Chapter 5

Narrative Theory as a Pedagogical Strategy for Culturally Responsive Teaching at HBCUs

Niya Pickett Miller

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0537-8988
Samford University, USA

ABSTRACT

Explication of how Walter Fisher's narrative theory may be utilized as a pedagogical approach toward culturally responsive teaching (CRT) communication-centric courses at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is shared in this reflective chapter. The fundamentals of this pedagogical lens lean heavily upon applied theoretical knowledge, scholarship, and the author's practical experiences in teaching predominantly Black students. It is argued that the everyday communication style and life experiences of Black students be routinely fused into the communication course curricula, assignments, and activities to improve learning student and engagement. While teaching students at HBCUs are highlighted in this chapter, it is argued that all marginal and minority student populations, at any college or university, can benefit from college classrooms where student narratives are woven into the learning.

INTRODUCTION

The author empathizes with Black[1] student perspectives of race and gender in America. As an African American female, assistant professor who has taught (communication courses) at historically Black college/universities (HBCUs) and

predominantly white institutions (PWIs), the author's dual consciousness informs (DuBois, 1953) considerations of what it means to be a minority student studying communication in an American college classroom. While Black students should attend HBCUs and PWIs, well-supported student diversity and cultural expression may be challenged more at PWIs. Albeit, the author's undergraduate and graduate training was at southern PWIs, where culturally diverse material and representative elements of Black identity were not a staple in most of the course content. This gap in the author's college learning experience caused feelings of isolation and inferiority—an (unfortunate) common occurrence for minority students who feel marginalized in the classroom primarily due to their perceived difference in identity (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008).

However, today's communication courses reflect a sea of diversity, with students representing a mixture of identities which include: age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and nationality. Irrespective of diversity, higher education curricula still reflect homogenous cultural ideologies shaped by whiteness (Hussain, 2015). Often university teachers, regardless of their race, are ill-equipped to address the challenges presented by diverse classrooms (Stairs, 2007). This partially because some are either ignorant of issues of inequality, or hesitant to speak up about them (Jost et al., 2005). According to Maingi (2017), some White teachers are oblivious to matters of racial inequity and perceive issues of fairness differently. For many Black teachers, race is a notion reconciled daily. The continued need for consideration of cultural experiences of Black students provides exigence for this reflective discussion of ways to enact culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices today. Addressing CRT from one's own experience with it is nothing new. As Geneva Gay (2013), notable CRT scholar acknowledges:

My ethnic, racial, and cultural identity as African American is the primary anchor and explanation for what I emphasize in analyzing current educational realities and future possibilities for marginalized students of color. I know from personal experiences the transformative benefits of culturally responsive teaching, and the devastating effects of perpetual failure due to educational irrelevance and ineffectiveness…I am neither apologetic for these autobiographical nuances in my scholarship, nor do I pretend they do not exist (p. 53).

Accordingly, this chapter reflects on the author's culturally responsive instructive practices within undergraduate communication-themed courses at a southern private HBCU. Specifically, it focuses on the author's narrative-centric approach towards teaching and working with predominantly Black students. Professors and instructors of communication, particularly at HBCUs, seeking to improve multi-cultural student engagement, retention, and comprehension of course content may

consider incorporating minority student narratives centered on their experiences and identities within the curriculum. Student narratives are valuable because "the cultural landscape is (always) changing and teachers at all levels must be better prepared to facilitate dialogues, deliberations, and discussions on issues of social injustice along the lines of race, ethnicity, and culture" (Maingi, 2017, p. 21). As facilitators of knowledge, college educators must demonstrate comfort with speaking about varied student experiences and applying them to the context of their class discourse.

Geneva (2002) describes essential tenants of CRT as (1) developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity; (2) including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; (3) listening to the silence of students; and (4) responding to ethnic and cultural diversity in the delivery of instruction. Therefore, educator goals must include encouraging and providing opportunities for minority students to think critically and freely about their culture and racial identity within the parameters of the communication courses we teach. However, as Maingi (2017) notes:

Race and ethnicity are only one part of CRT. A consensus in culturally responsive literature is that culture also plays a huge role in the classroom. While most scholars would agree with this idea, there is limited research on how the identities of both students and teachers influence classroom communication. Furthermore, most available literature focuses on strategies for K-12 teachers—often neglecting new college teachers who instruct at culturally diverse universities… thus it seems pressing for scholars to lend their voices and research to these experiences (p. 25).

The author's discourse and social practices with Black students rather than the systemic aspects of teaching within the professoriate is the focus of this essay. Reflections on how a Black professor thinks about their work in relation to Black students as a path to actualizing culturally responsive pedagogy at HBCU is significant because few if any, scholarship focuses solely on this marginal experience. Sharing might garner ideas amongst other minority communication faculty and potentially transfer this content, not generalize, to classroom realities and pedagogical practices in other academic disciplines. Moreover, the author offers thoughts on CRT as a point of consideration for college teachers seeking ideas about how to convey sensitivity towards their students who are (inevitability) dealing with multifaceted social issues.

The author's application of CRT in communication theme courses leans on Walter Fisher's (1984) Narrative Theory and Burke's (1950) communication principle, identification. Fisher posited that humans are homo-narrans (human story-tellers) who make sense of our world through narratives. We explain phenomena, behavior, experiences, and understand our identities through stories. Considering Fisher's conceived power of narratives, what function do narratives provide educators,

specifically instructors of communication? Narrative theory as a framework for teaching gives value to stories of the human experience. Clark and Rossiter (2008) addressed the significance of narratives to education by noting that:

The telling of stories makes the learner not the receiver but the actor, moving from a cognitive understanding of an idea, principle, or concept and linking it to their own experience. The eliciting of personal stories makes what's being studied more real, more immediate, and more personal (p. 1).

However, narrative pedagogy is more than teaching through the telling of stories and soliciting student stories. It is a way to conceptualize the learning process. "Involving students in active storytelling invites them to embody and enact ethical practices for discovering value in their personal lives and peer relationships. Meanwhile, instructors must attend to the ways students form connections through such communication" (Russell, 2018, p. 56). Establishing a connection between student lives and the material through stories is useful when students struggle with course concepts that they do not yet comprehend.

When we are learning something new, we're trying to make sense of it, to figure out its internal logic and how it's related to what we already know. We do this by working to story it, to make this new idea coherent to ourselves. The construction of that narrative is how we see our understanding come together and make sense (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, p. 3).

This tension between lived experience and the material is arguably how we learn to begin. The following elements of narrative in teaching are particularly resonant. Narratives:

1. Make ideas and course concepts less abstract and more concrete/immediate
2. Contextualize new information by creating a situation for students to apply the knowledge to
3. Prompt student recollection of emotional experiences that relate to the course material, which improves learning retention

Additionally, narrative pedagogy can help professors to identify gaps in their teaching and student learning. Instructors should reflect on their pedagogical practices and ask themselves:

How might we develop more innovative practices for involving students in discussing their differences? How might we explore creative techniques for helping students recognize limits to their understandings that summon further questions—leaving stories with and about others open-ended for future discovery? These questions mark beginnings for journeys ahead as we continue developing personal, relational, and/ or pedagogical practices for cultivating an ethical awareness through storytelling (Russell, 2018, p. 56).

Creating an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their stories is not always easy. However, professors that successfully encourage and utilize student narratives benefit from identification.

According to Burke (1950), identification is the rhetorical means by which people come to recognize others as sharing values and opinions. For Burke, identification is an alignment of individual interests. We identify with others when we imagine or feel energized by our association to another. Burke clarifies that within every rhetorical situation (e.g., classrooms, student conference, faculty meeting) is a dialectical struggle between identification and division. We can never be completely divided, because we have commonalities (e.g., experiences, language) which help us identify with each other. However, these identifiable experiences may be interpreted differently and cause division. Nonetheless, our inclination is consubstantiality, which Burkes describes as an unconscious desire to identify with others. Per Burke, "to identify *A* with *B* is to make *A* consubstantial, or similar in some way with *B*" (p. 20). The author's method of discovering student shared values and opinions is to exchange stories, or narratives in class. Demonstrating interest in the students' experiences and correlating them to the course material is a CRT in the purest sense.

Following Burke's explanations of identification and consubstantiation, consider how identification through classroom narratives can be established. When the author (A), wants to move (B)—the students to critically analyze a communication concept and rearticulate their understanding of it, a series of questions are posed. Initially, students are asked to write their responses. Then, orally share their thoughts as part of a larger class conversation with the author. As students read their responses out loud, they become more aware of how they possess shared ideas and attitudes, making them consubstantial. Various other engagement activities (e.g., small group work, virtual discussion boards) can be used to accomplish similar results. The idea, of course, is to cultivate an environment where student perspectives are invited to achieve identification.

Unquestionably, identification is an intentional communicative act (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004). Talking about how the course materials relate to life is identification, and it helps to situate the author as a person-professor with common experiences that students can relate to. It is important to note that clear lines of authority between the professor and student are established and maintained. As Cubbage (2018) explicates:

It is known for most faculty members, particularly those who teach in subjects [such as Communication] that allow for more free-flowing and open discussions that students will disagree with one another. By allowing students to speak openly about their opinions, yet maintaining authority as the instructor to referee the discussions and reign them in when they become contentious was seen as key to ensuring that faculty created meaningful and actual 'safe spaces'… these same practices can be encouraged for students in HBCUs or other institutions that predominately serve groups of color (p. 19).

As Sommerfeldt (2008) noted, when it [identification] fails to occur between individuals, one may respond with inherent divisiveness because their identity cannot be associated with another. Similarly, when professors exhibit minimal effort to include student values and opinions within their classrooms, students may negatively perceive their instruction and the course in general.

Within the scope of communication classrooms, sharing is a point of consubstantiation between the instructor and students who have come to perceive their professor with less trepidation. Student comments, informal feedback from colleagues, and formal teaching evaluations of the author have all corroborated student satisfaction with the author's narrative-centric teaching style. Simmons and Wahl (2016) noted that when professors seek to infuse student experiences into the classroom, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and student learning is enhanced. Moreover, students participate more in classes with instructors they believe share similar attitudes and backgrounds (Hosek, 2015).

HBCUs are a hub for multiple Black identities, accentuating racial and cultural pride. Nevertheless, the relevancy of HBCUs in the 21st century is (still) publicly debated even though their cultural significance is underscored in mass media. Recent attention toward HBCU culture, thanks to a spotlight guided by mega-star artist, Beyoncé, demonstrates this point. In April 2018, Beyoncé dazzled Coachella audiences with HBCU-themed performances (dubbed "Beychella") permeated with the social aspects of the "Black College" experience (e.g., marching band, Black Greek-letter organizational stepping, Izadi, 2018). However, Beychella and other popularized portrayals of HBCU culture (e.g., television shows, films) may help to foster one misnomer regarding HBCUs: that diversity of culture infiltrates *every* layer in the fabric of learning.

While aspects of Black identity on HBCU campuses are presumed (e.g., Black vernacular, history), we must not assume that inter- and intra-cultural miscellany is embedded within the learning environment because courses are taught by *woke*[2] professors (of any race or culture). "Despite the predominate view that HBCUs are safe havens for diversity of thought and lived experiences, the notions that such institutions and classrooms are automatically considered "safe spaces" must be

reconsidered and approached in more deliberate terms using culturally appropriate discourse" (Cubbage, 2018, p. 9). Indeed, HBCUs have diversity challenges, as they are not immune to sexism, classism, colorism, xenophobia, or homophobia (Junior, 2015). Furthermore, HBCU students are experiencing these challenges on an individual level and within environments both on and off campus. These social issues are poignant points of consideration within the study of communication. Communication professors who fail to address these topics in a culturally responsive manner about the course content miss a significant opportunity to connect students with the course material.

Culturally Responsive Teaching at HBCUs

Communication courses should be an enjoyable and beneficial experience for both the students and the professor, regardless of their racial identities and cultural backgrounds. However, this is the ideal scenario. In many instances, professors teaching Black/African-American students may think well of their teaching, while the students perceive their instruction quite differently. "Traditional collegiate education was once defined by instructors standing before the class and lecturing. These lectures were at times accompanied by chalk, or dry erase markers and boards, transparencies, or film clips projected from analog video cassette players" (Gilchrist-Petty, 2018, p. 102). Contemporary students may feel "turned off" by professors who poorly share communication material.

The supposition that subject-matter knowledge is enough for effective teaching is invalid. Content knowledge accompanied by sensitivity toward how Black/African-American students learn and what they identify with is better. When "students' learning styles are compatible with the teaching style of their instructor, they tend to retain more information, effectively apply it, and have a better attitude toward the subject" (Gentry, 2011, p. 256). Then, how should modern-day professors facilitate courses that reflect our consideration and appreciation for Black students? Moreover, how do we sustain a culturally responsive learning environment as we teach communication subject-matter (e.g., freedom of speech, ethical communication) with rigor and inclusivity amidst the Trump[3] era? The answer can be surmised with three words: culturally responsive teaching.

Communication instructors must actively engage in CRT, which uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching (Gay, 2010). As a critical approach, CRT contends that educators ponder judiciously and consciously what and why they are teaching in a sociopolitical context. Moreover, it requires consideration of the cultural values and perspectives of students, their families, and communities in the development and implementation of curriculum opportunities (Milner, 2016).

As Gay (2013) explains, education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living; promote educational equity and excellence; create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds; and develop students' agency, efficacy, and empowerment" (p.49). Such an emphasis is essential in learning at HBCUs because many Black students chose to study at spaces designed with their identity and cultural experiences in mind. Whereas, historically, PWIs have situated Black students in environments that marginalize the essence of their identity (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Thus, HBCUs fulfill a vital identity construction for many Black students.

Narrative Theory Applied as Pedagogy Toward CRT

Culturally responsive teaching is: (1) Validating, (2) Comprehensive, (3) Multidimensional, (4) Empowering, (5) Transformative, and (6) Emancipatory (Gay, 2010). Let us consider what these tenets mean for real-world teaching. Understanding these tenets of CRT from the author's applied narrative pedagogical strategy will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Validating Students and Teaching

Positively affirming and acknowledging the cultural backgrounds, experiences, ideas, and values of students are paramount to creating culturally responsive class environments. To validate students, teachers should work to understand and merge external classroom realities with intra-campus realities. In short, professors should work *with* not *against* student preferences and interests (Milner, 2016). Professors who work to cultivate validating classrooms "utilizes cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). CRT seeks to appeal to the whole student, not certain aspects of a student. As Gay explicates, "expectations and skills are not taught as separate entities but are woven together into an integrated whole that permeates all curriculum content and the entire modus operandi of the classroom" (p.32). For example, expecting students to demonstrate specific elements (e.g., applying writing style rules) is acceptable. But, we must also account for each student's current ability, previous training, knowledge of and access to resources. For the author, this consideration supports the need for multiple drafts, supplementary materials, and incentives for attending writing workshops on campus.

One significant problem in lower-level college courses is low student motivation. This reduced motivation may be linked to the student's inability to identify with the professor, the course material, or both. "Many students are bored, inattentive,

and unable to see much connection between schoolwork and their lives outside the classroom" (Crump, 1996, p. 6). Moreover, when students are not allowed to be culturally expressive, they may not engage in classroom interactions and may appear as uninterested, unmotivated, or low performing students. Contrarily, when students engage in class interactions while expressing their culture and identity, "they not only fulfill their desire to serve as joint contributors with the instructor but continue to perpetuate and reinforce elements of their cultural values" (Boone, 2003, p. 224). Therefore, students must be encouraged to express their thoughts comfortably in class.

The author finds that early morning classes (e.g., 8 a.m.) are more likely to be filled with unmotivated students. To combat this, the author does not lecture in the traditional sense. Instead, these classes are structured as active seminars. Readings are previously assigned, and class time is used for active engagement and discussion. The class may be divided into small groups to talk about a concept or question presented. Students may be asked to create visuals (e.g., flow charts, diagrams) to illustrate their ideas about the readings. Or, students may be given a brief amount of time to create an impromptu oral presentation about a concept. The key to success with this approach is to keep student conversations going and avoid negative criticism of *how* they express themselves— including the words and language used to communicate their ideas. The author's avoidance of criticism is a way of validating a student's cultural expression. Validation, as Gay (2010) noted, is a core tenet of CRT. While many faculty members claim to accommodate colloquial or informal language usage in their classrooms, not all do (Cubbage, 2018).

Black Vernacular

The author's allowance of Black vernacular (e.g., Ebonics, African-American English) within communication courses further explains the previous point. Writing deficiencies are a serious threat to many Black students' willingness to express their critical thought in written form (e.g., research papers). Moreover, Black students do express awareness of their deficiencies in writing. The author has found that a student's lack of confidence is exacerbated when they are asked to adopt a scholarly voice and apply specific formatting rules (e.g., the American Psychological Association style) for course assignments. These insecurities typically result in low scores on writing assignments. While student writing deficiencies deserve attention, the expression of their ideas and understanding must not be ignored. Here is where narrative theory can be applied.

The author utilizes a combination of written and oral assignments in lower-level communication themed courses. The written assignments are strictly assessed for their compliance with writing rules. However, the author incentivizes students for

seeking extra writing support (e.g., visiting the writing center, using Grammarly). This is done to inform students of the support resources available to bolster their writing skills, and to encourage their use of them. Contrarily, the author's students are not harshly evaluated for their style of speech during oral assignments. Instead, their expression of critical thought is more heavily weighted.

In short, a student's use of Black vernacular is not discouraged. American Standard English rules are substantially scrutinized in their writing assignments. However, exclusive reliance on student performance evaluations (grades) for writing assignments makes it difficult to assess earning and retention of course information fully. Moreover, such a focus on flat assignments, rather than multidimensional tasks that promote creativity can be stressful for students and not enjoyable for instructors to assess. However, when the pressure of rule-based writing as a measure of understanding is reduced, the author witnesses an increase in student willingness to share. This sense of empowerment demonstrates the power of CRT as described by Gay (2010). The author's shift from majority writing to balanced speaking and writing seems to help students exhibit more comfort in articulating their thoughts in class. This pedagogy is reminiscent of that which Stone and Stewart (2016) describe as resistant to monolingual ideologies. It embraces code meshing and translanguaging and distances the belief that Standard English is the [only]vehicle of academic and professional success (Stone & Stewart, 2016). Because of student feedback, the author continues to adapt some writing assignments (e.g., traditional papers) for the student's preferred channel of narrative sharing via social media in the form of audio and visual blogs.

Multidimensional Teaching with Technology

Milner (2016) explained that culturally responsive teachers recognize that curricula should be designed to complement multiple modalities of student learning. The author notes that most millennial students utilize social media (e.g., Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram) as their primary channel of communication. Often, their social media engagement is referenced in narratives shared. "Students reveal quite a bit about their interests through their anecdotal in-class comments, selection of speech topics, and casual conversations with peers before and after class" (Gilchrist-Petty, 2018, p. 102). By listening to the students and understanding their primary modes of communication, the author seeks to include these channels of communication into the class. This is an act of identification, as described earlier in the essay. Also, given the developments and pervasiveness of technology, including it within the curriculum, can be impactful. "When instructors incorporate students' interests into the basic course pedagogy, they communicate that the content is relevant to them…" (Gilchrist-Petty, 2018, p.103). This pedagogy is culturally responsive in that it

combats monolingual ideologies, embraces code meshing and translanguaging, and distances first-year composition from the belief that Standard English is the vehicle of academic and professional success. As a responsibility towards CRT, the author works to show students how their daily communication applies to the course material.

To connect course material to the students' primary vehicle for narrative sharing and consumption, audio- and audio-visual-based assignments utilizing online learning platforms and e-resources (e.g., Blackboard and e-textbooks) are heavily instituted. This is done so that students perceive their communication culture as consubstantial with the class and can comfortably discuss what they understand while using their preferred channels of communication, for critical thought. Within CRT, acknowledging that students come from varied backgrounds and cultural environments must go beyond cognitive knowing and involve an invitation for students to share their experiences in the ways they prefer. Moreover, CRT asks that professors provide diverse materials created by diverse scholars and resources for learning. As Gilcrest-Perry (2018) states "instructors should select required and supplemental readings written by and about diverse populations, give students opportunities to share unique lived experiences during class discussions, and encourage students to select speech topics that examine macro and micro cultural aspects (Gilcrest-Perry, 2018, p. 105). The author's students have more traditional oral presentations, audio-only recorded discussions, audio-visual recorded discussions, and virtual text chat discussions for course assignments than traditional writing assignments.

This does not mean that conventional research papers and other written assignments are abandoned. They are, however, broken into milestone assignments. These incremental writing assignments amalgamate into larger written response or paper. This permits more detailed and frequent feedback from the author, opportunities to seek student support assistance (e.g., tutoring, library navigation), and revisions for potentially higher scores. Consequentially, student writing concerns are less of an obstacle to the articulation of their ideas and understanding of course material. There are a variety of ways by which college teachers s can establish identification and consubstantiation with their students by creating activities that build on the students' existing knowledge bases. The author uses communication technologies to help with this, as they have dual purposes. As Gay (2010) asserts, class activities should validate the knowledge students already bring into the classroom by inviting them to engage in relevant activities. Most students come with knowledge of social media (a form of personal audio/visual blogging). Thus, the author has incorporated the following technology-centric assignment/activities to generate student narratives related to communication course concepts:

● Audio-only blogs (recorded using smart devices)

Students are asked to create voice-only recordings of themselves address a course promptly and support their ideas with credible references related to the class material.

● Image-only visual presentations (required oral discussion of images)

This task is similar to the audio-blog in that students are asked to discuss a course prompt with credible support. However, they are asked to include visual as arguments.

● Create critical social media (e.g., Twitter, YouTube) posts and surveys

This task introduces social media a critical forum of investigation. It encourages students to think more critically about their posts and the audience they engage.

● Online learning platform group discussions and journal entries (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas)

These engagements allow for asynchronous discussion between the students and the professor.

Notice, each assignment utilizes communication technology for narrative exchange—the students preferred channels of communication. Today's students are culturally and linguistically diverse. It is our responsibility to meet their needs by using the best possible methods in curriculum and course design (Tech Trends, 2017). Students enjoy using the tools (e.g., smart devices, laptops) they engage with daily to complete class assignments. Moreover, they exhibit more interest in sharing narratives in a fashion similar to their routine social exchanges. Additionally, non-traditional students increase their comfort with technology, as they come to rely on their peers for assistance with the various technologies for these assignments. Furthermore, the author finds a benefit to increased use of technology for class assignments. Each activity gives voice to the students, particularly those who may be less comfortable speaking aloud in class. Moreover, the author (or any instructor) comes to understand the preferred way of identification for each student which helps to reduce the implicit biases (Tech Trends, 2017, p. 473).

Empowered and Transformative Teaching

A significant implication of CRT is the positive impact it has on students' pursuit of excellence. "Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence…In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained" (Gay, 2010, p. 34). Professors who effectively employ CRT voluntarily share their

challenges and successes as teachable moments for students. In doing so, they can and do motivate students toward their highest personal and professional potential. The author credits talking about her struggles to develop a scholarly voice at PWI while maintaining her identity outside of academia as a significant point of connection with students. The author finds that students come to believe in their abilities more once they experienced success. However, many are reluctant to pursue challenging goals without encouragement to do so.

Culturally responsive teachers are not afraid to share their evolution. Students do benefit from hearing about the failures and success of their professors. Moreover, professors should not be afraid to nudge students who exhibit the potential for more. Also, taking an active role in helping students to realize their writing and research potential has led to an increased number of communication majors presenting in the discipline's state and regional conferences for the first time. Furthermore, students have expressed an increased interest in pursuing graduate studies in communication as a continuance of courses with a culture-centric focus. For example, the author has suggested high-performing students submit their research paper to an undergraduate conference or campus symposium; and express belief in the student's success. The reward, of course, is the student's acceptance and a new sense of empowerment.

CRT is transformative because students are allowed to see themselves as contributors to the classroom knowledge and the future of the discipline. Their stories and experiences should be situated as credible sources of knowledge. It is through the telling and sharing of individual experiences that a more collective understanding of the course material's relationship to the student's identity and the real world is realized. Transformative means that the culturally responsive teacher is "very explicit about respecting the cultures and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian American students, and it uses these as valuable resources for teaching and learning. It recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process" (Gay, 2010, p.36). Perhaps, most importantly, students come to recognize and develop themselves as community leaders through their story-telling. This is primarily because they are challenged to think critically about themes of social inequalities within their lived experiences and its relationship to communication. As a result, concepts such as justice, ethics, and truth become less abstract. Lastly, CRT is emancipatory in that it "releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing" (Gay, 2010, p. 37). Emancipatory learning is perhaps the most invaluable element of HBCUs for Black students. As noted, many Black students choose HBCUs for higher learning because they expect the curriculum to be tailor to their history, their current experience, and future. Culturally responsive teachers at HBCUs must work to ensure the fulfillment of such expectancies by thinking creatively and inclusively

about their subject matters and safeguarding that diverse voices are present within the material and the physical classroom. The author always challenges students to find themselves in the course material, and if it is not present, ask why.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, culturally responsive teaching is discussed through a narrative-centered pedagogical lens for communication themed courses. Teachers of Black students may struggle to understand what culturally responsive teaching looks like in practice. However, the author attempts to describe how utilizing student narratives establishes identification with students and exhibits cultural sensitivity within the course for a specific disciple. But, a teacher in any discipline can apply narrative teaching within their course delivery. This reflective essay seeks to inspire other college educators to consider the value of student narratives in their classrooms. In doing so, students can establish identification and consubstantiation with the material and the professor.

All instructors should be prepared to speak about and promote discussions of race, class, gender, and ethnicity as it relates to the course in the classroom. CRT considers the experiences of minority students, including but not limited to social injustices, history, gender issues, politics, and acculturation. Narrative-based teaching provides instructors a way to account for cultural differences through the exchange of stories consistently. However, not every communication instructor is equipped with tools to develop CRT practices. We did not all major in education, study pedagogical strategies, or receive professional development for classroom instruction. Therefore, strategies for more inclusive pedagogy must be implemented at both classroom and administrative levels (Simmons, Lowery-Hart, Wahl, & McBride, 2013). Such training should demonstrate how to include more diverse literature and assignments. Moreover, it should contain how to communicate about and with diverse student populations.

Communication pedagogy challenges educators to "situate their inquiry in relation to larger, macro sociocultural, socioeconomic structures to explore the ways in which racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression permeate classrooms and research on classrooms, teachers, and students" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 27). Therefore, Black communication professors are uniquely equipped to create curricula for Black students that illuminate the content in ways that teachers outside of the racial or ethnic background of their students may not be able (Milner, 2016). This assertion is not to suggest that non-Black professors cannot be successful with Black students. It does not propose that all Black professors are successful with Black students. However, the literature describes successful teachers

of Black students as those who maintain high expectations for their students, avoid pitying their students, and empathize with student experiences (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). HBCU students crave education that reflects their culture. Their professors are optimally situated to initiate such communication within the scope of their courses. Employing a narrative-centric approach toward teaching is an essential way in which we may help to foster inclusivity within the classroom and nurture learning.

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ENDNOTES

[1]   The terms Black and African American will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

[2]   Defined by the Urban Dictionary as one having perceived intellectual superiority about cultural and political issues.

[3]   Colloquial term referring to the socio-political environment surrounding the presidency of Donald John Trump, the 45th President of the United States.