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Black-White Earnings and Employment Differences in the K-12 Teaching Labor Market – Potential Impact on Black Males with Learning Disabilities

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BLACK-WHITE EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT DIFFERENCES IN THE K-12 TEACHING LABOR MARKET – POTENTIAL IMPACT ON BLACK MALES WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Donald D. Dantzler, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Abstract

This study addresses one possible barrier to more African American (or Black) males with learning disabilities moving through the educational pipeline – the dearth of African American (or Black) teachers. Despite recent attention being given to the educational benefits to Black (and other) students from the presence and contributions of Black teachers, the K-12 teacher labor market in the United States remains largely represented by White teachers. In order to assess whether Black teachers are treated unfairly in this labor market, the notion of competitive labor markets eroding racial disparities over time is studied. In particular, this study builds on prior work analyzing racial earnings and employment differences in the K-12 teaching labor market in the United States by Dantzler et al (2014) and examines the wage differential between Black and White teachers that remains after controlling for factors likely to affect wages in addition to race as well as attempt to understand employment probability disparities in the labor market, based on membership in a minority racial/ethnic group. The study's contribution to the literature is decomposing wage and probit regression equations following Blinder (1973) and Oaxaca (1973), revealing non-trivial portions of differentials which cannot be explained by differences in productive characteristics. Therefore, one cannot rule out the possibility of racial disparities in the K-12 teaching labor market or the need for targeted Black teacher recruitment and retention strategies in order to enhance the capacity of schools to better serve students such as African American males with learning disabilities.

Keywords Discrimination · Teachers · Wage differential · Employment differential

Introduction and Background

This study explores Becker's (1971) proposition that competitive labor markets erode racial disparities over time, building on prior work analyzing racial earnings and employment differences in the K-12 teaching labor market in the United States (Dantzler et al., 2014). During the period of 1994 – 2010, African American non-unionized teachers were found to receive a small racial wage discount of 1.01%, while African American unionized teachers received a small racial wage discount of 0.79% relative to their White counterparts (Dantzler et al., 2014). These findings suggest African American (henceforth referred to as Black) and White teachers, who might be described as workers with homogeneous skills, are not paid appreciably differently; however, Blacks were found to be underrepresented in employment as teachers. This study also examines the wage differential between Black and White teachers that remains after controlling for factors likely to affect wages in addition to race. As such, this study aims to understand labor market disparities by examining the probability of employment based on minority racial/ethnic group membership. First, a review of the historical and contemporary developments in the labor market for Black compared to White teachers is presented. Next,

appropriate statistical techniques are employed to conduct the examination including regression analysis of wage differences, probit analysis of employment differences, and decomposition of the estimated wage regression and employment probability equations. Finally, the statistical findings are discussed in the context of their potential impact on the achievement of Black males, especially those with learning disabilities.

Historical Overview

Around the turn of the twentieth century in the southern United States, public education was a new experience for Black and White families (Madkins, 2011). Public schooling was new to both groups; however, their first educational encounters were drastically dissimilar due to schools being racially separated by law and receiving unequal shares of funding, resources, and support. As a result, schools housing Black children were not of the same quality as those housing White children. In fact, they often located in dilapidated buildings or churches (Madkins, 2011). Nonetheless, teaching was still considered a viable career opportunity for Blacks, especially Black women (Fisher & Houseworth, 2011; McGregory, 2013). Segregation laws and regulations caused Black teachers to be largely responsible for educating Black students. This resulted in the employment of a great number of Black teachers, considering approximately 90% of Blacks lived in the south in the early 1900s (Morris & Monroe, 2009). A majority of Black teachers from the South received their education and training from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Anderson, 1988; Perry, 1975). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provided Black aspiring teachers with content knowledge, and stressed the importance of how teaching and educating served as a catalyst for motivating and liberating the race (Morris, 2004).

As previously mentioned, during the time of legal segregation, a constant theme was prevalent: Black teachers were expected to teach Black students without the same resources provided to White teachers delivering instruction to White students. However, Black teachers made it their mission to educate Black students despite their often unpleasant work settings (Siddle-Walker, 2000). Black teachers often served as guides and role models to Black students to show them how to successfully matriculate through life despite the harsh realities of Jim Crow society (Siddle-Walker, 2000). One might contend Black teachers had such success with their Black students due to maintaining high expectations as well as being involved in, and connected to their communities (Gordon, 2000). In addition, one might argue Black teachers were revered and considered pillars of the community.

Less than one decade after the culmination of World War II, approximately one-half of professional Blacks were employed as teachers (Siddle-Walker, 2000). Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court decision in 1954, more than 80,000 Black teachers were responsible for teaching nearly two million Black students in public schools (Hawkins, 1994). Yet, after the milestone decision by the Supreme Court that ruled separate schooling was unjust, the quantity of Black teachers began to diminish, marking the onset of an enduring trend (Foster, 1997).

Despite its good intentions, the Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling had an adverse effect on Black teachers. The school desegregation process left thousands of Black teachers unemployed. Black students were often sent to majority White schools (Madkins, 2011) while Whites typically did not enroll in majority Black schools (Kohli, 2009). Therefore, during the ten-year period from 1955 to 1965, approximately 40,000 Black teachers in 17 states lost their jobs (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Sadly, the remaining employed Black teachers arguably did not

experience any “true” desegregation, and were still primarily responsible for teaching Black students in the now “technically desegregated” schools (Torres et al., 2004).

By the late 1970s, Black teachers comprised just over one-tenth of the workforce and their proportion continued to decline to less than one-tenth early in the twenty-first century (BLS, 2014). While the dismal percentage of Black teachers is rooted in historical contexts, there also may be current perceived or real barriers which hinder Blacks from pursuing careers as educators.

The current lack of Black teachers could have spillover effects on achievement. Gershenson et al (2017) find Black male students in North Carolina who had at least one Black teacher were significantly less likely to drop out of high school, with the impact being largest among Black boys who were subject to persistent poverty. Moreover, other research suggests Black students who encounter Black teachers are more likely to have their capabilities noticed, complete high school, and aspire to attend college (Brown, 2016; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Staples, 2017). This body of research suggests African American males with learning disabilities might benefit from having contact with Black teachers, despite these teachers being in short supply in today’s K-12 landscape.

Contemporary Overview

Black teachers are disproportionately underrepresented in the current teaching labor market (Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Ingersoll, 2011). While Black students account for roughly 16% of the U.S. public school student population, Black teachers only comprise approximately 8% of the U.S. teaching labor market (NCES, 2012). White female teachers tend to dominate the labor market, comprising over 60% of employees (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Considering the rapid growth in the number of racial/ethnic minority students, the lack of heterogeneity in the teaching labor market appears to present an issue (Vilegas, Storm, & Lucas, 2012). This disproportionality is believed by many to negatively affect the educational outcomes of students of color, especially African American students (Clewell et al., 2005; Dee, 2004; Hanushek et al., 2005).

The lack of Black teachers in schools reduces the prospect of Black students interacting with individuals who look like them in a professional setting (Madkins, 2011). It has been well documented that it is vital for Black students to have Black teachers as role models (Alston, 1988; King, 1993; Madkins, 2011; Perkins, 1989; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Moreover, Ladson-Billings (2000) and Sheets (2004) contend that Black teachers may be able to better relate to Black students culturally and linguistically. The relational benefits of having Black teachers might be particularly important to a group particularly vulnerable to not advancing through the educational pipeline in the United States, such as Black males with learning disabilities. It is important to note, however, that this phenomenon may not be applicable to all Black teachers. White teachers are not automatically ineffective teachers of Black students, and sometimes may be able to serve as their role models (Madkins, 2011). Given the many obstacles Black students often have to overcome and the current landscape of today’s educational system, devoting more attention and resources to the proven effectiveness of Black teachers with Black students might be informative to sound educational practice (Farinde, Allen, & Lewis, 2016; Foster, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). If highly qualified Black teachers are relatively more effective teachers of Black students, employing more Black teachers could be one way to narrow performance gaps between Black and White students (Farinde, Allen, & Lewis, 2016). Therefore, racial disparities in pay and/or employment in the K-12 teacher labor market would be a signal of less than optimal educational effectiveness and economic efficiency.

This departure from optimal efficiency and effectiveness could be particularly damaging to Black males with learning disabilities, who are disproportionately represented in the worst educational outcome statistics.

Methodology

Data

The main data for this study comes from the 2000 to 2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group (CPS-ORG) files. These data provide information on teachers and other occupations throughout the country including standard demographics, education, labor force status, and income. The target population of the survey is kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers. The sample selected for this study contains observations on 91,746 teachers: 7,657 classified as Black; 80,023 classified as White; and 4,066 classified as members of other races. To make a clearer comparison of wage and employment differences between Black and White teachers, a sub-sample of 61,286 Black and White teachers was selected from the larger sample.

Econometric Approaches and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics on the sample population. Most of the sample's teachers are female, White, and live in a metropolitan statistical area (MSA). The average Black teacher earned \$9.60 per hour compared to \$10.27 per hour earned by White teachers in year 2000 dollars. Compared to White teachers, Black teachers were more likely to: teach in the southern region of the United States and metropolitan areas; possess a terminal degree or have educational credentials below a bachelor's degree; teach at the elementary school level; teach full-time; be foreign-born; and teach in the private for-profit sector. Also, Black teachers were less likely to: teach in the Midwestern, northeastern, or western regions of the United States; be male; be married; possess bachelor's and master's degrees; teach at the secondary level; be a member of a union; teach in the public or private not-for-profit sectors. These descriptive statistics do not suggest Black teachers are less qualified to earn wages comparable to White teachers. As such, the descriptive statistics suggest the need to more closely examine the wage differential between Black and White teachers, while taking into account productive characteristics.

Wage Regression Results

Table 2, column2, presents the results of a standard wage regression estimated similar to Dantzer et al. (2014) and Coomer (2015). The equation was estimated by regressing the natural logarithm of wages on a set of explanatory variables to examine differences in Black and White teacher wages:

$$w_i = \alpha_i + X_i\beta + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

The explanatory variables include continuous measures for potential experience, and potential experience squared, as well as indicators for race, gender, marital status, whether a teacher resides in an MSA, primary or secondary teaching level, education, union status, residency region, and foreign-born status.

Analysis of the control variables included in the log wage regression suggests they largely conform to standard labor market theory. Teachers with more education and potential experience earn a wage premium compared to less educated and experienced teachers. Teachers employed in non-urban areas tend to earn less than their urban counterparts. Those teachers with geographical residency in the West region experience a wage premium compared to their counterparts in the South and Midwestern regions. Teachers living in the Northeast region earn a wage premium compared to their Western counterparts. Male teachers and teachers in unions

earn a wage premium compared to their female and non-union counterparts. Interestingly, foreign-born teachers do not experience a wage discount compared to domestically-born teachers, and married teachers do not experience a wage premium compared to their unmarried counterparts. The experiences of foreign-born and married teachers do not align with standard labor market theory.

After standard labor market factors likely to affect wages are controlled for, Black teachers earned hourly wages annually that were approximately one percent lower than White teachers. To better understand the Black-White teacher wage differential remaining after controlling for factors likely to affect wages in addition to race, a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition is utilized. This technique decomposes the wage differential into the portion due to differing endowments or means and the portion due to differing coefficients, which is often understood as differential returns to characteristics, an imprecise indicator of discrimination. The decomposition is performed via a standard technique (Blau and Beller 1992; Blinder 1973; Oaxaca 1973).

To generate the decomposition, Eq. (1) is estimated separately for Black teachers and White teachers. The portion attributable to endowments is the difference between the productive characteristics of Black and White teachers, while the part which is attributable to differing returns to characteristics represents the difference between the relative valuation of the characteristics of the Black and White teachers. The portion of the differential attributable to differing coefficients would be zero if the market evaluated an identical bundle of traits equally for the two groups. If the term is non-zero, it is often viewed as discrimination. Table 3 illustrates the results of the wage decomposition, which suggest one-fifth of the wage discount realized by Black teachers is unexplained. Standard labor market interpretations of the unexplained portion of wage discounts after conducting wage decompositions allow for the possibility of racial disparities.

Employment Probability Results

To better understand potential disparities in labor market treatment, a probit function was estimated to determine the probability of a worker being employed as a teacher. The teaching employment equation is specified by the following equation:

$$\Pr(\text{teaching employment}=1) = \Phi\{\gamma_1 + \gamma_2\mathbf{Z} + \gamma_3T + \gamma_4\text{black}_j\} \quad (2)$$

The symbol Φ is a normal probability function, and *teaching employment* is a binary variable with a value of one if a worker is employed as a teacher and zero if the worker is not employed in this occupation. The explanatory variables are the same as those used in the wage differential equation. The variable *black* is an indicator variable if the worker claimed they had a Black or African American racial/ethnic background. The parameter estimate's estimated coefficient depicts the black-white teacher employment probability differential.

The results of the estimated probit equation are illustrated in column 3 of table 2. The estimation suggests workers employed as teachers are more likely to: be employed in the public or private not for profit sectors; be married; possess at least a bachelor's degree; reside in the Northeast, Midwest, or South regions of the country; belong to a union. Additionally, workers employed as teachers are less likely to: be employed in the private-for-profit sector; be employed in a metropolitan area; reside in the West region; be employed full-time; be foreign-born; be male. Moreover, the probit equation estimation results also found workers possessing a Black racial/ethnic background to be nearly nine percent (8.7%) less likely to be employed as teachers after controlling for other productive characteristics. In order to further examine the Black-White probability differentials in teacher employment, one must also examine whether differences in

the probability of employment based on membership in a racial/ethnic group are due to differing productive characteristics or differential treatment by hiring authorities.

Next, a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition procedure is used to decompose the teacher employment probit equation estimation results into the portion due to differing endowments and the portion due to differing coefficients, which is often understood as differential returns to characteristics, an imprecise indicator of discrimination. The portion attributable to endowments is the difference between the productive characteristics of Blacks and Whites. The portion attributable to the differing desirability of productive characteristics is the difference between how the characteristics of the Blacks and Whites are relatively valued. The portion of the differential that is attributable to differing coefficients would be zero if hiring authorities evaluated an identical bundle of traits equally for the two groups. If the term is non-zero, it is often viewed as indicative of discrimination.

The teacher employment probit decomposition results, illustrated in table 4, suggest a negative return on coefficients for Blacks and a positive return on the characteristics of Blacks. This suggests their productive characteristics are valued by employers in the K-12 teaching labor market, but these characteristics yield different returns when possessed by Blacks relative to Whites. The results suggest the returns to coefficients outweigh returns to characteristics four-fold, which may be evidence of some racial disparity in hiring.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study largely align with the findings of Dantzler et al. (2014). Black teachers experience a small racial wage discount compared to their White counterparts. On the other hand, Blacks experience a large probability disadvantage in employment in this labor market. These findings were largely supported by wage and probit decomposition analyses employed based on the work of Blinder (1973) and Oaxaca (1973). Overall, the decomposition results suggest Blacks enjoy different returns for their productive characteristics in the K-12 teaching labor market compared to Whites. As such, the possibility of racial disparities cannot be ruled out in this labor market.

The results of this study also support the historical and contemporary perspectives of the research literature relative to potential unintended consequences of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling on employment prospects for Black teachers. Although Black professionals in the middle of the twentieth century were disproportionately employed as teachers, thousands of Black teachers in southern states lost jobs from 1955 to 1965 during national efforts to desegregate schools (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Foster, 1997). Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) suggest the current ratio of the Black proportion of students to teachers is just over 3:2. This level of representation contrasts the Black proportion of students in the public school population exceeding the Black proportion of the U.S. population (NCES, 2012). This reality is not aligned with the purported benefits the presence of Black teachers has on Black students' educational outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Madkins, 2011; Sheets, 2004).

Conclusion

This study analyzed wage and employment probability differentials between Blacks and Whites in the US K-12 teaching labor market. Black teachers' hourly wages were nearly one percent lower than White teachers after controlling for typical labor market characteristics. Moreover, probit estimation results showed Blacks are less likely to be employed as teachers. Additionally, when a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique was deployed, the author found portions of the wage and employment probability decompositions which could not be explained.

Usually, this is recognized as evidence of racial disparity. These findings are not consistent with Becker's assumption that, over time, competitive labor markets would erode racial disparities. The Census Bureau predicts that the U.S. will become a "majority-minority" country within a quarter-century. If this is true, employment gains for Black teachers are needed to better reflect the changing demographics of the United States population. An increase in Black teachers could positively benefit the educational outcomes of Black students, especially Black males with learning disabilities. Education is considered to be the great equalizer in our country, so the documented positive effects of highly skilled and trained Black teachers of Black students (Farinde, Allen, & Lewis, 2016; Foster, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994) may be worth further investment, if we are truly concerned about our educational system operating effectively for all students. Irvine (1989) argues, "Black teachers are more than role models for Black students, they are cultural translators, counselors, parental figures, and mentors who advocate for their students and provide voice to the voiceless" (p. 117). As such, strategies for recruiting and retaining Black teachers might also serve as effective strategies for assisting more Black males with learning disabilities navigate through the educational pipeline in the United States.

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Table 1

Summary Statistics for African American, White, and Other Race Teachers

Characteristics	African American	White	Other Race
	1	2	3
Age	42.6112	42.5633	40.8465
Midwest	.1405	.2368	.1284
Northeast	.1706	.2417	.1225
South	.6138	.2993	.1985
West	.0751	.4157	.5507
Metropolitan	.8936	.7648	.7914
Male	.2036	.2384	.2322
Married	.4749	.6935	.6131
Less than BA	.2936	.1521	.2457
Bachelor's degree	.3782	.4538	.4306
Master's degree	.2967	.3725	.2885
Terminal degree	.0315	.0215	.0352
Real hourly wage (\$2000)	9.6018	10.2699	9.8802
Public	.6506	.6827	.6205
Private for profit	.2387	.1699	.2236
Private not for profit	.0983	.1156	.1045
Elementary teacher	.6559	.5925	.5711
Secondary teacher	.1520	.2094	.1655
Other teacher	.1921	.1981	.2634
Full-time	.8183	.7497	.7076
Union	.3751	.4394	.3714
Foreign	.0811	.0381	.3072
Number of observations	7,657	80,023	4,066

Note. Source: 2000 – 2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group Files

Table 2

Wage Differential and Teacher Employment Probability Results

Variable	Wage Coefficient	Employment Coefficient
Time	-.0004 (.0003)	-.0708 (.0005)
Black	-.0087 (.0036)	-.0875 (.0080)
Age	.0200 (.0006)	-.0319 (.0011)
Age Squared	-.0002 (7.74)	.0003 (.0000)
Public	.0068 (.0030)	.9611 (.0050)
Private Not For Profit	-.0488 (.0040)	.5492 (.0072)
Married	.0012 (.0021)	.1239 (.0048)
Bachelor's Degree	.1723 (.0035)	.9248 (.0054)
Master's Degree	.2368 (.0037)	1.1929 (.0060)
Terminal Degree	.2465 (.0067)	.4030 (.0135)
Metropolitan	.0640 (.0023)	-.0640 (.0051)
Northeast	.0291 (.0023)	.0657 (.0065)
Midwest	-.0278 (.0028)	.0571 (.0063)
South	-.0086 (.0028)	.1830 (.0061)
Full-time	.0128 (.0028)	-.1011 (.0051)
Foreign	.0008 (.0049)	-.1487 (.0100)
Union	.0678 (.0022)	.5721 (.0050)
Male	.0492 (.0022)	-.5411 (.0048)
Elementary	-.0333 (.0026)	
Secondary	-.0226 (.0031)	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-46090.522	-202227.34
Number of observations	61,286	2,401,135

Note. Source: 2000 – 2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group Files
Robust Standard Errors are in parenthesis

Table 3

Oaxaca Decomposition for Wage Differential Results for Black and White Teachers

Variable	Coefficients			Number of Observations
	Overall	Explained	Unexplained	
White	2.1864 (.0024)			56,019
Black	2.1031 (.0087)			5,267
Difference	.0834 (.0091)			
Explained	.0634 (.0048)			
Unexplained	.0199 (.0083)			
Time		-.0001 (.0001)	.0130 (.0186)	
Age		.0018 (.0070)		
Age Squared		-.0016 (.0057)		
Public		.0006 (.0003)	-.0283 (.0139)	
Private Not For Profit		-.0023 (.0005)	-.0086 (.0031)	
Married		.0007 (.0010)	.0122 (.0083)	
Bachelor's Degree		.0247 (.0024)	-.0390 (.0082)	
Master's Degree		.0394 (.0032)	-.0254 (.0077)	
Terminal Degree		-.0041 (.0012)	-.0047 (.0014)	
Metropolitan		-.0185 (.0009)	.0131 (.0231)	
Northeast		.0060 (.0007)	.0043 (.0055)	
Midwest		-.0057 (.0006)	-.0077 (.0050)	
South		.0069 (.0020)	.0157 (.0172)	
Full-time		-.0020 (.0004)	-.0184 (.0178)	
Foreign		.0001 (.0005)	.0019 (.0026)	
Union		.0106 (.0011)	.0187 (.0073)	
Male		.0056 (.0007)	.0071 (.0038)	
Elementary		.0048 (.0007)	-.0183 (.0161)	
Secondary		-.0036 (.0006)	-.0043 (.0046)	
Number of observations				61,286

Note. Source: 2000 – 2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group Files
Robust Standard Errors are in parenthesis

Table 4

Oaxaca Probit Estimation for Employment of Black and White Teachers

Results	Coefficients	Percentage	Number of observations
Black = 1			229,758
Characteristics	.0013	-35.2730%	
Coefficients	-.0049	135.273%	
White = 1			2,171,425
Characteristics	.0022	-60.2886%	
Coefficients	-.0058	160.2886%	
Raw	-.0036	100%	

Note. Source: 2000 – 2017 Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group Files