to obtain future opportunities and success.

Lastly, several scholars such as Giroux (1983), Cummins (1996) and Kohl (1994) have described resistance theory as another explanation for students' academic failure. Choosing not to learn what schools teach, especially when it is traditional knowledge, is a form of political resistance. It can be viewed as a manner of taking control in a situation in which students feel they have little agency, even though this kind of coping mechanism is counterproductive and only hinders students (Nieto, 2010). Regardless of the way in which stereotype threat or resistance may be present, negative stereotypes and a lack of agency could affect African-American students' view of their ability to be successful in school, particularly in classes which are dominated by White students. Students of color, in particular, face very complex issues in today's schools, thus, a lens of critical theory can be useful in understanding hegemonic practices and the way in which those practices may influence students' enrollment and experiences in courses such as foreign language study.

Critical Theory

Critical theory began in the 1930s with "the Frankfurt School;" these theorists became concerned with the economic depression, failed strikes, unemployment and the rise of fascism in the beginning of the 20th century (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2004) and aimed to hold up a "critical mirror" to reflect the social issues that were present in modern Western culture (Burbules, 1995, p. 57). Although no single theory formed from this group, the Frankfurt theorists argued that social phenomena could not be understood solely through the usage of scientific methods (Giroux, 1997). Enlightenment "arose in direct opposition to certain moral and political ideas," thus the objective of modern critical theory is to shift from positivistic research and revisit Enlightenment as a form of inquiry (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 1). Modern critical theorists often examine the way in which Eurocentric perspectives influence power structures and the manner in which experiences and knowledge are understood (Foucault, 1979, as citied in Jennings & Lynn, 2005). Furthermore, McLaren and Giarelli (1995) assert that an understanding of how relationships are influenced by difference – identity and otherness – is vital to educational practice. Thus, the critical theory movement, at its core, is an effort to focus on issues related to race, class and gender in research (Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995).

Critical theory is also concerned with discourse and Burbules (1995) points out that dialogue should be allowed to take place in which all participants should expect to be heard and treated with respect. Several studies with a critical theory framework provide examples of such dialogue that can create an understanding of issues in educational

contexts. Weis (1995) conducted a year-long ethnographic study in a steel town that focused on White students' identities and their co-construction of African-American students and White female students. The White males co-constructed Blacks and females as the "other." Weis found that young White males' voices revealed deeply entrenched racism in the school that was also linked to male dominance and heterosexuality, allowing her to conclude that schools and educators have challenging work to do. A qualitative case study with a critical theory framework also relied on dialogue with students, teachers and administrators to examine the correlation between social injustice and the growing number of alternative schools in the United States (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Sixty percent of the students were of color in the alternative school where the study was conducted while 70% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Data collection methods included classroom observation, interviews and an examination of curriculum materials. The findings revealed teachers who genuinely cared for their students, but a curriculum that would not allow students to progress beyond "credit recovery" (meeting basic skills and requirements). The students revealed their desires to attend college and pursue careers in the medical field and architecture, but an administrator commented that their curricular offerings were sufficient for the alternative high school students and stated, "How many kids at the alternative school want to be a nuclear engineer?" (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 213). Kim and Taylor (2008) concluded that the high school curriculum did not allow for real learning or the development of critical thinking skills. It was focused on basic skills that would not allow students to aspire to the goals they described in interviews. These studies illustrate the way in which critical

theory can be used to question existing practices and beliefs in schools, drawing attention to issues of racism and low expectations for students in alternative programs, for example.

Tatum (1999) asserts that perspectives, knowledge, and beliefs held by subordinates not in the "norm" tend to be devalued. In education, this can have a detrimental effect on students of color who do not benefit from White privilege. Therefore, in the present study, critical theory is an appropriate lens through which to view the phenomenon because it allows a researcher to explore the relationship between domination and subordination in regard to themes such as money, access, and identity, all of which are important topics in this study. "Critical theorists consider the ability to look at the contradictions of society and those of education in particular as starting points for developing forms of social inquiry that questions what is real versus what should be" (Kim & Taylor, 2008). The current study is in alignment with critical theory; its objective is to examine current factors related to the low enrollment and retention of African-American students in foreign language coursework at the high school level and to explore how African-American students' foreign language enrollment and experiences could be improved in the future.

The Need for Further Research

Much of the literature discussed in this chapter provides a good basis for understanding possible reasons for African-American students' low enrollment in foreign language courses. However, none of the literature directly addresses African-American students' enrollment and experiences through the incorporation of student voice. In order

to explore factors that influence African-American students' foreign language enrollment, it is necessary to go directly to the source. Although my M.A. research did focus on both teachers and African-American students' perceptions, there is presently is no published research that combines student voice with teachers' perspectives to examine the enrollment and experiences in foreign language study among African-American students in suburban and urban settings. Jones (1997) posits that equal access to school and opportunities has always been and continues to be a major issue in this country, and any effort to remedy discrimination is met with much contention. Therefore, it is important to look at the differences between White and African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language courses as in-depth as possible to uncover possible reasons for the disparity.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Through an examination of existing literature, it is possible to imagine how the nature of foreign language study coupled with a difficult history of the education of African-Americans may have contributed to the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study. Given that few scholarly articles have been published on this topic, it is necessary to make sense of the low enrollment through scholarly work and research related to the effects of the history of foreign language education and African-American education. Unfortunately, without the opportunity to discuss foreign language study with high school African-American students, it is difficult to know exactly why low enrollment among this population of students exists. The purpose of this study is to address a need in the research community by comparing and contrasting students' enrollment and experiences in both a suburban and urban context and in both a lower and upper level foreign language class. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Which factors influence students' enrollment and retention in foreign language study?
    a. How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her enrollment and retention in foreign language classes?
2. How do teachers and students describe their foreign language classes?
    a. How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her experiences in foreign language study?

3. How do teachers and students perceive the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study?
4. What suggestions do teachers and students have in regard to improving students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language classes?

In this chapter I will begin with a clarification of my theoretical framework and use of student voice in the study. Next, I will explain the context for the study and how I chose the two schools where the study was conducted. In the third section the methodology will be addressed through a discussion of participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, and validity of the study. Finally, I will describe my biases and identity as a researcher; this is particularly important because I am a White researcher focusing on students of color.

Theoretical Framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) state the following about the conceptual or theoretical framework: "A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the relationships among them" (p. 18). In the theoretical framework the researcher also has the opportunity to address external validity, which can make research more generalizable to greater populations (Cohen et al., 2000; Yin, 2003). Scholars often describe the theoretical framework as the "lens" that guides the study and provides the reader with the perspective of the researcher. The lens allows the researcher to narrow in on his/her curiosities, interests, and questions while situating him/herself within the study (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). As Yin (2003) states, the goal of a theoretical

framework is to provide a "sufficient blueprint" for the study (p. 29). Without the framework, the researcher cannot have a clear idea of what he/she wants to study, which can lead to a lack of rigor (Merriam, 1998).

In this study I use the theoretical framework of critical theory because of its ability to disrupt the status quo (Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). Gordon (1995) states:

> Critical theory seeks to understand the origins and operation of repressive social structures. Critical theory is the critique of domination. It seeks to focus on a world becoming less free, to cast doubt on claims of technological scientific rationality, and then to imply that present configurations do not have to be as they are." (as cited in Jennings & Lynn, 2005, p. 15)

Like Gordon, Patton (2002) points out that what makes critical theory "critical" is that it is used not only to understand but also to change society. I use critical theory to explore African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language coursework today, and also to speculate how African-American students' experiences and enrollment might be transformed in the future.

Critical theory also seeks Enlightenment as a form of inquiry, shifting away from positivistic research (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). Although researchers typically are taught to remain neutral observers, critical theorists examine systems of oppression and do not take a neutral stance. Giroux and McLaren (1991) argue that ethical behavior deems it necessary for the researcher to act as more than just a passive observer (as cited in Kincheloe, 1995). Lather (1990) also asserts that it is important for researchers to play

the role of an active participant when examining topics through the lens of critical theory. She cites Said (1989), who asked: "Is it possible for social science to be different, that is, to forget and become something else…or must it remain a partner in domination and hegemony?" (p. 315) As student voice is central to the study, I believe that a critical examination of the students' perspectives may allow for a better understanding of the phenomenon of a low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study.

Student Voice in Research

In the early 1990s, student voice was largely missing from educational research, and scholars called for the inclusion of student perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2006). Fullan (1991) asked "[w]hat would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?" (in Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 361). Jean Rudduck, Cambridge's first female professor and a pioneer of student voice in research, has often been looked to by other researchers and scholars as a scholar whose work serves as an example of the way in which student voice can be used as a powerful tool. Students are not often regarded as agents of change, but in reality, they can have a profound impact on schools if their perspectives are shared (Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). Pekrul and Levin (2005) state: "The voices of students may provide the tipping point to shift the culture and practices of high schools" (in Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 362). In 2012, a 13-year-old girl made her voice heard in an essay about Frederick Douglass, in which she compared the education at her primarily African-American and Latino school to a present day system of slavery, where Whites impede students of color from succeeding and making academic gains. She

stated: “A grand price was paid in order for us to be where we are today; but in my mind we should be a lot further, so again I encourage the white teachers to instruct and I encourage my people to not just be a student, but become a learner” (Dwyer, 2012). Because her words were made public, many Americans, including a number of teachers, are able to read about her perception of schools today. This is an example of the way in which student voice allows educators to explore topics of importance that have a direct effect on the students they teach and on educational practices and policies. Nieto (2010) points out that in order to provide transformative education dedicated to social justice, the voices of students are absolutely vital and must be part of the dialogue. Furthermore, the students’ perceptions of education must be “problematized and used to reflect critically on school reform” (p. 165). The current study has the potential to contribute to the educational research community through its focus on students’ voices, which provide unique insight and afford the students a sense of agency. Two important things could result from including high school students in this study: a. By acknowledging the students’ decision to enroll in a foreign language, whether level one or level five, we send the message that we think they have made a significant decision that positively impacts their education, and b. The students learn that their perspectives matter and might influence school practices and possibly the education of future students.

The Context: West High vs. East High

West High School is a first-ring suburban school while East High School is an urban school, and both are located in the same metropolitan area. The two previous studies on this topic that I conducted took place at West High School where I was a former German

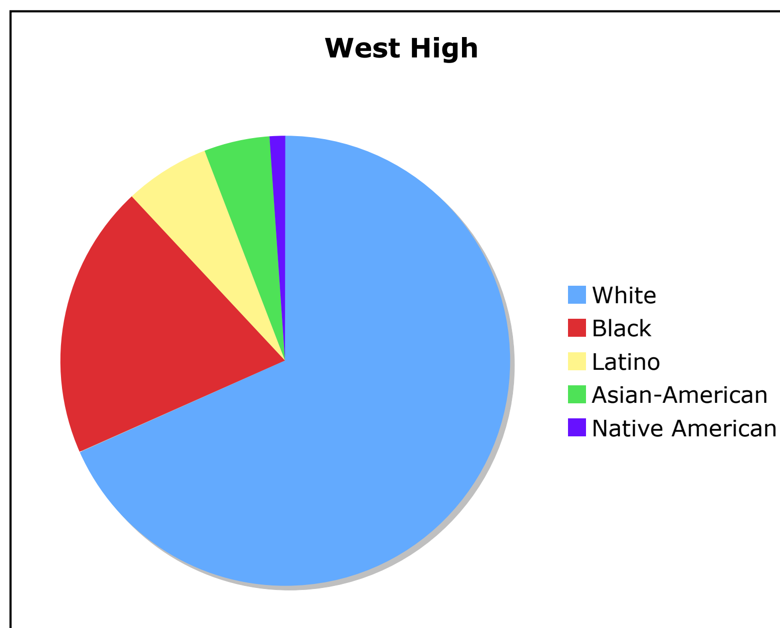
teacher (Glynn, 2007, 2008). As a teacher in the school, I had witnessed a low enrollment and high attrition rate among African-American students in foreign language classes. Access to courses such as foreign language and advanced placement was a topic often discussed among the staff and administration. Therefore, I felt it was important that West High be part of the study. Although the student and teachers' perspectives at West High proved valuable, I found it necessary to expand the study beyond a suburban context to include an urban school with a larger percentage of African-American students and a more diverse student body population. I was able to find an urban school that offered similar courses and was of a similar size to West High, thus, East High was included in this study, creating a good basis for comparison.

Both West High and East High have student populations of approximately 2,000 and both schools offer levels one through six of three languages. West High offers six levels of Spanish, German and French in addition to three levels of American Sign Language and Chinese while East High offers six levels of Spanish, French and Japanese. West High offers college credit through a local university for levels five and six while East High has an International Baccalaureate program for levels four through six. In size and foreign language course offerings, both high schools are very similar, but a comparison of their demographics shows major differences between the schools.

West High has seen many changes in its demographics over the years due to an influx of English Language Learners and students of color from urban areas who opt to

attend West High instead of an urban high school.[2] At the time of this study, the White student population was 69%, Black students comprised 20%, Latino students six percent, Asian students five percent and Native American students made up less than one percent of the overall student population (Figure 3.1). The majority of the students at West High could be considered middle class to upper middle class, although the shift in demographics has led to greater socioeconomic disparity. Three years before the study took place 90% of students attended post-secondary institutions, but that percentage gradually decreased to 83%. Thirty percent of students were on the free and reduced lunch plan (a state indicator of socioeconomic status) at the time of the study.

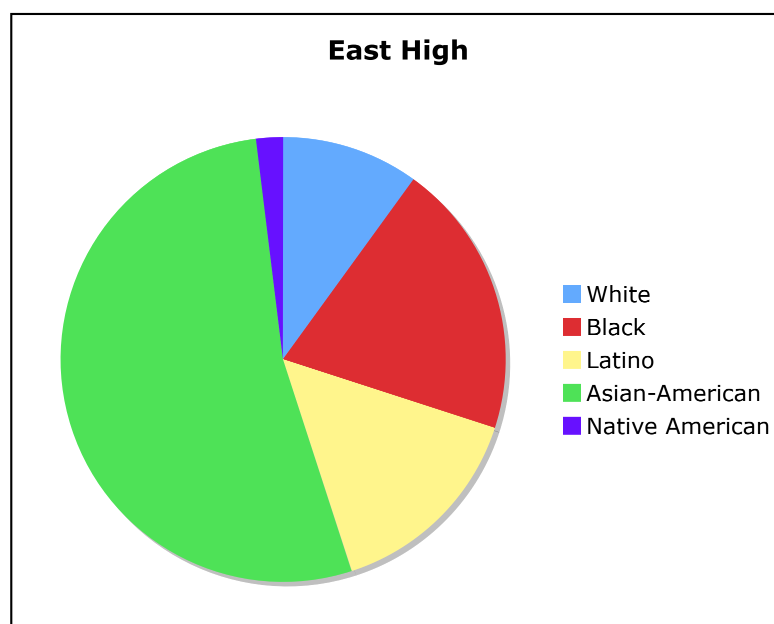
Figure 3.1 – The Demographics of West High (Suburban), Spring 2011



[2] Open enrollment allowed students at the participating schools to voluntarily enroll in a school other than the one assigned to them based on their place of residency. This was particularly common at West High, the suburban school.

East High, on the other hand, had a majority of Asian-American students with 53% of the population, most of whom are Hmong. Black students comprised 20%, and Latino students 15%. The smallest ethnic populations were made up of White students with ten percent and Native American students with two percent (Table 3.2). Many students in this school were of a lower socioeconomic status than the students of West High; 89% of students received free and reduced lunch, a much higher percentage of students than at the suburban school.

Figure 3.2 – The Demographics of East High (Urban), Fall 2011



At both schools, staff and administration were very receptive to this study, as they recognized the disparity between White student and African-American student enrollment in courses such as foreign language. Foreign language teachers in both schools had been engaged over several years in voluntary and mandatory professional development to examine methods for increasing the academic success rate of students of

color. The teachers at these two schools were candid and comfortable discussing this topic with me because they had been searching for a way to better reach and engage their students of color in their respective language classes. The objectives of this study aligned well with the goals of the foreign language departments in these schools, making both schools an excellent choice for the context of this study. Data collection began once approval was obtained by the school districts and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota (Appendix A).

Methodology

Comparative Case Study

This is an evaluative comparative case study. An evaluative case study includes three components: description, explanation and judgment (Merriman, 1998). Most importantly, this type of case study research culminates in judgment as "judging is the final and ultimate act of evaluation" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, in Merriam, 1998, p. 39). I chose an evaluative case study because it aligns well with my overall aim, which is to examine a population of students, African-American, that have a disparate enrollment in foreign language study in comparison with White students. In addition, critical theory is the framework in which the researcher takes an active role and seeks to reflect critically on issues in education, such as African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language coursework.

Furthermore, case study research is particularly useful in investigating a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). I chose to situate the comparative case study study in a real-life context of both an urban and suburban school for two main

reasons: a. it will be more likely to reach teachers, scholars and researchers of different backgrounds and interests, and b. existing literature illustrates differences in course offerings, students' experiences and students' enrollment in foreign language coursework based on whether the school is in a suburban or an urban area. In electing to use a multiple case study or multi-site design I was able to provide the study with more diversity and make it more applicable to readers of various situations (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I chose to conduct this research using a case study as there are several characteristics of this methodology that were advantageous for the current study. Firstly, as stated above, case studies take place in real-life contexts, resulting in the potential to provide rich, detailed descriptions that can allow the reader to gain a different perspective into the problem, a major advantage (Merriam, 1998). Secondly, the rich, detailed data that can result from a case study have the potential to expand readers' experiences, another major advantage. Finally, one of the objectives of this study was to uncover reasons for the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study in order to discuss methods of improving enrollment and retention. Merriam (1998) points out that in the field of education case studies are particularly advantageous: "Educational processes, problems and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practices" (p. 41).

Although the advantages discussed above made case study methodology a logical choice for the present study, I also had to contend with some limitations of the methodology. First of all, case studies can be time consuming and costly (Merriam,

1998). Secondly, Guba and Lincoln (1981) note that case studies can "oversimplify or exaggerate a situation," leading the reader to a false conclusion about the phenomenon being studied (p. 377, cited in Merriam, 1998). That limitation, in combination with the potential of case studies to be affected by the sensitivity, ethics and integrity of the researcher (Merriam, 1998), necessitated that I remain cognizant of my biases and ensure that I examined divergent data as well as prior research to make sense of the findings. For the current study, however, the advantages of case study methodology outweighed the disadvantages.

Selection of Participants

I conducted purposeful sampling in each school, which allows researchers to shed light on the research questions by selecting a sample from which he/she can learn the most (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Stake (2000) describes how a purposeful sample leads to an "intensive study" because the researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer an "opportunity to learn" (p. 446). In the interest of learning the most from the subjects, I chose to focus on two classrooms at each school: one beginning level class (level one or level II) and one upper level class (level three or beyond). While the main focus of the study is on student voice, foreign language teachers are also included in the study to provide an alternative perspective to and support for the student voices.

I conducted two levels of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) consisting of a questionnaire and focus groups or interviews. The questionnaire, the first level of sampling, was given to each student in the participating lower level and upper level

foreign language class within each school. The second level of sampling provided more detailed data through focus groups, group interviews and individual interviews. Students were selected based on their willingness to participate in focus groups and interviews; specifically, they indicated their willingness on the questionnaire. Among the World Language Teachers only one level of sampling was conducted via one group interview and one focus group. Table 3.1 depicts the number of questionnaires returned by students at each school. Fifty-eight questionnaires total were distributed at the suburban school, 27 to the lower level class and 31 to the upper level, while 53 questionnaires were distributed to students at the urban school, 28 in the lower level class and 25 in the upper level class.

Table 3.1 – Questionnaires Completed by Student Participants at West High and East High

Ethnicity	Lower Level West High	Lower Level East High	Upper Level West High	Upper Level East High
White	15	3	19	0
African-American	4	5	1	1
Latino	1	1	1	10
Asian-American	1	10	0	4
East African	0	2	0	0
Native American	0	1	0	0
Total Completed	21 students	22 students	21 students	15 students

The participant selection began by contacting the foreign language teachers at each school. One teacher at each school agreed to take responsibility for delivering materials (see detailed description below) to students in both an upper level and lower level Spanish class and collecting completed materials. Although my main focus for this study was the enrollment of African-American students in foreign language courses, I believe that the current study benefited from an inclusion of students of various ethnic backgrounds. Other students' voices and perceptions had the potential to support African-American students' voices and provided a means of looking at the issue through different lenses. In a pilot study of a Spanish I classroom that I conducted (Glynn, 2008), the White students, for example, shared beliefs about the dominance of White students in foreign language study that were insightful in gaining a better understanding of the issue. I believe it was necessary and useful to include White students' voices, as they dominate upper level foreign language classes, in particular, and are the peers with whom students of color must interact on a daily basis. In addition, Latino and Somali students' voices in the pilot study greatly supported the African-American students' voices, both echoing some of the African-American students' perceptions of language study, but also providing a diverse perspective. Therefore, all students in each of the four Spanish classes were invited to participate in the study.

The students were given a sealed packet containing the following: a letter of invitation to the study, the questionnaire (Appendix B), and consent form, and a form asking for students' contact information and lunch schedule . The objective was to minimize disruptions to the students' foreign language instruction; therefore, everything

students needed to know about the study was contained in the packet. Students were informed that the questionnaire and focus group/interview participation were voluntary. They had the option of completing just the questionnaire or they could complete both tasks for which they would receive lunch and a $10 Target gift card. Students opting to complete the questionnaire and obtain parental consent for the focus groups returned their sealed packets to the teacher collecting materials at each school, and those teachers forwarded them to me. I contacted each of the students via email to schedule the focus groups during the students' lunch hours, but due to students lacking home Internet access, particularly at East High, I communicated with some of the students through the teacher. At both schools, there were four lunch hours, necessitating the arrangement of four different focus groups or interviews. But, due to the lunch hour schedule, I was unable to divide the students evenly to make four separate focus groups. In some of the lunch hours, only one or two students were available. As a result of the uneven number of participants in each lunch hour, some meetings were better described as group or individual interviews rather than focus groups. Participation was better at East High, which allowed for more focus groups and fewer group or individual interviews than at West High. When students arrived for the focus groups or interviews, I explained the students' rights as participants of the study and gave them the assent form to read and sign. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 show the number of student participants at each school for focus groups or interviews and the demographics of each focus group or interview.

Table 3.2 – Focus Groups and Interviews Conducted at West High (Suburban)

TYPE OF DATA COLLECTION TOOL	**LOWER LEVEL**	**UPPER LEVEL**
Focus Group	2 White students 3 African-American students 1 Latino student 1 Asian-American student	
Individual Interview	1 White student	
Group Interview		3 White students
Group Interview		1 White student 1 Latino student
Individual Interview		1 White student
Individual Interview		1 White student

Table 3.3 – Focus Groups and Interviews Conducted at East High (Urban)

TYPE OF DATA COLLECTION TOOL	LOWER LEVEL	UPPER LEVEL
Focus Group	3 Asian-American student 1 East African student	
Focus Group	2 White students 4 African-American students 1 East African student 2 Asian-American students	
Focus Group	2 African-American students 3 Asian-American students	
Focus Group		4 Asian-American students 2 Latino students
Focus Group		6 Latino students
Group Interview		2 Latino students

All teachers in each department were given a letter explaining the study and a consent form. As all of the teachers were busy, I offered to conduct the interview anytime during the school day or outside of school to accommodate their schedules. Two of the suburban teachers signed consent forms and participated in the study, opting to meet together after the school day for a group interview. At the urban school, five of the language teachers had an open period during the lunch hour and requested to meet as a group; with five teachers; this was conducted as a focus group. The participating teachers at both schools had varied years of experience and taught different languages at different levels, allowing for diverse perspectives. Table 3.4 illustrates the participating teachers at each school and the languages they teach.

Table 3.4 – Teacher Participants in A Group Interview and A Focus Group

GROUP INTERVIEW WITH SUBURBAN TEACHERS: 2 PARTICIPANTS	FOCUS GROUP WITH URBAN TEACHERS: 5 PARTICIPANTS
Thomas – Spanish Anne – French	Jenny – Japanese and Spanish Dave – Japanese Brian – Spanish Susan – Spanish Carla - French

Data Collection Methods

Questionnaire. I provided questionnaires for all students in each of the four classes – two classes at the suburban school and two classes at the urban school. As with any method of data collection, I found both advantages and disadvantages to using questionnaires. One major reward of questionnaires in this study was the efficiency of the data collection process (Patten, 2001). It required little time, and I was able to retrieve responses from a number of students within one week. Secondly, the questionnaire data was simple to tabulate, therefore also easier to analyze, another advantage of this method (Patten, 2001). I created a number of tables to compare and contrast students' responses based on their level of foreign language study, ethnic background and school. Additionally, the students had the option of remaining anonymous, which may have allowed them to answer more truthfully (Patten, 2001). The anonymity of the students was important as I had asked them to describe various aspects of their foreign language experiences and the students were expected to provide their opinions without the fear of retribution.

However, there were also two weaknesses, in particular, with this method of data collection that I had to address. In the questionnaires, I included multiple choice answers about the students' backgrounds, prior foreign language experiences and family as well as open-ended questions (fill-in-the-blank and short answer) that targeted students' opinions about their current foreign language experiences. Given the weakness that questionnaires are most effective when obtaining objective answers that provide a "snap shot" rather than an in-depth view (Patten, 2001, p. 3), it was necessary that I ensured that the majority of short answer questions allowed the students to provide an answer using one or two words. Although the students answers were more subjective, the strategy I used to design the short answer section still made it possible to obtain a "snap shot" of the students' perspectives.

I was also concerned about the response rate of the questionnaires, which tends to be low even thought the researcher is typically able to contact many subjects through questionnaires (Patten, 2001). At both schools and in both classes, the response rate was good: The suburban school had a return rate of 42 out of 58 students while the urban school had a return rate of 37 out of 53 students. According to the Government Social Survey (Cohen et al., 2000), a well-planned survey or questionnaire should get a 40% response rate, and if the researcher uses three follow up reminders, a 75-80% return rate can result. In this study, the suburban school had a return rate of approximately 72% while the urban school's return rate was about 70%. The students were given one week to complete the questionnaire, thus the teacher at each school who was responsible for

distributing and collecting the packets gave the students multiple reminders during that week. This is likely the reason for the good response rate among the students.

After the questionnaire data were collected, I was able to examine the students' responses to gain a basic understanding of their experiences in foreign language study. This first level of sampling also provided an initial understanding of similarities and differences between foreign language students of varied ethnic backgrounds in suburban versus urban environments. Within the questionnaire packet, students could indicate whether or not they were willing to join a focus group about their experiences in foreign language classes; therefore, the questionnaire gave me the opportunity to divide participants into focus groups or interviews based on their level of foreign language study and to collect contact information. From there, I was able to communicate with students and arrange times to meet with them over their lunch hours. Having the chance to interview students with varied experiences and levels of foreign language study allowed for maximum variation and was important in exploring relationships among students' perspectives.

Focus groups. The use of focus groups in this study was advantageous because I, as the researcher, was able to take a background role and allow the data to be created through the interaction between participants. In focus groups, there is less "backwards and forwards" between the interviewer and participants as compared to a traditional interview (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 288). The focus groups in this study also gave me further insight into the "thinking pattern" (Krueger, 1994, p. 29) of the student and teacher participants, and due to the format of the focus group, I had the flexibility to

explore participants' comments and ask follow-up questions. This was a major advantage of the focus groups due to the range of students' perspectives; the content of the students' conversations varied from one focus group to another, and I asked different follow-up questions based on those conversations. All of the focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

At each school, I scheduled focus groups over two lunch periods, meeting with the students on consecutive days. The focus groups were an efficient method of collecting data from multiple students within several days and of increasing the sample size of the research (Krueger, 1994). The focus groups were conducted over the lunch hour because it was the only time during the days that was appropriate to meet with students. As this study is partly about access, it was important to ensure that every interested student would have the opportunity to participate without being hindered by outside factors. Many of the students in the participating schools, especially students of color, arrive and depart school via a bus, and in the suburban school, a significant percentage of the students are bused in from inner city areas or other suburbs, making before or after school meetings impossible. Adhering to the recommendation that focus groups should be comprised of 4-12 participants (Krueger, 1998), the student focus groups I created ranged from four to nine students, while the teacher focus group consisted of five participants. Additionally, I scheduled several student focus groups at each school, which is recommended as focus groups can have great variation behavior-wise, making it necessary to have multiple focus groups (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1988, in Cohen, et al., 2000). Only two students at the suburban school who were to participate

in the group with upper level Spanish students failed to come to the scheduled focus groups. I sent all of the participating students a text reminder two days before the focus group and on the morning of their focus group; therefore, all of the other students who were scheduled for focus groups participated.

Unfortunately, several limitations of focus groups surfaced in this study. Firstly, I am a novice researcher, which is a major disadvantage of focus groups because they require a skilled interviewer to obtain good results and to keep the focus group on topic, as there is less control in a focus group setting (Krueger, 1994). Although I was able to maintain reasonable control of the groups, this was the first time I had conducted focus groups, creating a trial and error process. The need to conduct the focus groups over the lunch hour also created time constraints, and it was necessary to keep the students very focused in order to allow time for discussion of the key questions. In addition, in the suburban school, some of the students had an A day or B day schedule, which disrupted the focus groups from the day before. For example, on the first day, three lower level focus groups took place, but on the second day, two of the focus groups combined to form a group of eight students. Day two was when key questions were to be discussed, but with eight students, it was difficult to obtain all of the students' opinions and perspectives. Some of the students in that group were also overshadowed by students who dominated the discussion, another common drawback of focus groups (Krueger, 1994). The lunch schedule at the suburban school also resulted in only one focus group among the lower level students instead of the desired multiple focus groups (Krueger, 1994). Among upper level students at the suburban school, I was unable to form any

focus groups. The only upper level focus groups took place at the urban school. Finally, at the urban school, the behavior of the lower level focus groups varied a great deal. Two of the three lower level focus groups were "cold" focus groups—cold focus groups are characterized as those in which participants are unengaged and talk very little with each other. This is another limitation of focus groups as it is possible to have a "cold" focus group in one session while participants in the next session may be very talkative (Krueger, 1994). Unfortunately, the second cold focus group was the most ethnically diverse and the largest focus group at the urban school, but it was very difficult to obtain students' perspectives and encourage the students to discuss the questions. These major limitations to the study will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Group interviews and individual interviews. All of the interviews conducted in this study were designed to be semi-structured: the questions and topics were chosen ahead of time, but the order and wording were not definite. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided a chance to respond to ideas or issues that arose (Merriam, 1998). As the focus of the study is on African-American students, it was important to remain flexible, especially because I could not predict interviewees' responses to the questions, particularly those questions that addressed ethnicity. I chose to include interviews as part of this study due to the opportunity to gain an understanding of events that cannot be observed (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) and to gather descriptive, rich data (Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Weiss, 1994). When I designed this study, however, I had not intended to make use of group interviews. My original plan was to have focus groups with the students, individual interviews with the teachers and follow-up interviews with

selected students. The constraints of the study made it necessary to include both individual and group interviews as data collection tools. The group interviews with students and teachers varied from the focus groups in that the group interaction and format were different. Although I asked participants the same key questions whether they were in focus groups or group interviews, I was unable to take the same background role as a researcher within the group interviews; the participants were more dependent on me to lead the conversation. Like the focus groups, all individual and group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Because it was impossible to change students' lunch schedules, there were several instances in which just two or three students were available to be interviewed during a particular lunch hour, resulting in a group interview. Two of the teachers were also interviewed in a group interview format due to time constraints. It was important to be flexible and work within the boundaries of the teachers' schedules; therefore, when they requested to be interviewed together, I agreed. In this study, the group interviews were not only practical and a time-saving technique, they also provided the opportunity for discussion to take place among participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In the group interview of two suburban teachers, the advantage of being able to interact with one another greatly enhanced the interviews and provided rich data. The teachers were very engaged with one another in the interviews and used each other's perspectives to clarify their own opinions and perspectives. Lewis (1992) points out that group interviews are a means for group members to challenge one another, resulting in a wider

variety of responses (in Cohen, et al., 2000). I was pleased to find that the teachers were very comfortable with me and one another.

It was also necessary to conduct individual interviews instead of focus groups with several students at the suburban school. They were willing participants in the study, but were the only students available during those particular lunch hours. Although I attempted to make the one-on-one a comfortable environment, it was clear that some of the students were somewhat uncomfortable sharing their perspectives and may have benefited from being part of a group interview or focus group. As stated above, I had planned to conduct follow-up individual interviews with selected students as well, but due to the time constraints and lack of student response, I was unable to conduct the follow-up interviews. The students with whom I attempted to arrange follow-up interviews did not respond to my emails or texts. In the case of the urban school, the teacher and I worked closely together to contact the students, as many had neither cell phones nor email access. After the focus groups were completed, it was very difficult to contact these students again for participation in individual interviews. These limitations to the study will also be discussed further in chapter 5.

There were several additional limitations to the individual and group interviews that I had to address. Firstly, interviewing is an accepted social norm, thus it is possible for the researcher to underestimate the complexity of information that can result from an interview (Briggs, 1986). According to "bias theory," bias on the part of interview participants may result due to factors such as gender, age and race and may be reflected in their responses (Briggs, 1986, p. 21). However, I was aware of these pitfalls of

interviews and despite these limitations, I was able to gather good interview data from the students and teachers. A major drawback to group interviews emerged in this study in that one or two students/teachers dominated the conversation in several of the group interviews. Such domination has the potential to intimidate other group members or simply not provide the opportunity for others to participate. This may impact the results if some groups members do not feel they can respond honestly to questions in front of the others or if they have not had an opportunity to participate fully (Cohen, et al., 2000). As a novice interviewer, I did my best to engage students or teachers whose voices were diminished by more dominating personalities in the groups, but the data do reflect this issue that arose during the interviews.

Data Analysis

I organized the data into one complete case study record to ready them for initial analysis, and I approached analysis in two stages. First, I completed a within-case analysis for each school by using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). I began by coding to summarize chunks of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) followed by pattern matching or pattern recognition to summarize the coded data into themes or sets (Cohen, et al., 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The constant comparative method was useful in placing the coded data into categories that were exhaustive and connected to the objectives of the study (Merriam, 1998). In the second stage of data analysis, I prepared the data from both schools for cross-case analysis and followed recommendations to examine the cases side-by-side while searching for patterns and diverse ideas that were important to the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 1998;

Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman describe two main reasons why researchers do cross-case analysis. The first is to increase the generalizability of the study; although this concept is less important in qualitative than in quantitative studies, it does demonstrate an applicability of findings. The second is to create a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through an explanation and interpretation of similarities and differences between cases. By comparing and contrasting two very different cases, the urban and suburban schools, the current study has the potential to be applied to various educational settings, allowing both myself and others to more clearly understand the enrollment decisions of African-American students in foreign language courses.

In addition to the two stages described above, I took other measures to ensure a strong analysis of the data. First of all, throughout the process I remained open to divergent ideas and considered contradictory evidence or rival explanations to bolster the internal validity of the study and not leave the study open to other interpretations (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). As I have conducted two previous studies on this same topic (Glynn, 2007, 2008), it was particularly important for me to remain objective and allow myself to view the phenomenon from perspectives that did not surface in the other two studies. Secondly, I presented the findings with a rich description, which added to the validity of the study by allowing the reader to imagine him/herself in the phenomenon and giving the write-up "an element of shared experience" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Thirdly, I used prior, expert knowledge during the analysis process to back up theories that I formed about the study and to demonstrate an "awareness of current thinking and discourse about the case study topic" (Yin, 2003, p. 137). I had a breadth of empirical research and

scholarly work from which I drew to make sense of the topic. Finally, I had intended to include both member checks and peer examination to verify my interpretation of the data and to gain fresh perspectives about the data (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Given that it was difficult to make initial contact with the students and follow-up contact was unsuccessful, member checks were, unfortunately, not performed. However, I emailed four of the same transcripts to two peers to gain different perspectives on the analysis of the students' and teachers' focus groups and interviews. Both peers were former foreign language teachers and became teacher educators. Both also had experience conducting interviews and analyzing data. I requested that they code the data and provide comments about data that seemed important to highlight. Then, I compared and contrasted their codes with my own to look for both similar and divergent patterns. I did use several of their codes as they verified my interpretation of the data, but also provided interpretations and questions that I had not considered. This feedback from peers during data analysis strengthened the internal validity of this study.

Validity and Reliability

I took several steps to ensure that construct validity was present in this study: a. I linked the data collection to existing literature (Cohen, et al., 2000), b. I used multiple sources of evidence and developed a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003), and c. I spent an appropriate period of time in the field to gain a feel for the situation (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). I addressed reliability by creating a case protocol that allowed me to stay on task and remain organized (Yin, 2003). I adhered to the recommendation that the researcher should imagine that another researcher is observing as he/she conducts the

study, which would allow him/her to replicate the study (Cohen, et al., 2000; Yin, 2003). Therefore, I followed the steps I had designed for gathering data as closely as possible given the various issues that arose during data collection. Despite the limitations I encountered, I believe that another researcher could replicate the study due to the questionnaires, informational handouts, focus group and interview protocols and organizational system I created. I also chose a dual-site design to give the study more reliability and validity; as a result, the findings from the study are more accessible and applicable to readers of various backgrounds and contexts (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I included two forms of triangulation in this study to avoid misinterpretation and bias and to bolster the validity of the study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). Patton (2002) explains that in order to collect data well, the researcher must include triangulation whether it is data (time, space, and persons), investigator (multiple observers), theory (use of multiple theories in the interpretation of the data) or methodological triangulation (more than one method or within/between method strategies). In this study, data triangulation was present as the study took place in two different contexts in which participants of varied backgrounds and experiences were involved, providing multiple perspectives. I also chose to include methodological triangulation as a key component of this study by using questionnaires, focus groups, group interviews and individual interviews to gather information from the participants. In employing more than one data collection method with participants in different contexts, there was an increased potential for gathering rich data that could be used to examine this topic in-depth.

Positionality

After having conducted two previous studies on the topic of African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language (Glynn, 2007, 2008), I was certain that this was a topic that I wanted to explore further. My experience as a middle school classroom teacher in a diverse environment was the impetus for choosing this topic as the focus for my M.A. thesis (Glynn, 2007). I had had the opportunity to work with students of many ethnicities in the middle school environment, many being urban African-American students. One seventh-grade African-American boy opted to fail his French quiz by leaving everything blank and when I questioned him, he told me that it was "not cool for no Black boy to be learning French." This was the moment when I first wondered if my students of color connected with the material or had a desire to learn about other languages and cultures in the world. Furthermore, although this young boy demonstrated great understanding of the French language in day-to-day activities, he deliberately chose to sabotage his grade because a good grade in French was "not cool" for an African-American male. I wondered if other African-American students in my classes felt similarly. Therefore, the chance to conduct research about African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language felt both personal and professional. Not only did it allow me to network with others in national organizations about empirical research, it also allowed me to reflect on how I could help my students to connect with the curriculum and think critically about the world.

It is also important to acknowledge my role as a White researcher studying students of color. This scenario is sometimes described as "researching the other," and

causes the research community to question whether it is appropriate, for example, for Whites to conduct research related to African-American students (Tillman, 2002). It is possible that when researching a group of people of a different ethnicity, issues of trust and credibility can arise. Edwards (1990), a White woman who studied the university experience of African-American women, gives an example of how her "placing" had an effect on the subjects she was able to recruit. As she was part of a university system, the African-Americans she attempted to recruit for her study had a mistrust of Edwards as they associated her with a White, middle-class system. Meanwhile, when she tried to recruit White, middle-class women, she had a high response rate because they could connect with Edwards (1990, cited in Egharevba, 2000). However, one can also argue that any researcher who is willing to ask difficult questions and to examine unfair or racist practices should be allowed to work toward social justice, regardless of ethnicity. Bergerson (2003) argues:

> The fight for social justice lies not only in the hands of people of color… I believe that white scholars have an important role in creating an environment that recognizes the need to ask difficult questions and challenge traditional notions in our personal lives as well as our work in education. (p. 61)

Due to my experiences as a classroom teacher and having had the opportunity to teach and interact with students of many backgrounds and ethnicities, including African-American students, I know how to connect and establish rapport with students. I have had many positive relationships with students of color and have learned a great deal about how students' backgrounds and cultures deeply impact who they are and the

manner in which they approach education. More importantly, I believe we must strive to reduce if not eliminate White privilege and institutional racism, and I truly want all students to experience success in schools. This is my goal whether teaching a class of White students or a class of ethnically diverse students. I am a proponent of Freire's notion of problem-posing education, in which the teacher and students work together in dialogue to challenge and make sense of the world: "Authentic education is not carried on by 'A' for 'B' or by 'A' about 'B,' but rather by 'A' with 'B,' mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it" (Freire, 1993, p.93). Admittedly, I cannot prove that I obtained the same quality of data that a researcher of color would have. But, I do believe that these qualities allowed me to approach data collection and analysis with an open mind and to make the environment as comfortable and trustworthy as possible for the student subjects.

In regard to the teachers, my background as a teacher and as a former colleague of the two teachers at West High, made it possible for me to have immediate rapport with the teacher participants, and I am certain that I was able to obtain data that an outsider may not have. The suburban teachers were very comfortable being interviewed by me, and thus were candid and open. The urban teachers did not know me well, but one of the five teachers, Brian, was engaged in research about the loss of African-American students' cultural identities. These five teachers were accustomed to discussing Brian's research as part of his Master's Degree, and they also engaged in many discussions of methods to increase enrollment and retention among their African-American students, in

particular. They were not uncomfortable with the topic and displayed a willingness to assist me with creating a successful study. Thus, my identity as a former language teacher contributed positively to the data collection.

Having conducted two previous studies about African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language classes, I had to be aware of biases I possessed about this topic. It was important to remain objective and realize that perceptions students had of language study and of themselves in prior studies would not necessarily appear in this study. I needed to make sure that I remained open to divergent data patterns. Although I had ideas about what students of color might tell me concerning their study of a foreign language, I needed to approach the focus groups and interviews as new experiences.

In the end, I do believe that I was successful in remaining cognizant of my biases and assumptions. I kept an open mind, thus, I saw new ideas and perceptions of language learning emerge in regard to students' ethnicities. The interviews with the teachers were insightful and motivational, and I was in awe of many of the students I met. The data collection process at both schools was interesting and allowed for a unique exploration of the topic that may lead to a better understanding of African-American students' low enrollment in foreign language study.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the findings of data analysis. The teacher data were compiled from a group interview with two suburban teachers and a focus group with five urban teachers. The student data were gathered from questionnaires completed by 42 suburban foreign language students and 37 urban foreign language students. I created tables to compare and contrast students' responses and examined differences and similarities between the two schools and between students of varied ethnic backgrounds. Additional student data were obtained through focus groups, group interviews and individual interviews with 15 suburban students and 32 urban students. All data sources informed responses to the four research questions.

In this study, both teachers and students were asked to describe their perceptions of foreign language enrollment and retention, experiences with their foreign language classes, the demographics of foreign language classes, and suggestions for improving students' enrollment and foreign language experiences, particularly in reference to increasing and maintaining enrollment among African-American students. While the students' perceptions are the central focus of the study, the teachers' perceptions of the topics listed above provide a more complete view of the foreign language programs at both the urban and suburban schools. I begin this chapter with a description of the teacher participants, student participants and the current state of the foreign language programs at each school using data pertaining to background information that was obtained through the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. This is followed by the findings, which are organized and presented in order of the research questions.

Foreign Language Teacher Participants

The foreign language teachers who participated in the study willingly shared interesting perspectives about their students and their program. These teachers appeared genuinely interested in increasing and retaining foreign language enrollment among students of color as well as providing good classroom experiences for their students. The ethnicity of the teachers in this study nearly mirrored that of the general foreign language teaching population in the United States (Boser, 2011; NCES, 2012). All of the teacher participants were White; although 76% of the American teaching force is female (NCES, 2012), three (43%) of the seven participants in the study were male. The teachers at both schools varied in age, experience, and languages taught, giving diversity to the teachers' perspectives.

At the suburban school, Anne, a French teacher, had approximately 15 years of experience. While her upper level French classes were comprised of predominantly White students, she was interested in developing strategies to retain more students of color in her lower level classes and encourage them to enroll in upper level French classes. Her Spanish teaching colleague, Thomas, had worked in music and business before returning to the teaching profession. He had been at the school for five years at the time of this study. Thomas had a strong background in music, particularly Cuban music, and he had a passion for using music as a teaching tool to allow students to experience the culture. While he indicated that music was popular with all students, he found music to be particularly successful with his students of color, and he used it as a means of developing relationships with students.

The teachers at the urban school were equally as varied in background and experience. Susan had taught Spanish for over 25 years. She began her teaching career in an urban school, but left in search of a different experience in a suburban teaching environment. However, she missed the diversity of the student population that exists in an urban environment and returned to an urban school when the opportunity arose. She worked diligently to develop relationships with her students and provided support for students who turned to her for help with academic or personal issues. She also recognized that her students of lower socioeconomic status sometimes lacked necessary supplies or spending money and she took that into account as she planned classroom activities. Brian, another Spanish teacher, grew up in an urban environment and attended an urban school and perceived that he truly understood the students and environment. At the time of the study, he was writing his Master's Thesis, in which he was focused on the loss of African-American students' cultural identity. Of the remaining teachers, Carla, taught French, Jenny taught Spanish and Japanese, and Dave was a Japanese teacher. Due to these three teachers arriving late to the focus group, I did not gather the same background information from them as I did from the other teacher participants. All five of these urban teachers had spent their majority of their teaching career in urban schools and stated that they enjoyed the environment.

Student Participants

The student participants in this study came from many different ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences. Some students had traveled extensively, having had the opportunity to use their second language in a real context, while many other students

talked about their dreams of traveling the world and experiencing other people and places. Some of the students were unsure whether those dreams would ever be realized. Overall, the students in this study had a strong desire to be successful and possessed future goals, and the way in which they characterized themselves as students who opt to learn a foreign language was very similar at both schools (suburban, urban), in both levels (lower, upper) and among all ethnicities. Overwhelmingly, the students in this study described themselves in focus groups and interviews as intelligent, hard-working, motivated, dedicated to academic success and more curious about the world than non-language learners. Some students in this study were living up to parents' expectations of academic success while others were exceeding their families' expectations of academic success. Regardless, the students came to foreign language study for a multitude of reasons, and it was possible to see how students in two very different educational environments were working toward similar goals.

In general, students were receptive to the focus group and interview questions. As stated previously, there were two "cold" focus groups (Krueger, 1994) with lower level urban students during which it was more difficult to glean a great deal of information. The suburban students, both lower level and upper level, were the most talkative and seemed most open to sharing all of their opinions and perceptions about second language learning. The upper level focus groups and group interview at the urban school were more reserved and perhaps more wary about talking with someone unfamiliar. But, it was clear that they were still pleased to be asked about their perceptions and gave, what appeared to be, honest answers. Overall, the students were

friendly and enjoyed participating in the focus groups and interviews over lunch with fellow classmates and friends. It seemed that the majority of students truly wanted to share their ideas with each other and me.

The following tables (4.1, 4.2) list the students' names, their ethnicities, and language level. The heading on each group of students denotes the data collection method: focus group (FG), group interview (GI) or individual interview (II)[3].

Table 4.1 – Suburban Student Participants in Focus Groups and Interviews

STUDENTS	ETHNICITY	LANGUAGE LEVEL
FG:		
Zoe	White	Spanish 2
Will	White	
Stacy	Latina	
Tanya	African-American	
Kutrice	African-American	
Latricia	African-American	
Darcy	Asian-American	
II:		
Rachel	White	Spanish 2
GI:		
Brandon	White	Spanish 4
Robin	Latina	
GI:		
Elise	White	Spanish 4
Ashley	White	
Maria	White	
II:		
Emma	White	Spanish 4
II:		
Sean	White	Spanish 4

[3] Codes are used throughout the chapter to indicate the data source. Three codes represent four different data sources: questionnaire (Q), focus group (FG), group interview (GI), and individual interview (II).

Table 4.2 – Urban Student Participants in Focus Groups and Interviews

STUDENTS	ETHNICITY	LANGUAGE LEVEL
FG:		
Hien	Asian-American	Spanish 1
Pao	Asian-American	
Xang	Asian-American	
Ayana	East-African	
FG:		
Yeng	Asian-American	Spanish 1
Shua	Asian-American	
Demaine	African-American	
Marcus	African-American	
Tayisha	African-American	
Nadif	East-African	
Allison	White	
Adley	White	
Sophia	White	
FG:		
Kia	Asian-American	Spanish 1
Xi	Asian-American	
May	Asian-American	
Desiree	African-American	
Rakesha	African-American	
FG:		
Clara	Latina	Spanish 4-6
Marisa	Latina	
Jia	Asian-American	
Chan	Asian-American	
Jolina	Asian-American	
Tou	Asian-American	
FG:		
Marisol	Latina	Spanish 4-6
Eliana	Latina	
Javier	Latino	
Daniela	Latina	
Isabel	Latina	
Selena	Latina	
GI:		
Camila	Latina	Spanish 4-6
Liliana	Latina	

In the group interviews, the teachers described the demographics of their foreign language programs. At both the suburban (West High) and urban (East High) schools teachers reported that the lower levels (levels one and two) tended to embody the most diversity among students. At the majority White suburban school, lower level Spanish and French attracted ethnically diverse students, mostly of African-American ethnic background. Meanwhile, at the majority Asian-American (predominantly Hmong) urban school, Hmong students comprised the majority in the lower level Spanish and French classes, but White, African-American and Latino students were also were present in those classes.

At both schools, teachers stated that their retention of students was good between level one and level two. However, after level two, Susan (EH[4]) quipped, "it's a crapshoot" (GI). Both schools struggled with retention after level two, finding that enrollment declined significantly from level two to three. With the drop in enrollment, teachers at both schools found that the demographics of their language programs changed. At the suburban school, Thomas, who typically taught levels one, two, and three of Spanish described how he could see the diversity of his classes change from one level to the next. If he lost students from level one to level two, they were most often students of color, and by level three, few students of color remained. In French, Anne believed that French III typically retained about 10-15% students of color, but that percentage declined from level three to four. Similarly, at the urban school, the

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[4] Codes will be used throughout the chapter to identify the school of each teacher and each student participant: WH = West High, the suburban school and EH = East High, the urban school.

enrollment of African-American students in Spanish classes declined sharply after level two, but instead of maintaining a majority of White students in upper level Spanish like the suburban school, levels three, four, and five at East High were comprised of predominantly Latino students. In contrast, the upper level Japanese and French classes retained the majority of their Asian-American and White students. The urban teachers stated that in all of the upper level foreign language classes at East High, very few African-American students were present. Overall, the teachers at both schools agreed that the enrollment and retention of African-American students was persistently low in their foreign language programs and was a major issue that needed to be explored by their departments.

The questionnaire data provided similar evidence to the teachers' descriptions. The upper level classes at both schools had the best retention rates. At the suburban school, 19 of the 21 level four students stated that they would continue to level five while 10 of the 15 level four and five students at the urban school would opt to continue to the next level. At the suburban school, one African-American student and one White student would not continue, while at the urban school, one African-American student said she would not continue along with two of the heritage learners and two of the four Asian-American students. In both cases, the two African-American students were the only upper level African-American student participants in the study, pointing again to the disparity in enrollment between African-American students and their classmates. It should also be noted that several of the East High students in levels five and six were seniors in high school, and, therefore, stated that they would not continue to the next level

in high school. However, these students revealed in their focus groups that they were interested in continuing their study of the language in college.

The questionnaires collected from the lower level foreign language classes, on the other hand, had more varied responses, and respondents were less confident about their desire and/or ability to remain in a language course. According to the survey data, only eight of the 21 suburban students stated that they planned to continue to level three while 14 of the 22 urban students planned to continue to level two. In other words, according to the questionnaire data, the suburban school would have an attrition rate of 62% from level two to level three while the urban school would have lost 37% of students between level one and level two. However, many of the urban students shared that they would not continue on to level three; therefore, it is likely that the attrition rate from level two to level three would have been similar to the suburban school's rate of 62%. Although research demonstrates that it is not unusual to witness a significant attrition rate between levels two and three of a foreign language (Draper & Hicks, 2002; NCES, 2007; Reagan & Osborn, 2002), the potential loss of 62% of students between levels two and three is troubling. At the suburban school, three of the four African-American students stated that they would continue to level three while only four of the 15 White students planned to enroll in level three. Of the remaining 21 students, one Latina student said that she would continue her language study while the Asian-American student stated that she would not. Of the urban students, approximately half or more of all of the students of varied ethnicities planned to enroll in level two of Spanish: both East African students, two of the three White students, one Native-American student, three of the five African-

American students and six of the 10 Asian-American students. One Latino student who participated in the study stated that he would not continue to level two. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate the number of students based on questionnaires who were enrolled in lower levels and upper levels at the time of the study versus the number of students who reported that they would enroll in the next level of the language. These data demonstrate that both schools had retention issues and disparities in enrollment, particularly in upper levels among African-American students and students of other ethnic backgrounds. Additional findings presented in this chapter will shed some light on why African-American students' enrollment and retention in foreign language study is persistently low at these two schools.

Table 4.3 – Upper Level Students' Reported Current and Continued Enrollment

Ethnic Background	West High students enrolled in upper levels at the time of the study	West High students who reported they would enroll in the next level	East High students enrolled in upper levels at the time of the study	East High students who reported they would enroll in the next level
White students	20	19		
African-American students	1	0	1	0
Latino students	1	1	10	8
Asian-American students			4	2

4.4 – Lower Level Students' Reported Current and Continued Enrollment

Ethnic Background	West High students enrolled in lower levels at the time of the study	West High students who reported they would enroll in the next level	East High students enrolled in lower levels at the time of the study	East High students who reported they would enroll in the next level
White students	15	4	3	2
African-American students	4	3	5	3
Latino students	1	1	1	0
Asian-American students	1	0	10	6
East African students			2	2
Native American students			1	1

Research Question 1: Which factors influence students' enrollment and retention in foreign language study? a. How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her enrollment and retention in foreign language classes?

In this section, findings related to research question one will be addressed. Data obtained from both the teacher and students provided a view of enrollment and its relation to students' ethnicities at both high schools. During data analysis of the data six themes emerged in response to this question: opportunities for success, the usefulness of foreign language, personal benefits, encouragement and lack of encouragement, persistence in language learning, and drawbacks of language learning. These findings

stem primarily from focus group and interview data with supporting evidence from the student questionnaires.

Foreign Language Study Creates Opportunities for Success in High School, College, and Beyond

The suburban students in the lower and upper levels of Spanish reported that by studying a foreign language they could make better connections to other disciplines. They shared that they had improved their understanding of the English language and developed better study habits. It is encouraging that students in traditional foreign language programs found that language study provided them academic benefits in other coursework such as English, which has been found to improve students' skills in other content areas (Hoffenberg, et al., 1971; Masciantonio, 1977). Several of the upper level students described how Spanish had become an integral part of their high school education; therefore, it was not a difficult decision to continue language study, as the following quotes illustrate.

> Elise (W[5], WH): It was pretty easy like I don't know, Spanish is something that interests me. I want to go lots of places that speak Spanish, so, it's kind of a no-brainer. I mean, I want to minor in it in college (GI).
>
> Maria (W, WH): Yeah. For me, it wasn't a question. I just signed up. I was like working my schedule around it (GI).

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[5] In addition to codes indicating students' schools and the data source, codes will be used throughout the chapter to indicate students' ethnicity (W – White, AA – African-American, L – Latino, AS – Asian-American, EA – East African).

Interestingly, when asked on the questionnaire why they initially enrolled in a foreign language, lower level White students at both schools cited college applications as the number one reason: 14 of 15 suburban students and 2 of 3 urban students. Few students of other ethnic backgrounds pointed to college applications as a reason for their initial enrollment. During focus groups and interviews, however, the majority of students of all ethnicities and discussed the importance of obtaining foreign language credits for their high school transcripts. Most students believed that a high school transcript that included at least two years of a foreign language would afford them more post-secondary options as they applied for college and university acceptance. Students seemed informed that foreign language study at the high school does act as one of the major pipelines to college and universities as has been indicated by the College Entrance Examination Board (2005) and the National Center for Educational Statistics (2003). Among both suburban and urban student participants, this was one of the main benefits of language learning. They stated that it was important to their success as most students indicated their plans to obtain a post-secondary education. According to questionnaire data, the majority of the students at both schools believed that they were college bound and would attend a four-year institution. Eighteen of 22 lower level Spanish students at East High stated that they were college bound while 12 of the15 upper level Spanish students at East High had four-year post-secondary plans. Among those students who said that they planned to attend a two-year school or seek employment after high school, one was Asian-American, one African-American, one White, and four were Latino students. At West High, only three White students out of 21 lower level Spanish students said that they did not plan to attend

a four-year post-secondary institution while all 19 of the upper level students stated that they were college bound.

Although it was positive that students realize the importance of at least two years of foreign language study for access to college, the teachers explained that the students' focus on completing a minimum of two years of a foreign language can have an adverse effect on enrollment after level two. Teachers at both schools mentioned that once students have met the two-year college entrance requirement (based on advice from counselors), they see little need to continue. As Anne (WH) pointed out, if the coursework becomes more difficult and it is not a requirement for high school graduation, why would students opt to enroll in the upper levels? She described what she sees in the suburban students:

> I mean for them they can't necessarily say, 'You know what this is something that is going to enrich my life for years to come.' I mean for them it's just about this year, this semester and so that goal of sort of lifelong learning maybe just doesn't enter into their consideration because they just can't picture it (GI).

Unlike the African-American students and Latina student, several of the lower level White students in the West High focus group confirmed the teachers' perceptions by describing how they had enrolled in two years for college applications, but that was enough. Zoe (W, WH) stated: "I just wanted to take the minimum and get out. I don't like it" (FG). Zoe's comment is, unfortunately, not uncommon for students as many tend to view foreign language as a "hurdle" they must cross for college acceptance. Once they have completed two years, they need not suffer through additional foreign language

courses (Reagan & Osborn, 2002). The urban teachers added that, in general, their students are in search of "easier" coursework for their senior year. They claimed that students perceive that if they have met their two year requirement, they have the opportunity to enroll in other coursework that may not be as challenging. The urban teachers were also unconvinced that counselors inform all students of the type of coursework necessary for success in the future. As the teachers point out, the students' attitudes toward language study can lead to attrition after level two. Although increased acceptance to a variety of colleges and universities was certainly the impetus for many of the students to learn a foreign language, students at both schools discussed other benefits of foreign language study that were worthwhile and influenced their enrollment decisions.

Students at both schools and in both lower and upper levels of Spanish perceived that knowledge of another language and culture would also positively impact their ability to compete in the job market. Students were astute in this perception, as proficiency in a foreign language has been shown to lead to an increase in opportunities and salary in the workplace (Bagnato, 2005; Ezarik, 2001). Two of the lower level Spanish African-American students at West High, Kutrice and Latricia, stressed several times that the driving factor of their foreign language enrollment was their belief that it would lead to success and advancement in the future. Although some of the lower level students did not plan to continue to study the language, they could envision how the knowledge of Spanish could be very useful in the job market. Liliana, a heritage learner and upper level student at East High, hoped to work as a translator, and several of the upper level East

High seniors planned to work in healthcare. They could imagine that their Spanish skills would be useful in these careers. The upper level African-American student at West High indicated on her questionnaire that she continued foreign language study because she planned to study medicine and had a desire to be able to use Spanish with her patients someday. Several of the upper level White students at the suburban school had similar perceptions about the usefulness of Spanish in their future careers, and agreed that they, too, had a desire to continue their language study in college. Latricia (AA, WH), a lower level student, impressed on the other students in her focus group the importance of realizing that they could never be completely sure what they would need to know in the real world.

> I feel like what makes me want to continue is the fact that I can accomplish more by just knowing another language. I can accomplish more. And you can never know for sure what you or how you're going to use what you learned in the real world…So, that's what makes me want to move on [to the next level]. And also the fact that I can connect to other people. To me, that's important and that's what makes me want to move on (FG).

Knowing a Foreign Language Is Useful Within Students' Communities and Around the World

The utilitarian nature of knowing another language was mentioned by many students as a benefit. Upper level students, Robin (L, WH) and Brandon (W, WH) pointed out that they can imagine using Spanish in a meaningful way, unlike pre-calculus, whose usefulness was more difficult to conceive. In questionnaires, students in

all levels and of all ethnic backgrounds reported that one reason for their enrollment was due to their perception that Spanish is a common language in their own communities. At the urban school, five of the 10 lower level Asian-American students shared on their questionnaires that they enrolled in Spanish to be able to speak with and understand their Latino friends. During the focus groups and interviews, urban African-American and East African students also pointed to the usefulness of knowing Spanish because the Latino students often used Spanish to communicate with each other; the students in the lower level had a desire to understand them and be included in the conversations.

Lower level Spanish students at East High shared in focus groups and interviews that in their communities, they all know Spanish speakers. Although many of the students did not feel confident enough in their skills to use the language with native speakers, some of the students said that they work with Spanish speakers and having a knowledge of the language is good because (a) they sometimes recognize words they hear, which they enjoy and (b) they feel more connected to their co-workers and have developed relationships with them. One of the Spanish teachers, Susan (EH), mentioned that Hmong students' parents used to steer their children away from studying Spanish and toward French because within the community, the Hmong parents wanted to maintain a social status one rung above Latinos, and they perceived French as a higher status language than Spanish. In recent times, Hmong parents have been engaged in business with Latinos, thus, they have begun to encourage their children to study Spanish as a means of helping their families' businesses. This has caused an increase in Hmong students' Spanish enrollment, and several of the urban Asian-American students,

particularly in upper level classes, alluded to their ability to use the language with Latinos in their community and appreciated being able to interact in a meaningful way with Spanish-speakers.

The upper level East High students, who were mainly heritage learners, asserted that learning Spanish allowed them the chance to help others in their communities who may not speak English well. They stated that this was an important outcome of their language skills. Several of the upper level White students at West High agreed that providing assistance to those who do not speak English well is important and described how they had developed empathy for English Language Learners as a result of being a language learner themselves. The students' ability and desire to use Spanish in their own communities is noteworthy as the empathy demonstrated by both the Latino and White students and their willingness to assist immigrants is necessary for the future of the United States (Jackson & Malone, 2009). Moreover, a study of Latino heritage learners provided evidence that students who are able to positively use the language in their community gain both higher academic performance and stronger self-efficacy (Buriel, et al., 1998). The Latino students in the upper levels were successful students, had academic goals and were proud to be able to use the language well.

The other benefit mentioned by the majority of students was the possibility of travel. Many of the students of all levels at both schools believed that knowing another language would allow them to realize their goals of traveling the world and experiencing other cultures. For these students, the concept of being able to travel someday and use the language within a real-life context was very motivational and a major benefit of

language study. They shared that it gave them a connection to the real world and a world view. Camila (EH, L) stated: "I think it's beneficial because it opens your eyes up to the world..." (GI). The students at both schools who discussed this benefit were certain that language study had made them more open-minded. This perception is corroborated by research evidence. Cutshall, 2004/2005 and Morales-Jones, 2001 report that students have the potential to grow personally from the study of a foreign language and develop an understanding of their role as a citizen.

Foreign Language Study Affords Students Personal Benefits

All of the students described the social interaction that is afforded them through language learning. They enjoyed the friendships they had cultivated with others in their language classes, and the upper level students at both schools revealed that they knew each other well after being in language classes together year after year. These students also pointed out that it is fun to be able to communicate with a friend in Spanish in front of non-Spanish speakers, especially when they want to leave others out of their conversation. Wesely's (2009) research on immersion students demonstrates that students use the target language as a secret language or as a code with their friends, leading to increased motivation to continue learning the language. Urban lower level students did not cite this benefit, but they were in level one and had only been in class for two months together. The rest of the students in the study had known each other in Spanish classes for at least one year and enjoyed this added benefit of knowing another language.

The teachers and students also pointed out that students are drawn to study a language that reflects their own cultural identities. Latino students at both the urban and suburban schools reported in questionnaires and interviews that honing their Spanish skills made them feel a greater connection to their ethnicity and their families, and thus was a major impetus for their initial and continued enrollment. Six of the 10 urban Latino students and the upper level suburban Latina student indicated on questionnaires that they enrolled in Spanish to improve reading, writing and speaking skills. Stacy, a Latina student at West High, was adopted from Paraguay and had a deep desire to gain proficiency in Spanish and learn about the language and culture of her birth parents. She talked about how her parents were White and she was raised in White culture, but by learning Spanish, she felt connected to her heritage. Stacy's desire to learn about her background is significant and is supported by research evidence about various types of heritage learners. Van Deusen-Scholl (1998) differentiates between heritage learners, who have some degree of bilingualism and learners with heritage motivation, who seek to connect to their heritage through learning the target language (cited in Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). In the case of learners with heritage motivation, such as Stacy, Vincent Giangreco's (2000) autobiography highlights the importance of satisfying one's identity through the formation of a connection to one's heritage language and culture (cited in Carreira, 2004). Heritage learners who have little knowledge of their heritage language often possess the desire to learn about who they are, and the opportunity to formulate their identities is a motivating factor (Carreira, 2004). This evidence is congruent with

Stacy's statement that her drive to learn about her heritage kept her motivated when she encountered difficult aspects of learning Spanish.

In contrast to Stacy, many of the Latino students at East High had grown up exposed to the Spanish language, but the opportunity to further develop their Spanish skills gave them more confidence in their own communities to use the language on a regular basis. Robin (L, WH), a heritage learner who spoke Spanish at home with her mother and had a strong desire to be connected to her heritage language and culture, stated that her goal was to be truly bilingual, which she acknowledged would take time. According to the Japanese teachers, Asian-American students also demonstrated a desire to learn a language that reflected their Asian heritage. As a result, lower level Japanese classes were comprised of almost entirely Asian-American students, minus perhaps two or three students who were either White or African-American students. They believed that although very few of the Asian-American students were of Japanese descent, they were drawn to the language because it reflected their Asian heritage and the students could more easily connect to the language and culture. Carreira (2004) supports this finding and asserts that it is of little consequence if the target language is an exact match for the ethnic identity of the learner. She cites an example of African-American learners who may choose to learn an African language even if it is not the same African language of their heritage; the learners still reap the benefit of tapping into their identities. In regard to Japanese classes at East High that were comprised of predominantly Asian-American students, Dave, a Japanese teacher, expressed that many of his non-Asian students in the lower levels were intimidated by the overwhelming number of Asian-

American students. Therefore, retention of these students was difficult, and the Asian-American students' motivation to connect with a language that best reflected their heritage appeared to have an adverse effect on other students. From Dave's perspective, non-Asian students seemed to feel that they did not belong in the Japanese classes. This is not uncommon, as students tend to gravitate toward classes in which they are not the minority. Faircloth and Hamm (2005) provide evidence of this in their study of four different ethnic groups of students – White, African-American, Latino, and Asian-American. The students in that study ranked relationships and interpersonal connections as highly important among all four groups in relation to their feelings of belonging in school, and thus, their engagement in school. This finding may also reflect a form of stereotype threat (Steele, 1999) in which students who are not of Asian-American descent may perceive that, in comparison with Asian-American students, they are at a disadvantage and may not succeed in the same capacity. Therefore, they may opt for French or Spanish classes in which the demographics are more diverse.

Although Latino students and Asian-American students tended to enroll in foreign language courses that allowed them to best connect with their cultural identities, two of the lower level African-American students at West High stressed that as foreign language learners, they had a desire to make a connection to others around the world. Kutrice and Latricia regarded this as an important characterization of themselves as language learners. Although many of the Latino students discussed the importance of connecting to their own heritage, Kutrice and Latricia were the only students in the study to regard themselves as possessing a stronger desire than non-language learners to develop

connections to others around the world. The development of connections to others described by these students is often identified as an important benefit of language learning (Cutshall, 2004/2005; Morales-Jones, 2001). It is noteworthy that two lower level African-American students revealed in their focus group that such connections were one of the main reasons for their continued enrollment.

Finally, students talked about the joy of language learning and their desire to fulfill of a dream of speaking multiple languages. The upper level students, in particular, at both schools shared that they have enjoyed gaining proficiency in another language and believed it would serve them well. An upper level Asian-American student at the urban school, Chan, stated that although all of these benefits are important, her decision to enroll in a foreign language was due to one main benefit: the joy of language learning. She thought, initially, that the main reason she should learn a language was for her college applications, but she changed her mind as she made the decision to continue language study past level two: "I think it's fun learning a different language. I really do. I didn't really do it for college applications, but I find it real interesting" (EH, FG). Several of the students, including Emma at West High and Camila at East High were studying a third language, French, in addition to Spanish. Emma (W, WH) stated, "I really want to fulfill my dream of becoming fluent in Spanish and French." In the lower level classes, both East African students at East High, Ayana and Nadif, commented that they enjoyed learning Spanish and wanted to gain proficiency in the language, with plans to continue to at least level four. In contrast to the lower level White students at West High, the lower level African-American students had a strong desire to be proficient in

the language and shared that they would continue as long as necessary until they felt they could function comfortably in the language and be able to use it in a meaningful way. Both female African-American students in one of the lower level focus groups at East High, Desiree and Rakesha, felt similarly; they expressed an enjoyment for learning Spanish and had a desire to become proficient in the language. Desiree stated: "I really, really want to like finish, and be like really super good at Spanish." In both upper and lower levels of Spanish, several students considered the personal benefits of foreign language to be a factor in their enrollment decisions, but the students also pointed to the importance of encouragement from others.

Encouragement and Lack of Encouragement from Family, Friends and School Staff

At both schools and in both levels of the language, several students discussed the role that family and friends have played in motivating and encouraging them to study a foreign language. An examination of the questionnaires showed that of the 79 students who returned the questionnaire, 44 students received encouragement from family members or friends. That left 35 students who reported receiving no encouragement from anyone within or outside of the school. Additionally, 22 of 37 White students, all 15 Asian-American, all 13 Latino students and both East African students revealed in questionnaires that they had family members who spoke a foreign language. In interviews and focus groups, students frequently referred to these family members as a source of inspiration for choosing to learn a foreign language without being prompted to do so. African-American students, however, were least likely to have family members who spoke a foreign language; only three of the 11 African-American students indicated

that they had family members who spoke a language besides English. These data are an important consideration in examining the encouragement students received to enroll in a foreign language.

Overall, Latino students at both schools reported having the most support both in and outside of school. The urban Latino students, however, were the only student participants, who indicated in questionnaires and focus groups that they had received a great deal of encouragement from school counselors. In every other case (including White students),,if students received support to study a foreign language, it stemmed primarily from family or friends, not from school counselors. When asked specifically about conversations they may have had with counselors about foreign language study, none of the students, other than the upper level urban Latino students, were able to state that counselors pointed them in the direction of foreign language study. In addition, Latino students at both schools were the most vocal about the role their families and friends have had in encouraging them to enroll initially in the language and to continue their enrollment. Table 4.5 illustrates the number of students of each ethnicity in total from both schools received support from family members, friends, counselors and teachers. There were no distinctive patterns in the two different schools; therefore, data from both schools are reported together. Some of the students received encouragement from multiple sources; this is reflected in the table.

Table 4.5 – Encouragement To Study a Foreign Language

	White Students n = 37	African-American students n = 11	Latino students n = 13	Asian-American students n = 15	East African Students n = 2
Total number of students encouraged	23	5	10	6	0
Students encouraged by teachers	4	0	1	1	0
Students encouraged by family members	23	4	6	4	0
Students encouraged by friends	9	1	1	1	0
Students encouraged by counselors	2	0	6	0	0

Although approximately 2/3 of White students received encouragement from someone, it could be argued that some of these students may have benefited from additional support, especially from counselors and teachers because several of the White students were discouraged about foreign language study by level two and unmotivated to continue their study of the language. Other students lacking encouragement were African-American students, Asian-American students, and East-African students. At both schools, neither of the upper level African-American students indicated they were encouraged by anyone to learn a language. At the time of the study, the African-American student at the suburban school had dropped Spanish IV and the African-

American student at the urban school reported that she would not continue to Spanish V. Furthermore, half of the lower level African-American students at both schools were not given any encouragement from family, friends, or counselors. A previous study of African-American students in foreign language classes provided support for this finding; counselors admitted in an interview that they tended not to encourage African-American students to enroll in foreign language study (Glynn, 2007). The reported lack of encouragement given to African-American students in this study suggests the possibility of a similar pattern in both the urban and suburban environments. While the lower level suburban African-American students in focus groups shared positive perspectives about language learning and planned to continue their enrollment, most of the lower level urban African-American students shared in focus groups that they would not choose to continue past either level I or level II of Spanish. These students held a perception that one or two years of foreign language was satisfactory. It seems possible that African-American students are adversely affected by the lack of encouragement given to them, particularly by counselors and teachers. In contrast to the African-American students, counselors made an effort to discuss foreign language study with Latino students and to encourage them to study Spanish. The Latino students were routinely steered toward levels three and beyond by counselors; this may have been because they were typically heritage learners and the counselors perceived that it would be a good fit. The foreign language teachers stated that they welcomed this practice because the Latino students tended to be genuinely interested in developing more formal Spanish knowledge, and the Latino numbers aided their enrollment. According to the students, the counselors, unfortunately,

did not extend the same encouragement to other students. Like African-American students, Asian-American students reported being largely unsupported by counselors. The majority of Asian-American students at the urban school, who do comprise the majority of students at East High, received far less encouragement for language study from their families and friends than other students and no encouragement from counselors or other adults in the school. Many of the lower level Asian-American students might have benefited from additional support, as they discussed their lack of confidence to succeed in Spanish during the focus groups. Finally, the East African students at East High received no encouragement to learn Spanish. Both students had already gained proficiency in the English language and spoke Somali and Oromo at home with their families, which seemed to give them added confidence in learning Spanish. Despite the lack of encouragement from others, these two lower level Spanish students appeared to be the most excited of all the lower level urban students to learn another language and continue to upper levels.

Interestingly, the lower level students at East High were the only students to describe how their friends provided encouragement to get them through the difficult aspects of language learning, which enhanced their experience. Many of the students in the study talked about their enjoyment of being with their friends in class, especially as they progressed through upper levels of the language. Research provides evidence that a sense of belonging and being known by teachers is a vital part of many students' school experiences; it can lead to better retention in certain coursework and increased academic success (Bracey 1997; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). In addition, interaction with fellow

students has been shown to have a positive correlation to students' experiences in class, allowing students to engage more fully and share ideas (Nieto, 2010; Phelan, et al., 1992). In the case of the lower level urban students, friends played a role in their foreign language enrollment and possible retention.

The teachers in the study shared in their group interviews that they aspired to find new means of providing encouragement and positive influence for their students. The teachers perceived that their attempts to encourage students through one-on-one conversations and curricular changes have increased retention among their students. Anne mentioned excitedly that one of her French IV classes had more diversity than she had ever seen in a level four class. She hoped that perhaps that was an indication that the French program was making gains in appealing to students of varied ethnic backgrounds. From level two to three, Susan and Brian, the Spanish teachers, had seen better retention than in the past. Brian stated that their program made an effort to keep standards high and to encourage students to reach the goals set by their foreign language department. Moreover, Brian discussed his perception of the importance of providing additional encouragement to African-American students, in particular, and affirmed that it was not unusual for him to push his African-American students more than his other students. He asserted that this was important because so few of their lower level African-American students continue their foreign language study. Susan acknowledged that Brian's students, particularly African-American students, were positively influenced by him and wanted to remain in his classes. It is important to note that although the teachers perceived that they were encouraging their students to continue study of the language,

very few of the student participants reported receiving encouragement from their teachers. This vast difference in students and teachers' perceptions of the encouragement given to students is troublesome and raises questions about the impact that teachers actually had on the students.

It is also troubling that half of the African-American students reported that they were not encouraged by anyone, and it begs the question of how many other African-American students may have enrolled in foreign language courses and/or continued enrollment if they had been encouraged to do so. In each of the upper level classes, only one African-American student was enrolled; neither student reported receiving encouragement to learn a language. Perhaps increased and sustained encouragement could have lead to more than one African-American student in those classes. It is important to note that the majority of the students, regardless of ethnicity or school, received no encouragement from counselors and teachers. This is unfortunate considering that research has demonstrated that counselors have the potential to make a significant impact on students. In a study about African-American males mattering to others in schools, nine African-American students discussed the positive impact that engaged and involved counselors had on their ability to succeed in school. One student remarked that his current counselor, unlike counselors he had in the past, "gives a crap" while another student considered his counselor to be his "school mom" (Tucker et al., 2010, p. 139-140). Research also illustrates that like counselors, teachers can play an important role in students' attitudes toward school. In a study of 22 elementary and 21 high school African-American students, the students reported in open-ended

questionnaires that encouragement and praise from teachers was vital to their academic success (Tucker et al., 2000). Meanwhile, Faircloth and Hamm (2005) assert that positive relationships with teachers are a part of students' feelings of self-efficacy and belonging at school. Given the overwhelming lack of encouragement from school staff, students in this study appear to be devalued by counselors and teachers, in particular. These findings demonstrate a general apathy among staff in encouraging all students to enroll in coursework such as foreign language. Without the opportunity to partake in such coursework, it is impossible for both students and staff to know if students will find success in foreign language coursework or enjoy learning a foreign language.

Ultimately, the impact of encouragement from others did play a role in students' initial and continued enrollment. At West High, students had the option of enrolling in a foreign language in 7th grade, but as an elective, it was in competition with other electives such as art or music. Ashley (WH, W) discussed how as a 7th grader, she had considered signing up for art, but her parents had a serious conversation with her about her future and which courses would be most beneficial in reaching her goals. They weighed the options together, talked about Ashley's interests that might lead to a career, and in the end, she decided to enroll in Spanish. These conversations with her parents about the future have led her to appreciate her study of a language and continue it through level IV. Similarly, Emma (WH, W), was dependent on her mother to help her gain the motivation to continue her study of the language. She disliked her level I and II experiences and wanted to discontinue her language study, but her mother encouraged her to enroll in level III. To Emma's surprise, she began to enjoy language learning and it became an

integral part of her education. She was grateful that her mother pushed and motivated her to continue. Brandon (WH, W) and Robin (WH, L) revealed in their group interview that their mothers were simply forceful about the necessity of gaining proficiency in a second language. As a result, both students had remained in Spanish through level IV and had a desire to study abroad the following year in college. Meanwhile, several Latino students at East High discussed how their families have kept them on track academically and encouraged an education that included foreign language study. These students shared that they have faced some difficult times due to moving and changing schools many times, therefore, have been dependent on their mothers, especially, for support. Camila (EH, L) stated that she had always talked with her mother about her dream to travel the world; therefore, her mother believed it was important for Camila to gain proficiency in Spanish and to learn a third language, French. According to Camila, without her mother, her academic success would not be possible: "She's the one that keeps me going every day" (GI). Given the pivotal role that encouragement from others played in students' enrollment, it seems that it is important to develop a means for encouraging more students to remain in language study and to provide additional support in schools for students who do not receive outside support and encouragement, such as many of the African-American, Asian-American and East African students in this study.

Confidence, Determination and Persistence in Language Learning

Several of the focus groups and interviews yielded responses that described upper level students as having more confidence in themselves and in their knowledge of the language. Lower level students perceived that the upper level students had confidence in

their abilities to continue, while the upper level students themselves shared that they had gained more personal confidence because of their knowledge of another language. At the time of the study, many of the lower level urban students, because they were in level one, had not yet gained confidence in their ability to learn a foreign language. Meanwhile, the upper level students at East High, the urban school, stated specifically that knowing another language made them "feel good." Clara (L) commented: "It helps build your confidence" (EH, FG). This finding, particularly among Latino and Asian-American students at East High, is supported by evidence from other literature that among students of color foreign language study can increase students' self-confidence (Hayes, 1996; Tharps, 2008; Wilberschied & Dassier, 1995).

Many of the students at both schools and in both levels also talked about determination and persistence. This was a major theme for many of the groups in trying to describe foreign language learners and themselves as language learners. Several students at West High provided examples of their determination and persistence. One lower level African-American student, Kutrice, had already completed level two of Spanish the previous year, but was not confident in her ability to continue, therefore, decided to re-take Spanish two. At the time of the study, she affirmed it was a good decision and would benefit her in level three. She was not ashamed that she had repeated level two and explained that she was determined to learn the language well and to ensure that she understood the material. Two other students at West High, Stacy, a lower level Latina student, and Emma, an upper level White student, stated that learning Spanish was not an easy task, and at times, they struggled, but they retained the determination and

persistence necessary to succeed in the class and continue to the next level. One of the lower level White students, Zoe, asked Stacy why she would continue her enrollment if the class is difficult for her. Why not drop the class? Stacy (L, WH) countered that she would not drop the class because she is determined to learn the language and wants to overcome the difficult aspects of language learning. She described how enrollment choices in coursework are influenced by students' academic persistence:

> I think there's a different determination level with the classes you choose. Like if you choose a language, there's a certain boundary that's crossed that shows that you actually want to do more (L, FG).

Similarly, Emma (W, WH), who was in an upper level class stated:

> I have a lot of motivation to learn Spanish, but it doesn't come easily for me. It's something I study a lot…But, so it's something that I really want, but it's not an easy thing for me to do (W, FG).

Students at the urban school also demonstrated their persistence to learn a foreign language. Three lower level Asian-American students were certain they would continue to upper levels. Kia (AS, EH) explained her drive to continue: "Like I do plan on going into higher level – when I find something that I like or that I'm passionate about, I want to learn everything about it" (FG). Xi (AS, EH) agreed and described how it is it not in her nature to quit before she has mastered something because she comes from a determined family. Lower level African-American students at West High, Kutrice and Latricia, as well as lower level African-American students at East High, Desiree and Rakesha, provided similar descriptions of their persistence and stressed that they would

continue the language despite the difficulty of learning Spanish that they have encountered.

The upper level students at both schools spoke the most about the relationship between enrollment and persistence. They felt that they embodied more determination and persistence than other students because from one level to the next, they watched as students dropped the class. They opted to continue, which they perceived as having more motivation to succeed than other students in the two schools. Several of the upper level students at both schools also described foreign language students as risk-takers. Maria (W, WH), an upper level student remarked:

> It's not easy to do a language. Most people don't stick with a language – college you need three years, but I think it's risky, it's time consuming, it's hard (GI).

Likewise, another upper level student Dahn (AS, EH):

> I think they're more willing to, like, put themselves out there – I don't the know the word, but, like, they're willing to, like, learn more things and, like, even if they don't know it, they want to learn it (FG).

Students at all levels in both schools demonstrated that confidence, determination and persistence in language learning can positively impact students' drive to remain in language classes and continue foreign language study. Prior research on students' motivation to learn a language provides an explanation of the students' perception of the importance of confidence and persistence. Tremblay and Gardner (1995) found in their study of secondary French students, that the students' self-efficacy (self-reported as a feeling of confidence), or belief that they could accomplish the task of learning a

language, greatly impacted the students' motivation and persistence to continue. While many of the students demonstrated an ability to persist in language learning, they also described several major stumbling blocks that can discourage them from continuing language study.

Foreign Language Learning is Perceived As Difficult, Time Consuming and Unnecessary

Most of the students described the same negative aspects of language learning, regardless of school, language level or ethnicity. Firstly, the majority of the students talked about the difficulty of learning grammar in Spanish. Most of the students found the grammar to be tedious and difficult to produce correctly when writing or speaking. The majority of students, especially the lower level students, also found spelling to be difficult and a turn-off to language learning. They asserted that due the new concepts related to both grammar and spelling, not to mention, the necessity of learning vocabulary, there was a great deal of memorization involved with language learning. Previous studies on students' perceptions of language learning illustrate that students tend to feel discouraged by language study due to their perceived difficulty of learning the language and grammar instruction tends to be a major drawback for students (Glynn, 2007, 2008; Moore, 2005; Tse, 2000).

Overall, students at both schools in both levels of foreign language agreed that language learning was challenging and spoke at length about the difficulty of foreign language courses as students continued from one level to the next. Lower level urban students of all ethnic backgrounds believed that although they could be successful in

level one, they were not sure whether they would have the same experience as they continued. The level two students at West High agreed that level two was much more difficult in comparison to level one, and according to Kutrice (AA, WH), their teacher was “leaving students behind” in their level two class. Will (W, WH) concurred and said that it seemed as though the teachers designed level one to be “easy” so that students would feel motivated to enroll in level two, but that they made level two significantly more difficult to discourage students from enrolling level three. Stacy (L, WH) commented that, as a result, “everyone drops after level two.” The level one students’ comments at East High mirrored those of the level two students’ perceptions. They agreed that everyone opts out of foreign language study after level two because of their perception that level three is substantially more difficult. This perspective led many of the lower level students at East High to state that they were certain that they could not imagine enrolling in level three or beyond. In response to whether or not he would continue, Demaine (AA, EH) answered, “No. For me, I could barely understand level one” (FG). He stated that the course had been difficult and he was not confident that he would succeed in the next level. Three Asian-American students in one focus group stated that although they planned to continue to level two, they would re-evaluate the situation before enrolling in level three. Despite their enjoyment of the different activities the class offered, they were not confident that they would succeed at level three or beyond. Emma (W, WH), an upper level student, also acknowledged that level two increased in difficulty, and that level three was significantly more difficult than level two. She struggled with the transition between levels two and three and felt, at times, very

discouraged in her language study. Reagan and Osborn (2002) argue that students' perceived difficulty of foreign language study is a significant issue in today's foreign language programs and leads to attrition. The perceptions held by students such as Demaine are troubling; he enjoyed several aspects of the Spanish class, but struggled to learn the grammar, which caused him to question whether or not he could continue. Reagan and Osborn (2002) confirm that foreign language courses are designed to weed students out from one level to the next, but in weeding students out, teachers lose students like Demaine, who may have had the potential to become an excellent foreign language student. As students pointed out, the increased difficulty from one level to the next led many of them to question their ability to succeed and also caused several students to feel discouraged from enrolling in the next level. The upper level students at both schools supported the lower level students' perceptions of language learning as difficult and stressed that it impacts retention rates. The West High students noted that they watched from one year to the next as many of the classmates with whom they began foreign language study in levels one and two opted out of Spanish class.

A few students offered other perspectives that addressed the difficulty of language learning. Ashley (W, WH) suggested that foreign language study is, in part, more difficult because students are much more dependent on the teacher in order to gain understanding. She explained that it is difficult to open up the book and teach oneself the concept; therefore, if one does not have an effective teacher, the language learning process can be even more difficult. Meanwhile, Ayana (EA) at East High tried to impress on her focus group that some aspects of foreign language study seem difficult

and require more time, but as a student progresses, s/he grows accustomed to the language and it becomes easier. Ayana had experienced second language learning, as she spoke Oromo at home and had to gain proficiency in English when she moved to the United States. This seemed to give her more confidence in her ability to adjust to the language and learn it well, especially because she was looking forward to continuing her study of Spanish through upper levels. Research supports Ayana's confidence and success in learning Spanish; bilinguals are able to more easily apply language learning skills from one language to the next, making learning a subsequent language easier (Science Daily, Feb. 1, 2011; Thomas, 1992). Additionally, several of the upper level Asian-American and Latino students at East High pointed out that although foreign language study may be difficult or time consuming, they believe that when students reflect on the opportunity to have learned a language, they will be able to see how it benefited them. A lower level Latina student, Stacy, was frustrated by the students' attitudes about discontinuing their language study after level two. She chastised them and told them that it was a "waste of your time."

> You went through all of this to learn this much, then, you just quit. You're not going to learn any more than you already have, and you don't know the full language. You took Spanish, but that's not really saying much if you can't speak it. That's how I feel " (FG).

Lower level students at both schools revealed foreign language study, due to its difficult nature, required more of their focus and study time than some of their other coursework. All of the students in lower level focus groups felt this was the case, minus

one White student at West High. The Asian-American students in upper levels of Spanish at East High, along with several upper level White students at West High, agreed with the lower level students that their foreign language studies require more of their study time outside of class.

In regard to the characterization of foreign language as time consuming, the students also perceived that it requires a great deal of time to acquire proficiency in the language. The lower level urban students commented that as level one students, they have learned new words and were beginning to grasp the concept of the Spanish language, but they described how when they left the classroom and heard native speakers in the hallway it made them realize how little of the language they knew and how much they had to learn. They found this disappointing and discouraging. Two upper level students, Camila (L, EH) and Maria (W, WH), pointed out that foreign language is a course in which there is always something to be learned, and one is never truly finished learning a language. In Maria's focus group with Ashley (W, WH) and Elise (W, WH), they discussed this aspect of the manner in which foreign language learning is time consuming.

> Interviewer: You feel like it's time consuming?
>
> Maria: Yeah.
>
> Elise: I feel like it's the least time consuming thing I have. I feel like it's the break in my schedule. I loved it because I've had Spanish all year first block, so, it's a nice way to wake up in the morning.

Maria: Yeah, I guess I agree with that work-wise, but the thing is, there's always something to be learned [in foreign language]. It's not like all of a sudden you graduate the class and you're a master at this.

Elise: Yeah, like with a math class, assuming you do well in it, you've learned all of the topics in that class.

Ashley: You know how to do all of the problems you've been presented.

Elise: Even if you know all of the verb conjugations, you're still going to run into words you don't know.

Elise's reference to "verb conjugations" should be noted. The very fact that Elise chose to focus on learning verb conjugations as a means of developing proficiency and knowledge about the language, demonstrated the grammar focus of her upper level Spanish class. Throughout the study, students struggled to describe language activities that did not include some form of grammar instruction or memorization; these findings are discussed further in the next section of Chapter 4.

The nature of foreign language study is such that it does require a great deal of time to acquire a proficiency level that would allow students to function comfortably in the language, but several students in this study held a misperception of how long they would have remain in foreign language coursework to reach their proficiency goals, which many students described as "bilingual" or "fluent." Hien (AS, EH) believed, for example, that it would be important to re-evaluate the situation at level two and if he felt like he needed more language study, he would consider continuing, but if not, he would stop with level two: "If I feel like I'm good, I'm satisfied, I'll just stay there" (FG).

When asked what he meant by "satisfied," he explained that he would be content with his language skills when he could carry on a conversation with a native Spanish-speaker. This student holds a naïve view of language learning because, in general, there is a lack of understanding about proficiency (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001; Panetta, 1999; Reagan & Osborn, 2002). He hoped to be "satisfied" by level two, but his proficiency level would certainly not allow him to hold a conversation with a native speaker. A recent CASLS (2010) report illustrated that students only achieve a novice-high or intermediate-low proficiency level by the third or fourth year of language study, meaning that students are very limited in their language proficiency, typically unable to produce much beyond memorized, predictable phrases.

The West High lower and upper level students further theorized that students discontinued language study because it is an unnecessary elective. Upper level student, Sean (W, WH), pointed out that students drop the class because they realize that foreign language is unnecessary and they would likely never use the language in a meaningful way. Zoe (W, WH), a lower level student, also stated that foreign language teachers do not encourage all of their students to continue. Instead, they advise students to consider what is truly necessary for their future goals. For example, if students were college bound and already had two years of a language, Zoe explained how even her foreign language teachers told their classes that it was not necessary to continue beyond level two. At West High, the goal appeared to be seat time to earn the necessary credits for college entrance rather than a proficiency goal. According to Zoe's statement, one might be inclined to conclude that the teachers believed it was unnecessary for the majority of

their students to continue to upper level foreign language classes. As reported earlier in the chapter, however, the teacher participants expressed a desire to increase retention in the upper level classes. Yet the lower level suburban students' perceptions did not reflect that desire on the part of the teachers. It is not uncommon, according to Reagan and Osborn (2002), for teachers to weed out weaker students to retain the strongest students in upper levels. Samantha (W, WH), another lower level student, also perceived foreign language class to be unnecessary, and she had little desire to put effort into a language class, especially given the rumors surrounding the difficulty of level three:

> Right now I'm not signed up [for level three] and I'm still debating whether or not to because I don't need it and I already have a really hard schedule, so, it depends. It depends on how my schedule gets organized…I just kind of want an easier class compared to the rest of the classes in my schedule, compared with the hard ones I'm taking" (II).

In general, lower level White students at the suburban school described in focus groups that foreign language was not as useful as other classes, especially in regard to their future goals and post-secondary studies; this was in contrast to their African-American and Latino classmates, who discussed at length the utilitarian value and personal benefits of learning a language. These White students could envision few situations in which they would use the language meaningfully. The lower level urban students of varied ethnic backgrounds shared a similar perspective about their future plans to study a language. Marcus (AA, EH) made the statement "I think two years is enough" (FG), and explained that after two years, he had met the college entrance requirement and did not need further

language study. In the same focus group, one Asian-American student and three White students agreed with Marcus that they could not imagine continuing past level two and were unable to share experiences they have had that would motivate them to continue their language study.

In the description of their Spanish classes, it is interesting to note that none of the students of color pointed to a characterization of their language classes as Eurocentric. Although many scholars argue or present findings showing that the foreign language classroom is largely Eurocentric (Dahl, 2002; Guillaume, 1994; Moore, 2005; Osborn, 2006; Reagan & Osborn, 2002), only a few upper level Latino students at East High mentioned that they are, at times, frustrated when they are exposed to dialects of Spain, mainly *castellano*. The students took issue with the use of *castellano*, which was not spoken in their own communities, making it more difficult for the students to understand. Reagan and Osborn (2002) provide evidence that although there has been improvement, it is not unusual for Latino heritage learners to struggle with the Eurocentric nature of the language in many Spanish classes, as the standard tends to be *castellano* of Spain. In regard to the other students, a possible explanation for the lack of their attention to the Eurocentric nature of foreign language classes is that Spanish teachers at both schools included the ethnic diversity of Spanish-speakers in the curriculum, but it failed to stand out to students, and/or students of underrepresented populations are accustomed to curriculum in many content areas that does not reflect their cultural identities. Thus, Eurocentric curriculum is the norm, making it challenging for students to imagine anything different.

Research Question 2: How do teachers and students describe their foreign language classes? How does the ethnicity of the student relate to his/her experiences in foreign language study?

In this section of chapter four, I begin by presenting findings related to students' descriptions of language learning experiences in elementary and junior high schools. This provides a background of students' experiences, which is important in understanding their current experiences in their classes. The rest of this section is dedicated to teachers' and students' perceptions of their foreign language classes. They discussed both negative aspects of the class such as grammar instruction and positive aspects of the class that enhanced their experiences. The findings in this section are primarily from focus group and interview data with supporting evidence from questionnaires.

Students' Foreign Language Experiences in Elementary and Junior High

The majority of the student participants in this study did not have any formal foreign language study at the elementary level, and several students at East High indicated that their classes as English Language Learners were their exposure to second language study as elementary students. According to questionnaire data, only 20 of the 79 participants reported having experience learning a foreign language in elementary school. There were a few students who had experienced Spanish in a setting of once or twice per week for 40 minutes in the elementary school. Although these students did state that these short lessons in elementary school piqued their interest and made them more curious to learn about the Spanish language, there was little else remarkable about these experiences. Maria and Elise (W, WH) stated that their required elementary

Spanish experience created an interest in the language, but they were unable to remember any details of that experience.

Junior high, on the other hand, proved to be a more impressionable experience for many of the students. In both school districts, students had the option of taking two levels of a language at the junior high level. According to the questionnaire data, most lower level suburban students, 18 of 21, opted to learn a foreign language in junior high. These 18 students had either enrolled in a language other than Spanish or had completed level one of Spanish, but had little desire to begin level two of Spanish in the junior high. Thus, some of the students chose to re-enroll in Spanish I at the high school before continuing to level two or simply waited until high school to resume language learning in Spanish II. A few of the students who had opted for one year of a different language found that French or German was not a good option for them because they perceived that it lacked relevancy and usefulness; they chose to enroll in Spanish at the high school level. Dörnyei and Csizer (2002) explain that students' motivation to continue to learn a language is influenced by the students' perception of the language's purpose. If students regard the language as useful and important, it creates more motivation for the student to persist in the language.

Unlike the suburban lower level students who had wavered in their Spanish enrollment, beginning in the junior high, but discontinuing foreign language study until high school, most of the urban lower level students simply opted not to enroll in a foreign language at the junior high level. Only seven of the 22 lower level students at East High studied a foreign language at the junior high, although when asked in focus groups, most

students stated they had had the option to do so. In contrast, the upper level students at both schools began learning a foreign language when it was an option at the junior high level and continued through high school. All 21 of the suburban upper level students and 12 of the 15 urban upper level students began a foreign language in junior high. The remaining three urban upper level students were Latino and skipped the lower levels to begin in level three and beyond at the high school.

The lower and upper level West High students had strong sentiments about their experiences and stressed that teachers had played a large role in developing both negative and positive perceptions about foreign language learning. Overall, the majority of the lower level and upper level students described in focus groups and interviews that junior high language classes were frustrating, and they had negative experiences with the junior high Spanish teachers. In terms of lower level students' experiences, this manifested itself in an overwhelming desire to discontinue their language study, which the majority did. They felt that the teachers were at fault for causing them to cease their foreign language study in junior high and have to begin again in high school in order to earn two years of foreign language study for college entrance requirements.

The upper level students agreed with the lower level students' assessment of the language courses at the junior high, but articulated more clearly some of the issues. Several of the upper level students revealed that it was evident that their teachers had little interest in teaching Spanish to a room full of junior high students, and these students also had an awareness that their junior high teachers lacked oral proficiency and cultural knowledge. Emma (W, WH) described in an individual interview that she began Spanish

in 7th grade with a curiosity and excitement of the unknown as she had no prior foreign language experiences, but after one year of junior high Spanish, she had developed negative feelings about the language and was unmotivated to continue. According to her, she needed her mother to push her; otherwise, she would have discontinued her Spanish study. She discussed her experience in junior high:

> Emma: So, in Spanish II, it was mainly some of the teaching styles, but it was also my attitude. Like [my attitude] wasn't being open, but some of the teaching styles in the junior high, it was obvious that the teachers didn't want to be there, and they were getting frustrated really easily, and I know that it's junior high and we were all kind of crazy, but they didn't want us to do better, it wasn't an incentive for them. It was like, why am I here? I'm wasting my time (II).

Sean (W, WH) had spent one year in German in 7th grade, but chose not to re-enroll in 8th or 9th grade. He felt that the language was not contextualized and made relevant to the students. At that age, he struggled to see the necessity of learning a foreign language, thus opted for other electives. Although Krashen's (1981) "affective filter" has been widely criticized, and researchers recognize that language acquisition is dependent on the production of comprehensible output as well as input (Ellis, 2008; Swain, 1985), Krashen's notion of an affective filter may have played a role in these students' abilities to persist in junior high foreign language classes. According to Krashen's theory, the affective filter can impede students' learning if they have negative experiences learning a foreign language, which can cause a negative emotional reaction; the filter will rise, making it difficult for the students to acquire the language. Furthermore, Krashen (1981)

argued that it is necessary for students to connect with the material in order to maintain a low affective filter. The suburban students certainly struggled in their junior high foreign language classes to connect with the teachers and curriculum, and as a result, many failed to find success. These experiences in the junior high are a travesty; if lower level students had been exposed to a more positive foreign language experiences, they could have begun Spanish 2 or 3 in the high school rather than beginning again with Spanish 1. According to the students, the junior high teachers were very much at fault for their negative experiences.

In contrast to the suburban students, the upper level urban students had, overall, positive junior high foreign language experiences. They found that they were progressing well in the language and were told early on and often by their teachers that a continuation of the language would be beneficial to them as students. Jia (AS, EH) felt it was not an option to discontinue language study after level two, especially because she was doing well in the course and had learned that she may not be required to enroll in college level Spanish if she gained a certain proficiency level. Tou and Chan (AS, EH) expressed similar perceptions about their junior high experiences and became certain at an early age that their continuation of language study would prove to colleges and universities that they wanted to learn and be successful in their educations. Because they had not had negative lower level experiences, they had discovered in junior high that they enjoyed learning Spanish, developing a desire to travel to Spanish-speaking countries and to “get to know the world.” Due to their positive experiences in junior high foreign language classes, they determined that it was not an option to discontinue their

enrollment after level two. Thus, they began level three when they arrived at East High. The Latino students who began in junior high found in their first year of learning Spanish formally that they had improved in speaking with family and friends in the target language, which proved to them that it was important to continue. Several of them stated that they would even continue in college to further develop their written communication in the language. The Latino students experienced the benefits of language learning in junior high more immediately and expressed that their first experiences in Spanish classes were, overall, quite positive. The suburban students began foreign language study at West High with the hope of having a different experience than in junior high, while the urban students arrived at East High with a desire to continue the positive experiences they had in junior high. All of the students discovered that there were both positive and negative aspects to their high school foreign language courses that impacted their experiences and desire to continue the language.

The Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices Are Grammar and Textbook Focused

Regardless of students' foreign language level, school, or ethnicity, the heavy grammar focus that takes place in each of their classes was a major topic when asked to describe negative experiences with language learning. On questionnaires students at all levels indicated that their least favorite components of their foreign language classes were grammar and spelling, leading students to comment on questionnaires about the difficulty of their Spanish classes. Many of the students shared in focus groups and interviews that there was too much time spent in class learning grammar, much of which was not connected to curriculum in a meaningful way. The lower level suburban students talked

at length about the disjointed nature of the curriculum and how the grammar was never linked to the topic or theme of their chapter or unit. Specifically, lower level suburban students described how the class, as a whole, was unable to visualize the progression of the language because the grammar topics jumped around, leading to confused classmates:

> Zoe (W, WH): We keep going between past and present and then we have to do this worksheet and we don't know whether it's supposed to be past or present (FG).
>
> Stacy (L, WH): Yes. Everyone in our class is lost.

Robin (L, WH), an upper level student, echoed the lower level students' comments and stated, "…so far it's like all about grammar, grammar, grammar" (GI). Many of the 22 lower level urban students in all three of the focus groups described how they have a desire for more one-on-one help and time from the teacher due to the heavy grammar focus. The students felt confused about various grammar points, spelling and pronunciation. Some students commented that they would like to be provided with more written examples along with oral explanations, while other students stated that although they recognize that the teacher only has 53 minutes, they believed that much of the information, especially grammar points, were taught too quickly and the students were expected to move on to the next concept before developing a solid understanding of the previous one. Most importantly, the students at both schools in all levels felt frustrated that so much time was spent on grammar instead of relevant and useful vocabulary and phrases. The students' perception that the grammar focus took time away from learning useful language, led to comments such as Will's (W, WH): "The thing I don't like is that

the teacher, like, lectures us every single day. Like on the same [grammar point] for two weeks" (FG). Will provided a different perspective on grammar instruction; while the urban students perceived that grammar instruction moved too quickly, several of the White suburban students agreed with Will that grammar instruction tended to be redundant. Regardless of whether grammar instruction moved too quickly or too slowly, students expressed a great deal of frustration with the grammar focus of their Spanish classes.

In a discussion of how the curriculum impacts their foreign language programs and students' experiences, the two suburban teachers agreed with the students about the grammar focus and appeared to feel more pressure than the urban teachers concerning grammar instruction. The suburban teachers spent a great deal of time discussing the stress they are under to ensure that their students are taught every grammatical concept that is deemed necessary at each level. This pressure to follow a mandated scope and sequence has caused both Anne and Thomas to feel that the entire curriculum is dictated by grammar. Anne equated the foreign language program to mathematics, describing how foreign language is taught like one giant math problem. She stated that if students cannot solve the math problem, they cannot continue to the next level of the language. Thomas agreed that the program is very grammar intensive and he struggled to reconcile the way he was told to teach Spanish at West High with the way he believed students actually could or should learn a language. He was interested in giving students practical, real-life experiences while learning the intricacies of the language. Both Anne and Thomas described the guilt they experienced if they spent a class period doing something

different or cultural with the students because they needed to stay on the same schedule as their colleagues who were not engaging their learners in the same cultural activities, for example.

In addition, students at every level could not understand why they had to rely so heavily on the textbook and learn vocabulary from the textbook that seemed irrelevant to their ability to function in the target language and culture. In questionnaires, students were asked to list activities that are least helpful in their acquisition of the Spanish language. The two most common answers among all levels and ethnicities were worksheets or the workbook and the textbook or other textbook activities, such as the videos from the textbook companies. This is a common criticism of language classes regarding the irrelevant information students are forced to learn from the textbooks (Tse, 2000). Nieto (2010) compiled similar findings in interviews with diverse groups of students. They were very critical of teachers who tended to lecture and force students to memorize information and to rely heavily on the textbook for instruction. In this study, all of the students were able to give examples of vocabulary from the textbook, which they were required to memorize and use correctly on a test. For example, some of the upper level students had to learn the parts of a car and could not fathom how they would make use of that vocabulary in every day Spanish usage. Many of the students felt frustrated that they needed to memorize “useless” vocabulary from the textbook in order to succeed on quizzes and/or tests. Tou (AS, EH) stated that much of her upper level Spanish class was comprised of worksheets and memorization.

> I hate it when she gives us text. I don't know, like textbooks and worksheets and has us memorize worksheets. She doesn't really have to go through it. She doesn't really go through it; it's just memorize this, memorize that, quiz (FG).

Samantha (W, WH) made a similar comment about her lower level Spanish class. When asked how they learn the vocabulary, she said, "It's basically just look at it and memorize it for the test" (II). The East High and West High students' comments raise significant questions about the current approach to foreign language education and manner in which foreign language pedagogy in both schools was heavily reliant on the textbook. There are multiple issues with basing the curriculum on the textbook. One such issue to which the students alluded is that the way in which textbooks written for students in traditional foreign language classes tend to be based on "idealized and reductionist perceptions of adults" that do not take into account the range of interests and beliefs of today's teenagers (Osborn, 2006, p. 59). Thus, the language conveyed in most textbooks is not very relevant to the lives of the students. Furthermore, "[textbooks] fail to capture the imagination and interest of the students or to make students think and spurn current knowledge about cognitive information and linguistic processing" (Ornstein, 1994, p. 71).

As a result of the focus on grammar and the textbook, students in both levels at West High recognized that a disconnect existed between the language and culture in their classes. Overwhelmingly, students indicated that culture was lacking in the curriculum. Lower level students Zoe (W, WH) and Stacy (L, WH) described how they believed that language and culture should intersect in the curriculum.

Zoe: It's cool to see how you're learning about this language, but the language is also part of this culture. It feels like you're supposed to be taking this class about the culture, but you're only taught a tiny little chunk of it instead of the whole big thing that incorporates all of this (FG).

Stacy: Yeah, in order to see how the language and culture connect (FG).

The upper level students agreed with the lower level students, and Brandon described how due to the disjointed nature of the curriculum, it can be difficult to see how pieces of the language and culture work together. Ashley and Maria (W, WH) further described they way in which culture was taught in their upper level class. They shared the following during their group interview:

Ashley: We have little cultural projects, but it's not really like the culture is combined with the grammar and the vocab. I would like that.

Maria: It's like glue pictures to a poster board.

Ashley: That's not culture.

When students were asked what kinds of activities they had experienced that allowed them to explore the culture, some students did mention Spanish teacher Thomas' use of Cuban musicians and dancers who interacted with the class when they were level one students. Yet other students, such as Samantha (W, WH) said, "We watched a movie once." Students' descriptions of culture in the foreign language classroom illuminate the way in which culture has been reduced to a small, disconnected topic in the classroom. The result of this practice is that cultural awareness has become its own educational objective in the foreign language class, functioning independently from the language

rather than being at the core of language learning (Kramsch, 1993, in Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Furthermore, although culture occurs within a context, school curriculum often decontextualizes culture (Nieto, 2010). The students realized that culture and language are interwoven and that culture should extend beyond superficial topics, but in its current state, culture is often defined as holidays, food or music (Nieto, 2010). According to the ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning (2006) students should have the opportunity to explore the practices and perspectives of culture and not just products related to culture, as the students described. Practices include behaviors such as table manners or how one uses personal space (i.e., how to gauge proximity to an interlocutor), while the exploration of perspectives allow students to understand beliefs and values that may bring deeper meaning to the cultural products and practices introduced in classes. In order to form connections and develop a deep understanding of the culture, students should be allowed to progress beyond the "textbook blurb," conduct inquiry, and engage in activities that will lead them to a greater comprehension of themselves and others (Osborn, 2006).

In regard to revamping the program and shifting away from a grammar focus, Anne was certain that they would encounter a great deal of resistance from the other teachers. She described how it would be difficult to convince others to adopt a different model of foreign language education:

> But it's hard to see. I mean that requires a total revamping, which is really intimidating and it's turning things on end quite a bit. And you're going to meet a

> lot of resistance because the truth is that a lot of foreign language teachers, we love grammar (GI).

Anne pointed out that the program had always functioned this way; the teachers remained entrenched in the textbooks and traditional teaching practices because the program graduated successful students who continued to study a language at the post-secondary level. From Anne's perspective, this practice seemed to prove effective, thus it became the model for producing successful foreign language students. In addition, Anne made the following statement about the assessment of foreign language with a grammar intensive approach:

> It's easier to quantify their learning. It's easier to measure that you know when you're assessing it. It's harder to measure cultural appreciation or passion for the language" (GI).

Valencia's (2011) survey study of 415 teachers and 64 teacher educators provides evidence that this perception is not uncommon. Survey respondents were asked about the extent to which they focus on the culture standard in their language classes or in the preparation of pre-service teachers. The majority of the participants held a belief that integrating perspectives into the curriculum required the most effort. Furthermore, although teacher educators perceived that they emphasized perspectives more than products and practices, the teachers indicated that their pre-service programs focused least on teaching perspectives (Valencia, 2011).

Anne and Thomas also believed that this was the approach their school's language program took to teaching because this model was what the teachers were exposed to

when they were foreign language students. They were simply teaching using the same methods with which they were taught. Lortie (1975) coined the term "apprenticeship of observation" to describe the preconceptions that many pre-service teachers have about teaching; these preconceptions often result in teachers teaching their students very similarly to how they were taught. It is common for teachers to employ methods of instruction that mirror the way in which they were instructed as students, despite what they may have learned in their teacher preparation programs. Like the foreign language teachers at West High, teachers tend to believe that these methods are tried and true, producing expected results (Lortie, 1975; Buchmann, 1987). The result of this grammar and textbook focus was that Thomas, in particular, was discouraged. He stated that over 90% of what he was supposed to teach students is not joyful, making it difficult for him to pass on a passion for lifelong learning of languages and cultures. As traditional educational practices tend to follow a banking system of education (Freire, 1993), it is not uncommon for teachers to attempt to fill students with factual, often discrete point knowledge rather than engaging with their students in dialogue and working together toward common goals. This is the lack of joy Thomas described. He felt that he was forced to simply "fill" his students with grammatical knowledge in order to follow the guidelines set by his department. Despite the fact that the student participants were discouraged by the reliance on grammar and textbook activities, they also discussed aspects of their classes that provide positive experiences.

Engaging, Relevant and Interesting Classroom Activities Enhance Students' Experiences

Students of both levels and of all ethnicities spoke at length about a variety of engaging activities. In questionnaires, students described foreign language study most often as interesting, fun, exciting and rewarding. It should also be noted that 91% of African-American students utilized the adjective "fun" to describe their foreign language class in comparison with 49% of Whites, 46% of Latinos and 50% of Asian-American students, providing evidence that African-American students seemed to enjoy aspects of language learning. In focus groups and interviews students' discussed that their best experiences in class revolved around the teacher using several methods to teach one particular concept, adding that their favorite activities were engaging and interactive. For example, Maria (W, WH) described the Spanish teachers who have helped her most to learn.

> I was going to say I think the teachers that have helped me the most are the teachers that do really interactive stuff in their class, like they have different activities to, like, appeal to all learning styles instead of just read out of the book, conjugate, conjugate. Like the songs and the activities and the worksheets and also like orals and just, like, there's a really big variety of stuff that helps (GI).

The majority of students in all of the groups mentioned the importance of using a variety of examples and visual methods to assist them in learning more difficult concepts. The five most helpful activities that students cited in questionnaires varied equally among the different levels and ethnicities: games, worksheets, flashcards, oral activities and group

work. In focus groups and interviews, most students expressed that they appreciated games in which they could all be involved and have fun playing with the language. The upper level students at East High stated that they were very competitive with each other, which pushed them to improve and bred further success in the language. Finally, although none of the students pointed to music as a positive aspect of Spanish class, many of the students at both schools described in focus groups and interviews how music impacted their experience in class. One group of lower level students at East High stated that hearing the music allowed them to experience the language in a different manner. In turn, they determined that they were better able to remember words in the song and capture the meanings.

Other activities described by students that engaged them in class varied from level to level at each school. Upper level suburban students shared that their level four experience was greatly enhanced by the amount of the target language used by the teacher in class with students. They noted that the use of the target language by the teacher had increased from level two to level three, but by level four, the teacher spoke to the students mostly in Spanish. Three of the upper level students at West High mentioned several times that this was one of the most positive aspects of their Spanish class. A few upper level White students at the suburban school and many of the upper level Asian-American and Latino students at the urban school indicated in focus groups and interviews that they appreciated the worksheets and packets that allowed them to practice the language on their own and improve their skills. They shared that the written work was very helpful and increased their understanding of various language concepts.

The heritage learners in the upper level classes at East High also pointed out that the written work allowed them the opportunity to hone in on their weaknesses in the language. In addition, because the upper level students at East High were of various ability levels and had different reasons for being in the class, their teacher gave them some autonomy in class to focus on concepts that were necessary for them. The heritage learners appreciated that the teacher respected their opinions about what they needed to improve and treated them in a mature manner, giving them some autonomy in learning Spanish.

To combat the grammar intensive nature of the suburban foreign language program, which they admitted does not engage students, Anne (WH) and Thomas (WH) made an effort to connect students to the ethnic diversity of French and Spanish speakers around the world. For Thomas that meant that he took advantage of his music connections to invite Cuban musicians to his classroom each semester to teach his students how to dance and play the congas. He believed that music and dance were the two main connections he had to the Latino community and best embodied his passion for the Spanish language, thus, he wanted his students to make a similar connection. He also recognized that it was important for his students to continually see that Spanish speakers look different in various parts of the world, having very light to very dark skin, which was not typically a part of the curriculum. Therefore, he chose to incorporate it as an important piece of his curriculum and perceived that it had a positive impact on his students' experiences in his classes. Brian (EH) had a similar notion about the Spanish curriculum at East High, the urban school, and he stated that African-American students'

stories are not often told in the textbooks and traditional curriculum; thus, it is important for teachers to make those connections with all students. Both French teachers, Anne (WH) and Carla (EH) discussed how one of the first activities in French I was to focus on the diversity of French speakers around the world. Given that both programs had the most diversity in their level one classes, the French teachers stated that it was important to allow students to see that there are French speakers who look like them. Carla made the following comment:

> My sense is, and this is just anecdotal, but my sense is when they're watching a clip or something showing [a French-speaking African] that they connect to that, that they like that, that they're not looking at another White person (GI).

The teachers recognized the importance of allowing students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum (Grande, 2004; Guillaume, 1994; Huber, 1990; Kincheloe, 2004; Wilberschied & Dassier, 1995) and expressed that their efforts to assist their students in connecting to the target language and culture enhanced their students' experiences. However, it is necessary to point out that the students made no mention of their teachers' efforts to introduce them to the wide diversity of Spanish-speakers and Spanish-speaking cultures around the world. If teachers follow a strictly Eurocentric curriculum, it is highly problematic. A Eurocentric curriculum marginalizes students and tends to be considered the norm; this kind of education assumes that "all children, regardless of ethnicity, language, class, gender, will benefit from this curriculum" (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003, p. 4). Without having asked the students specifically, it is difficult to know whether or not the teachers incorporated many activities related to the diversity of

Spanish-speaking countries into the classes, but the fact that students did not address the topic at all raises the question of the extent to which the students are reflected in the curriculum.

Research Question 3: How do teachers and students perceive the low enrollment of African-American students in foreign language study?

This section of chapter four contains perhaps the most direct link to the issue of a low enrollment in foreign language study among African-American students. Teachers and students discussed their perceptions of the demographics of the foreign language classes, as well as their opinions and perspectives concerning African-American student enrollment in foreign language study. Students were asked in focus groups and interviews to offer their perspectives on why African-American students represent the lowest enrollment in foreign language across the United States.

This was a difficult topic for the students. Many of the suburban White students started by saying, "I feel racist, but…," while students of color at both schools were hesitant to comment on the topic even though they acknowledged that there are few African-American students in foreign language classes. Although some of the students, especially those who were not African-American, may not have known exactly why African-American students are least likely to enroll in foreign language classes, the students offered their perspectives as fellow students. The objective was to brainstorm possible reasons for the low enrollment and to explore whether or not it was possible that students of color are uncomfortable in classes such as foreign language. Both teachers

and students held several distinct perceptions about African-American students in their schools.

Perception #1: African-American Students' Low Enrollment in Foreign Language Is Related to Socioeconomic Status

When the teachers were asked to talk about why they believe that African-American students tend to either opt out of foreign language study or discontinue their study of a language, the focus group and the group interview were very similar in that the teachers pointed to the effect of African-American students' socioeconomic status (SES) on their enrollment in foreign language classes. All teachers indicated that although all students were prone to discontinuing language study after level two, they perceived that SES impacted predominantly African-American students.

The teachers expressed that socioeconomic factors have a substantial impact on enrollment and retention among their African-American students, in particular. According to Nieto (2010), SES does play a large role in students' academic experiences and their cultural capital; therefore, this may be a valid consideration on the part of the teachers. Participants in both group interviews pointed out that their African-American students tended to have a lower SES than other students. At the urban school, teachers stressed that it was important to recognize that a middle class African-American population did not exist; the majority of the East High African-American students were from low SES backgrounds. As a result of the low SES among African-American students, the teachers discussed that parents of the African-American students were commonly neither educated nor involved in the school their children attended. Susan

(EH) talked about how she rarely had the opportunity to meet parents of her African-American students and alluded to her perception that they lacked interest in their children's educations. Unfortunately, when African-American families are uninvolved in the school, it can lead to the impression that they are not concerned with their children's academic successes and failures (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Thompson, 2003), as was demonstrated by Susan in this study. Even when Susan had the opportunity to meet parents of her African-American students, she did not believe that parental involvement would result in better retention:

> When [African-American parents attend conferences], I like talking to those parents, but those [African American] kids probably aren't going to stay beyond two for the most part, and I don't know why. If they think "oh my kid did two years, that's more than I did" (GI).

Like Susan, Anne (WH) believed that SES was related to a lack of experience with foreign languages among African-American parents. She posited that due to their lack of experience, they did not know how to pass the importance of learning a language on to their children:

> And also probably, you know, at home their parents probably haven't overall had a lot of successful language learning…So at home, parents, they might be like, "Oh, I struggled in this, too. I'm not sure how I can help you with this assignment" whereas a lot of the college educated White parents are saying, "Okay, you know this is how I did it. This is how I was successful in language learning" (GI).

There may be some merit in Anne's point considering that only three of the 11 African-American students reported having family members who spoke a foreign language. This was a much lower percentage in comparison with students of other ethnic backgrounds. Although the teachers perceived that their African-American students received less encouragement or involvement from family, as teachers they also impacted African-American students very little regarding encouragement to learn a language. The teachers did not appear to bridge the gap between African-American families and their foreign language program, even though they acknowledged the existence of the gap.

The teachers at both schools agreed that their upper level students were typically from a middle class background and had more opportunities available to them due to their higher SES. At the suburban high school, Anne and Thomas theorized that the small percentage of upper level African-American foreign language students tended to have a middle to upper middle class background. But, because there was no middle class African-American population in the urban school (as reported by teachers), teachers at East High believed that the few African-American students in upper level foreign language classes were of a lower SES than other students in those classes. The teachers also remarked that parents of their upper level students likely provided more encouragement for continuing the study of a foreign language. Although that may be possible, it should be noted again that neither African-American student in the upper level classes reported having received any encouragement to learn a language. The teachers' perspectives created an interesting paradox; the West High teachers were certain that their upper level African-American students were of a higher SES than other

African-American students in the school. Meanwhile, the East High teachers asserted that their upper level African-American students were of a lower SES than other students in the class due to the very low SES of the African-American population in their school. The suburban teachers seemed to assume that in order for African-American students to persist in upper levels and keep pace with White students, they, too, would have to be middle to upper middle class. The urban teachers, on the other hand, ascertained that despite having a low SES, a handful of African-American students were capable of persisting in the upper level Spanish coursework. It would appear that this paradox was a product of two very different environments. Regardless of students' SES, the teachers at both schools had a perception that upper level African-American students were committed to their education, had good study habits and were determined to succeed no matter their SES.

Four of the suburban upper level White students' assertions mirrored those of the teachers, and they were the only students to discuss SES as a factor that may be related to African-American students' enrollment in foreign language classes. Emma, Ashley, Maria and Elise agreed with the teachers that if the family incomes of the upper level Spanish students were examined, they would be at least middle to upper class. Ashley, Elise, and Maria explained why they felt SES had an impact on enrollment in courses such as foreign language.

> Ashley: Yeah, I think, like, not, I'm not racist. I don't want you to think that at all. But, I think that a lot of, like, the reason could be just the fact that income-wise, like, the families of color just seem to be…kind of have lower income and

so therefore, it's, like, some, some people of color I feel, like, – this goes for Whites, too, but mostly it's, like, their priority isn't to go to college really. They don't have the funds. No one in their family has, so why are they going to takes these high level AP classes when they just need a job kind of. Something like that.

Elise: Yeah, it's a socioeconomic thing. When you're more focused on getting a job that pays enough to have somewhere to live and have enough food to eat, then taking enough classes and upper level classes and doing well in them, to go to a good school and get a good education to get a better job isn't a priority (FG).

The girls also perceived that the SES of the general population of African-American students in their school related to the students' ability to travel and use a foreign language in a meaningful way.

Ashley: And also, like, it's kind of, like, well, I mean like traveling. Traveling costs a lot of money, and a lot of people that, like, take high levels of foreign language are interested in, like, studying abroad or, like...

Maria: Going to those places.

Elise: Visiting.

Ashley: Yeah. It's, like, if you don't have money it's just like some of those opportunities aren't there, so, it's kind of like, I don't even know…Yeah. I would feel like…I'm, like, upper middle, middle class, and I feel like if I was, like, really low class and I did all this work in Spanish but now I can't afford to go to college. I can't afford to travel. It's like…

Elise: How are you going to use it?

Ashley: Yeah.

It is important to recognize that, firstly, Ashley struggled to discuss this topic as witnessed by the overuse of "like;" she appeared to be hedging and had difficulty expressing her perception. Secondly, these three students approached the topic from the viewpoint of White privilege, and the students seemed to describe aspects of a cultural capital that receives a high social value. Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as "acquired tastes, values, languages, and dialects, or the educational qualifications, that mark a person as belonging to a privileged social and cultural class" (in Nieto, 2010, p. 141). If one considers that the cultural capital of Whites is more highly valued in the United States, students who have not acquired this cultural capital appear "culturally deprived" (Nieto, 2010, p. 142). During the course of the focus group, the students, who considered themselves middle to upper middle class, talked a great deal about the opportunities they have had to travel; from their perspective, travel was within their realm of normal. It seemed that they could not fathom that a student of color would either have the means to travel or to find a meaningful way to use a second language that did not involve travel. These students seemed to consider African-Americans "culturally deprived;" therefore, unable to reap the same benefits from foreign language study as middle class Whites. The influence of SES among students was a major consideration among teachers and several upper level White students in discussing African-American students' enrollment in foreign language study. In addition to SES, however, the second

main point made by teachers suggested a lack of a strong cultural identity among African-American students.

Perception #2: A Weak Cultural Identity Among African-American Students Negatively Impacts Their Enrollment and Retention in Foreign Language Study

All of the teacher participants were convinced that one of the biggest factors hindering African-American students from enrolling in or continuing their study of a language was a lack of a connection to the concepts of language and culture. Firstly, the teachers perceived that African-American students found it difficult to tell their own stories within the curriculum of the language class. Thomas (WH) pointed out that African-American students have not been given the opportunity to develop a personal connection to the language and culture.

> They have to feel like there's an opportunity for them to tell their story in the context of learning the stories of other people, of other places…If they don't feel like they can tell about themselves, share about themselves in the context of language learning, then they're not going to feel like this is a place for them (GI).

Scholarly work provides support for Thomas' point, as students must be able to see themselves reflected in the curriculum in order to form a connection (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nieto, 1996). El Haj (2006) found that when students' cultural identities are not recognized in the curriculum, it can be detrimental to the students. She states, "[t]hus when collective identities are absent from, or distorted by the school curriculum, students are denied full and healthy participation in their education" (El Haj, 2006). Like Thomas, Carla (EH) also believed that enrollment was dependent on students' connection to the

language and culture, and she described her view of why students learn a foreign language as follows:

> I think being college bound is one and I think the other is just the interest in the other language or culture and, you know, African-American students don't see the connection because a lot of them [Asian-American students] have a second language already or their parents do and the White students mostly think of themselves as college bound…I think a lot of African-American students don't see that connection with themselves and so they don't take the language (GI).

Carla alluded to the difference between Asian-American students, voluntary immigrants, and African-American students, involuntary immigrants (Ogbu, 1989). Ogbu found in his research that voluntary immigrants, such as the Asian-American students in East High, tend to have a stronger cultural identity, thus, more confidence in their ability to succeed academically when compared to involuntary immigrants like the African-American students. Thomas (WH) also pointed out that it may be difficult for African-American students to develop that connection when the majority of their teachers are White and may or may not "get them." A body of scholarly work has demonstrated that White teachers do, as Thomas stated, struggle to understand their African-American students and also struggle to help their students reach their full potential (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

The urban teachers asserted that the lack of a connection between African-American students and the target culture can be attributed to African-American students not being culturally centered. The teachers perceived that a weak cultural identity among

African-American students impacted their enrollment and retention in foreign language classes because if their students have a weak cultural identity, it is more difficult for them to connect to notions of learning about another language and culture. Brian (EH) stated: "It comes down to their cultural identities. They don't really have…I mean because of slave trade and everything and their cultural identities being erased." The history of African-Americans in the United States did certainly involve the loss of their cultural identity. As a result, it is possible that African-American students struggle to identify with languages and cultures to which they do have a connection, but are unable to see it (Kincheloe, 2004). The teachers at the urban school explained that the students with connections to strong traditions, cultures, and languages were the most successful students they had and also the most likely to continue the study of a language. For example, they stressed that their Asian-American, Latino, and Somali students were more at ease with the concept of learning about other languages and cultures and often talked about the connections they saw between their own culture and that of target culture in comparison to their African-American students. The teachers at East High stated that Native American students, for example, even if they were not college bound, still had a "high interest in learning a foreign language" due to a strong cultural identity. The teachers at both the urban and suburban schools felt certain that students with a strong connection to their own or another language and culture were more likely to connect to the target language and culture. Therefore, they perceived that such students had more confidence while African-American students tended to have less confidence in their ability to learn a foreign language. Thomas (WH) added that although many students in

his level one class were unmotivated at times, his African-American students appeared more uncertain of their ability to learn a language and stated, "it seemed to be there was more of this predominance of like 'I just can't do this.'" Both lower level and upper level Asian-American and Latino students who speak another language at home felt certain that they were more confident than African-American students about learning another language because they have already had an experience with multiple languages. The Asian-American students in the lower level focus group commented that African-American students are not around other people who are multilingual. Dave (EH), one of the Japanese teachers, shared a similar sentiment and described why he perceived many of their students were more confident about language learning in comparison to African-American students:

> …I think maybe it's that they've grown up in multilingual backgrounds so they see a value in having another language and they're not threatened by it…I mean you kind of feel more like you're already sort of in the sea of language. You know? And maybe it's easier to go for it (FG).

Given Dave's logic concerning African-American students' lack of experience with other languages, it is important to note that the teachers did not perceive White students, who also tend to grow up in monolingual environments, as unable to succeed in foreign language study. This may be because the teachers considered their own White cultural capital and that of their White students to be the norm, and as such, more highly valued (Nieto, 2010).

Jenny (EH) pointed out that her most successful African-American language learners are able to talk about having an uncle from the Bahamas or Puerto Rico while Susan (EH) said that her most successful African-American students often talk about their strong religious background or holiday traditions. The teachers asserted that these connections provided students with a stronger identity, which impacted their motivation in foreign language classes. While the teachers recognized the importance of students' cultural capital, they seemed to struggle with how to demonstrate to African-American students that they possessed rich cultural capital. However, the teachers also seemed to cling to a traditional definition of culture as they described students' holidays or religious backgrounds. Nieto (2010) points out that culture is rarely viewed as values or one's view of the world, but these are important elements that should not be overlooked; the ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning also point to the necessity of teaching not only cultural products, but practices and perspectives as well (2006). The teachers did not seem to recognize that African-American students' views and beliefs could be capitalized on to aid their students in developing stronger cultural identities and possibly, a stronger connection to the target culture and language.

Finally, Brian (EH) wanted to make it clear that he believed that African-American students are simply unable to envision a connection to other languages and cultures because they lost their cultural center. One contributing factor to the loss of African-American students' cultural identity, according to Brian, is that their stories have not been told from a language perspective in school, and that this has made them believe that they don't have strong connections to other languages and cultures. He stated,

> I find our African-American youth is just trying to grab onto what our society has given them for the culture, which is Ebonics. They've tried to make that a language. Okay? And that's what they're trying to hold on to. They're trying to create something that has been lost to them (GI).

Brian's view is problematic because although he made it clear that he believed that students' cultural capital and identities were important and needed to be strengthened among African-American teenagers, he also seemed to devalue the importance of African-American English, which is a vital part of many African-American students' cultural capital. It is disturbing that Brian was uninformed and lacked an understanding of the rich history of African-American English. When teachers devalue a dialect such as African American English, such as Brian did, students may have a negative reaction toward a particular class or school as a whole (Delpit, 2005; Macedo & Bartolome, 1999; Nieto, 2010). Beyond students' cultural identities, the urban teachers, in particular, asserted that it is important to account for the effect of outside influences on the African-American students.

Perception #3: Outside Influences Impact African-American Students' Enrollment in Foreign Language Study

The urban teachers discussed how the impoverished state of many of the African-American students in East High can have more dire consequences and impact students' academic success and enrollment in courses such as foreign language. They revealed that many of their lower level African-American students have been influenced greatly by drugs and gangs, making it difficult for these students to see a future for themselves that

involves education. Susan (EH) had found that some of her African-American students were stuck in a cycle that they could not break. She described one recent student who had told her that if someone is born into a gang, it is impossible to get out of the gang. This student had become pregnant by a fellow gang member, and their child would be the product of two parents in a gang. Brian (EH) was particularly vocal about the impact of gang involvement on their students:

> Well, think about it; the family cycle, I mean it's the family business. When you're growing up and your parents are packaging crack in the house and it's in front of you every day, and you see them with wads and wads of money and you're like "Oh… I've got this," and part of it is you might die young and they accept that and they're ready for it and that's why they act so…because they're, like, 'I probably won't be alive until I'm 24.' I went to school in the urban setting and I have friends who lived that way and died that way. I've been to at least six funerals of African-Americans who lived by the gun and died by the gun (FG).

Because of the prevalence of gang involvement among the African-American students at East High, the teachers discussed how they witnessed the Africans in the school distance themselves from the African-American students who were considered "robbers, crooks, and uneducated." From Brian's (EH) perspective, however, this perception held by Africans in the school had little effect on African-American students.

> [T]hey're okay with that because that's where they see themselves in their societies and they walk around doing the yadda dabba and they see they get

> laughs from people in the high places by doing the Uncle Tom, putting on the Black face with the White eyes (FG).

It seemed that Brian wanted to make the point that African-American students in East High believed these stereotypes were the role they were supposed to play in the community, causing them to embrace the stereotypes. Thus, the urban teachers stressed that the enrollment of African-American students in courses such as foreign language was greatly dependent on "money and identity." Yon's (2000) work does support the teachers' perception, as his ethnographic study demonstrated that teenagers are greatly influenced by stereotypes; they base the formation of their cultural identities on these stereotypes, just as African-American students at East High seemed to form their identities based on the notion that African-American students in their school are crooks and uneducated, according to the urban teachers. In addition, Tatum (1997) suggests that African-American students turn to their peers to learn about how they should act:

> It is the peer group, the kids in the cafeteria, who hold the answers to these questions. They know how to be Black. They have absorbed the stereotypical images of Black youth in the popular culture and are reflecting those images in their self-presentation. (p. 60)

Yet the manner in which Brian chose to describe African-American students' development of their identities seemed to marginalize and devalue the African-American students in East High. Furthermore, the other teachers in the focus group verbally agreed with the way in which Brian characterized the African-American students. Although the teachers stated that the East African students

perpetuate stereotypes of African-American students, it is possible that the teachers gave credence to the stereotypes as well. It is also necessary to consider that a focus group can create a different dynamic among the participants in which one participant may dominate the conversation (Krueger, 1994). The other teachers knew that Brian was writing his Master's Thesis on the cultural identity of African-American students. Thus, they may have considered him to be an expert, allowing him to dominate the conversation and to speak for them. In response, Brian may have chosen to position himself as the "knower." In research on race and oppression, categories have been found to emerge that divide subjects into the "knower" and the "known." The knower adopts an ability to disseminate perceived "universal truths about knowledge and human nature" (Code, 1995, p. 109, as cited in Westcott, 2004). In this study, Brian's positioning as the knower may have given him the opportunity to disseminate his knowledge about African-American students without being contradicted by the other participants, which may have led to his use of outrageous descriptions. Unfortunately, if African-American students are aware of or have embraced these stereotypes described by Brian, it could be a significant hurdle to success.

Perception #4: African-American Students Have A Negative Attitude Toward Education

Some of the White students at West High addressed their perceptions concerning African-American students' attitudes toward education, which they believed, impacted attitudes toward foreign language study. As stated earlier, these students began offering

comments by stating, “I feel racist, but…” or “I’m not racist, but….” Once again, it is important to consider that these students have the benefit of White privilege, and in their school of predominantly White students, the majority of teachers and students respond to education in a manner that is considered the norm (Fordham, 1996; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 1997). Lower level student, Samantha (W, WH), asserted that White students work harder and the African-American students in her classes do not put as much effort into being successful in their classes.

> Samantha: It tends to be that some of the African-Americans might not want to be there as much, it’s more because they have to and don’t try as hard. I mean there’s tons of White students who probably do the same thing, but I guess just because they want to be there more and want to learn more.
>
> Interviewer: Who wants to learn more?
>
> Samantha: The White students. I mean, in this school at least. I mean…
>
> Interviewer: It’s okay, you’re talking about you know in this school.
>
> Samantha: Right. It just seems like the African-American students in this school don’t try.

Samantha went on to describe her perception that the African-American students in her classes talk and are off-task, while the White students tend to stay on-task more often. All seven of the upper level White students shared similar perceptions when asked why they believe a low enrollment of African-American students exists. Sean (W, WH) matter-of-factly explained that it seemed as though White students care more about their futures, are more motivated, and have different priorities than African-American

students. Emma (W, WH) had a similar perception, but also pointed to the history of African-Americans in the United States and suggested that perhaps there were still differences between the way in which African-American and White students define success. Elise (W, WH) added the following:

> I think it's, like, the same thing as any upper level class, right? You get to AP classes, and it's the same thing. It's not a question of the particular class, but a question of the rigor and, like, how into school and how, like, how much the families make school a priority and stuff (FG).

The prevalence of White privilege and the suburban students' perceptions of African-American students are troubling because their attitudes toward their African-American classmates may make it difficult for them to remain in classes with a predominance of White students.

Although most of the student participants of color were not as candid as White students, some of the African-American, Latino, and Asian-American students shared similar perceptions. Kutrice (AA, WH) and Latricia (AA, WH) stated that junior high is considered to be more recreational, and White students tend to be tuned into education and are more likely to enroll in foreign language in 7th grade. African-American students, on the other hand, have other interests, and foreign language study is not a priority. Several of the Asian-American students in the lower level Spanish class at East High expressed that the African-American students do not feel a need to learn and be successful. In addition, they felt that the African-American students were deficient in their English skills; therefore, they perceived that, for African Americans, learning

another language on top of honing their English skills would be too difficult. Upper level Spanish students, Camila (L, EH) and Liliana (L, EH), explained that the African-American students in their school are indifferent toward education and are not raised with parents who encourage them to make education a priority. Instead they are raised to be done with school as soon as possible and do not have long-term goals. Jolina (AS, EH) agreed that education is not a priority for African-American students:

> Well, I would think that…I don't want to sound stereotypical but I think like most of them aren't really college bound so they don't really care about doing it for college and stuff. That's the primary reason most people take upper levels, for college, and like most of them aren't going to college (FG).

In East High, African-American students seem to be characterized most often by teachers and students as struggling academically. The upper level Latino and Asian-American students had little trouble setting themselves apart from the African-American students in their school. This could be indicative of two factors. Firstly, a stereotype lift may have taken place in which upper level Asian-American and Latino students were aware of the stereotypes of a comparison group, the African-American students, which created a boost in performance as they set themselves apart from their African-American classmates (Walton & Cohen, 2003). Secondly, it is not uncommon for teenagers in racially diverse settings to define who they are while also declaring who they are not (Yon, 2000). The upper level Asian-American and Latino students made it clear in their focus groups and interviews that they are achieving academically while many African-American students in their school are not.

Other than Kutrice and Latricia's perspective that African-American students are uninterested in foreign language study at the junior high level, none of the nine remaining African-American students shared any perspectives related to African-American students' attitudes toward education. It should also be noted that none of the students who perceived African-American students as having a negative attitude toward education were in interviews or focus groups with African-American students; it is possible that without African-American students present, they were able to express their beliefs more honestly. Even though Kutrice and Latricia alluded to the difference between their academic goals and those of other African-American students, none of the other seven students in their focus group addressed the topic.

Perception #5: African-American Students Are Uncomfortable in Foreign Language Study

Anne (WH) and Thomas (WH) revealed their perception that there is peer pressure among the African-American population not to succeed in the White system at West High. In fact all of the teachers in the study pointed to the history of how the educational system was set up initially to benefit Caucasians and how White culture continues to drive education. Anne and Thomas considered that succeeding in foreign language classes that attract primarily White students could be viewed as "acting White" and, therefore, may discourage African-American students' initial or continued foreign language enrollment. Thomas believed that in the suburban setting, where it was predominantly White, Thomas stated that a notion of "You're an Oreo cookie" was prevalent in the school; this racist slur refers to African-American students who are Black

on the outside but White on the inside, meaning that their behaviors and choices align more with those of Whites.. Anne thought that it was possible that African-American students in level two may look at the demographics of the upper level foreign language classes and think that they do not belong. She commented,

> Well, you know, I'm going to stop here because if I go on, I'm putting myself in that system where I'm doing what all the White kids do (GI).

Prior research provides support for Anne's statement. Viadero (2000) found that when students of color struggle to balance their cultural identity with existing stereotypes, it can lead to a feeling of being uncomfortable in courses that are dominated by White students. The notion of trying to succeed as an African-American in a predominantly White school was a topic that suburban teachers considered important in the discussion of increasing and retaining African-American student enrollment in their classes.

Both White students and African-American students at West High provided an explanation of how foreign language classes could be perceived as White. They agreed that there are many electives in junior high, making it difficult for students to choose coursework, and this impacted the demographics of the classes. According to the White students who began a foreign language in 7th grade, their classes were comprised mostly of White learners, while the students who began a foreign language in 9th or 10th grade described their classes as more diverse. Therefore, the students in the lower level focus group came to two conclusions: (a) They could see how foreign language classes could be perceived as "White classes," especially if the majority of students enrolling in 7th grade were White, and (b) if the majority of students who began in 7th grade and

continued foreign language study throughout high school were White, the majority of the students in the upper level classes would remain White. The students believed that these demographics could deter African-American students from enrolling in foreign language courses.

The urban students, in contrast, were the only ones who considered that perhaps African-American students view foreign language as being a difficult course, causing them to feel uncomfortable enrolling in it. The lower level students admitted that they have heard different groups of students talk about their perceptions of foreign language classes. Olivia (AA, EH) and Xi (AS, EH) shared the following:

> Olivia: I think that they think that it's too difficult and that they wouldn't be able to do it, in some cases (FG).
>
> Xi: They don't want to be embarrassed because you're, like, being put into a class, a language you don't know, you might, the teacher might say all this kind of stuff and then, well, you're confused… (FG).

Several of the upper level Latino students agreed with Xi that African-American students did not want to "look bad" in front of other students if they struggled with learning a foreign language. The Latino students explained that foreign language classes have a stigma of being challenging, which can be intimidating. They related foreign language classes to advanced placement classes such as 20th Century Topics, which also tended to draw students who were not deterred by what they had heard about the level of difficulty. The students who discussed the difficulty of foreign language alluded to stereotype threat whereby if African-American students were to enroll in foreign language study, but fail,

they would live up to the existing stereotype (Steele, 1999). According to the way in which students characterized their African-American classmates, the stereotypes African-American students would fulfill if they failed were those of students who lacked the will or ability to succeed academically.

The urban students also pointed to African-American students' lack of experience with other languages, asserting that the concept of learning another language would make African-American students uncomfortable. Some upper level Latino students, however, disagreed and suggested that it was a less an issue of feeling uncomfortable and more an issue of being annoyed with the Spanish language. They explained that African-American students in their school were often annoyed by the Latino students who used Spanish with each other in the hallways. Therefore, they considered that perhaps this discouraged African-American students from learning Spanish, for example, because they were already turned-off by the Latinos in their school.

When asked if students of color are uncomfortable in classes such as foreign language or AP courses because they tend to attract lower percentages of students of color, at least one student from each level at each school had an opinion to share. Some of the students were unable to imagine that students would be uncomfortable in a class with few students of the same ethnicity. Several of the Asian-American students in the lower level focus group at the urban school stated that it should not matter if African-American students are not in class with other African-American students and therefore, should not feel uncomfortable. In East High, the Asian-American students were in the majority, however, and dominated most of the classes. Like the White students in the

suburban school, who gave little thought to the role of their ethnicity in their predominantly White school, the Asian-American students were not faced with the dilemma of ethnicity and race in their school to the same degree as other students. Robin (L, WH) and Brandon (W, WH), upper level Spanish students at the suburban school, also could not imagine that African-American students would be uncomfortable in foreign language or AP classes.

> Brandon: And this school is pretty nice so not too many people are uncomfortable. Well, I shouldn't say that 'many.' I don't know. I don't know of any (GI).

Again, Brandon viewed this issue through the lens of White privilege. Because he was White, he had not encountered racism nor had he likely been confronted by his own racial identity (Tatum, 1997). It was difficult for Brandon to consider that there were perhaps several aspects of his "nice school" that created difficult situations for African-American classmates.

Two White students participants and two Latino participants felt, however, that it was possible for students to be uncomfortable in classes that lack students of the same ethnicity. Stacy (L, WH) described her experience as a Latina in a suburban school.

> I kind of feel, like, not on any racial type thing here, but I feel like it's kind of weird when you are a minority in the classroom. I mean, I've been in classrooms where I'm the only colored person and it makes you feel really, really awkward (FG).

One of the White students in the lower level focus group at the urban school described how she had been in a Hmong language class and felt very uncomfortable surrounded by a majority of Asian-American students. She, therefore, could imagine that if African-American students perceive foreign language classes as having a low percentage of African-American students, it could be a deterrent. Liliana (L, EH) asserted that she understood what it meant to feel uncomfortable in a particular class. She had been the only Latina in many of her classes at a suburban school she had attended:

> Liliana: I mean, I felt different when I went to a school where there was only, like, White people, 'cause I felt uncomfortable…I was, like, I don't belong here, this school is not for me. But then once you get to know people, you learn that you could fit in anywhere, and it's just the fact that you've got to pour your stuff into it and you'll get everything.
>
> Interviewer: But, it was hard?
>
> Liliana: It was hard at first.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, I bet.
>
> Liliana: It was really hard.

Liliana made the point that although she struggled at the beginning and did not feel a sense of belonging, she adjusted over time and made friends. But, it was not an easy process, and it could be difficult for students to voluntarily place themselves in classes which they know do not contain students of their same ethnicity. Emma (W, WH) pointed out that although she could definitely imagine that students of color who have been in her upper level Spanish class or in her AP classes may feel uncomfortable, she

also explained that she was impressed by the amount of confidence they exuded as students in those classes. She stated that even though those students were in the minority in advanced coursework, they did not hold back.

Several of the lower level African-American students in the suburban school, Kutrice, Latricia, and Tanya, disagreed with these perceptions. They stated that although they are often the only African-American students in certain classes, they do not feel awkward or uncomfortable. The following is the conversation that took place after Stacy, a Latina in the focus group, stated that she felt uncomfortable when she was the only Latina in her classes:

> Kutrice: I disagree. Because whenever I'm in a class full of different colored people than me, I don't feel awkward, I feel achieved. Not better than them. But, for instance, I was on the golf team, and I was the only African-American on there, and I just felt good. Like, I don't care. I don't feel bad. I don't feel intimidated. I feel there are more expectations. I feel more accomplished.
>
> Latricia: You feel like you're pushing yourself.
>
> Kutrice: Yeah. It feels like we're all on the same level, we all have the same smarts.
>
> Interviewer: So, it doesn't make any difference to you?
>
> Kutrice: No, I feel more accomplished.

Both Latricia and Tanya agreed with Kutrice's remarks. It was clear that Kutrice, especially, exuded a lot of self-pride and stated later that she felt as though she had achieved something important because she opted to learn a language when many African-

American students opt not to enroll in foreign language. The African-American students wanted both the interviewer and their fellow students to continually be aware of their academic success and that they were not afraid to deviate from the behavior of other African-American students. Yon's (2000) research supports the reaction by Kutrice and Latricia; it is not unusual for students of underrepresented populations who are academically successful to set themselves apart from others of the same ethnic background who have not obtained the same level of success. Most students were able to identify specific issues that could impact African-American students' enrollment and retention in foreign language study, but some of the findings point to the students' belief that the enrollment of African-American students in foreign language classes was simply a coincidence and product of the school demographics.

Perception #6: African-American Students' Enrollment in Foreign Language Study is a Coincidence and a Reflection of School Demographics

Throughout the discussion of African-American students' enrollment in foreign language study, students of varied ethnic backgrounds tended to add that perhaps the low enrollment was simply a coincidence or a product of school demographics. Lower level White suburban students and several lower level African-American urban students asserted that the enrollment numbers of African-American students in their schools were not of consequence and should be considered a coincidence. Additionally, the African-American students stated that African-American students in the urban school may just not be interested in learning a foreign language because they live in America, and, therefore, only want or need to speak English. Kutrice (AA, WH) agreed that it was a coincidence

and stated, "I don't think it matters" (FG). It seemed that although Kutrice was proud of learning Spanish and acknowledged that fewer African-Americans opt to do so, she was also dismissive of the topic. She talked at length about her own enrollment and experience, but did not think it important that few other African-American students opt to enroll.

Several students at the suburban school perceived that their school was "White," which explained why the foreign language classes were predominantly White. Even though upper level Latina student, Robin, described how she is the only Latina in her Spanish class and often the only Latina in most of her classes, she still attributed the disparity in enrollment to the school being White. Having grown up in the predominantly White suburb, it appeared that even Robin normalized the Whiteness of the school. When the students were told that the suburban school was comprised of approximately 30% students of color, the majority of those students being African-American, several of the upper level White students – Maria, Ashley and Elise – were surprised by the percentage of students of color in their school. After a moment, they came to the realization that, in general, they are in "White classes," and they shared that few students of color were in their music classes and AP classes. Elise added, "[w]hich is not a good thing, I don't think" (GI). The three girls were very talkative throughout the focus group, but were momentarily thrown off their course of conversation as they considered the demographics of their classes. This is, however, a common reaction, as White teenagers are rarely confronted with their racial identity and often struggle with the concept of having a racial identity because Whiteness is the norm (Tatum, 1997).

Research Question 4: What Suggestions Do Teachers and Students Have in Regard to Improving Students' Enrollment and Experiences in Foreign Language Classes?

In this final section, I present teachers' and students' suggestions for improving foreign language study at their schools. Both teachers and students were asked to generate ideas and provide suggestions that could improve students' foreign language experiences, leading to an increased enrollment, especially among students of color. The teachers and students addressed changes that could be made to district and school policies, pedagogical practices and the curriculum, and classroom connections to students' cultural identities, which could potentially improve students' experiences in foreign language classes.

District and School Policies and A Need for Staff Training

The participants in focus groups and interviews shared many ideas that could potentially make a significant impact on foreign language enrollment among African-American students. The suburban students and teachers discussed the necessity of "hooking" students immediately in level one to give them a sense of buy-in and to develop their interest in the target language and culture. Additionally, the students asserted that required language study at the elementary level could assist students who struggle to read and write in the English language, as the students in the study had ascertained that language study impacted their knowledge and skills in other content areas. Ashley (W, WH) stated: "I think like we said for the benefits, it helps with English, it helps with a lot of other skills that you need, and so for people who at a young age are struggling with English, that could just be a really good thing" (GI). The students

suggested that elementary foreign language could give students more confidence in their academic abilities while also creating interest in the target language and culture.

Both students and teachers suggested that making foreign language study a graduation requirement could create more interest in language learning among students.

> Anne (WH): If you don't force a kid out of his or her comfort zone, i.e., taking a foreign language in this situation, it's not going to happen…Let's face it, we're going to catch some students who wouldn't have taken it probably at all before (GI).

The suburban teachers were confident that a graduation requirement would allow them to reach more students of color and give them the opportunity to demonstrate to students that learning a second language is possible. The teachers believed that this would have a positive effect on enrollment over time although the teachers did not consider that if students have negative experiences at the junior high, as many of the students had described, retention rates would not necessarily improve. However, students continually asserted that the suburban teachers weed out their weaker students in level 2, which raises the question of how honest the teachers were being about their stated desire to increase enrollment in upper levels. Simply implementing a graduation requirement of two years would still allow teachers to weed students out in level 2 while continuing to teach the best and brightest in levels 3 and beyond. It is far easier for the teachers to state that they would support a graduation requirement than it is for them to engage in the challenging work necessary to make required foreign language coursework successful for students of all abilities and backgrounds. Three of the upper level suburban students agreed with the

teachers and indicated that they would make foreign language a requirement because they felt it was important that all students learn a language. These three students were truly excited about learning Spanish and wanted other students to have a similar experience. Elise (W, WH) described how she felt about the importance of language study:

> You're required to take fine arts, so, I don't understand why you're required to take that and not a foreign language for at least a year or two. I feel like there are a lot of people who don't get exposed to it early enough and they don't realize that maybe they're good at it or maybe they like it (GI).

Like the teachers, several of the White students who had discussed making foreign language a requirement were certain that students who had not envisioned foreign language would discover their ability to learn a foreign language.

At the urban school, the teachers shared their strategy to increase retention of students. Like the suburban school, foreign language was not a graduation requirement at East High, and the teachers found their strategy to be effective. Each year, the five foreign language teachers gathered to compare lists of students who were in level one with lists of students who signed up for level two. They kept track of students who passed level one and should have enrolled in level two so that they could (a) talk to the students personally and encourage them to enroll and (b) give the list to counselors who could also talk with the students about enrolling in level two. At both schools, the teachers discussed that strong administrative support for their language programs gave them the ability to try different methods of enticing students to study a language. They also mentioned the importance of maintaining communication between their language

department and counselors and with each other as colleagues to make sure to meet the educational needs of their students.

Along with communication, both the suburban and urban teachers stated that training is necessary to make changes and provide better educational experiences for students. The urban teachers suggested that it was necessary to conduct training with the counselors on the behalf of their foreign language department. It was not unusual to have turn-over in the counseling department on a yearly basis in East High, therefore, the teachers wanted to make a connection with the counseling staff at the beginning of the year. The goal was to ensure that the counselors understood the importance of encouraging students to enroll in foreign language and of challenging themselves their senior year to avoid remedial college classes. The urban teachers expressed that it was important for students to be encouraged to learn a foreign language from multiple adults in the school, especially because they recognized that some of their students do not receive encouragement from home to study a language.

Pedagogical Practices and Curriculum and A Need for Teacher Professional Development

The suburban teachers, Anne and Thomas, were concerned with providing professional development for their own department and were certain that revamping the curriculum would provide a more engaging experience for their students. As a result, this would impact enrollment and retention of students in their language program. They were adamant that there had to be “buy-in” among the foreign language staff to accept training in using a content-based instructional approach, for example. Thomas also mentioned his

idea to pilot a new curriculum in his Spanish 1 classes that he referred to as "visual Spanish." In other words, students would learn the most essential elements of Spanish I, ensuring that students were learning relevant and authentic Spanish rather than memorizing vocabulary from the textbook. Thomas suggested that it would be interesting to compare the piloted curriculum with traditional curriculum in regard to students' interest level and knowledge after one semester of instruction. No matter the pedagogical approach, the suburban teachers stressed that it was important to make the lower levels, in particular, less grammar intensive and to embed the grammar in the content of the curriculum. This is an important point given that research indicates that students tend to be critical about tedious grammar instruction (Tse, 2000), just as the students in this study demonstrated. One approach to language instruction that would address the students' need for the content, culture and language to be relevant and interconnected is content-based instruction (CBI). In CBI, the language becomes the "vehicle for learning content rather than the focus or object of instruction per se" (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). Brain research has demonstrated the effectiveness of CBI due to the interdisciplinary nature of this approach; brain activities also tend to be interconnected, thus interdisciplinary instruction in language classes has proved effective for students (Kennedy, 2006, cited in Tedick & Cammarata, 2012).

Many of the students at both schools also remarked that if they were teaching the Spanish classes, they would ensure that there is less focus on the textbook and more focus on language that is relevant and meaningful. Samantha (W, WH) mentioned that in her Spanish 2 class, it would be better to have students doing less book work and give

students the chance to interact more with each other. The students demonstrated a preference for learning vocabulary and practicing grammatical structures that would be useful in daily situations. They also mentioned that language courses could be made to be more relevant for students their age by teaching them slang or words used by young people. The lower level African-American students at West High stated that some of the textbook topics were difficult to relate to and it would be better to create units based on topics that are current and to which young people can connect. Several of the lower level Asian-American and African-American students at East High shared this sentiment and wished that their Spanish I class were comprised of more topics that related to their own interests. Once again, students pointed out the importance of providing classes with relevant topics that reflect their interests and allow them to engage in the topic. One must consider the high attrition rates, especially after level two at West High, and the effect that the curriculum may have had on the students' decisions to opt out of foreign language study.

The students also pointed to the importance of foreign language teachers to recognize individual students' needs in the classroom. Ashley, Elise, and Maria suggested that perhaps it would be useful to create "upper and lower tracks" for foreign language classes. They had recognized that it seemed as though students were "weeded out" in level two as the curriculum became much more difficult, and many students could not keep pace. The three girls thought that perhaps an upper level track could teach students the curriculum at a faster pace while the lower level track would take more time with difficult concepts, rather than simply leaving some students behind and discouraging

them from studying a foreign language. Tracking is often *perceived* to provide better education for students, as suggested by these students' comments, because programs can focus on the needs of the students in each track. But the reality of tracking is that it leads to inequalities and mediocre education for the majority of students in schools (Oakes, 2005). In order to track students, schools must make assumptions about the abilities of individual students, which can decrease self-esteem and motivation to succeed among students who are tracked into lower levels. Compounding that issue is that African-Americans and Latinos from low SES backgrounds are disproportionately placed in lower tracks for students who are not college bound (Oakes, 1995).

Robin, the heritage learner in upper level Spanish at the suburban school, and the heritage learners at the urban school expressed their desire to speak more Spanish with the teacher and focus on more of the elements of the language with which they struggle. Many of these students described their struggle with accents and spelling and would prefer to practice these more with the teacher. Tse (2000) provides support for these students' suggestions, as she found that students' interest in a foreign language remained higher when the teacher dedicated time to students regarding problematic concepts and provided them the necessary assistance in understanding the concept. Finally, the urban students in both the lower and upper levels shared their interest in the origins and history of the Spanish language. They had a strong desire to know more about how the language evolved and how the language differs from one Spanish-speaking country to the next. The students felt that if they were teaching the class, this would be a topic they would

cover with their students and would have appreciated the opportunity to provide their teacher with that suggestion.

Connect Students' Cultural Identities to Target Language and Culture

Overwhelmingly, all of the students in the study expressed a desire to include more culture in the curriculum. The White, Latino and African-American lower level suburban students shared how they appreciated Thomas' use of music, dance and interactions with Latinos in the community to connect them to the culture. They stated that if they taught Spanish, they would do as Thomas did in their level one class and assist students in making cultural connections. The lower level urban students stressed their belief that it is important to be given more opportunities to explore differences and similarities between the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries and their own. West High African-American students, Kutrice and Latricia, also stated that they would include more opportunities to experience holidays and celebrations so that students can examine differences and similarities between their own culture and that of the target culture. Many of the lower level urban students agreed that understanding holidays and celebrations of other cultures is important to them, and the upper level urban students stated that rather than just skim the surface of celebrations in Spanish-speaking countries, it would useful to examine them more closely to gain a deeper understanding of the culture. The students expressed a desire to make meaningful connections and use critical thinking skills in regard to target culture rather than being taught superficial aspects of the culture. Once again, students point to the importance of exploring cultural practices

and perspectives, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of various aspects of the target cultures (National Standards, 2006).

In order to better connect African-American students to the target culture, thus increasing and retaining enrollment among African-American students, the urban teachers suggested that it was necessary to center them culturally in the curriculum. This would allow them to make personal connections and tell their own stories. One suggestion that Brian (EH) made was to offer a language such as Swahili or Arabic, which would perhaps give African-American students a better connection to their heritage. Additionally, the urban teachers believed that an Afro-centric curriculum could impact enrollment and retention by viewing the history of African-Americans through a linguistic lens. For example, Carla (EH) pointed out that in an Afro-centric French class students would learn about African culture while learning French, which could establish a cultural identity for African-American students. In describing how to significantly increase African-American students' foreign language enrollment, Brian (EH) stated that the solution is to create a place for African history at the elementary level that is as much a part of the curriculum as White history. Brian shared that through his research, he has found that in schools where this curriculum is present, students are becoming more culturally centered, leading to more success. He made the following comments about his perception of the importance of re-shaping curriculum at the primary level:

> They're not these lost souls who can only grab onto this undercurrent of drugs and fast money and dying young, which is what most impoverished African Americans are into (FG).

> …you teach them about their culture and you teach them it's okay to be African. You are somebody. You have a place in this world and it's not as a crack dealer or a whore or a convict…So, we need to do that in preschool and teach them about the kings and queens [of Africa] and teach them about how really the African race is a strong race, it is a smart race and education is the way to go (FG).

There are two main points regarding Brian's comments that should be examined. Firstly, he described the importance of allowing students to learn about their cultural identity in a context that goes beyond slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr. (El Haj, 2006). The other four urban teachers agreed with Brian that centering African-American students culturally in primary education would affect foreign language enrollment at the secondary level because African-American students would arrive in high school having a cultural identity, making the opportunity to find a connection to another language and culture possible. El Haj (2006) provides evidence that supports the teachers' suggestion for exploring African Diaspora in primary education. In interviews with students of color in a predominantly White school, El Haj found that students harbored a desire to delve into topics that allow them to explore their cultural identity beyond typical themes. One African-American student told her, "I think in all of my years of school from kindergarten I learned about one African queen, and I learned about her through a summer program" (p. 154). Williams (2003) asserts that African Diaspora, particularly a focus on "kings and queens" lends itself well to painting a picture of all of the injustices caused by the slave trade, including the loss of a legacy related to African royalty. "The

precept that slavery usurped the rightful dominion of would-be kings and queens is among the earliest African-American literary themes" (p. 60). By delving into topics of African Diaspora, students have the opportunity to explore positive characterizations of people of color as well as a cultural heritage that was lost to their ancestors when they were brought to the United States as slaves. It allows African-American students to visualize a group of people, who reflect their own ethnicity, as leaders in a position of esteem, honor, and power.

It is necessary to examine the manner in which Brian described African-American students at East High. On the one hand, Brian seemed to care about his African-American students and expressed a desire to improve their educational experiences, but on the other hand, Brian chose to utilize strong stereotypes of urban African-American students to convey his point. He claimed to understand African-American youth, and the other teachers confirmed that Brian was adept at connecting with the African-American students in his Spanish classes. Yet, Brian used language that was politically incorrect and tended to marginalize the students. It may be possible that his objective was to demonstrate the great challenge that exists for teachers in transforming education in a way that will reach urban African-American youth. But, it is also possible that Brian harbors racism about the majority of the African-Americans in his school. He seemed passionate about improving education and their foreign language program to reach more of their at-risk students, but he never explored the topic beyond the superficial, opting not to address extraneous factors that affect students in schools (e.g., institutional racism) or that impact students' communities (e.g., societal racism). White liberals, such as Brian,

tend to proclaim the need for change and tolerance while maintaining a position of power afforded them through White privilege (Macedo & Bartolome, 1999). Macedo and Bartolome argue that

> … many white liberals willingly call and work for cultural tolerance but are reluctant to confront issues of inequality, power, ethics, race, and ethnicity in a way that could actually lead to social transformation that would make society more democratic and humane and less racist and discriminatory. (p. 14)

Furthermore, Macedo and Bartolome (1999) assert that the victims of this kind of racism recognize it easily and consider it patronizing. While it is difficult to know whether Brian's students question his genuineness, it is certainly possible that it is easier for Brian and the other teachers to call for change than it is to do the very challenging work for change that disrupts the status quo. Regardless, Brian seemed to, once again, position himself as the knower in the focus group, sharing his perceptions about "the known" – the African-American students. Once again, he encountered no resistance on the part of the other teachers in the focus group and his knowledge, no matter how narrow-minded or outrageous his delivery, seemed to be accepted as universal truth (Westcott, 2004).

The final topic discussed by the suburban teachers reflected their passion for Spanish and French. Thomas (WH) asserted that establishing a meaningful connection between their students and the target language and culture should be one of their primary goals as teachers. He described the importance of transmitting the teacher's passion for the language and culture to the students to assist students in finding their own connection, and he tells his Spanish I students the following on the first day of class:

> [Spanish] is a bridge to friendship. I mean, this is why I'm really here. This has led me to friendships all over the world and it's led me to dance and music and rhythm and my wife.

He added that without the knowledge of Spanish, "…your world would be so much smaller and so much different and less joyful" (GI).

In general, all of the teachers seemed to express a desire to give students agency in their educations and to assist their students in exploring the value of their cultural identity and cultural capital. They also recognized that if students' identities and cultural capital were ignored, it would give way to negative experiences in their classes (Delpit, 1995; Fecho, 2004; Grande, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004; Nieto, 2010). But, the students' perceptions of the foreign language teachers' practices were often contradictory, which could lead one to question whether the teachers actually possessed a desire for change. Perhaps if African-American students had the opportunity to develop a strong cultural identity as children, as the urban teachers suggested, foreign language enrollment and retention would be positively impacted among African-American students. Thomas and Anne also shared a desire for shift in their foreign language curriculum from banking education (Freire, 1993) to a more engaging approach that would give students more agency in the classroom. But, they raised an important point that the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) is difficult to overcome, as is a banking system of education. As the teachers stated, their current methods did result in some successful foreign language students, and it would, therefore, be difficult to convince their colleagues to revamp a curriculum that appears effective. Thomas was particularly adamant, however,

that his passion for the language and culture and his desire to bridge students' own cultures with those of Spanish-speaking countries would allow students to explore their own cultural identities while finding a passion and connection with the target language and culture. Thomas' desire for change in his Spanish classes is reminiscent of Nieto's suggestion of the way in which a bridge can create a multicultural classroom that is dedicated to social justice:

> A bridge provides access to a different shore without closing off the possibility of returning home; a bridge is built on solid ground but soars toward the heavens; a bridge connects two places that might otherwise never be able to meet. The best thing about bridges is that they do not need to be burned once they are used; on the contrary they become more valuable with use because they help visitors from both sides become adjusted to different contexts (Nieto, 2010, p. 17).

Thomas described his desire to create a foreign language classroom that is reflective of the description above, asserting that it would offer students richer experiences that would lead to greater enrollment and retention among all of their students.

Conclusion

Both the students and the teachers in this study offered many perceptions that provide diverse viewpoints regarding students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language study. Although there were certainly perceptions that pointed to specific issues and problems that must be addressed, the teachers and students also shared perceptions that should be considered carefully in order to improve students' foreign language experiences and retention in various educational settings. Overall, it was clear that we

can learn a great deal from students; these findings demonstrated that critical theory and students' voices in research have the potential to provide a greater understanding of complex issues.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Throughout the study, it became clear that although many of the students grew up with different backgrounds and attended two very different schools, they shared many common experiences as language learners. When I designed the study, I had expected to uncover more differences between the suburban and urban schools regarding African-American students' foreign language enrollment and experiences. But, both schools had a Black population of approximately 20%; African-American students were dominated by White students in the suburban school and Asian-American students in the urban schools. In both schools, African-American students were in the minority, creating similar hurdles to overcome, such as a lack of a critical mass of African-American students in courses such as foreign language. The African-American students were also stereotyped similarly at both schools by their fellow students and teachers; it is difficult to know the extent to which these stereotypes affected the students. Finally, the few African-American students who were enrolled in foreign language courses at West High and East High were, generally, engaged, college-bound students, leading to similar perceptions about their foreign language experiences.

The divergent perspectives in this study often pointed to the students' differences in ethnicity and their socioeconomic status. Meanwhile, the addition of the teachers' voices in this study both supported the students' voices and gave the study another lens through which to view the issue of African-American students' low enrollment in foreign language courses. The student and teacher voices gave way to four major findings: the importance of adult encouragement, the necessity of a positive junior high experience, the

demand for an engaging, relevant and equitable curriculum, and the pervasiveness of negative perceptions of African-American students in schools on the part of both students and teachers. I will discuss these key findings in this chapter and address their implications as they relate to change at various levels of education. I will also summarize the limitations of the study, and finally, offer suggestions for further research pertaining to the enrollment and experiences of African-American students in foreign language study.

Discussion

"We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment – and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue" (Delpit, 1995, p. 46-47).

The Importance of Adult Encouragement

The most glaring findings in regard to encouragement highlighted students' overwhelming lack of encouragement from counselors and teachers to learn a foreign language. The fact that only eight out of 78 student participants were told by counselors that they should enroll in a foreign language points to a major issue in each of the schools. None of the 11 African-American, 15 Asian-American or two East African students received advice and encouragement from counselors. There is no excuse for the lack of counselor involvement in students' decisions to enroll in a foreign language initially and continue enrollment through subsequent levels. Research demonstrates that the concept of students "mattering" to others at school increases their academic

achievement (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Chen, 2007; MacNeil et al., 2009, in Tucker, et al., 2010), and this same concept has been found to be particularly effective and vital among marginalized populations of students, such as African-American students (Brown, et al., 2004; Stewart, 2007, in Tucker et al., 2010). In light of this research, it is clear that the counselors in this study missed an opportunity with many of the 78 students to enhance their educations through the study of another language.

In regard to teacher encouragement, it is very troubling that only five out of 37 upper level students could state that their teachers encouraged them to remain in the language class and continue their study of it. There would have been ample opportunity for the Spanish teachers in each school to provide those students with encouragement at some point between levels one and four or beyond. Again, none of the 11 African-American students' teachers impacted their decision to enroll in or remain in language study. Although the teachers perceived that they made an effort to encourage their students' retention in language classes, the students were unable to confirm their teachers' perceptions. According to the lower level suburban students, the teachers even seemed to give students permission to opt out of language study after meeting college entrance requirements in level two, which gave credence to the students' perception that their teachers weeded out the level two students, a practice that is not uncommon in foreign language education (Reagan & Osborn, 2002). Teachers wield a great deal of power in being able to motivate students to succeed and to foster feelings of belonging (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Tucker et al., 2000). Recently, a colleague, Reginald Bess, told me a story about his educational experiences as a young, African-American male that

illustrates the kind of power that teachers have to push students academically and personally. Bess' history teacher, who also became his Spanish teacher, told him one day, "You have *it*." In that one moment, he realized that somebody at school *valued* him, and he became the first African-American in West Virginia to win the state history and algebra contests, and later, to receive a Fulbright Scholarship (R. Bess, personal communication, Aug. 1, 2012). Unfortunately, due to the lack of influence from counselors and teachers in this study, students in this study pointed to their families as the greatest source of encouragement.

It was also apparent that students who received encouragement from their parents were greatly influenced by their parents' desires and opinions of foreign language study. Some of these students would have liked to discontinue their foreign language study, but because of their parents' insistence that they continue, they found that they developed a connection to the language and culture and a desire to gain proficiency in the language. Unfortunately, not all students reported receiving encouragement outside of school from family members. Only four of the 11 African-American students, four of the 15 Asian-American students, six of the 13 Latino students, and neither of the two East African students could report receiving encouragement from their families. According to Smith (2008), schools in the 1970s and 1980s failed to normalize low SES African-American and Latino parents in the White culture of the schools and chose to exclude parents from much of the educational process. This has impacted their involvement today. Low SES parents tend to believe in the merits of obtaining an education, but also maintain a belief that a high school education is a more realistic goal than college (Smith, 2007; 2008).

These parents may lack the "critical capital," also referred to as "college knowledge" necessary to advocate for their children and encourage them to strive for a post-secondary education (Auerbach, 2004, cited in Smith, 2008, p. 19). Meanwhile, a study of thirty middle class African-American parents revealed great variation in their involvement at a high-achieving middle class school, similar to West High in the current study, that ranged from perceived racism to uncertainty about their role in the school (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Regardless of the reasons for the absence of parent encouragement of more than half of the students of color at West High and East High, one must ask why the teachers and counselors did not bridge the gap between their programs and families of their students from underrepresented populations, especially when the foreign language teachers noted the absence of parent involvement. It seems that a joint effort between the students' families and the school staff would have the potential to greatly impact students' enrollment, retention and success.

A Positive Junior High Experience is Key

The manner in which many of the suburban students described their experiences in the junior high was troubling; the students emphasized that the curriculum was not relevant or engaging, and the approach their junior high foreign language teachers took to teaching them Spanish was, simply put, apathetic. As a result, the students became disenchanted with language study. Unfortunately, this was a shared perception held by the majority of the suburban students. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) published a position paper in 1995 to describe their expectations for curriculum and instruction at the middle level. NMSA stated that rote learning, drilling, and a

textbook/worksheet-driven curriculum must cease. In its place, interdisciplinary coursework should be introduced, along with a focus on content rather than on the process (cited in Sandrock & Webb, 2003). Yet at the time of the study in 2011, students described precisely these kinds of practices (rote learning, drills, worksheets) at the junior high that led them to believe that their teachers cared very little about engaging with them and instructing them in a meaningful way. These experiences interrupted lower level students' overall enrollment; had these students persisted in junior high language study, they could have begun at level three in 10th grade when they arrived at the high school instead of re-enrolling at the beginning in Spanish I. The role of junior high foreign language was pivotal for many; most of the students in level four or beyond had begun foreign language at the middle level, which is why they had the opportunity to continue their language study in upper levels in high school.

In contrast to West High, upper level students at East High explained that their positive experiences in junior high foreign language classes (French, Hmong, and Spanish) piqued their interest in language learning and demonstrated to them that they could be successful in the coursework. Sandrock and Webb (2003) assert that foreign language study at the middle level is important for the development of intellect, basic skills, and language learning skills. But, another major advantage of a middle level foreign language experience is the "potential for higher achievement in the discipline. Beginning an extended sequence of language study in the middle grades or earlier provides students with the opportunity to become proficient users of the target language" (Sandrock & Webb, 2003, p. 3). At the time of the study, the upper level students from

both school districts who began language study in junior high were enrolled in level four or beyond. Many of them asserted that they would continue their language study at the post-secondary level and/or complete a study abroad experience, allowing for the possibility of gaining proficiency and "higher achievement" in the language. This finding points to the vital need to encourage more students to enroll in junior high foreign language study and, most importantly, to provide rich experiences for middle level students that promote relevance, creativity, and critical thinking.

An Engaging, Relevant, and Equitable Curriculum Is Necessary

The students' perceptions of the foreign language curriculum are significant and must be examined seriously. This is a poignant example of the way in which student voice can provide great insight into the advantages and drawbacks of various pedagogical practices. Students criticized the dependency on the textbook and the focus on irrelevant vocabulary and grammar. The way in which the students described the instructional practices of their teachers was reminiscent of Freire's (1998) notion of banking education. The students could see that they were not using the vocabulary in a meaningful way that promoted critical thinking, but were simply required to recall the words on a quiz or test.

The students continually recognized the inattention given to the target culture, which points to a major need to shift pedagogical practices. The teaching of culture is a contentious issue in foreign language instruction because teachers tend to find it difficult to assess (Valencia, 2011); as Anne pointed out in her interview, it is easier to assign a grade to grammar than to cultural appreciation. *The Standards for Foreign Language*

Learning in the 21st Century point to the need not only to integrate products and practices of culture into the curriculum, but also the underlying cultural perspectives to develop students' comprehension of why practices are performed and why a society creates its products (National Standards, 2006, p. 50-51). The students at both schools described their experiences learning about the target culture as superficial; the findings demonstrated that students had a desire to delve into the perspectives of the culture, but the teachers barely addressed cultural perspectives.

The students' criticisms of the foreign language classes gave credence to the high attrition rate after level two at the suburban school. Students commented multiple times that they felt as though the foreign language courses were designed to weed students out as they progressed from one level to the next. This is a glaring issue, but it is somewhat common and not limited to this suburban high school (Reagan & Osborn, 2002). However, I believe that it is problematic that students could recognize that this kind of tracking exists in foreign language study, but that the teachers, who claimed that they wanted to retain more students in upper level classes, failed to articulate that this major issue was present in their foreign language programs. Furthermore, several suburban students mentioned that teachers emphasized seat time; in other words, if they completed two years, they could opt out of further foreign language study. If students perceive that the teachers do not necessarily want as many of their students as possible to continue and be successful in learning a second language, it is not difficult to imagine why the attrition rate after level two at the suburban school was 62% according to student questionnaire responses.

The Perceptions of African-American Students Held by Adults and Students

In this study, teachers and students alike characterized African-American students as struggling academically due, in large part, they surmised, to a low SES. At the suburban school, students and teachers believed that enrollment in upper level foreign language classes was greatly dependent on a middle class to upper middle class SES. The suburban White students not only assumed that most of the African-American students in their school were of a lower SES, but also that most African-American students would have few means or reasons to use the language meaningfully. Meanwhile, the female Latina and Asian-American students at the urban school characterized the African-American students similarly, stating that due to their low SES, they had different priorities and obtaining an education was not one of them.

The identity of African-American students was also called into question by the teachers. The suburban teachers described successful African-American students in their school as suffering from an "oreo cookie" syndrome and asserted that students struggled to reconcile their Blackness with success in a White system in classes with predominantly White students. The urban teachers, on the other hand, posited that cultural identities were absent in the majority of their African-American students; therefore, without a cultural identity, it would be difficult for an African-American student to connect with other languages and cultures. Interestingly, they never mentioned a lack of cultural identity in their White students, and they made an assumption that because their Asian-American and Latino students were bilingual, they also had strong cultural identities. In actuality, several of the female African-American students were the only student

participants to assert that their continued enrollment in language study was a result of their desire to develop connections with others around the world. Their stated aspirations were in direct contradiction to the teachers' assumptions about their African-American students. It is possible that some African-American students have a weak understanding of their cultural identity? Yes. But, it is also highly probable that a percentage of White, Latino, and Asian-American students have a weak understanding of their cultural identities.

The findings also seemed to point to the pervasiveness of White privilege and racism in the suburban school, in particular. Most of the students seemed compelled to state immediately, "I'm not racist, but..." The "but" was telling, as most of the students did, in fact, harbor very specific opinions about their African-American classmates, and it appeared that their use of "I'm not racist" was used to distance themselves from their racist remarks. The urban teachers described the perceptions East Africans had of African-American students as uneducated crooks, but the five teachers had few positive comments to make about the African-American students in the school. Brian even stated that the U.S. "gave" African-Americans "Ebonics," demonstrating an utter lack of understanding of African-American culture that he claimed to comprehend, having grown up in an urban environment. There was a distinct and pervasive devaluation and marginalization of African-American students in this study. The teachers, who were well-versed in topics related to diversity training, expressed a desire to attract and retain more African-American students in their language programs, yet they offered few perspectives that would allow them to progress beyond superficial changes in their

program. Freire (1998) points out that without true reflection on one's practices and attitudes and trust in the abilities of one's students, one will exchange the potential of "dialogue, reflection, and communication" for superficial "slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions" (p. 66).

Overall, I question the genuineness of the teachers' desire to address the low enrollment and retention of African-American students. All of the teachers were fully aware of the low enrollment issue and recognized its existence in their schools, yet other than a supposed attempt to demonstrate the diversity of speakers of the target language, they seemed to have taken few steps to improve the situation. Simply recognizing a problem, but choosing not to actively pursue solutions to the problem is similar to Tatum's (1997) moving walkway of racism. Those who opt to stand on the walkway and allow it to move them in the direction of racist practices are as guilty as active racists; none of the teachers in this study described behaviors or practices that demonstrated a motivation to walk the opposite direction on the moving walkway, which is substantially more difficult. The teachers at East High did discuss their efforts to increase retention from one level to the next by comparing enrollment lists from the current year and next school year. However, the teachers used the lists to have one-on-one conversations with students who they decided *should* continue foreign language study. Did that mean that students who they perceived as unable to succeed in subsequent levels did not receive one-on-one encouragement? Furthermore, how did they determine which students "should" continue? It is necessary to consider that although their strategy of comparing lists could be effective, it could also be used to arbitrarily determine which students

would receive encouragement while weeding out the students they would prefer not to teach.

Implications and Suggestions for Change

"The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist in the development of a 'relevant black personality' that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African-American culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Throughout the course of the study and data analysis, it became clear that there are several issues that warrant change and further exploration. I have organized my suggestions into several categories: district-wide policies, changes in foreign language curriculum, school staff attitudes and teacher preparation and development.

State and District-Wide Policies

1. Make foreign language a requirement for graduation at the state level. The two suburban teachers and several suburban students mentioned that one solution to the problem of low enrollment among African American students would be to implement two years of foreign language study as a graduation requirement. They contended that it was important to remove students from their comfort zones and allow them to try something new. While there is merit in the participants' perceptions of making foreign language a requirement, there are also several important considerations. Firstly, these two teachers may have claimed to want a two year foreign language requirement for graduation, but many of the lower level and upper level students alluded to a system of weeding out students in the lower levels, and even the French teacher, Anne, acknowledged that if students fail to understand the giant mathematical equation that is

grammar, they are unable to continue language study. If teachers genuinely want to have all types of students in their lower level classes as part of a graduation requirement, major changes in attitude and curriculum will have to follow. If not, teachers can still opt to weed students out of lower levels, and the lower level students will continue to bide their time and complete the "required" two years of study before opting out of foreign language courses. Interestingly, since the study was conducted, the district in which West High was located did implement a two-year language requirement for graduation among all students. I believe that very little has changed in regard to the teachers' approach to foreign language instruction in the year and half since data collection took place; therefore, the graduation requirement may have very little impact on upper level foreign language enrollment numbers of students, those of underrepresented populations, in particular.

Despite the issues described above, I still assert that making a foreign language a requirement at the state level has the potential to positively influence students' educational experiences and to increase the enrollment of students of color in foreign language study. Texas is an example of a state that adopted a two-year foreign language requirement for graduation with the Recommended Plan, the standard diploma for *all* students. A study of three years of the same language is required for the Distinguished Achievement Program, and there is no foreign language requirement for the Minimum High School Program. But, it is very difficult for parents to convince the district to allow their child to opt out of the Recommended Plan and into the Minimum High School Program without a great deal of evidence (National Council of State Supervisors for

Languages, 2010). Although this example from Texas does not demonstrate that students who complete the two year graduation requirement make the decision to continue language study through level three or beyond, it does reveal that at the state level, standards can be raised for all students, allowing students who may not have otherwise enrolled in language study to discover their ability to learn a language. In the state of Minnesota, such a requirement would need to be phased in over time to ensure that enough qualified teachers are available. I argue that in combination with a policy requiring foreign language study, it is vital that foreign language teachers adopt an objective of meeting the needs of a variety of students and creating curriculum that allows more students to succeed. It is time for a major shift in foreign language teachers' perceptions of the type of student who can succeed in language learning.

2. Develop a support system to bridge the gap between families and the school. In my M.A. thesis on the low enrollment of African-American students (Glynn, 2007), the assistant principal, Margaret, with whom I conducted an individual interview, had wondered what the outcome might be if she were to reach out to the parents of African-American students who had not yet enrolled in foreign language classes. Her point was that it could make an impression on both students and teachers if school staff made an effort to connect with parents, dialogue with them about their child's potential, suggest courses in which he/she should enroll and personally invite them to events at the school. Margaret's suggestion is applicable to this study as well. Susan, one of the Spanish teachers at the urban school, had mentioned that she rarely has the opportunity to meet and talk with African-American students' parents. I do want to state that teachers

have full plates at school and a great deal to balance; therefore, reaching out to parents does certainly add another element to their already busy jobs. But, in regard to foreign language enrollment, doing so could have a significant impact on the overall enrollment and retention of students in the program.

Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) assert the following: "The value of school-family-communities partnerships to African-American children's academic achievement cannot be understated" (p. 54). Furthermore, when parents of low SES students, in particular, are active participants in their children's education, they are more likely to reach for academic goals such as college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001, cited in Smith, 2008). But, it is necessary that the families of students of underrepresented populations be able to recognize that the counselors and teachers understand the way in which extraneous factors have impacted their communities. Counselors must emphasize trust and compromise in order to form relationships with African-American families; working effectively with African-American parents requires that counselors address the way in which race, gender, and social class affect African-American students (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). Rather than hoping that African-American parents come to them at back-to-school nights or conferences, as many of the teachers in this study seemed to, it may be necessary to call and invite these parents, making it clear that teachers and counselors have a desire to meet the parents of their students. If foreign language teachers and parents can partner together to encourage students to remain in foreign language study, the high attrition rates witnessed at the schools may be positively impacted. Systemic alliances with schools, families, and communities can have a

positive impact, creating institutional change and a sense of agency among students and their communities (Edelman et al., 2006, cited in Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

3. Develop a system of recruitment at the elementary and junior high levels. Often, it is the role of foreign language teachers to recruit students to their program and spark an interest among new students, but I believe that involving students in the recruitment effort has the potential to send a powerful message. Considering that schools across the United States have become more diverse, a group of White foreign language teachers talking about the benefits of foreign language learning to potential students may be less impactful than involving current foreign language students of varied ethnicities. I would also suggest in the recruitment process to dispel myths students might have about speakers of the target language. Recently, in a metropolitan junior high that has become increasingly diverse, a group of high school German students visited with several classes of 7th graders, introducing them to Afro-Germans, Muslim Turkish-Germans, German rap music, and the influence of many immigrant cultures on traditional German food. Most of the students, especially students of color, were surprised by the videos of Afro-Germans rapping. The enrollment in German at that junior high tripled the following year. Although it is impossible to state that these current German students caused the increase in enrollment, it is likely that the students demonstrated the overwhelming diversity of speakers of foreign languages around the world and that this may have impacted enrollment decisions. It is vital to "plant a seed" early with students that people of many colors speak many languages around the world to allow students to see themselves as language learners. But, strong administrative support, foreign language

teachers' mutual support of each others' languages and the involvement of current students must be present in the design of a successful recruitment program.

A Call for Change in Foreign Language Curriculum and Instruction

1. Equity and differentiated instruction must be an integral part of the approach to foreign language instruction. Recently, I witnessed an entire high school staff in a large school district define equity as "treating all students the same." Equity in education is quite the opposite; it was a shock to see how many teachers were utterly uninformed about equity and differentiation. A school district that is dedicated to equity recognizes the differences in students and seeks to take advantage of the differences to instruct students using various methods that will allow all of the students to understand information, express what they have learned, and still meet the same objective. An elementary school in Maryland that utilized differentiated instruction improved the percentage of African-American students passing the state reading test from 55% to 91%, while the percentage of White students who reached the advanced level on the math test increased from 33% to almost 66% (Petrilli, 2011). This example provides evidence that an equitable education that promotes differentiated instruction allows for greater success among students of all ethnic backgrounds. The principal of the school where the study was conducted was asked if he had grouped the students homogeneously in order to obtain such results. He stated, "There's no such thing as a homogeneous group. One kid is a homogeneous group. As soon as you bring another kid in, you have differences. The question is: how do you capitalize on the differences?" (Petrilli, 2011, p. 53).

An approach to foreign language instruction that includes differentiation would allow students of various backgrounds and ethnicities to have the opportunity to explore their own cultural identities and tap into their cultural capital while working toward the same objective in the classroom. Teachers do tend to view differentiation as challenging (Petrilli, 2011); it is often difficult for teachers to imagine meeting the needs of many students while still meeting the district's benchmarks. But, if differentiated instruction is an integral part of teachers' pedagogical approach, students would have more options and could take various routes to meeting an academic objective. Differentiation is informed by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and research provides evidence that the curriculum and instruction that accounts for students' ZPD allows students not only to learn more, but also gain more confidence in their abilities (Fisher, 1980, cited in Tomlinson, 2001; Subban, 2006). In the foreign language classroom, curriculum grounded in differentiation would have to shift away from drill and practice to give students more agency in their foreign language experiences. Students would be allowed more choice in the way they express what they have learned, giving them the opportunity to examine topics of interest as they relate to the objectives of the content being studied (Tomlinson, 2001).

2. Less dependency on the textbook. A major shift must occur in foreign language education that focuses much less on the grammar-driven textbook and more on providing relevant, authentic and engaging curriculum for students. It is a known fact that foreign language teachers tend to emphasize grammar in the foreign language classroom (Reagan & Osborn, 2002; Tse, 2000) and tend to overlook the fact that

students rarely find learning grammar structures as gratifying as their teachers do (Moore, 2005; Tse, 2000).

One possible solution is a content-based approach to teaching foreign languages. This approach would allow students to use authentic language in a meaningful way that transfers knowledge between the target language and various content areas, while assessing students on their language proficiency. The objective of a content-based approach to language teaching is a focus on both meaning and form (Lyster, 2007), and students are better able to develop an appreciation for the relevance of language learning (Horn, 2011). According to Met (2004), "[s]tudents have real-life reasons to want to understand what is being said and to make themselves understood, and they use language to communicate about topics that are engaging and motivating" (p. 217). Met's description of content-based instruction as relevant and engaging reflects the suggestions for improving foreign language classes provided by the student participants. However, some teachers of traditional foreign language classes tend to find content-based instruction overwhelming and intimidating. Cammarata (2010) found that although CBI offers much promise for motivating students and increasing their success in language classes, teachers struggled to "let go" of their beliefs of how languages should be learned. Foreign language teachers are accustomed to short units from textbooks that are based primarily on grammatical structures, leading to a strong "belief in the existence of an ideal linear grammar sequence of language instruction" in order for students to be successful in language learning (Cammarata, 2010, p. 99). This belief persists despite second language acquisition research to the contrary (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

The teachers in Cammarata's (2010) study struggled to reconcile the scope and sequence of textbook with the implementation of CBI units. CBI may also push teachers out of their comfort zone, and there is a loss of "predictability and control" because they may not yet know the pitfalls of the unit they are teaching (Cammarata, 2010, p. 104). I maintain that CBI is one good solution to increasing students' retention in language classes, but shifting teachers' approach to language teaching would certainly be challenging and would require sustained professional development, ongoing support, and published materials that follow a content-based approach.

Foreign language teachers should also be familiar with Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA), a standards-based, student-centered approach to assessing interpretive, interpersonal and presentational communication skills, which was developed by ACTFL (Glisan et al., 2003). Three interrelated communication tasks are associated with a single theme or content topic and allow students to use the language meaningfully and authentically (The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2012). As previously stated, Integrated Performance Assessments are standards-based, and therefore, require that teachers' focus on the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (11 standards organized under the five goal areas of Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities). While the standards offer great potential for students to be able to gain proficiency in the language and a profound comprehension of target cultures, Cutshall (2012) and Phillips & Abbott (2011) have found that few teachers embrace all five C's. Teachers tend to focus mostly on the Communication and Culture standards (Cutshall, 2012; Phillips & Abbott, 2011). The

Connections standard, on the other hand, is all but disregarded by teachers despite the capacity the Connections standard has for developing independent leaners and an intrinsic motivation for language learning (Cutshall, 2012). Meanwhile, Communities is referred to as the "lost C" due to its perceived difficulty in instruction and application (Phillips & Abbott, 2011). It would seem that although CBI and IPA units, both of which require an integration of the 5 C's, could transform students' experiences in language classes; transforming teachers' beliefs about language teaching is a challenging hurdle to overcome.

3. Shift away from a Eurocentric curriculum and toward a culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) states that culturally relevant pedagogy embodies three main principles: "(a) [s]tudents must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). But, to ensure success, cultural competence and a critical consciousness about the world, a Eurocentric curriculum cannot be a part of the classroom. One of the objectives of a culturally relevant pedagogy is to prepare students to function effectively as citizens in diverse communities. Moreover, teachers who embrace culturally relevant pedagogy accept that knowledge is "continuously recreated;" therefore, they cannot be exclusively reliant on textbooks to decide the content and process of the instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). There are, however, some issues that create practical challenges to embracing a culturally relevant pedagogy. Firstly, there is a lack of culturally relevant materials available to teachers (Gay, 2010);

thus, it requires more time on the teacher's part to locate and/or to prepare materials. Secondly, it is not uncommon for teachers to harbor a fear of addressing contentious issues, such as racism, with their students. In my experience as a language teacher, even the inclusion of pictures of same-sex couples with children in units about family caused discomfort among colleagues, as it was perceived that such pictures could open up conversations with students about homosexuality. Finally, in order for new teachers to adopt a culturally relevant approach to teaching, it must be part of pre-service programs, but teacher educators often struggle with how to integrate topics of diversity into their programs (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006). There are indeed challenges to changing foreign language curriculum and instruction, but the potential for greater foreign language retention and motivation among students must be the impetus for change.

School Staff Attitudes

1. Foreign language teachers. Among foreign language teachers, a shift must occur that focuses on teaching all students, not just the best and brightest. Foreign language teachers have maintained an elitist attitude for many years (Reagan & Osborn, 2002), but in order to attract and retain more students, particularly students of color, it is necessary to be inclusive and not weed students out. As Delpit (2005) states, "[p]retending that gatekeeping points don't exist is to ensure that many students will not pass through them…" (p. 39). Increasing success and retention among foreign language students requires a multi-pronged approach. As I described in detail above, foreign language teachers must encourage their students, no matter the perceived ability level of

the student. As a German teacher, I often witnessed my struggling students, some who were formerly "D" German students, gain confidence in their ability to learn the language, but it required a great deal of one-on-one encouragement. As a result, the retention rate of my German classes rarely fell below 90% from one level to the next. It is vital that foreign language teachers realize that all students have the potential to reach proficiency goals in foreign language study. Instructional and curricular changes are necessary to allow students of varied abilities to find success. As described above, foreign language teachers must adopt new instructional approaches to teaching foreign language by embracing differentiated instruction and a culturally relevant pedagogy. In regard to curricular changes, I have offered two suggestions: Content-Based Instruction and Integrated Performance Assessment. Students should have the opportunity to use authentic language in a meaningful manner that allows them to explore topics of interest and express their own perspectives and opinions. I argue that this shift would increase enrollment and retention in foreign language classes exponentially.

2. Counselors. There is great potential among the counseling staff for motivating students to try coursework that they may have otherwise ignored. It is possible given the elitist reputation of foreign language study that today's counselors may believe that language study is reserved for only the best and brightest students. Counselors must be educated about the benefits of language study to all students and be told that when they meet with students about their schedules each year, they must encourage them to try a foreign language course. It is impossible for the counselors to know what kind of student may actually succeed or enjoy learning a foreign language,

but if they continue to make assumptions about students' abilities to learn a language, especially about African-American students (Glynn, 2007; Moore, 2005), those students may lose out on the opportunity to learn a language without additional encouragement from an adult such as a counselor.

Teacher Preparation and Development

1. Explore racial identity and frame of reference. Before pre-service teachers enter the classroom, they must have the opportunity to explore their own racial identities and beliefs about teaching. Meanwhile, teachers already in the classroom must enter into dialogue as a staff to consider the impact of their racial identities on their own classrooms and the school environment as a whole. Given that the majority of teachers are White and that most classrooms across the United States are diverse, it is important that pre-service and classroom teachers examine what it means to be a White teacher. If White teachers continue to underestimate the power and privilege that is synonymous with their Whiteness, they will also underestimate the importance of their students' varied and diverse cultural identities and cultural capital (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 1997). Singleton and Linton (2006) state, "[t]o develop a fuller understanding of race, we must first look deeply and introspectively at our own racial existence as a doorway to understanding the complexities of race in America" (p. 74). But, as stated previously, one of the major challenges to teacher educators is to re-think the way in which pre-service teachers are instructed; it is not unusual for teacher educators to either disregard or grudgingly include topics related to culturally relevant pedagogy, diversity, and race in teacher education programs (Kea et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Kennedy (1999) asserts that it is necessary for teacher educators to address Lortie's (1975) notion of "apprenticeship of observation" in both teacher education and professional development programs. An exploration of future and current teachers' own experiences as learners "allows them to interpret their experiences and gives them some ideas of how to respond to them" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 55). Frames of reference are important for teachers to consider; they provide the opportunity for teachers to examine the way in which they respond to situations in the classroom. Kennedy (1999) found that teachers' stated ideologies and objectives rarely aligned with the way in which they actually responded to both hypothetical and real situations in the classroom. I would argue that an examination of teachers' own identities along with their frames of reference is vital for the development of effective teachers.

2. Address Issues in Foreign Language Curriculum and Instruction. Both pre-service and practicing foreign language teachers must have the opportunity to participate in coursework and experiences that problematize key issues in foreign language instruction, such as a grammar and textbook-driven curriculum to which many foreign language teachers are accustomed. It is necessary, however, to recognize the difficulty in altering the practices of classroom teachers whose instruction seems tried and true. Research has shown that teachers' beliefs about language learning have more influence on their instruction than specific methodologies taught in teacher education courses (Williams & Burden, 1997, cited in Cammarata, 2010). Furthermore, Allen (2007) emphasizes that it is unusual for teachers to implement new approaches to instruction that are not based on their own experiences as learners (cited in Cammarata,

2010). While both practicing and pre-service teachers are affected by the "apprenticeship of observation" and often approach teaching in the same manner in which they were instructed, there is a great need to implement change in foreign language teachers' practices. The first step is to prepare pre-service teachers in foreign language methods courses to approach foreign language instruction using meaningful, authentic activities that are relevant, require critical thinking, and allow students to tap into their own ideas and identities. I assert that, despite the roadblocks to changing teachers' beliefs about language learning, future students could be positively impacted if pre-service teachers embrace the ideas espoused in their programs. It is also very important that teachers have the opportunity for sustained professional development. Professional development that is intensive, sustained over a long period of time, and connected to teachers' specific content areas has been shown to be most effective. Studies have shown that teachers who received 80 hours or more of professional development in a year-long program were more likely to implement changes to their curriculum and instruction than teachers who received less professional development (Corcoran, McVay & Riordan, 2003; Supovitz & Turner, 2000; Banilower, 2002, cited in Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). "Intensive professional development, especially when it includes applications of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction, has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, leading to gains in student learning" (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009, p. 9). The process of changing teachers' approaches to and beliefs about foreign language instruction must begin in pre-service programs and continue through sustained and meaningful professional development.

3. Critical Pedagogy and Issues of Social Justice. Both pre-service and in-service classroom teachers can benefit from the exploration of critical pedagogy and social justice, allowing them the chance to imagine the way that problem-posing education can transform their classrooms and give way to critical thinkers. These are topics that should be integrated into both education programs for pre-service teachers and continuing professional development for classroom teachers. One of the major issues with education in its current state, referred to by Freire (1998), as banking education, is that students are not given the opportunity to learn to think critically and freely about the world, which allows institutional racism and White privilege to endure. As Nieto (2010) states, however, problem-posing education is not as simple for teachers to carry out as banking education: "Teaching becomes much more complex when learning is based on the idea that all students have the ability to think and reason" (p. 7).

I realize that this suggestion seems idealistic, but I would argue that education based on critical pedagogy that addresses issues of social justice is simply good education. It is necessary to develop an appreciation for others' languages, cultures and backgrounds among students of all ethnic backgrounds, including classes of predominantly White students. Nieto defines teaching for social justice as the following: "[a] philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity and generosity" (p. 46). By creating environments in classrooms that demonstrate respect for an interest in students' unique perspectives and knowledge, students will engage in classes and have better success (Kincheloe, 2004; Nieto, 2002).

Reagan and Osborn (2002) believe that critical pedagogy must be the driving force in foreign language programs:

> Critical pedagogy calls for us to re-examine not only the purposes of foreign language instruction, but even more, the hidden (and often not-so-hidden) biases about language, social class, power and equity that underlie language use." (p. 30)

Critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice in foreign language classrooms could transform students' experiences and allow them to create knowledge, form relationships, strengthen their identities and become true participants in learning about other languages and cultures.

Future Research

Because there is little empirical research on the topic of African-American students' enrollment and experiences in foreign language classes, it is important to continue to examine this topic. The following are suggestions for future research:

African-American students not currently enrolled in foreign language classes

In order to better understand why African-American students opt out of foreign language study at a higher rate than students having other ethnicities, an opportunity to speak with African-American students with no foreign language experience could be very illuminating. In the limitations section, I point out that because of the volunteer nature of the study, very few if any African-American students who have withdrawn emotionally from school were included in the current study. A population of African-American students with no foreign language experience may contain more students with negative experiences in school. A qualitative study targeting such students could provide a

broader view of issues in school that result in a low foreign language enrollment among African-American students. The opportunity to dialogue in interviews or focus groups with African-American students who have no experience with foreign language could point to specific perceptions or hurdles that cause students to opt out of language study.

Students who left foreign language study

It may also be very useful to conduct a qualitative research study that includes group interviews or focus groups with African-American students who studied foreign language for one or two years before opting to discontinue their language study. Due to the high attrition rate after level two of all students, it could be beneficial to compare and contrast students of varied ethnicities. Ideally, it would best to form group interviews or focus groups based on the students' ethnic backgrounds to allow students the freedom to be more honest about topics that involve race or racism. The current study pointed to several main factors that clearly influence many students to discontinue language study. In order to gain a more solid comprehension of how foreign language programs can better retain their students, it is necessary to listen to students' perceptions of foreign language study.

Identifying and describing successful foreign language programs with a high level of African-American students enrollment and retention

Very little of the existing research related to African-American students in foreign language study explores curriculum and instruction, strategies, and attitudes in successful language programs at the secondary level. It would be illuminating to involve high school teachers and students in a descriptive or an evaluative case study or an

ethnographic study of a program that consistently attracts and retains African-American students. I know of one such program in Little Rock, Arkansas; the German teacher, Jennifer Lusk, typically attracts a large population of students of color, mostly African-American, to her German program. Moreover, she has an excellent retention rate of students, and seeks to provide her students of color, many of which are of a low SES, the opportunity to travel abroad with her in the summer (Jennifer Lusk, personal communication, Aug., 2, 2012). It would be extremely helpful to examine a program such as Lusk's to explore strategies and practices that other teachers could adapt to their own classrooms and programs.

Middle level foreign language programs

The middle level foreign language experience seemed to be pivotal for many of the students, as the majority of the upper level students began language study in the junior high. I believe that it would be useful to conduct qualitative research of various foreign language programs at middle schools and junior highs using students' voices to explore their perceptions of the foreign language classes and how they would make future enrollment decisions. I would suggest replicating the current study at the middle level, comparing suburban and urban schools, and including questionnaires, focus groups and interviews as data collection tools.

Persistence and motivation of African-American students in foreign language study

In this study, the African-American females displayed more persistence in learning a language than White students in the same focus groups; therefore, it would be interesting to examine the relationship between students' gender and ethnicity and their

persistence and motivation in language classes. Pratt's (2012) quantitative study on the relationship between motivation and ethnicity illustrated that African-American students were less motivated in language classes than their White peers, but his study involved solely the use of surveys as a data collection tool. I believe a mixed methods design at a school with African-American students of varied SES backgrounds would allow me to examine the topic in more depth. I would include a survey to ask students about various factors related to motivation and persistence; this would allow me to explore correlations between students' ethnicity, gender, SES and motivation to learn a foreign language. In addition to the survey, the use of focus groups and/or interviews would provide the opportunity to focus on the students' voices and the way in which they describe their motivation and their ability to persist in language classes.

Teacher and counselor beliefs about students' potential in foreign language classes

Recently, I presented some of the findings from this study to colleagues from *Alle Lernen Deutsch*, and several teachers were adamant that the attitudes of the teacher participants in the study were not reflective of the majority of foreign language teachers in the United States. I would make the argument that a significant percentage of foreign language teachers harbor a perception that only certain types of students can truly succeed in foreign language classes. In a qualitative study on foreign language teachers' beliefs, it would also be interesting to examine the way in which the teachers make sense of "weeding out" students, something that many of the students pointed to in this study. I would include observations of a wide range of foreign language teachers and interviews with each teacher. Although it would be impossible to observe counselors, I would invite

counselors to participate in individual or group interviews to gain an understanding of their beliefs of the types of students who should be encouraged to study a language.

Limitations

As in any research study, there are limitations that must be considered. The majority of the limitations of this study were due to the fact that the study took place in high schools that are neither static nor predictable environments. Although I designed the study in a manner that would yield the most ideal results and opportunities to explore the topic of foreign language study with students and teachers, my original study design did not account for the participants' busy schedules and the day-to-day activities that often accompany public high schools. The result is that the major limitation of this study revolved around the issue of time.

I was not allowed to meet with students at school during a time that would disrupt students' abilities to attend their classes, and the available meeting times with students were dictated by the students' lunch hours. Therefore, the focus groups and interviews were subject to a time constraint of fitting the discussion into the allotted lunch hour (30 minutes). I was also unable to re-connect with the students for follow-up interviews. This did have a significant impact on the study, as it was difficult to obtain all of the students' perspectives on the various topics covered in the focus group. In regard to the teacher participants, it was unfortunate that only two of the possible eight foreign language teachers at the suburban school were able to participate in the study. Given that all five of the urban teachers participated in the study, it would have been useful to gain the insight of additional suburban teachers.

An additional limitation pertains to the demographics of the participating schools. In the original design of the study, I had planned to involve an urban school with a higher African-American population than 20%. However, I was unable to obtain permission to conduct research in my desired school district; thus, both participating schools had a Black population of 20%, which provided less contrast. It is also necessary to point out the limitations that result from the volunteer nature of a study such as this one. Students, who volunteer for such studies and take the time to fill out a questionnaire, and return consent forms, are generally students who have positive attitudes about education. The voluntary nature of the study may have impacted the results.

Finally, I am a novice researcher, which made dealing with several of the limitations more difficult. I am not an expert at conducting focus groups or interviews and sometimes missed opportunities to probe further. I was unable to gather background information on three of the teacher participants at East High, for example; in hindsight, I should have emailed them to gather more information, but by the time I realized my error, it was summer and many months had passed since the data collection period. Another example is my error in not following up on some of the language or choice of words used by the teachers and students. It was a learning experience, and I hope that future research I conduct will reflect the lessons I learned in conducting interviews and focus groups.

Conclusion

The findings in this study demonstrate the positive impact foreign language study can have on students' overall school experiences and attitudes toward others. On the

contrary, it was also apparent that a shift must occur in foreign language curriculum and that foreign language teachers must adapt and change in order to better encourage, engage and retain students in language classes. A continued focus on banking education, textbook materials, irrelevant vocabulary and complex grammar will discourage students from enrolling in foreign language or continuing past levels one or two. Furthermore, it became clear that there is much work to do regarding equity in education. Although the lower level female African-American students in the study demonstrated a greater desire to persist in language study than lower level White students, many of the perceptions of African-American students held by their classmates and teachers at both schools were troublesome and, at times, disturbing. Several of the African-American male students at the urban school simply felt incapable of succeeding in level two or beyond. As a result, it is necessary to wonder how African-American students are affected by negative perceptions and how those perceptions have the ability to discourage students from persisting in coursework they perceive as challenging.

Change must occur sooner rather than later in order to provide a situation in which African-American students can visualize foreign language classes, not as White, but rather as diverse, relevant and inclusive. Foreign language is in a position to demonstrate to and instill in students respect and understanding of various ethnicities and groups (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). “We must learn to love more and respect those national groups against which we are still somewhat prejudiced…Let us learn how much more we have in common with these Americans of foreign origin” (De Gaetano, 1943, as cited in Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001, p. 169). De Gaetano’s words from 1943 still hold a

great deal of meaning today, almost 70 years later. It is time for foreign language study to engage all students and foster discourse and critical thinking that will lead to students who are prepared for a global and diverse world.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

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02/01/2011

Cassandra L Glynn
Curriculum and Instruction
Room 125 PeikH
159 Pillsbury Dr S E
Minneapolis, MN 55455

RE: "Diverse Perspectives in the Foreign Language Classroom"
IRB Code Number: **1101P94954**

Dear Ms. Glynn:

The referenced study was reviewed by expedited review procedures and approved on January 28, 2011. If you have applied for a grant, this date is required for certification purposes as well as the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA 00004003). Approval for the study will expire one year from that date. A report form will be sent out two months before the expiration date.

This approval comes with the understanding that IRB approval letters from both Hopkins Public Schools and St. Paul Public Schools will be submitted to the University of Minnesota prior to the implementation of this study.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of this study includes the consent form, assent form, and study invitation, all received January 13, 2011.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 140 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

The code number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

As the Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Unanticipated problems and adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal. If you have any questions, call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success with your research.

Sincerely,

Christina Dobrovolny, CIP
Research Compliance Supervisor
CD/ks

CC: Diane Tedick

APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire

Background Information:

1. What is your grade in school? Check one:

☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12

2. Ethnicity – Check one:

☐ Caucasian ☐ African-American

☐ Hispanic/Latino ☐ Asian-American

☐ East-African ☐ West-African

☐ Other: ______________________

3. Which language do you use most often at home with your family? Check one:

☐ English ☐ Somali ☐ Hmong

☐ Spanish ☐ Arabic

☐ Other: ______________________

4. Which language do you use most often with your friends? Check one:

☐ English ☐ Somali ☐ Hmong

☐ Spanish ☐ Arabic

☐ Other: ______________________

5. Which family members are able to speak more than one language? Check as many as apply:

☐ parent/guardian(s) ☐ sibling(s)

☐ cousin (s) ☐ aunt/uncle

☐ grandparent(s) ☐ none

☐ Other: ___________________________

6. What are your plans after high school? Check one:

☐ Find a job ☐ 2-year college

☐ 4-year college/univ. ☐ I don't know

☐ Other: ________________________

Prior Language Experience:

7. Did you learn a foreign language in elementary school? Check yes or no:

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** – *move to question 8*

If yes, check the language(s) you learned:

☐ **Spanish** ☐ **French** ☐ **German**

☐ **Chinese** ☐ **American-Sign Language (ASL)**

☐ **Other: ____________________________**

8. Did you study a foreign language in junior high? Check yes or no:

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** – *move to question 9*

If yes, check the language(s) you studied:

☐ **Spanish** ☐ **French** ☐ **German** ☐ **Chinese** ☐ **ASL**

☐ **Other ________________________**

Which level(s) did you take?

☐ **I** ☐ **II** ☐ **III**

9. Did you study a language other than *(Spanish)* in high school? Check yes or no: *(Spanish is an example and will be replaced with the language class to which this questionnaire is given)*

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** – *move to question 10*

If yes, which language?

☐ **French** ☐ **German** ☐ **ASL** ☐ **Chinese** ☐ **Other**

____

Which level(s) did you take?

☐ **I** ☐ **II** ☐ **III** ☐ **IV** ☐ **V** ☐ **V**

(Spanish) Enrollment:

10. Describe in one or two sentences why you enrolled in the 1st level of (*Spanish*).

____

____

____

____

11. Did anyone encourage you to enroll in (Spanish)? Check yes or no:

Yes **No** – *move to question 11*

☐ **Parent/guardian** ☐ **Sibling**

☐ **Other family member** ☐ **Teacher**

☐ **Friend** ☐ **Counselor**

☐ **Other:** __________________________

12. Describe in one or two sentences why you chose (Spanish) instead of the other languages offered in your school:

____

____

____

____

(Spanish) ___ *(*the level will be included here)* Experience:

13. List 3 adjectives that you would use to describe what it is like to learn (*Spanish*):

____

____

____

14. Name 2 activities that you do in *(Spanish ___)* that most help you to learn:

____

____

15. Name 2 activities that least help you to learn (*Spanish)*:

---

16. Name one thing that you like best about learning (*Spanish*):

---

17. Name one thing that you dislike the most about learning (*Spanish*):

---

18. Based on your experience so far in (*Spanish* ___), would you enroll in the next level?

Check one:

☐ **Yes** ☐ **Maybe** ☐ **No**

Why or why not?

Perception of Self as Language Learner:

20. Name one thing you think you are most successful at in (*Spanish*):

---

21. Name one thing that you struggle with the most in (*Spanish*):

---

22. How would you describe the amount you participate in class? Check one:

☐ **always** ☐ **most of the time** ☐ **sometimes**

☐ **rarely** ☐ **never**

23. How would you describe the amount of effort you put into learning (*Spanish*)?

Check one:

☐ **A great amount – I work hard all of the time**

☐ **A fair amount – I work hard most of the time**

☐ **Some – I do enough to get by**

☐ **Very little – I don't do my work or study**

24. What kind of grade do you think you are able to earn in (*Spanish* __)? Check one:

☐ **A** ☐ **B** ☐ **C** ☐ **D** ☐ **F – I don't think I'll pass the class**

25. How does your foreign language experience influence your overall school experience?

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___

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Are you interested in participating in a focus group and interview about this topic? Your time would be compensated with a $10 gift certificate to Target because your opinions and thoughts are highly valued and would be very helpful for this study. Please contact Ms. Glynn if you have further questions about it before making a decision. You can email me at ober0172@umn.edu or call me at 952.212.2165. I'm happy to answer any of your questions and I hope that you will consider participating!

Please write your name here if you would like to be contacted about your participation in the focus group and interview:

___

Thank you for completing the survey!!!

Please place your survey in the envelope, seal it, and give it to the teacher.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: Students with ONE to TWO LEVELS of FL

Opening Question:

1. Tell us your name, grade, and what you enjoy most at school.

Introductory Questions:

2. On this piece of paper you will find several sentences that you need to complete. Take a moment to write in your answers before you share with the group.

   My favorite thing about learning a foreign language is…
   My least favorite thing about learning a foreign language is…
   My foreign language teacher helps me to best learn when he/she…
   One thing my teacher could do to help me learn better is…
   What surprised me most about learning a foreign language is…
   One topic I would most like to learn about in foreign language class is…

3. How do you think learning a foreign language benefits you?

Transition Questions:

4. On the piece of paper in front of you answer the following question: Write down 5 adjectives that best describe students who decide to study a foreign language. You will share these in a moment with the rest of the group.

5. What kinds of students enroll in upper level foreign language classes? The envelope in front of you contains pictures of different students. Working with the person sitting next to you, decide which of these students would be most likely to be in upper level foreign language classes. In a moment, you will be asked to describe these students.

Key Questions:

6. What experiences have you had in your foreign language class that make you want to keep learning the language? What kinds of experiences make you want to quit?

7. How do you feel about continuing your study of a foreign language? How will you make the decision to enroll in the next level or stop your study of the language?

8. Research shows that in schools across the United States, African-American students are the least likely to learn a foreign language in comparison with students of other ethnicities. Why do you think that is the case?
9. Some literature suggests that students of color are uncomfortable in courses like foreign language and advanced placement. How you do feel about that?

10. Working in teams of 2, you will create an advertisement that will encourage more students of **all ethnicities** to learn a foreign language. You can use any of the materials in front of you (magazines, markers, tape, etc.). The collage should contain both words and pictures. You have five minutes to do this before you will share your ideas with the group.

Closing Question:

11. You have the chance to encourage a friend to enroll in a foreign language. What do you tell him/her?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: Students with ADVANCED LEVELS of FL:

Opening Question:

1. Tell us your name, grade, and what you enjoy most at school.

Introductory Questions:

2. On this piece of paper you will find several sentences that you need to complete. Take a moment to write in your answers before you share with the group.

   My favorite thing about learning a foreign language is…
   My least favorite thing about learning a foreign language is…
   My foreign language teacher helps me to best learn when he/she…
   One thing my teacher could do to help me learn better is…
   What surprised me most about learning a foreign language is…
   The best topic that we have covered in class is…
   One topic I would still like to learn about in foreign language class is…

3. How do you think learning a foreign language benefits you?

Transition Questions:

4. What kinds of students enroll in upper level foreign language classes? The envelope in front of you contains pictures of different students. Working with the person sitting next to you, decide which of these students would be most likely to be in upper level foreign language classes. In a moment, you will be asked to describe these students.

Key Questions:

5. What made you decide to continue studying a foreign language through advanced levels? How did you make that decision? Who helped you to make that decision?

6. What kinds of things might have caused you to consider not enrolling in the language past levels one or two?

7. Research shows that in schools across the United States, African-American students are the least likely to learn a foreign language in comparison with students of other ethnicities. Why do you think that is the case?

8. Some literature suggests that students of color are uncomfortable in courses like foreign language and advanced placement. How do you feel about that?

9. Working in teams of 2, you will create an advertisement that will encourage more students of all ethnicities to learn a foreign language. You can use any of the materials in front of you (magazines, markers, tape, etc.). The collage should contain both words and pictures. You have five minutes to do this before you will share your ideas with the group.

Closing Question:

10. Take a moment to complete the following statement on the slip of paper before you share your answer: The most important thing that students, who are enrolled in levels one or two of foreign language classes, should be told about upper level foreign language classes is…

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol: Foreign Language Teachers

Thank you for participating in this interview. Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary, and you are able to withdraw from the study at any point. If you are asked a question that makes you uncomfortable, you are also able to decline to answer it. Remember that I am just interested in your opinions and ideas; there is not a right or wrong answer to any of these questions. Everything that you share will remain private.

Key Questions:

1. Describe the ethnic make-up of your classes. How do you believe that your students perceive learning a foreign language? In what way do your White students approach language learning differently than your students of color?

2. What do you do as a teacher to assist your students of various ethnicities in connecting with the language and culture?

3. Research shows that retention of students drops dramatically after level two of a foreign language. Why do you think that is? What do you think could be done differently to retain more students?

4. Level II students remarked in their interviews that the curriculum became much more difficult and continued that way through level III, causing a lot of students to drop. In a sense, it is like weeding out the weaker students to retain the best and brightest in the class. Level IV students agreed that was the case and did feel the best and brightest remained. What do you think about that? Why do you think this phenomenon happens in FL? Why does it seem to be okay that it takes place in FL but is frowned upon in required courses where differentiated instruction is encouraged?

5. Research shows that in schools across the United States, African-American students are the least likely to learn a foreign language in comparison with students of other ethnicities. Why do you think that is the case?

6. Why do you think that foreign language classes, especially upper level classes, are dominated by White students?

7. Research demonstrates that African-American students are least likely to continue past level II of a foreign language. How do you think those numbers could be

increased to include more African-American students in upper level foreign language classes?

8. Suppose you had the opportunity to encourage a student of color to enroll in the first level of a foreign language. What would you say to him or her? What would you do as his/her teacher to encourage him or her to continue studying the language from one level to the next?