

Diversity and inclusion in world language teachers' instructional practices

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry explored how world language teachers interpret, rationalize, and integrate multiple forms of diversity in the instruction of culture. In this investigation, 17 instructors at one independent secondary school in the northeastern United States were interviewed. Findings suggest that most participants (15 of 17) incorporate cultural diversity in their teaching practices, and three participants incorporated the diversity of their student populations in assessments. Further, several teachers draw upon student interests in their teaching practices and some instructors consider the intersection of their social and professional identities in their instructional approach to diversity. These findings, buoyed by empirical literature, contribute to the scholarly investigation of diversity and inclusive

Although scholars continue to refine what teaching cultural content looks like in world language (WL) classrooms, recent studies suggest that teachers' recognition of different student profiles and their diverse goals for learning languages ought to be important considerations in teaching practices

practices in world language pedagogies. Practical implications for world language teaching are discussed.

Introduction

Although scholars continue to refine what teaching cultural content looks like in world language (WL) classrooms (Meadows, 2016), recent studies suggest that teachers' recognition of different student profiles and their diverse goals for learning languages ought to be important considerations in teaching practices (Al-Amir, 2017; Mills & Moulton, 2017). More specifically, instructors can emphasize "diverse cultural practices, create interdisciplinary connections, and interact more readily in the community" (Mills & Moulton, 2017, p. 729). The ability to communicate understandings of diversity in secondary school settings is vital to the field of world language instruction, as language classrooms across the country have experienced a relative decline in the numbers of students who enroll in world language courses (American Councils for International Education [ACIE], 2017).

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While the concept of diversity is complex and challenging to define, it is “commonly used to describe race, ethnicity, culture, and a range of factors in an individual’s identity” (Conway & Richards, 2017, p. 32). However, this definition is limited in that it does not accurately account for the intersection of social identities or fluidity and nuance across group identities, omits diversity’s relation with pre-colonial and colonial histories, and obscures how distinct characteristics exist in social contexts of unequal power dynamics. Thus, rather than a comprehensive investigation of diversity in language teaching, this study alternatively focuses on how teachers articulate, make decisions about, and incorporate multiple forms of diversity in their instruction of culture. Specifically, this research seeks to understand how cultural diversity, teacher experiences, student diversity, and student interests are considered resources in world language teaching practices.

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Related to diversity, inclusive pedagogy is an important part of faculty development that should be discussed in world language teaching. Inclusive pedagogy adopts the premise that all students are able to learn, focusing on the role teachers can serve in helping students achieve (Thomas, 2014). Therein, inclusive pedagogy holds the potential to empower students to reflect on their impact in personal, local, and global settings. By extension, the decisions world language teachers make about their pedagogy can promote inclusivity, as multidimensional, cross-cultural perspectives in language instruction are integral components of cultural and linguistic exploration.

The intent of this study was to investigate how world language instructors integrate diversity in their instruction of culture at one secondary, independent institution in the northeastern United States. The purpose of this research is twofold: (1) to gain insight into how the instruction of culture incorporates multiple forms of diversity, and (2) to understand how teachers draw upon cultural diversity, their experiences, and student interests as resources in world language teaching.

Review of the literature

Although studies maintain that diversity ought to be an integral curricular component in language teaching practices (Krulatz, Steen-Olson, & Torgersen, 2018), there is relatively little empirical research on “how world language teachers treat the ethnoracial, cultural, and linguistic diversity that their individual students bring to the world language classroom” (Baggett, 2018, p. 2). Along with cultural and linguistic diversity in world language classrooms, research points to the importance of teacher knowledge and awareness of a wide range of diversity such as gender and disability (Possi & Milinga, 2017). Aiming to eliminate “exclusion resulting from negative attitudes and lack of a response to diversity” (Possi & Milinga, 2017, p. 28), the examination of multiple representations of diversity has important implications for world language teaching practices.

For example, linguistic and cultural diversity involve more than skills, attitudes, and knowledge that teachers can develop. Byram and Wagner (2018) argue that language teaching ought to be linked to other disciplines, as coordination between world language teachers and teachers of other subjects can align content in thematic and relevant ways. Cross-curricular opportunities can support language teaching by fostering student reflection on identity as well as the different contexts of communication in which they engage. Infusing cross-curricular elements in world language

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teaching implies teachers' decisions about curricula, their abilities to think critically, and their engagement in local and global settings.

Further, inclusive pedagogy is an important consideration in world language teaching practices. Recent studies highlight teachers' efforts to develop inclusive practices and the challenges they face when determining curricular adaptations. In one study, Taylor (2008) situates the competing institutional and societal contexts in which teachers develop their practices against their decisions to build inclusive practices. Findings in this study show that while all teacher participants valued cultural diversity and incorporated it into many class activities, teachers "had never framed or tapped into students' linguistic capital as valuable forms of literacy" (Taylor, 2008, p.103).

On the other hand, examples of classroom practices that create space for students' multilingual identities do exist. Wedin (2020) highlights a monolingual language policy that was adapted for multilingual students who had recently arrived at a school "to facilitate positive development for all students in school by including their varying linguistic resources" (p. 3). Additional research emphasizes a need for a greater and sustained attention toward fostering inclusive teaching environments that support the development of teachers' and students' identities (Liao & Maddamsetti, 2019; Wedin, 2020).

In particular, inclusive pedagogies ought to be carefully considered when multilingual and other marginalized students are present as they are particularly susceptible to exclusion. Inclusive pedagogies in world language practices can be positively associated with students' sense of belonging, their willingness to participate, and their capacity to learn independently (Freeman & Li, 2019; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015). Recent research adds depth to this discussion, urging scholars to grapple with the challenge to not treat group identities as merely "an outcome of various social processes" (Jiménez, Fields, & Schachter, 2015, p. 107).

Moreover, incorporating students' diversity and fostering inclusive pedagogies may promote discussions among world language teachers and communities about how critical cultural awareness (CCA) can be practically integrated into the L2 curricula. CCA can be defined as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria of perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 53). As a practical example of CCA, teachers can develop connections between themes and lessons in ways that can prepare students "to enter into intercultural relationships with a greater awareness of the multifaceted nature of culture" (Nugent & Catalano, 2015, p. 75). Through this lens, world language pedagogies are poised to incorporate critical thinking about cultural diversity and to reflect the aims of recent literature in identity construction (Jovés, Siqués, & Esteban-Guitart, 2015; Krulatz et al., 2018).

In addition, world language teachers may consider the diversity of their students' interests in their pedagogical design. Although research suggests that a majority of students express an interest in learning about cultural content (Drewelow & Mitchell, 2015), other studies point to a misalignment between students' and instructors' perceptions of the value of culture in world language instruction (Al-Amir, 2017; Mills & Moulton, 2017). More specifically, students "placed significantly more value on cultural practices and products than instructors valued in their course goals" (Mills & Moulton, 2017, p. 729). Taken as a whole, these studies suggest that a greater understanding of students' beliefs about culture as well as their diversity can better equip world language educators to critically reflect on their pedagogy, to convey its value to students and educational stakeholders, and importantly, to connect with local and global communities.

The Present Study

This research is set at one private secondary institution in the northeastern United States with a student body of approximately 1,100 students. During the 2018-19 academic year, the percentage of students who reported identifying with being non-white was 46% (505 students). More specifically, students who identified as Asian comprised 11.1% (122); Asian-American, 18.7% (205); African American 6.8% (74); Black 4.2% (46); Hispanic 9.5% (104); and Native American, 1.3% (14). The 2018-19 student body comprised 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and 28 foreign countries. To investigate how teachers incorporate multiple forms of diversity, their experiences, and student interests in world language teaching, this study focuses on the following guiding question: What are world language teachers' decisions about integrating diversity in their instruction of culture?

Participants

Participants in this study were 17 teachers in the World Languages department who expressed an interest in participating in the study. Teachers were not offered any form of monetary or other incentive for participation in the study. Collectively, teachers are fluent in 10 languages. Seven teachers are bilingual, and 10 are multilingual with linguistic fluency in up to five languages. Geographically, teachers' origins are diverse, represented by birthplaces across five continents and nine countries. Teachers in this study are veteran teachers with over twenty years of language teaching experience, on average.

World Language curriculum

Eight languages are taught in the World Languages department at this school: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Students are required to take three years, or nine trimesters, in a continuous language as a graduation requirement. Among the languages offered, Italian and Japanese are one-year elective offerings for students who have already completed their three-year language requirement. Classical languages were not investigated in this study; however, two additional languages are offered in that department, Greek and Latin.

Method

The rationale for narrative inquiry stems from research that suggests that this form of inquiry may be characterized as professional development (Golombek & Johnson, 2017, Johnson & Golombek, 2013). The educational value of narrative inquiry supports the research question as it empirically documents "the crucial role of teacher educators in creating mediational spaces (and) dialogic interactions" (Golombek & Johnson, 2017, p.15). In this sense, teachers may benefit from the opportunity to share their stories, engage in the conversation, and reflect on their own experiences. Conversely, the risks for engaging in this study were minimal. Teachers were not in danger of any physical or financial harm, and all data were kept confidential and stored in a password-protected file.

In order to address the research question, a semi-structured interview guide was used. The interview guide is enclosed (see Appendix). Each participant engaged in one approximately 30-minute individual interview that was audio recorded. During these interviews, teachers were asked to describe how they consider diversity, teachers' experiences, and students' interests as resources in their pedagogy. Participants were also asked to bring a curriculum artifact that they felt demonstrated their instruction of culture and sensitivity to diversity in the classroom. During the interview they were asked to tell the story of that artifact, which was also photographed, and a digital voice recorder was used to

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capture conversations during the interviews. This study was supported and approved by the author's home university institutional review board (IRB) and the principal's committee at the secondary institution. All participants in this study will remain anonymous and will be referred to as "Teacher A" or "Teacher B," and so forth when quoted throughout.

Data collection and analytic techniques

Data were collected from July 2018 until December 2018. Responses were transcribed, and data analyses began broadly by examining transcripts and notes for descriptions of multiple representations of diversity and their use in language teaching practices. Next, responses were coded using first-round narrative coding (Saldaña, 2016), and a second round of pattern coding was used to explore possible themes (Saldaña, 2016). In the first-round coding process, clauses from transcripts were classified into one of the following elements: culture type, orientation (who, what, where), purpose, setting, evaluation, characterization, theme, and result. After codes were established, a second round of coding was conducted to develop the thematic organization by grouping the codes into themes specific to different forms of diversity.

Initial codes and themes were then evaluated across all participants for patterns of consistency, and an additional check was conducted for patterns of disagreement and nuance. To the point of fidelity to subject matter (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017), fidelity in the consideration of how the researcher's perspective influences and guides the interpretation of data was addressed through member checks with participants to solicit feedback about the data and conclusions from those being studied (Maxwell, 2013). The final phase of analysis involved the organization and interpretation of data in writing.

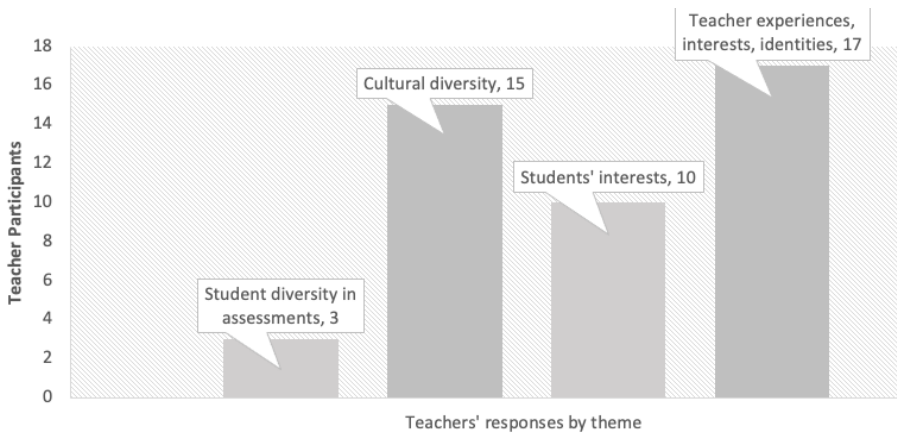
Findings

From the narrative and pattern coding processes, interview responses were grouped into four major themes defined as follows:

- *Theme 1: Cultural diversity in teaching practices*— instructors' decisions to incorporate cultural diversity as a resource in their classroom teaching practices.
- *Theme 2: Student diversity in assessment*— teachers' integration of student diversity in world language assessments (i.e., work that is graded).
- *Theme 3: Students' interests in teaching practices*— students' exploration of a variety of cultural products (e.g., music, art), various regions, scientific innovations, and political systems, among others as a component in their world language coursework. Student interests differ from student diversity in assessments in that they do not explicitly draw upon students' linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity.
- *Theme 4: Teachers' experiences, interests, and identities* —teachers' curricular choices in teaching culture based on their own experiences, interests, and identities.

Figure 1 (next page) visually depicts the frequency of each theme. Specifically, three of 17 teachers report including students' diversity formally in assessments, and many instructors (15 of 17 or 88%) reported incorporating cultural diversity of the languages being taught in teaching practices. Student interests were also factors influencing teachers' decisions; over half (10 of 17 or 59%) of participants reported incorporating student interest in various cultural in-class activities and instruction. Regarding student interests, no teacher in this study reported situating student interests in their language assessments. This does not preclude the possibility that teachers may incorporate student interests in assessment. However, the examined data show no evidence of student interests in teachers' assessments.

Figure 1. How do teachers make decisions about diversity in their instruction of culture? (n=17)



Theme 1: Cultural Diversity in Teaching Practices

Most teachers, 15 of 17 in this study, communicated the importance of cultural diversity as integral components in their teaching practices. Thirteen teachers (76.5% of participants) integrate cross-cultural comparisons as a starting point for students to share their diverse experiences and abilities. As one French and Spanish teacher describes, “I try to see what the students find interesting, but I also look at the cultural components that I think are important out there that students might not mention. I try to show my students that the development of French is right now actually rapid” (Teacher H, July 25, 2018). Other participants reported drawing on cultural diversity in class discussions of literary texts and Socratic-type seminars, encouraging students to share ideas and offer insight through their personal experiences.

Examples of how teachers initiate cultural comparisons include

- Discussions of dialects in Germany and France
- Differences between Egyptian, Syrian, and Modern Standard Arabic
- Geographical and historical exploration of Central America and South America
- The use of films such as the French film *The Untouchables* (Adassovsky, Nakache, Toledano, Zeitoun, & Zenou, 2011) as a platform for discussions about inclusivity, dis/ability, and privilege.
- Discussions of Spanish poetry in non-heteronormative contexts
- Political and social disparities in Spain
- Arabic pop music and culture.

In addition, one Japanese teacher discusses students’ reactions to single-parent family discrimination in Japanese culture, fostering several important moments in her teaching experiences. To illustrate, she presents the example of the film, *Nobody Knows* (Kore-eda, 2004). The film is based on a true story and depicts five children whose single mother never registered them for birth certificates and subsequently abandoned them. According to the teacher, Japanese children of single-family households are at a disadvantage when they apply for employment. They do not have “married couple” on their birth certificates, which they are required to produce when they apply for jobs. Because of discrimination against unwed mothers in Japanese society, this process often results in insurmountable disadvantages

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for the young Japanese citizens seeking employment. In the opinion of this instructor, her students are moved by this film and from learning about this form of discrimination. She states that her students are “actually very sad and feel lost, but many Asian cultures have the same kind of discrimination” (Teacher F, August 12, 2018). In turn, the film has sparked discussions among students about discrimination and social equality in her classes.

Theme 2: Student Diversity in Assessment

Of the teachers who reported integrating student diversity in assessments, three teachers described assessments that integrate student cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity. These assessments prompt students to (1) write personal narrative essays throughout the term; (2) interview each other about their experiences and family history, which then become presentations; and (3) draft their personal immigration stories as complements to literary texts or poetry. To illustrate one example of students' writing, one teacher described the impact of personal or a family history of immigration can have for students in language pedagogy:

I have them all share their immigration stories. We discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we've been able to establish a safe place for them to share. Obviously, it is important to be able to have some really important personal story-sharing moments where kids who have no idea what it means to immigrate or what it means to live in different country get a better idea and just what it's like to have a different way of looking at the world. (Teacher G, August 22, 2018)

On the other hand, the benefit of individual student contributions in this context should be carefully considered, as it can risk placing students on the spot and singling them out as representative of an entire nation, region, and culture.

Theme 3: Student Interests in Teaching Practices

Participants reported a variety of considerations and influences in their decision-making processes about weaving students' interests into the curriculum. In particular, one Spanish instructor incorporates her students' interests through the choice of either food, music, or an instrument in her introduction of different points of view throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain. For example, students during a recent semester selected a series of protest songs by Calle 13 (Puerto Rico), Pablo Milanés (Cuba), and Fernando Delgadillo (Mexico). Through music, this teacher's class was able to investigate different political and social movements while engaging with memorable words, adjectives, and clauses. As another example, students in a French course that explores identity through Francophone novels are offered the option to collectively select films based on class readings and discussions. The class then views the films together, comparing and contrasting themes across readings and selected films.

A Spanish instructor draws upon student interests in a more open-ended task. This teacher asks her students to bring in an item and describe its importance in their lives during two classes each semester. This activity allowed students to “connect with their own culture” and sparked conversations about how a description may be different in another language (Teacher N, July 24, 2018). Extending this exploration, this instructor has on occasion asked students to draft short narratives about the item after completing the group-based discussion.

In the Arabic curriculum, one teacher described making decisions based on students' interests in various social media outlets such as creating memes in Instagram and shared class Snapchat stories that “expose students to the ways in which language and culture intertwine” (Teacher D, August 13, 2018). Related to this intersection, a Russian instructor gives her students

the option to explore a topic of interest each semester which has resulted in student-driven exploration about their families' histories and descriptions of family members' personalities.

Theme 4: Teachers' Experiences, Interests, and Identities

Teachers also described incorporating supplemental cultural materials in their practices that reflected their diverse experiences, interests, and identities. In particular, one Spanish teacher finds that drawing on the intersection of her social identity as Jewish and Latin American in her pedagogy has resulted in the discovery of several personally meaningful stories and films that she incorporates into her teaching, including a collection of short stories, *Tropical Synagogues: Short Stories by Jewish-Latin American Writers* (Stavans, 1997), and the film *Nora's Will* (Chenillo, 2008).

Other examples of teachers' decisions about the instruction of culture that draw upon their personal experiences, interests, and social identities include learning about calligraphy and traditional art in Chinese classes, Haiku competitions and Kabuki theatre in Japanese classes, a Senegalese drum used to disseminate information and music, Russian matryoshka dolls as representations of motherhood, Arabic music from Egyptian artist Umm Kulthum and Lebanese artist Fairuz, carved masks from Ghana, and dozens of Spanish football club paraphernalia. In addition, one German and French instructor's table displays pieces of the Berlin Wall that he carved by hand during a sabbatical term in 1990 to initiate discussions of its history and communism between 1961 and 1989.

Discussion

The findings from this study advance several practical implications that can support instructors' efforts to integrate different forms of diversity and establish inclusive pedagogies in their teaching practices. To start, cultural diversity was an important consideration in teaching practices, yet few teachers (3 of 17) offered examples of how student diversity is integrated into world language assessment. While the three examples of student diversity are robust and may benefit teachers as they reflect upon their world language curricula, this finding substantiates the call for empirical research that examines how teachers integrate student diversity in world language practices (Baggett, 2018). Importantly, the lack of these student characteristics in the curriculum highlights not only what is absent but also the implications of this absence.

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A second implication involves the imperative of cross-curricular opportunities referenced by the literature that align world language content with other disciplines (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Despite the promise of these opportunities, there was little evidence of curricular links between world languages and other departments. Moreover, teachers' examples of connections with other disciplines were trivial and somewhat scattered. As one teacher conveys, he makes connections with other disciplines in the practical context of classroom discussions: "If I know some kids are taking biology, I'll say, okay, what's symbiosis? And I say, can you think of a species that's symbiotic? And one of them is lichens. Lichens are a combination of algae and fungi and they can't live without each other" (Teacher O, December 21, 2018). Recognizing that cross-curricular options hold the potential to emphasize interdisciplinary connections and support students, the apparent lack of coordination across departments is an opportunity that ought to be explored more intently.

Next, teachers expressed their inclination to include additional cultural and linguistic elements based upon their students' interests. As one example, a Chinese instructor spoke

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of a small group of students who were motivated to establish a Chinese conversation hour over the course of two academic years. Although this teacher describes challenges to sustaining these opportunities, this component relates to the establishment of inclusive instructional environments and support to student's identities reflected in the literature (Liao & Maddamsetti, 2019; Wedin, 2020). In fact, this finding supports the thought that world language classes can establish social and academic spaces where students' diverse abilities, skills, and experiences can thrive.

Moreover, the relatively substantial number of teachers (13 of 17 or 76.5%) who referenced cross-cultural comparisons links cultural diversity with more complex understandings of language instruction and CCA (Nugent & Catalano, 2015). The ability to communicate these associations can help students reflect critically on their identity and different modes of communicating across various contexts (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Other examples that world language teachers may consider in their practices include implementing themes that position equity and diversity as stakeholders in the curriculum (Wassell, Wesely, & Glynn, 2019) and developing activities that draw upon students' unique identities (Jovés et al., 2015; Krulatz et al., 2018). How missing content is reflexively considered "through one's own identities and privilege" (Ennser-Kananen, 2016, p. 561) is also an important consideration.

To foster a greater understanding of how their colleagues draw upon diversity and foster inclusive pedagogies within the world languages department, teachers might also engage in practical professional development opportunities within and across departments such as observing a colleague's classes, collective lesson planning, and mentorship opportunities (Liao & Maddamsetti, 2019). World language educators could also benefit from seeking additional support through workshops, conferences, engaging colleagues and community members, and making connections to a school's surrounding community (Wassell, Wesely, & Glynn, 2019). Although curricular change can be challenging, curricular design that strives to be relevant to students, schools, and their communities can empower teachers to consider not only the cultures, histories, and languages that are present in the curriculum but also those that are missing.

Limitations

Given the findings and implications presented in this article, the author notes the limitations of this study. As this study involved a limited number of individuals ($n = 17$) and setting (i.e., one independent secondary school), these results are not intended to be taken as representative of a generalized report of world language teaching practices. Rather, this study describes how teachers at this institution described their sensitivities to diversity in their instruction of culture and contributes to the scholarly conversation of diversity in world language pedagogies. The author also acknowledges that not all teachers find that they have complete independence in making instructional decisions about addressing diversity in their classrooms. However, at the examined research site, teachers described having substantial latitude to address diversity in their pedagogy.

Further, conclusions from this qualitative research are "embedded in the contextual richness of individual experience" (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 871). Two ways this potential loss of contextualization from the coding process can be addressed in the study's design involve making interpretive choices across teachers' accounts of teaching practices and making case-specific interpretive choices within analyses. Intuiting, defined as "the critical reflection on and identification of themes as they are found in the accounts of multiple respondents" (Ayres et al., 2003, p. 875), was also a factor in these analyses. Specific to narrative inquiry, this form of inquiry also involves "overreading, a sensitivity to unspoken or indirect statement, which

is central to interpretation” (Poirier & Ayres, 1997, p. 551). However, it is not clear how far overreading can be taken in terms of conclusions and inferences that can be made.

Future research

Despite its stated limitations, this study serves as an important step for future research. While the investigation of multiple forms of diversity at this secondary site initiates one of many conversations, there is considerable work to be done. Future studies investigating how student diversity is incorporated in world language pedagogies would methodologically benefit from data collected from multiple sources such as classroom observations, student projects, and course syllabi. The incorporation of multiple data sources may also offer insight into the intersection of student diversity and inequities in language teaching practices.

To this point, how teachers rationalize, interpret, and incorporate a sensitivity toward diversity in public and other secondary school settings is also a recommendation. In particular, student bodies with higher percentages of students who are non-native speakers of English, economically disadvantaged, and differ by urbanicity, among many other factors, can identify how inequities are sustained, persist, or may be overcome in educational settings. As a final note, it would be methodologically beneficial to collect data that include multiple perspectives such as students, teachers, administrators, and other educational stakeholders.

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Appendix

Interview guide for teacher participants:

1. What are the cultural components of your classes?
2. How did these cultural components become part of your class?
3. What components of your classes expose students to ways of life they may not otherwise know about?
4. What is it about making students exposed to other ways of life that is valuable as part of the curriculum?
5. (Participants are asked in advance to bring a curriculum artifact to interviews. This series directly addresses the artifact.)
 - a. What is the story of this artifact from a teaching perspective?
 - b. What is the learning objective of this artifact?
 - c. Did the student expand the learning objective of this artifact?
 - d. How do you rationalize the value of this artifact?
6. How is student diversity a resource for learning?