

## EMPOWERING THROUGH EDUCATION: DECOLONIZATION AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING IN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES"

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**Abstract:** A robust curriculum serves as both a reflection and an entry point, fostering knowledge acquisition and expanding perspectives. This implies that students should not only identify with the curriculum as a reflection of their own experiences and backgrounds but also be encouraged to explore perspectives vastly different from their own. Unfortunately, the educational system has often overlooked the rich assets, cultural references, and experiences that students from underrepresented and historically marginalized groups bring to the classroom. This neglect contributes to an inequitable and non-inclusive learning environment, perpetuating biases and barriers.

The consequences of this oversight are significant, leading to a hostile and unsupportive educational climate that hampers academic performance, diminishes GPAs, increases absences, and reduces retention rates (Cruz et al., 2019). Culturally and linguistically diverse students, in particular, are disproportionately labeled as having learning deficits, face higher rates of disciplinary actions, and struggle with lower retention and graduation rates (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2016; Losen et al., 2015; Murnane, 2013).

This paper acknowledges the legacy of colonization and racialization within modern universities, emphasizing the need for decolonization. Decolonization entails recognizing and addressing the constraints imposed by colonization and racialization, challenging and dismantling marginalizing practices, and implementing strategies to promote educational equity (Shahjahan et al., 2021). Culturally responsive teaching emerges as a crucial strategy in this context, helping educational institutions progress toward decolonization, indigeneity, and interculturalism (Chetty, 2018; King, 2006; Owens & Njoku, 2021).

**Keywords:** Robust curriculum, Inclusive education, Decolonization, Culturally responsive teaching, Educational equity

### Literature Review

A robust curriculum is a mirror and a door that builds knowledge and extends perspective. This means that students need to be able to see themselves in what they're learning as a reflection of themselves and their histories, and also must be encouraged to see outwards and consider perspectives and experiences vastly different from

their own. Students bring a wealth of assets, cultural referents, and experiences into the classroom. Yet, traditionally, the experiences and insights of students from under-represented and/or historically marginalized groups aren't thoughtfully considered contributing to a learning environment that is not inclusive or equitable and where biases and barriers persist. The result is the creation of a hostile and unsupportive educational climate that research shows contributes to lower academic performance, lower GPA, increased absences and decreased retention and persistence to graduation (Cruz et al., 2019). More specifically, culturally and linguistically diverse students are disproportionately identified as having learning deficits (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2016; Harry & Fenton, 2016; Ong-Dean, 2006) are more likely to experience disciplinary actions (Losen et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2013) and have lower retention and persistence to graduation (Murnane, 2013).

Modern universities carry a long legacy of colonization and racialization with colonization referring to the act of appropriating a space for one's own use through the subjugation of others (Stein, & Andreotti, 2016). Decolonization is the process of recognizing and addressing the constraints placed on educational systems and institutions from colonization and racialization; confronting, disrupting and undoing marginalizing practices; and introducing strategies for making education more equitable (Shahjahan et al., 2021). Culturally responsive teaching is one strategy that is recognized for helping educational institutions work towards decolonization, indigeneity and interculturalism (Chetty, 2018; King, 2006; Owens & Njoku, 2021).

Culturally responsive teaching is also known as culturally compatible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and/or culturally relevant teaching (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. She refers to culturally relevant pedagogy as the use of "... cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frame of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant. It teaches to and through strengths of the students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29). Gay (2002) further explains that CRT is about "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106).

According to Lynch (2011) culturally responsive instruction is "a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world." Further, Lynch and Cruz et al. (2020) explain that CRT is a set of practices intended to extend and incorporate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the teaching and learning process.

Ladson-Billings (1995) posits that all learners, regardless of personal attributes or backgrounds, should be given opportunities to be academically successful, culturally competent, and critically conscious. They further identify the three central tenets of CRT as: 1. maintaining high expectations and learning standards while providing appropriate scaffolds and learner supports; 2. building on students' existing knowledge, experiences, and assets by implementing curriculum that incorporates their cultural knowledge and connections; and 3. supporting students' ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. These tenets are represented in Figure 1: 3 Tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching.

3 Tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Maintaining high expectations and learning standards while providing appropriate scaffolds and learner supports	Building on students' existing knowledge, experiences, and assets by implementing curriculum that incorporates their cultural knowledge and connections	Supporting students' ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities.
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Figure 1. Based on Ladson-Billings (1995)

Byrd (2016) explains that CRT empowers learners because “culturally relevant teachers raise students’ critical consciousness. They encourage students to identify problems in their communities and to seek ways to address them. They acknowledge societal oppression and encourage students to notice how those dynamics are evident in their everyday lives” (p.2). Byrd further explains that CRT practices align with and complement constructivist pedagogical ideas of teaching in a way that is student-centered, authentic, active, and reflective (Byrd, 2016; Yilmaz, 2008).

Culturally responsive teaching seeks to validate and inspire learners building their academic self-efficacy and initiative (Gay, 2000). Self-efficacy is a concept that refers to the confidence that one has in their innate ability to achieve goals. Self-efficacy was introduced by Albert Bandura (1991) and rests at the center of his social cognitive theory, which posits that learning occurs in a social context that involves a dynamic and reciprocal interplay between the person, their environment, and their behaviors. Self-efficacy asserts that the level of a person's confidence in their ability to successfully perform a behavior directly impacts their goal achievement. Findings have consistently shown that self-efficacy beliefs and mindset have a significant influence on student success, affecting how a learner experiences and responds to learning situations and setbacks (BuzzettoHollywood et al., 2019). Self-efficacy is built from the vicarious experiences people have by observing others and using those experiences to judge themselves; past experiences, negative or positive, performing a task or engaging in a space; their physical and/or emotional state; their visualization of the future; and social persuasion in the form of positive or negative messages from others. Figure 2 presents a Self-Efficacy Model based on the work of Bandura that was prepared by this author in a prior paper (Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2019).

## SELF-EFFICACY MODEL

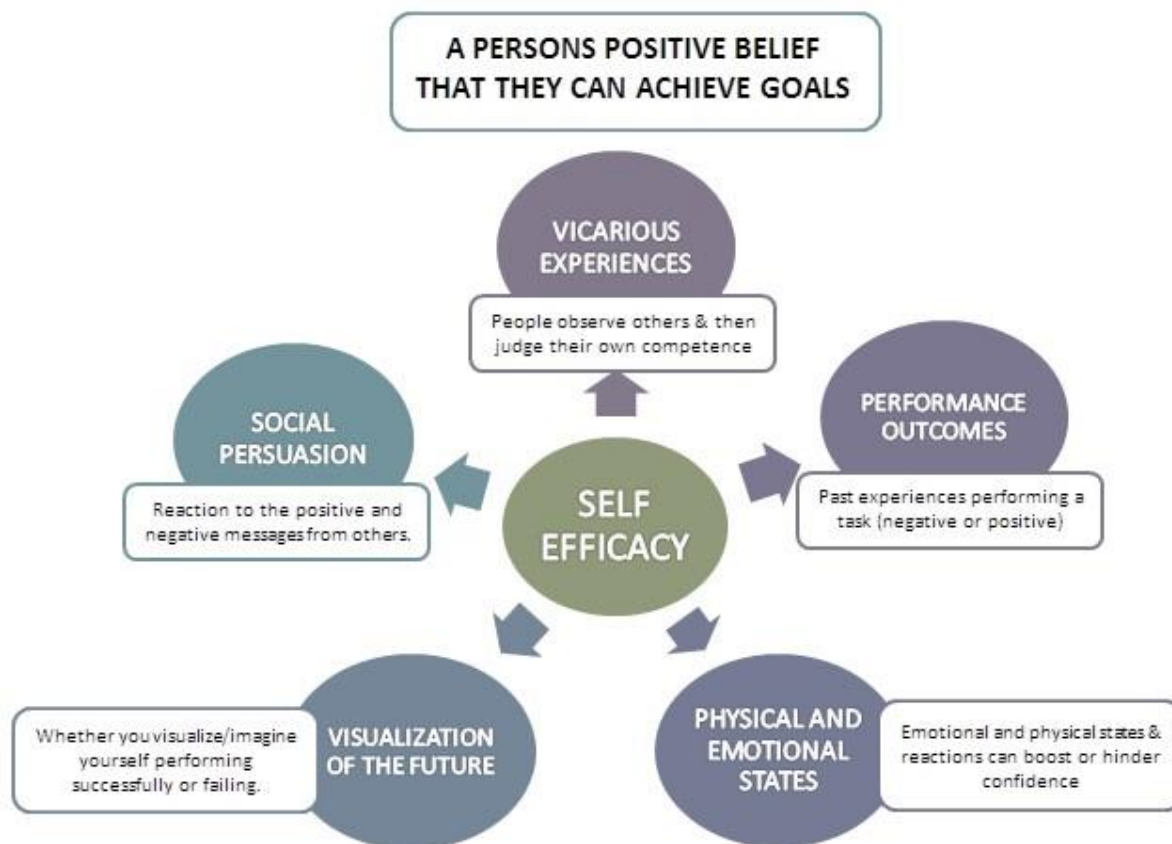


Figure 2: Self Efficacy Model Based on The Work of Bandura

Who are our current students in higher education? The majority of students entering higher education today are members of Generation Z, a more racially and ethnically diverse group than any previous generation (Buzzetto et al., 2019). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2023) Gen Z has been more likely to have been raised in diverse and/or nontraditional family structures such as single parent homes, with same sex parents, in multi-racial households, or in a home where one of more members is gender expansive. They explain that as a result, Gen Z is more accepting of diversity in race, sex, gender expression, or religion than previous generations. Accordingly, understanding the social and emotional experiences and cultural and group identities of Gen Z should be used by teachers to create culturally responsive curriculum (Kristen Hopkins Global, 2020).

There are many benefits associated with culturally responsive teaching, including increased expectations; the ability to better address the needs of learners; remedying disparities and barriers in classrooms; the development of cultural competencies and global perspectives; learner empowerment; increased student engagement; creating a more level and equitable educational experience; and new opportunities for students to shine. Bottom line, CRT helps teachers and students expand perspectives, recognize each other's strengths, build empathy, and move towards a more equitable and inclusive future for all under the guise that the academic achievement of diverse

students improves when they can learn “through their own cultural and experiential filters” moving education from a passive-receptive style to an active-participatory experience (Gay, 2000).

The literature on culturally responsive teaching is not new. Rather, academics have been exploring culturally responsive teaching for over thirty years. The body of literature on CRT is varied and is largely brimming with positive outcomes for learners and educational institutions. In order to synthesize the body of research in a manner that is both comprehensive and cogent, a table has been prepared for inclusion in this paper. Table 1 seeks to amalgamate the themes prevalent in the literature on culturally responsive teaching organized thematically and citing a number of the major works that have been published in this area of exploration.

Positive effects on the academic achievement of learners	Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, and McMillen (1985); Cabrera, Milem, & Marx, (2012); Christianakis, (2011); Ensign (2003); Gutstein (2003); Lipka and Mohatt (1998); Milner (2011); Moses and Cobb (2001); Tharp and Gallimore (1988)
Enhanced learner engagement	Au & Kawakami, (1994); Gay, (2000); LadsonBillings, (1995).
Higher expectations for all students	Hollins & Oliver, (1999); Nieto, (1999); Stenbridge (2019)
Increases in student motivation	Bui & Fagan, (2013); Ensign, (2003); Hill, (2012)
Fostering of active teaching and learning	Banks & Banks, (2001); Byrd, (2016); Yilmaz, (2008)
Increases in cultural competencies	Aldana, Rowley, Checkoway, & Richards-Schuster, (2012); Banks & Banks, (2001); Ladson-Billings, (2006); Martell (2013); Nieto, (1999); Schmidt (2005)
Emphasis on social justice	Aronson & Laughter, (2016); Byrd, (2016); Gay (2010)
Increases in student interest in content	Choi, (2013); Dimick, (2012); Ensign, (2003); Martell, (2013)
Enhances learner empowerment	Byrd, (2016)
Takes a constructivist approach whereas learning is based on a process of reflection and active construction where learners build new knowledge on existing understanding.	Byrd, (2016); Yilmaz, (2008)
Makes education transformative	Aronson & Laughter, (2016); Gay (2013); Stenbridge (2019)

Encourages students to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities	Aronson & Laughter, (2016); Ladson-Billings, (1995)
Promotes critical reflection	Dover, (2013)
Increases in student ability to engage in content area discourses	Gutstein, (2003); Martell, (2013)
Improved learners' self-efficacy or the positive perception students have in themselves as capable students	Christian, (2017); Gay, (2000); Hubert, (2013)
Learning becomes culturally sustaining	Evans, (2019); Paris & Alim,( 2017)
Decolonizing	Chetty, (2018); Evans, (2021); King, (2006); Owens & Njoku, 2021

### **Practices of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive educators recognize that understanding students' lives and perspectives can help foster a sense of belonging that ensures all students feel recognized, respected, and challenged. Culturally responsive educators address and remediate their biases, introspect on how their own identities impact their practices, recognize systems of oppression, and understand the sociopolitical context in which education operates (Gay, 2013; Muniz, 2020; Stenbridge, 2019).

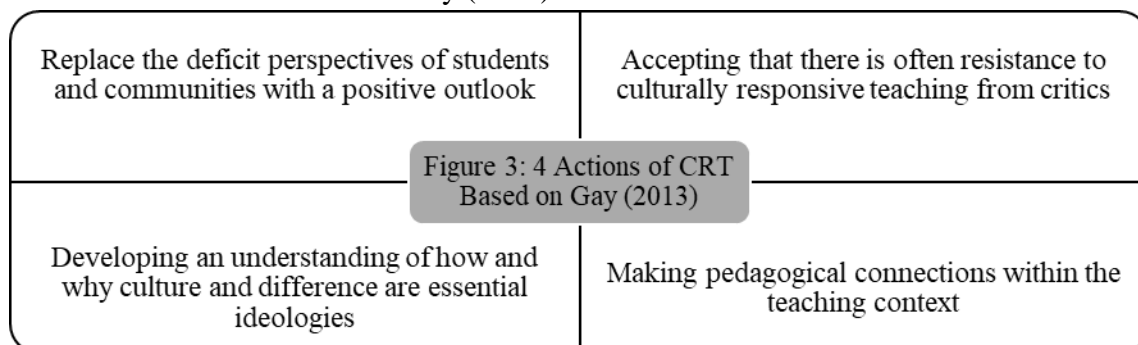
While the concept of culturally responsive teaching is nearly three decades old, a specific model has yet to be introduced that serves as a standard template that can be followed. There is, however, guidance that can assist educators, and this paper seeks to synthesize the best of these sets of practices and includes the work of Gay (2010), Gay (2013), Howard (2020), Muniz (2020), Lemoine (2019), Stenbridge (2019) and Evans (2021).

At its core, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) attempts to bridge the gap between teacher and student by helping the teacher understand the cultural nuances that impact learners. Accordingly, Gay (2010) identified six dimensions for culturally responsive educators:

1. Culturally responsive educators empower students socially and emotionally with high expectations and a commitment to every student's success;
2. Culturally responsive educators incorporate cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives;
3. Culturally responsive educators recognize all learners' cultures are valid and work to bridge gaps between school and home through diversified instructional strategies and multicultural curricula;
4. Culturally responsive educators seek to educate the whole learner;
5. Culturally responsive educators seek to transform schools and societies;
6. Culturally responsive educators reject behavioristic practices as they lift "the veil of presumed absolute authority from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools." (Gay, 2010, p. 38)

Gay (2013) also believed that there were four actions essential to implementing culturally responsive teaching. These actions include 1) replacing the deficit perspectives of students and communities with a positive outlook;

2) accepting that there is often resistance to culturally responsive teaching from critics; 3) developing an understanding of how and why culture and difference are essential ideologies for culturally responsive teaching; and 4) making pedagogical connections within the teaching context. These four actions are represented in Figure 3: 4 Actions of CRT Based on Gay (2013).



Dr. Tyrone Howard (2020), who describes culturally responsive teaching as a fundamental belief in the ability of all students to learn, explains that CRT is not a single approach or set of curriculum materials but rather a multi-faceted set of practices. More specifically, he identified seven practices to help guide educators to more culturally responsive teaching.

1. Activate students' prior knowledge through questions and reflection.
2. Make learning contextual encouraging students to connect content to their lives or current events impacting their community.
3. Consider your learning environment and whether representation of individuals of different genders, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, ability status, nationalities, etcetera are included.
4. Form relationships by sharing appropriate personal information and encouraging learners to do the same.
5. Discuss social and political issues and do so respectfully.
6. Tap into students' cultural capital.
7. Incorporate popular culture.

In 2020, New America released a policy paper focused on culturally responsive teaching (Muniz, 2020). According to the policy paper, the global pandemic has put a powerful spotlight on inequities in our educational systems revealing resource disparities, exclusionary practices, segregation, and a lack of inclusion. They paper further explains:

“These enormous challenges cannot be addressed without culturally responsive teachers. While educators cannot singlehandedly make schools less segregated and more equitable, they can ensure that students feel valued and affirmed in schools, in the curriculum, and in their interactions with peers. They can promote engagement and achievement by connecting curriculum to students' daily lives, cultural backgrounds, and concerns. They can deploy rigorous activities that help students make sense of the world around them and become agents for positive change. They can call attention to educational injustice and work to bolster opportunities for all learners. Culturally responsive teachers do these things and more (p. 1).”

The report builds on New America's previous work in culturally responsive teaching and includes eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching which are represented in Figure 4: 8 Competencies for Culturally Responsive Teaching. They include:

1. Reflecting on one's own cultural lens by considering one's own life experiences as well as one's membership in various identity groups by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religion, nation of origin, and etcetera as well as how these personal factors are likely to impact beliefs, expectations, and behaviors. This also involves considering how one's identities differ from students and colleagues, how these factors may shape interactions, whether they have ever experienced stereotyping or microaggressions, and whether those impact the lens by which they view others. This type of reflection is commonly referred to as an internal cultural audit and is often started by taking implicit bias tests and learning about implicit bias. A popular tool for examining implicit bias is the Harvard University's Project Implicit.
2. Recognizing systematic biases by differentiating between personal biases and biases at the systemic and institutional level and questioning whether their classroom and institution are helping to reinforce or disrupt disparities and what can be done differently.
3. Drawing on students' culture to shape curriculum using a technique known as cultural scaffolding that links to, and builds upon, students' cultural referents in the creation of teaching and learning experiences. This involves examining whether students can see themselves in assignments, assessments, and instructional resources, whether these materials are free from stereotypes and bias and incorporate historical accuracy, cultural relevance, and multiple perspectives.
4. Bringing real world issues into the classroom by considering how the content taught, and assignments, assessments, and projects used, help learners address problems relevant to their lives and communities, including issues related to social justice.
5. Modeling high expectations by clearly communicating these expectations, providing supports and scaffolds, and ensuring that students view expectations as realistic and attainable.
6. Promoting respect for student differences by modeling inclusive actions and reflecting upon how one can create safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments that build empathy and appreciation for diversity.
7. Collaborating with the local community, alumni, students, and their families by actively seeking input and looking for opportunities to build bridges, connections, and partnerships.
8. Communicating in culturally responsive ways by understanding that culture influences verbal and nonverbal communications as well as norms related to participation and assistance seeking. This also involves respecting students' natural communication styles and accommodating multi-lingual learners.



Figure 4: 8 Competencies for Culturally Responsive Teaching

A major part of teaching is student learning outcomes assessment. Traditional assessments are often plagued by biases that intentionally or unintentionally impact students based on personal characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion, culture, or place of origin. These biased assessments diminish the overall quality of educational delivery, serve as obstacles to student success, lead to incorrect inferences about student abilities, and contribute to the systematic oppression of students from historically marginalized groups. Institutions with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion must carefully evaluate their teaching processes and learning assessments for equity, understanding that education must provide both mirrors and windows, have cultural validity, afford multiple mechanisms for student success, be centered around the assets of students, and recognize that assessments themselves are cultural artifacts. Culturally responsive teaching utilizes culturally responsive assessment practices whereas with culturally responsive assessment one considers the qualities that students bring to the classroom so as to create equitable learner-centered opportunities for students to demonstrate learning mastery (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017).

Assessments are not prevalent in the various models and guides traditionally used to promote culturally responsive teaching; however, Lemoine (2019) offers specific advice for adopting culturally responsive teaching strategies in higher education settings which address assessment.

- Utilizing discussions and accommodating them to be both peer to peer and learner to instructor,
- Diversifying instruction and assessment using multiple methods and incorporating both high and low-tech modes.
- Using a random response strategy during class time to gauge learners understanding and so that all students have an opportunity to participate and contribute and so that the class is not dominated by a handful of verbose voices,
- Structuring heterogenous groups,
- Using a variety of probing or clarifying techniques,
- Using formative assessments,
- Pre-assessing all students, • Being explicit in expectations.

Stembridge (2019) identified six themes of culturally responsive teaching in his book *The Six Themes of Culturally Responsive Education*. Known as the Stembridge’s Big 6, they include engagement, rigor, relationships, assets, vulnerability, and cultural identity. Building off of Stembridge’s framework, Carla Evans of the Center for Assessment (2021) developed a framework specific to culturally responsive classroom assessment, which is represented in Figure 5: Stembridge’s (2020) Six Themes of Culturally Responsive Education Applied to Classroom Assessment by Evans (2021).

Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Encourage student agency (voice &amp; choice) over what, when, &amp; how learning is demonstrated</li><li>•All assessment is meaningful to students</li></ul>
Cultural Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Authentic assessment experiences that compel students to draw upon their social and cultural backgrounds</li></ul>
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Students are encouraged to draw on their cultural capital, tools, and strengths to demonstrate learning mastery</li></ul>
Rigor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Students challenged to transfer knowledge to novel situations</li><li>•Requires demonstration of higher-order thinking and interdisciplinary connections</li></ul>
Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Formative assessment is prioritized</li><li>•Grades are not used as motivators</li></ul>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Collaboration is incorporated into assessment experiences</li></ul>

Figure 5: Stembridge’s (2020) Six Themes of Culturally Responsive Education Applied to Classroom Assessment by Evans (2021) **HBCUs and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are American institutions founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide educational opportunities that might otherwise be denied to historically marginalized populations (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Mitchell, 2019; Schexnider, 2017). HBCUs were forged from the fire of colonization and racialization and have as their missions to engage and up-lift students who are often from underserved groups (Lomax, 2006; Seymour & Ray, 2015). Gregory Clay of The Undeclared points out that this is because “HBCUs operate with a special mission in mind and a higher cause” as they seek to elevate and improve traditionally disadvantaged communities (Clay, 2016). While the original challenges that existed during their creation no longer persist, educational inequities and the legacy of racialization, colonization, and otherization continue to present themselves today impacting students entering modern HBCUs, who primarily come from historically marginalized and under resourced communities (Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2018; Lomax, 2006).

HBCUs serve significant populations of low-income students of color, the majority of whom are the first generation in their families to attend college, and HBCUs are known for accepting students at far higher rates than traditionally white institutions (TWIs) from more challenging environments and who are more likely to have been subjected to a deficit mindset and colonizing treatment (King, 2016). Culturally responsive teaching compliments the historic missions of HBCUs and is used at many with the “objective of defying the deficit-oriented model of learning, while ensuring students see themselves and their communities reflected and valued in their educational experience (Owens & Njoku, 2021).” Accordingly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been at the forefront of culturally responsive teaching since before the term existed, yet they are often overlooked as designers or producers of effective student success programming for Black students (Owens & Njoku, 2021).

It is impossible to deny the success of American HBCUs. While Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) make up just 3% of America’s colleges and universities, they produce almost 20% of all African American graduates and 25% of African American graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Further, 50% of public-school teachers of African-American descent and 70% of Black doctors and dentists attended HBCUs (UNCF, 2015). As institutions of higher education, HBCUs are found to provide deeply supportive educational environments that are unparalleled elsewhere in the United States, with Black graduates of HBCUs more likely than Black graduates of majority serving institutions to be thriving - a phenomenon largely attributed to their highly supportive student-centered culture (Buzzetto-More & Mitchell, 2009; Seymour & Ray, 2015). In fact, a 2015 Gallup poll (Seymour & Ray, 2015) found that graduates of HBCUs overwhelmingly cited supportive faculty and mentors as contributing to their success and when compared to nonHBCU graduates, were 33% more likely to strongly agree that their professors cared about them and 23% percent more likely to have felt supported.

A research study that examined culturally responsive practices in higher education found that despite decades of underfunding, being perceived by others with a deficit mindset, and a legacy of marginalization, HBCUs are unmatched when it comes to implementing culturally sustaining practices in a comprehensive manner (Braithwaite, J. et al., 2021) explaining “HBCUs channeled the effects of that exclusion in constructive directions by focusing on inclusivity and by specializing in programs, such as STEM, in which white institutions struggle

to retain Black students (p. 32). The authors further pointed out that HBCUs have cultivated “humanistic” environments for student learning where students recognize that they are valued. The authors specifically identified the sense of belonging felt by students, the meaningful relationships between faculty and students, and the commitment to equity.

Recognizing the important role that HBCUs play in the American education system and the history and missions, the United Negro College Fund produced a report titled Culturally Relevant Practice: Implementation Among Historically Black Colleges and Universities. In this report, four principles for grounding culturally responsive teaching at HBCUs were presented and which included: 1. leveraging lived experience to mine meaning; 2. assessing knowledge claims through dialogue; 3. caring as an act of educational responsibility; 4. centering cultural experience as an act of resistance in research (Owens & Njoku, 2021)”. The report also recognized the importance of building engagement and buy in, sharing knowledge and resources, capacity building, and providing robust supports in implementing successful CRT strategies in higher education. Figure 6: Culturally Relevant Practice: Implementation at HBCUs illustrates the theoretical practices recommended by the UNCF with recommendations for practice with programmatic examples.

Theoretical Principle	Practice	UNCF Programmatic Examples
Leveraging Lived Experience to Mine Meaning	Building Community and Facilitating Partnership through Program Design	In-network Best Practice Highlights and Sharing
Assessing Knowledge Claims through Dialogue	Championing Consensus Conversations and Stakeholder Inclusion	Convenings Regional Meetings Group Calls and Webinars Check-in Calls Town Halls
Caring as an Act of Educational Responsibility	Cultivating Trust through Mutual Goal Setting and Relationship Building	Relationship Building Weekly Communication
Centering Cultural Experience as an Act of Resistance in Research	Highlighting Positionality and Qualitative Research	Semi-structured Interviews with Various Stakeholders Unstructured Focus Groups and Feedback Sessions Consensus Building Conversations

**Figure 6: Culturally Relevant Practice: Implementation at HBCUs**

Established in 1886, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is a Historically Black, 1890 land grant institution. It is a member of the University System of the State of Maryland and primarily serves first-generation, low-income, and minority learners.

The student population is approximately 2600 with a student body that is 71.1% African American, 14.9% white, 5% Hispanic, 3.6% multi-ethnic, and 3% international. UMES is ranked in the top 20 among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and the acceptance rate for applying students is 61%, with the majority of students coming from the Mid-Atlantic region, more specifically the Baltimore and Washington D.C. urban centers. UMES has a long history of providing academic programs and services for ethnically and culturally diverse students and, toward that end, offers programs and assistance that attract, serve, retain, and graduate many first-generation college students (Buzetto-Hollywood and Mitchell, 2019; Buzetto-Hollywood, Mitchell, and Hill, 2019).

To better meet the needs of students, remove barriers to student success, and improve student learning outcomes, the Department of Business, Management, and Accounting at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore works towards, and has been acknowledged for, embracing culturally responsive teaching and assessment practices. These activities have included, but are not limited to, the widespread use of culturally relevant projectbased learning; e-portfolio usage; simulation based learning and assessment; incorporation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in multiple courses; creation of a dedicated course purposed to teach the application of the scientific method and reasoning as applied to business and community problem solving; abundant use of cultural referents and issues related to social justice; experiential learning opportunities; adoption of a student tracking and alert system; highly personalized and extensive advisement; extensive DEI training offerings for faculty; preparation of a departmental DEI glossary; emphasis on formative over summative assessment; creating experiences that compel students to draw upon their social and cultural backgrounds; adopting the practice of allowing multiple attempts for student work submission; creation of a custom mindset intervention; emphasis on mutual goal setting and relationship building; and much more. Perhaps most significantly, the Department has created a required course titled Justice and Diversity in Organizations. This interdisciplinary signature course satisfies the university's newly introduced Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) learning goal. The knowledge and experiences that have been developed as a result of the Department's CRT work, have been used to develop a checklist for culturally responsive teaching and assessment represented in Figure 7: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Assessment Checklist.

### Culturally Responsive Teaching and Assessment Checklist

- Curriculum includes abundant opportunities for personal interactions and structures for effective caring where meaningful relationships can be built
- Curriculum encourages students to consider factors that influence events and interpretations
- Curriculum recognizes the cultural wealth and knowledge that diverse students bring to the classroom
- Curriculum emphasizes the use of student-centered performance-based assessments
- Curriculum integrates anti-oppressive and inclusive practices
- Curriculum makes available abundant support services
- Curriculum provides opportunities to explore intersectionality, social justice, oppression, and DEI
- Curriculum includes dynamic teaching practices that are rich with multicultural content and referents
- Curriculum works to contextualize learning for students
- Curriculum includes multiple means of assessment in order to achieve parity and increase student success
- Curriculum acknowledges institutional legacies that either contributed to, or sought to overturn, colonization
- Curriculum centers students and provides space for students to share their stories and mine meaning from lived or learned experiences
- Curriculum uses students' personal experiences and interests to drive civic and community engagement
- Curriculum incorporates progress and early alert systems
- Curriculum depends heavily on formative assessment and robust feedback
- Curriculum minimizes the use of summative assessment
- Curriculum is periodically reviewed to ensure that it does not promote dominant culture values and funds of knowledge

Figure 7: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Assessment Checklist.

## **Conclusion**

Gen Z is the current generation enrolled in higher education, and they are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation viewing increasing racial and ethnic diversity as positive change while also possessing a keen awareness of racial justice and equity issues. As a result of Gen Z's diversity, combined with their valuing of multiculturalism and social justice, the best way to meet the educational needs of these learners is for educators to acknowledge the experiences and assets of these students by creating inclusive and equitable culturally responsive educational environments.

HBCUs serve significant populations of low-income students of color, the majority of whom are the first generation in their families to attend college, and HBCUs are known for accepting students at far higher rates than traditionally white institutions (TWIs) coming from more challenging environments and who are more likely to have been subjected to a deficit mindset and colonizing treatment (King, 2016). Culturally responsive teaching compliments the historic missions of HBCUs, which have been a vanguard of culturally responsive teaching since before the term even existed (Owens & Njoku, 2021). By learning from the practices at HBCUs and adopting culturally responsive teaching strategies, we can promote the success of all learners equally by addressing the biases and disparities plaguing higher education. Accordingly, HBCUs not only should remain at the forefront of advancing this movement but also can serve as exemplars and provide mentoring to other institutions across the globe committed to CRT.

There are many benefits associated with culturally responsive teaching, including increased expectations; the ability to better address the needs of learners; remedying disparities and barriers in classrooms; the development of cultural competencies and global perspectives; learner empowerment; increased student engagement; more level and equitable educational experience; and new opportunities for students to shine. This paper offered an exploration of the concept of culturally responsive teaching, summarized the findings in the existing literature on CRT, discussed easily adoptable practices that can support culturally responsive teaching and assessment, addressed the role HBCUs can play in promoting CRT, and introduced the culturally responsive teaching and assessment checklist.

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