

**Teaching First-Year Seminar:  
The hidden curriculum of culture, history, and heritage at Historically Black Colleges and  
Universities**

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**Abstract**

Teaching First-Year Seminar: The hidden curriculum of culture, history, and heritage at Historically Black Colleges and Universities Abstract First Year Seminar (FYS) is a commonly used retention tool developed to support the progression and encourage the completion of college for students during their initial year of post-secondary education. Yet very little is known about the pedagogical approaches of FYS instructors, particularly at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This study specifically explores the experiences and pedagogical perceptions of HBCU FYS instructional professionals. The researchers interviewed six participants to understand ways in which these institutional agents, specifically instructors, leveraged tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy and aspects of fictive kinship to enact social justice, within teaching approaches. Based on the coding and interpretation of semi-structured qualitative interviews, the results uncovered attempts to culturally reach and teach students. Thus, the researchers argue, that HBCU FYS instructors practice a hidden curriculum of instruction informed by Black culture and the institution's history as a form of explicating heritage as capital in teaching.

**Keywords**

First Year Seminar, HBCU, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Fictive Kinship

The ease, or lack thereof, in navigating the system of college is not seamless. Sewell (1999) explained the academy is a complex system, with several symbols and processes that may be unfamiliar to entering students. First-year seminar (FYS) has become an integral pathway by which college freshmen are prepared for the collegiate experience within the initial year of college. The presence of FYS aids students in decision-making processes throughout their academic career to make meaning of the complex university and or college system. FYS supports foundational experiences of college learning and it is a tool to improve student success, widely used by many American colleges and universities (Schnell et al., 2003). FYS is a curricular flashpoint whereby the unwritten rules of being an astute collegian are demystified through instruction (Bayne & Dopico, 2020). In as such, FYS provides students with a designated space to gain and leverage knowledge regarding college while socializing them to access numerous forms of university support (Barefoot, 2000). FYS is a 20th century iteration of the higher education social contract, where students are responsible for acquiring knowledge and instructors are responsible for facilitating the application of knowledge (Macke et al., 2019). When this contract is maintained student learning occurs and they complete college. Yet, researchers have spent limited time to understand the influences of FYS at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), where the population of students who attend HBCUs are Black.

The unique positionality of FYS courses lacks framing that would address and confront racial inequity. The current literature on FYS unfortunately has significant void regarding what is known about the approaches, structure, and organization of FYS especially when situated within the context of minority serving institutions. Historically, research on FYS concentrates on uncovering outcomes trends originating from predominantly white institutions (PWI) which inadvertently overlooks the contributions of HBCUs (Abelman & Dalessandron, 2009; Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Bailey, 2015). It's important to consider HBCUs because minoritized students have higher graduation rates at HBCUs, particularly Black students who attend HBCUs compared to their counterparts at PWIs (Davis et al., 2004). Additionally, it has been noted that HBCU faculty have been found to employ methods and practices that allow students to reach their full potential without forcing them to assimilate into the ubiquitous dominant culture of higher education (Anyon, 2006). With this information in mind exploring the connection of FYS at HBCU can provide a greater understanding of Black student success in non-white or predominately white spaces.

The above shared research is emblematic of yet another concern, teaching in postsecondary settings. Instructional practices are both essential and integral to the fabric of learning (Linnemanstons & Jordan 2017). Overall HBCUs are understood to be places where learning is a democratized exchange. HBCUs teaching approaches are designed to support the distinct historical and social positions of the institutions and student learning needs (Irvine & Fenwick,

2011). Relatedly, at the classroom level, instructors are instrumental in supporting student success (Bayne & Dopico, 2020). While instructional practices are important an examination of those practices should be understood and explained. For instance, a deliberate review of the literature revealed the scope of FYS and HBCU research was focused on achievement, anti-blackness, engagement, culturally relevant pedagogy, learning elements, structure and transition, (Tillis, 2018; Talpade & Talpade, 2014; Wilkerson, 2016). Thus, we posit the necessity to research the instructional approaches of HBCU instructors within the context of teaching FYS. Our understanding of the role of HBCUs knowledge production helps the academy to eliminate information gaps and provides the opportunity to dissect inherent erasure of the deployment of culturally relevant pedagogical practices (Kirylo, 2013). The acknowledgement that HBCUs teaching approach of faculty-student and student-student relationships suggest culturally relevant practices should be in consort with the learning process (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2019).

As such, the purpose of this study is to understand and describe the ways in which six FYS instructors at three HBCU institutions approached teaching to support student success and how those approaches might integrate aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy as a form of social justice teaching. The central research question for this study is as follows: What are the teaching approaches or pedagogical practices that might assist post-secondary instructors integrate aspects of social justice, i.e. culturally relevant pedagogy, into teaching? Tuitt (2016) stated critical and inclusive pedagogies in higher education affirm students' identity, learning, and encourage students development of self within a community. Duncan (2020) found emancipatory pedagogies helped Black students navigate the social landscape through their relationship with faculty. Similarly, the work of this study seeks to understand the work of faculty at HBCUs; particularly those teaching FYS.

Within this work the research team's analysis explored additional sub questions to describe the ways instructors integrate social justice teaching through the usage of culturally relevant pedagogy are as follows: What teaching approach does the instructor identify or describe as culturally relevant? What practices does the instructor perceive as culturally relevant teaching? And finally, what teaching practices as described by the instructors are attributable to instruction that is centered on social justice? We now turn our attention to reviewing literature that discuss the historical roots of FYS; we then explain fictive kinship; and present how we approached analyzing the research to demystify the applications of social justice teaching and culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

## **Literature Review**

### **First Year Seminar (FYS)**

FYS is a tool used by higher education institutions to assist students to successfully navigate college. These courses have centered on increasing the awareness of library services, counseling

support, and involvement opportunities as well as improving study skills among first year college students (Hunter & Murray, 2007). The first year of college students is crucial in determining retention and student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The most recent FYS expansion due to the popularity of the University of South Carolina's University 101 of the 1980s led to the formation of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition which serves as a model for other institutions of higher education (Hunter & Murray, 2007). There are variations in how the course is administered with some institutions choosing to make the course mandatory while others make it optional. The content, structure, and pedagogical approaches differ as well.

The long term effectiveness of FYS has been mixed and difficult to prove (Culver & Bowman, 2020). However, Culver & Bowman (2020) shared that FYS is more effective when the efforts are tied to larger institution initiatives. Therefore, we argue that FYS at HBCUs which are largely driven by a mission to support Black students, can serve as a model for FYS pedagogical approaches at PWIs.

Historically, college served as a setting for the sons of wealthy families and the clergy (Thelin, 2011). The Morrill Act of 1862 expanded access to higher education to a wider population to include socioeconomic statuses and women. However, Black citizens in general did not gain access to higher education until the passing of the second Morrill Act of 1890 which provided funding for separate and unequal higher education opportunities through the establishment of public land-grant Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs serve an important role in the education of Black college students. They account for 3% of institutions of higher education (Strayhorn, 2008) yet award the most degrees to undergraduate Black students (Strayhorn, 2019). It is only in the turn of the 21st century that HBCUs have adopted FYS into their curriculum and little research exists that examines their approaches.

### **Fictive Kinships**

Fictive kinship refers to relationships that are similar to familial relationships but without blood relation (Nelson, 2013). These kinships are vital to coping during times of need and sit at the gap of what is not provided by blood relationships. An important factor to note is the implication of the word fictive. The authors believe that it is important to note the rejection of the notion of fictive being unreal or fake. We believe that fictive kinships are very real and are meaningful to those within the relationship. We use the phrase fictive kinship in this manuscript as this is the most universally used phrase in this research area.

Given the negative connotation of the word fictive, fictive kinships have been referred to in various terms including chosen family, other mothering, and voluntary kin and the distinction is mainly tied to specific populations, for example, Black, LGBTQI, and the elderly refer to fictive kinships in unique ways. While different, there are key characteristics associated with fictive kinships that involve the willingness to share resources and help one another. Furthermore, trust is a critical piece of fictive kinships as these individuals treat and refer to each other as family. Additionally, Nelson (2013) offers three alternative terms to clarify fictive kinship - situational kin, ritual kin, and intentional kin. Rather than focusing on the types of populations in these relationships, Nelson's terms clarify the nature of the relationships. Nelson (2013) describes situational kin as those that are created by a specific time period where there are clear and agreed upon expectations. Ritual kinship is tied to religious obligations and are formed as a result of participation in a religion. Intentional kinships are strategic bonds that are built for specific purposes.

Fictive kinships have been shown to be beneficial in school settings (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Knight, 2004; Williams, 2018). Williams (2018) found utility in care as the framework to connecting and inspiring middle school students. She outlines the framework as the following:

- (a) serve as other parents or fictive kin; (b) become role models giving time, compassion, and teach racial pride; (c) accept responsibility for speaking back to stereotypes and address inequities; (d) teach honestly in terms of systemic injustices; (e) know, believe in, and showcase students' brilliance; and (f) commit to genuinely loving relationships defined by high expectations, straightforward loving talk, and support (Williams, 2018, p. 11).

These characteristics were drawn from and influenced from the teachers' own experiences with their own teachers who believed in them and nurtured their talents. Additionally, Knight (2004) provides insight into how adopting a Black humanist approach of care can aid educators to be more culturally competent. Knight's 2-year long case study with a Black pre-service teacher exposes five themes including culturally affirming practices of multiple cultures, developing the fortitude to persevere during adversity, importance of seeing children holistically, commitment to recognize and confront inequities, and ability to see oneself as a teacher engaging as part of a collective in challenging inequities.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) analyzed the caring approaches used by Black women educators and shared how the womanist and liberator lens is another form of mothering that can be used to promote student success. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) shares how caring mirrors mothering in that the teachers nurture yet resist structures that oppress, and also discusses how knowledge is provided as a source of power. The characteristics of those engaging in Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) version of care is awareness of inequities and fighting them for a more just society. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) goes on to say,

From a womanist standpoint, we understand that oppression, as a misuse of power, occurs when there is a disconnection between people - when people refuse or fail to care for each other. As a result, womanist teaching offers ways to repair such relational breakdowns by emphasizing the following: the agency that each of use has to treat others as our own; the obligation we have to understand as fully as we can the world around us; and the responsibility we have to make sure that our actions contribute to the larger human goal of freedom for all (p. 84).

Brooks and Allen (2016) found that both fictive kinship and religion were salient in the retention of Black college students attending an HBCUs. The kinship relationships extended from professors, classmates, and religious figures. These fictive kinships were crucial in times of struggle and when they felt like dropping out. They received the encouragement and referrals to key resources that aided them to continue with their education when their family did not understand their circumstances. In the cases of faculty and staff kinships, these individuals went above and beyond to care and assist the students, a role in which the students described as “parent-like”. Furthermore, Brooks and Allen (2016) highlight the importance of encouraging or promoting peer fictive relationships both in the classroom and through student organizations.

Exploring fictive kinship and other forms including ‘motherwork’ can be helpful to higher education administrators. Parents trust that institutions of higher education will “take care” of their college students. As such, we are “custodians” in a sense which denotes the duty to ensure the success of the college students entrusted in our care. HBCUs have long been considered supportive environments with institutional agents who serve as fictive kin to Black college students. Therefore, we argue that FYS at HBCUs which are largely driven by a mission to support Black students, can serve as a model for pedagogical approaches at PWIs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The authors of this work interviewed and studied the pedagogic approaches taken by HBCU instructors who taught FYS. Further the exploration of the collected data focused on understanding how the participants applied axioms of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) examines the application and influence of culture as a part of the student learning experience. The foundational scholar of CRP, Ladson-Billings (1995), observed that literature in the field of education heavily assessed African American learners through a deficit lens. To challenge the aforementioned notion

Ladson-Billings (1995) undertook a longitudinal study focused on the approaches of outstanding teachers who were community nominated by parents, peers, and administrators. As result she came to describe and defined CRP as the ability to “develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness.” (p. 483). That is, the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) CRP is informed by three propositional praxis. First, CRP is concerned with demonstrating that all students can achieve academically. Similarly, in order to be effective in reaching the ethos of culturally relevant instruction, instructors must “demonstrate their commitment to these conceptions of self, others and the curriculum” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 479). The next proposition of CRP is social interaction. Social interaction accounts for teachers interacting with students in a manner that encourages interconnectivity, promotes community, and creates positive relationships that help build upon the classroom instruction while providing accountability for the teacher, student, and other stakeholders. Finally, the last proposition of CRP is conception of knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995) contextualizes conception of knowledge as critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is usually correlated with a greater degree of critical thought, and the willingness of students to objectively analyze curricular information. Moreover, students are subjected to analytical thought through classroom appraisal, classroom inquiry, taking attendance, and review of results assessed through teaching.

Given the focus of this study, we united tenants of conceptions of the reviewed CRP literature to ground the work of this study. We extend the body of research work to understand how CRP might be practiced in post-secondary settings. CRP, in this discovery, acted as the main investigating lens. That is, the structured elements of analysis were used to examine the instructional activities of the research participants to determine if they align or not with CRP practices. Since CRP has a clear conceptual sense and intent, this study records instructional activities by FYS practitioners at different HBCUs. Thus, the extended aim of this paper was to explain how HBCU FYS services utilized instructional approaches that might be described as CRP and how race and culture intersect or not with the aforementioned practices. Figure 1 depicts entities of CRP. Relatedly, while CRP was a theoretical lens for this work, it also inspired the methods, data collection, and analysis of this study.

### **Methods**

Case study was the methodological approach which drove this study. Case study research allows researchers to describe and explain one or more phenomena (Yin, 2018). This form of research inquiry, case study methods, caters to many social science fields to include education (Stake, 1995). Yin noted that case study approaches are most interested in understanding what is done, why it was done, and how a thing was done (2018). A case study approach worked well with the central tendency of this research as the focus was on the approach of first-year seminar instructors at HBCUs. That is the work of this case study design was bounded by time, (four months) activity (teaching), and a single case (HBCUs). Moreover, using case study methods,

the researchers sought to study the experiences of the group, explain their teaching approaches and better understand if or how these approaches contributed to pedagogic practices associated with social justice.

### Study Participants

This section explains why we refer to the study participants as instructors. Further, we utilize this section to explain the recruitment process and participation selection for participants. First, during the time of the study we found that each participant involved in the study had professional titles, which were not aligned with the traditional functions of post-secondary faculty. That is, participants were full time employees of the institution who also had part-time instructional roles identified as instructors for the FYS course. Yet, many of the participants were not regarded as faculty. Instead, several of the participants were either student personnel professionals, program directors, or academic administrators. As a result, in this study participants will be identified as instructors denoting that their primary role at their institution was not based in full-time faculty work.

The study consisted of six participants. These participants worked at a Historically Black College or University which were geographically located in the southeastern part of the United States. Provided below, Table 1, are the listed names, institutions, race, and other basic geographic information.

Table 1: *Interview Participants' Names and Institutions*

Name	Institution	Race	Gender	FYS Instructor
Mr. Andrew	Hillman College	Black/ African American	Male	Yes
Dr. Blue	Black Ivy University	Black/ African American	Female	Yes
Ms. Lisa	Mays College	Black/ African American	Female	Yes

Mr. Reginald	Black Ivy University	Black/ African American	Male	Yes
Mr. Rudy	Mays College	Black/ African American	Male	Yes
Ms. Trish	Hillman College	Black/African American	Female	Yes

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### Participant Recruitment

To attract participants, the researchers employed a snowball sampling approach (Gentles et al., 2015). Specifically, we assembled a listing of all the FYS programs at the HBCUs included in this study. Coordinators were consulted at each of the HBCU FYS programs. Meaning, the coordinators were contacted, a rapport was formed, and information was requested regarding the number of FYS instructors at the school. Relatedly, coordinators were asked to include the names and email contact addresses for their population of FYS instructors. Upon receiving the aforementioned information participants were selected for the study based on the following criterion: (a) teaching FYS within the last five years at an HBCU, (b) identified as an instructor who had high standards of their students, and who based their teaching methods on affirming the social, emotional, cultural learning needs of the students. Of the individuals contacted, six agreed and met the study's selection requirements. Of the six, two were FYS instructors at a public HBCU, while the remaining participants were instructors at private HBCUS. A quantitative description of the student enrollment demographics associated with the post-secondary institutions for this study can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: *Study Institutions by Student Enrollment and Type*

Institution Name	Student Enrollment	Institutional Classification
Mays College	500 -1,999	Private

Hillman College	2,000 - 6,999	Private
Black Ivy University	7,000 – 12,000	Public

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*Note.* Student Enrollment reflects the enrollment range. Source: Wilkerson, 2016, p. 45

### Data Collection

The evidence for this empirical research work derived from in-depth semi-structured one on one interviews with participants, and teaching artifacts. Each interview was conducted on the campus of the participant at a pre-arranged location of their choosing. Furthermore, the interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. In the interviews the participants were asked questions about their teaching approach in FYS. For instance, the participants were asked how they helped students understand the importance of their first year within a cultural context, and they were also asked questions regarding how they characterized their teaching strategy. Additionally, the interviews for this study took place over the course of several months during one academic year. Furthermore, each interview was audio-recorded, and notes were taken during each discussion. At the conclusion of the interviews instructional participants were asked to provide a teaching artifact. Although participants had the option of providing a sample copy of the students' work, class handout, or sample assignments as a teaching artifact all the participants opted to provide a course syllabus ( see table 3 for data collection information by source). All of the collected data; interviews, observations, and course syllabi were used to triangulate data.

**Table 3:** *Data Collection Information by Source*

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Research Participant	Interview	Observation	Artifact
Mr. Andrew	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dr. Blue	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ms. Lisa	Yes	Yes	Yes

Mr. Reginald	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mr. Rudy	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ms. Trish	Yes	Yes	Yes

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### **Analysis**

The primary method of data analysis and the techniques utilized to understand the collected data was informed by Patton (2002). The researchers transcribed interviewed data that was collected. Next, each participant received an opportunity to review his or her transcript for the purposes of member checking. Once the transcripts were reviewed and approved by participants the data was coded. Operating under Creswell and Poth's (2016) approach for case study research coding, labeling, and categorization took place. Finally, the researchers categorized and evaluated grouped themes to achieve greater meaning. The coding technique was open-ended and aligned with a strength-based approach to humanizing the results. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Findings**

Results from the analysis of the data identified three findings that centered on multiple multifaceted forms of instructor led classroom practices. Our findings showed how instructors navigated classroom instructions inundated with aspects of CRP. The first finding focused on culture, specifically participants organized and structured their courses infused with culture. The second finding revealed that participants grounded their instruction by integrating the extraordinary histories of their institutions into instructional practices. Incorporating the storied histories of the institutions served to enrich students, providing them with a why, that would aide them in aim for academic success, in spite of insurmountable challenges African American learners historically faced. Finally, the third finding showed that the participants rooted their instruction in traditions tied to African American heritage. The findings aligned propositions outlined in Ladson-Billings (1995) CRP work. Moreover, the findings present the authors with a unique opportunity a profile of the perceptions held by HBCU FYS instructors, while also understanding the strategies the instructors utilized to foster pedagogic practices that were culturally appropriate for the learner.

## Culture of Care

Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that a key aspect of CRP was to cultivate a culture of achievement. When participants were interviewed about their teaching, they felt a strongly obligation to seek opportunities which allowed them to be a resource for students' learning. Further, imbued in their approaches were discussions centered on "support." The instructors wanted their teaching to help students. Relatedly, their form of help centered teaching relied on using care to demonstrate to and for their students they were capable of achievement in a post-secondary setting. Some examples of care were love and concern. Incubating a culture for which the instructors felt connected to the students in a special way. When the participants were asked how they were sure students could achieve without first assessing their abilities Ms. Trish responded immediately. She contended "we do not test students to know if they are capable, we test them to measure whether our instruction has reached them." She continued, "plus, I'm like their mother, when they are delivered to me in their first year, they come into the world of higher education having a lifelong advocate. I have to believe in my students, and I take care of them, so that they can achieve." Ms. Trish remarks are reminiscent of the work of Brooks and Allen (2016) who established that compassion and care inspire students. Among the participants it was generally understood that care was critical if they were going to reach and teach students.

Yet as the conversation continued it appeared that instructional "care" was not always fictive. Mr. Andrew explained that he was neither a father nor brother to his students. He referred to the culture of care as "coaching them for the game of college life and learning." Given this point, Mr. Andrew wanted to establish that his instruction demonstrated care, yet that care was primarily centered as a motivator reducing the impact of other mothering. Further, Mr. Andrew worked to ensure that his students knew how to reach him. He made sure that students understood the expectations of the course. He even asked students to share what their expectations were of him and included their co-constructed class expectations in his syllabus. Actively incorporating student recommendations into his approach for teaching them, was a unique approach he utilized in his teaching as well. "The way I teach the class is I do, you do, we do." He established that the class was a shared space. He would generally, provide an overarching lecture. Then he would allow students to explore what they understood from the concepts discussed. Then within the same class they would go over material for which the students did not understand. Ultimately, Mr. Andrews believed that helping his students achieve success meant he could display his care within the context of empowerment. Additionally, he wanted to focus his instructional interactions on learning. He explained, "I'm too young to be a dad, maybe I'm a brother, but my role is to teach them, let them know I am there for them, and so I'm always giving them ideas for how to approach learning in my class and asking them for feedback about my teaching." The aforementioned approach differed from the other instructors. Ms. Trish cared for her students in a matronly way. Yet, Mr. Andrews created a culture of care through coaching and academic mentoring.

Dr. Blue turned to developing a culture of care through maintaining high academic expectations of the students.

One of my students once told me, Dr. Blue you assign a lot of work. It is true, the workload in my course is heavy, but it is not busy work. I pour over research that indicates all of the skills a first-year student must have to be fit for the college journey. I find unique ways to incorporate those research findings into the practice of my instruction and the operation of the student work. They have no idea that I care enough to help them in that way, but I know what works. I find creative scholastic ways to show I care about them being astute students. I hold study halls, I schedule office hours for them with me, I hold examine reviews. All of what I do is in solidarity to helping them decode the college journey because I care.

## **History**

In their seminal work Cohen and Jody (1978) expounded upon the traditional structure and organization of FYS. Of note were their identification of the variety of areas for which freshman seminars were operationalized. Expanding on the research of Cohen and Jody, Pagett and Keup (2011) explained FYS models included extended orientation, academic seminar, basic study skills, and pre-professional seminar. Yet, the FYS instructors included in this study actively incorporated history as a component of FYS. In particular, each participant explained their teaching approach for FYS by specifically referring to the history of their institution, and the historicalness of HBCUs as democratizing post-secondary educational settings. Overall, we found, the FYS instructors all intentionally utilized the fabric of the course to weave together, the history and origins of their school to develop the critical consciousness of learners as a central focus of the course. The notion of critical consciousness was centered on race. The findings of this section will offer a significant contribution to the nascent literature on CRP, within an HBCU ecosystem, characterized by individuals who present a significant void in what is known about FYS instructors teaching at HBCUs.

Mr. Reginald articulated that he tried to educate students in a way that did not reassert the dominant conventions of higher education, expressing only the reality of the ideas of white, male and middle-class values.

I teach mostly Black and some Brown students. In my class it is all about learning where to access support in this new environment called college. But at the same time, I am teaching them about how this institution was started by people who survived slavery and wanted to learn. We learn the history of the school and they write how they will be added to the school's legacy. I teach to their heart about the history of the people that built the school. They are no different than the students that came before them. I want to orientate them not just to college but to their Black college experience.

Mr. Reginald's teaching enabled students to decipher the hidden curriculum of learning about race in FYS by challenging deficit-minded perspectives about Blackness, and HBCUs. When asked why using the history of Black colleges was such an important part of the HBCU FYS teaching experience Ms. Lisa offered a rather simplistic response. She claimed that teaching about the histories of the institutions was a way to uplift the students.

So many of these students come to our Black Colleges and they have hopes of being more than they can ever dream. In my class I am willing to show them that they have the tools to harness their dreams and they can use the stories not just of a system that came into being but what is meant by the idea of not settling. They will be inspired to break barriers by knowing the history of the school and the history of the students that attended this school. The original barrier breakers. I tell them if the founder of our college could survive the school being burnt to the ground but still rising above the ashes, literally, then what more can they do in a setting that was created for them to thrive.

## **Heritage**

“It's not a rite of passage it's our heritage”

Equally important to the previously mentioned key themes concerning the pedagogic approaches of HBCU FYS instructors was a clear distinction between history and heritage. Here the participants carefully addressed how, instructionally, they used the histories of HBCUs to alter the worldview and or belief systems of the students within the context of class instruction. Yet the process of invoking the heritage of the school was expressed and viewed in a more applied manner. Teaching heritage was action orientated, and less stratified than history. Each of the participant discussed the ways in which their teaching was rooted in cultural customs experienced in and outside of the traditional class setting. These customs included mandatory attendance at freshman convocations. The convocation or freshman assembly were not just a speaker's series for freshman. Mr. Rudy explained that convocation was an opportunity to use the classroom time to “connect the journeys of the students to the heritage of the campus.”

We have a protocol for everything at our college, even for freshman convocation. Freshman are to wear black and white. They don't just come in and sit in the auditorium, they are escorted in by sophomores. The convocation program is for freshman but they are apart of the program. They give the welcome, they announce the speaker, they give the benediction (closing prayer).

When asked to explain how the convocation was used a teaching tool Mr. Rudy provided further explanation. He noted that convocations allowed him to give his students “holistic instruction” the priority was to maximize the efficacy of students academically in spaces that gave them “external opportunities to teach students about the power of leadership and character development.” The practice of utilizing heritage in teaching was also demonstrated in other ways that were viewed as high priorities for the FYS instructors. For instance, Mr. Andrew would have a red, black, and green day (pseudonyms) which were the school’s colors. During the school color day, his lesson was about what it meant to be a baby panther (pseudonym). As he explained it, the goal was to have them proud to wear the colors of the university, colors that the early students of the school selected with pride in defiance of the then governor of the state who once forbade the school from exercising in school pride because the school was only established to serve the “spiritual” needs of “their” community. In order to describe the aforementioned approaches, for which the instructors spoke of during their interviews, the research team wondered if these practices were rites of passage. Dr. Blue clarified the difference, “It’s not a rite of passage it’s our heritage” and the other participants collectively agreed. The sharing of heritage was an instructional style that provided the instructors with interactions with students resulting in enriching programming.

## Discussion

There are several studies and empirical works for which we referenced that speaks to educational teaching patterns in line with the tenants of CRP (Brooks & Allen, 2016; Knight, 2004; Williams, 2018). While pedagogy is a formal tool that instructors can learn to foster student learning our findings suggest that the participants of this study were guided by the use of purpose. That is a pattern of using instruction for student success as a goal to help instructors form various teaching approaches to guide their scholastic support of students. Further, we discovered that the approaches used were culturally compatible within the context of both the educational settings and student populations for which the instructors taught. Finally, the findings illustrated that teacher training of a specific pedagogic mode was not necessarily present. Nevertheless, the results did indicate that HBCU FYS instructors took personal responsibility for assisting their students in handling the first year with a heightened sense of professional obligation for their students’ success. As Ladson-Billings (1995) explained it, teachers who provide the aforementioned levels of care through instruction are fundamentally exhibiting good teaching. To help, some of the participants might have used fictive forms of instruction (Nelson, 2013). These instructors understood that in order to teach their students, they

had to find ways to connect and reach them. Yet, it is also important to consider that some participants reimagined their instructional approaches that would afford students the space to see them as supportive without pathologizing their teaching through the lens of familiar roles. While literature like Ladson-Billings emphasizes developing strong pedagogic approaches and that work has led to training teachers how to teach the stories of the participants of this work emphasizes the necessity to be purposeful, serious and deliberate in instruction. The participants illustrated this approach. Further, while pedagogy is important and necessary, based upon the findings, we argue that an often overlooked tenant needed in teaching is to first consider the work with purpose; an unyielding belief in student's ability to succeed. Instead of tracing instances of CRP in their teaching practices we found that the instructors practiced a hidden curriculum. The work of the students aligned with the traditional objectives of FYS. Nevertheless, the profile of FYS instructional practices at HBCUs were sought to (1) Develop passion and intellectual depth of the students as proximal solutions for understanding the heritage of the schools and its modern relation to the learner. (2) Interfere with forces of injustices by developing relationships with students that extended beyond the traditional teacher student relationship as an indicator of their knowledge and support of the student. (3) Educational socialize the students through cultural orientations and practices.

## **Recommendations**

This pioneering study has important consequences for research and teaching regarding FYS. The overwhelming majority of the literature explored the intent and function of the class, but few studies dealt with HBCUs' approaches to delivering FYS guidance. Additionally, this study uncovered the strong commitment to teaching that was associated with the structure and nature of the FYS course, connected to the historicalness of the schools and heavily focused on student success. In order to identify the impacts of CRP, further analysis is needed particularly regarding student perceptions of instruction. Relatedly, further analysis might review how faculty teaching at HBCUs in FYS how students are affected by culturally specific activities.

Similarly, CRP philosophy and framework emphasizes various issues for further research. Some of the participants employed the tenants of CRP, but not all of it. For example, though FYS instructors focused on academic achievement, by way of progression from the first to the second year of college, Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that academic achievement and student learning is about measuring where one begins and determining if there is any progress with where they end up. Demonstrating understanding of CRP is critical in order to improve learners' capacity to implement the system. As such we recommend that instructional purpose might be included as an explored tenant of CRP. Additionally, while college educators might consider exploring how to implement CRP within their own instruction we argue that CRP is a framework for instruction that can only be enhanced by instructional positionality related to the student and the content

material. While educators might consider learning new instructional frameworks, such as CRP, a specific focus on instructional reflection is essential. In this way, teaching with purpose informed by pedagogic strategy, such as CRP, will only enhance the instructional experience of the students; as the hidden instructional figure is marrying together support for students based upon their needs to ensure that they succeed.

### **Conclusion**

This paper presented data regarding the pedagogic approaches of HBCU FYS instructors to determine the procedures used in their classrooms. Overall, the researchers found pedagogical methods and instructional approaches were operationalized to encourage and academically support students. More noteworthy is this study's investigation of participants' inclusive attitude to CRP. Yet the findings offered an interesting contribution to the cannon of college teaching and instruction, before applying pedagogy instructors have to approach teaching with purpose.

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