



# A Conversation about Culturally Responsive Teaching: What does it really mean?

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# In this presentation

- ▶ Why culturally responsive teaching (CRT)?
- ▶ Overview of CRT
- ▶ The BIG QUESTION
- ▶ Pilot study on TESOL teacher candidates
- ▶ Some strategies for ELs
- ▶ What do you (would you) do?

# Why CRT?

- ▶ ELs often underperform academically and experience marginalization in schools
- ▶ CRT is a way to deal with cultural difference among students to improve academic achievement of all
- ▶ Originally conceived for ethnic minorities (such as African Americans), it is also applied to ELs who are often ethnically and linguistically diverse

# Overview of CRT

- ▶ Poor academic achievement of students of color in schools seen as result of disconnect between language interaction patterns between teachers and students
- ▶ Other terms: “culturally appropriate,” “culturally congruent,” “culturally compatible”
- ▶ Term “culturally responsive” allows for more “dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 467).

# Overview, cont'd.

- ▶ Others have noted cultural mismatch also in social structures, like schools, which uphold societal inequities (Villegas, 1988)
- ▶ Call for focus on language interaction patterns, communication patterns, and cultural values
- ▶ CRT aims to find a cultural “fit” between students’ home cultures and school culture.

# Three goals of CRT

1. Develop students who can **achieve academically**  
“...requires that teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely making them ‘feel good’” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160).
2. Develop students who demonstrate **cultural competence**  
“...utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning...students learn that what they [have] and where they [come] from [is] of value” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161).
3. Develop students who understand and can **critique societal inequities**  
“...students are expected to ‘engage the world and others critically’” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162).

# Philosophical underpinnings of CRT

1. How teachers view themselves and others
  - ▶ See teaching as worthwhile and pedagogy as an art form
  - ▶ Believes all students are capable of academic achievement
  - ▶ Sees diversity as resource rather than problem
  - ▶ Believe they are members of the community and “give back” through teaching
  - ▶ Believe in “teaching as mining” (Freire, 1974)

## 2. How teachers view relationships

- ▶ Know about lives of students
- ▶ Create relationships to meet 3 goals of CRT
- ▶ Have fluid teacher-student relationships (CoP)
- ▶ Are connected with all students and have a community of learners
- ▶ Encourage collaboration over competition, are committed to collective empowerment



### 3. How teachers view knowledge

- ▶ See knowledge not as static but as shared and constructed
- ▶ Believe critical questioning is key
- ▶ Are passionate about knowledge and learning
- ▶ Build bridges to facilitate learning (scaffold the known/familiar to the unknown/unfamiliar)
- ▶ Use alternative assessments to see learning

## In sum...

- ▶ “[CRT] is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as **conduits for teaching them more effectively**” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).
- ▶ “[CRT is] a beginning look at ways that teachers might **systematically include student culture in the classroom as authorized or official knowledge**” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 483).
- ▶ “[CR teachers] acknowledge the existence and validity of a **plurality of ways of thinking, talking, behaving, and learning**...[and understand that] White, middle-class ways are most valued in society [and] understand that this status derives from the power of the White, middle-class group rather than from any inherent superiority in sociocultural attributes” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 23).

# Big Question

- ▶ How do we include students' culture in the classroom in ways that...
  - ▶ improves academic achievement,
  - ▶ develops their cultural competence,
  - ▶ encourages the critique of societal inequities?
- ▶ In other words, how do we go beyond the “feel good”?

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# What culture to use?

## ▶ Big C culture

- ▶ Holidays
- ▶ Foods
- ▶ Clothing
- ▶ Dance/music

## ▶ Little c culture

- ▶ Values
- ▶ Beliefs
- ▶ World view
- ▶ Ways of being

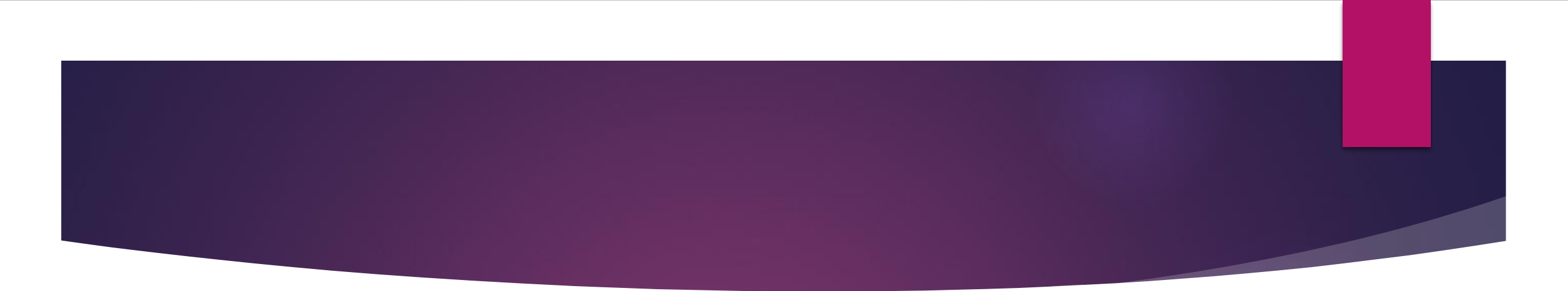
# Pilot Study

- ▶ Two TESOL minor students tutoring ELs at elementary school
  - ▶ Tutor A: MC-EA Education Major
  - ▶ Tutor B: Psychology and Spanish Double Major
- ▶ Focus on language and literacy with reading (Tutor B) and math (Tutor A)
- ▶ Had some introduction to CRT in TESOL methodology courses
- ▶ Reflective journal entries and final interview as data sources
- ▶ One host instructor (ESL Teacher)—final interview

# Pilot Study Results 1

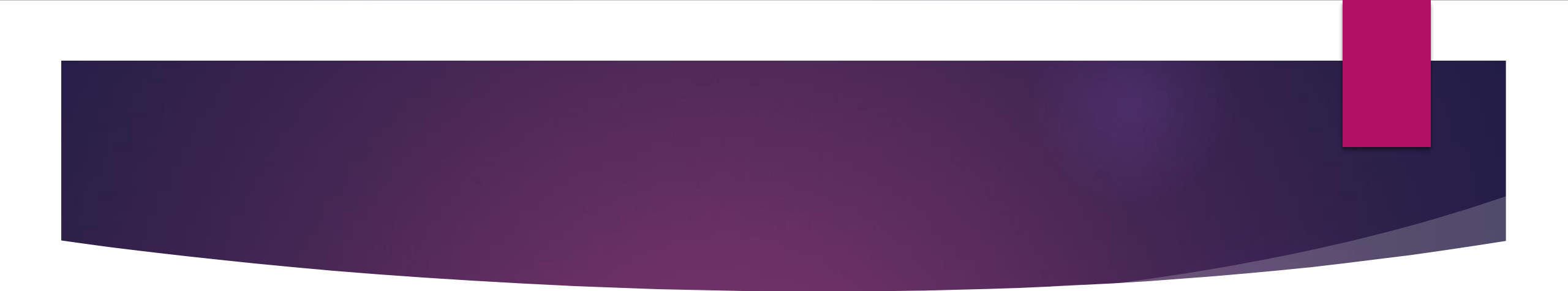
- ▶ What is CRT?
  - ▶ Similar answers from both Tutors, and from Teacher
  - ▶ CRT is knowing students and their background
  - ▶ CRT is knowing if students have support at home in learning language and academics
  - ▶ Tutor B: CRT is understanding students' culture and home life; connecting home life and experiences to school life for greater achievement
  - ▶ Teacher: unsure if answer is right, validating students' culture, background, and what they have to share



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- ▶ Focus on knowing students and using this knowledge to relate to instruction
  - ▶ Narrative of “no home support”
  - ▶ Little mention of three tenets of CRT:
    - ▶ Developing students’ academic achievement
    - ▶ Developing students’ cultural competence
    - ▶ Developing students’ critical consciousness of societal inequities

# Pilot Study Results 2

- ▶ How incorporate CRT in teaching?
  - ▶ Tutor A:
    - ▶ Make sure get homework done at school if no support at home
    - ▶ Ask about L1, enthusiastic about bilingualism and two cultures
    - ▶ Use word problems less US-centric and less wordy
    - ▶ Know more about students' culture and relate teaching to culture
  - ▶ Tutor B:
    - ▶ Try to use books that represent diversity
    - ▶ Asked to create own story that the teacher can write
    - ▶ Talk to students and ask what they did over the weekend, incorporate what they do into lessons

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- ▶ How incorporate CRT in teaching?
    - ▶ Teacher:
      - ▶ Doesn't really, can't think of ways
      - ▶ Decorates room, makes warm and inviting place, students know understands and values their culture
      - ▶ Sponsors extracurricular activities for students and parents
  - ▶ Awareness of connection between culture and academic achievement
  - ▶ Focus on the “feel good”
    - ▶ Recognize challenges and help overcome
    - ▶ Be pro-linguistic and -cultural diversity
    - ▶ Talk to students about their lives

# Pilot Study Results 3

- ▶ How engage students in learning?
  - ▶ Both tutors use same strategies
  - ▶ Let students pick readings based on their interest
  - ▶ Make learning relatable to students' lives (ask if student has experience with the topic, what they would do, etc.)
- ▶ Know they need to connect to students' lived experiences, but are limited in strategies to do so.

# Pilot Study Results 4

- ▶ Both Tutors and Teacher recognize they need to know more about students' cultural backgrounds.
  - ▶ Tutor B connects this to learning and wants to know the preferred learning styles of students, how they communicate at home and with whom, and what responsibilities they have at home, to connect more from home to school.
  - ▶ Tutor A sees knowing about the students' culture as separate from learning: "I really did not have any more discussion about their culture due to me starting to work with them on educational activities."
  - ▶ Teacher sees need for more training in culture of ELs for all teachers.

# Other...

- ▶ Tutor A:
  - ▶ Talk about students' days, weekend plans, etc.
  - ▶ "I can see how knowing more about their culture, or education culture they grew up with would be important to address right away when they come to school here, however since it was the middle of the year they are most likely used to most aspects of school such as the schedule, their teachers, the teaching styles, etc."
  - ▶ *Once students learn the ways of the school, no need to be concerned with cultural differences.*

# Other...

- ▶ Tutor B:
  - ▶ Talk with students, what's important to them or their parents, what they do with family
  - ▶ School is not emphasized at home so there is no literacy support or homework support.
  - ▶ Students are not as exposed to surroundings or larger world knowledge.
  - ▶ *Linguistic and cultural diversity seen as a problem rather than a resource for learning.*

# Other...

- ▶ Teacher:
  - ▶ Compares writing styles; “doesn’t work” in US English style
  - ▶ Stresses importance of US English style to students
  - ▶ Allows students to express themselves and write what they feel at times
  - ▶ “They have to know how to perform in our standards.”



# Pilot Study Results

- ▶ Tutors and Teacher understand that culture is an important aspect in learning, but lack deep understanding and strategies to...
  - ▶ Value students' little c cultures in the classroom
  - ▶ Use students' little c cultures as vehicles for learning

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# So what can we do?

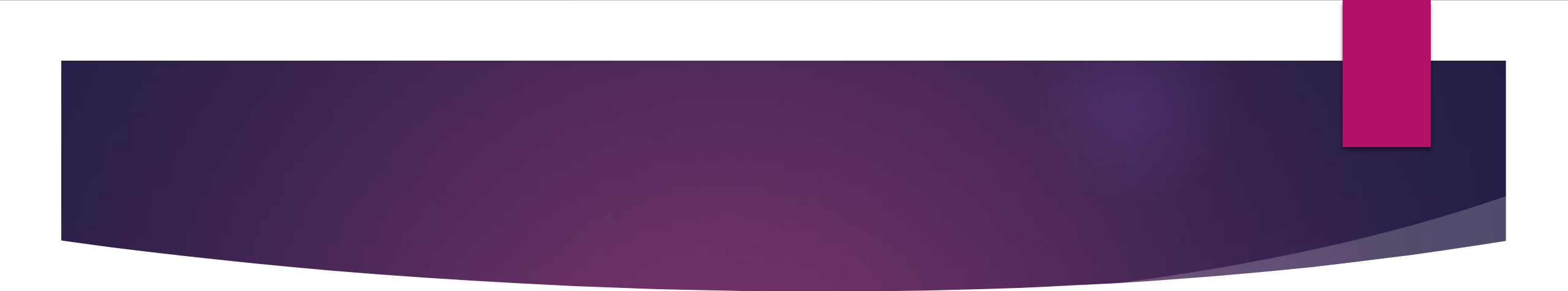
- ▶ How can we bring the little c cultural elements into teaching?
- ▶ How can we enact CRT that increases students' academic achievement while developing their cultural competence?

# Some ideas for ELs

- ▶ Reading
  - ▶ Multicultural literature in original or in translation (have students translate)
  - ▶ Analyze narrative structure and write own stories in different style
- ▶ Writing
  - ▶ Analyze letter writing in different languages
  - ▶ Write letters to parents in different styles and see how respond
- ▶ Speaking
  - ▶ Notice and learn different patterns for interaction
  - ▶ Reflect on which are more comfortable and "easy," and why
- ▶ Listening
  - ▶ Listen to speeches of Martin Luther King and compare to President Obama
  - ▶ Recognize patterns of speech of AAVE and write a speech in that style

# Ideas, cont'd.

- ▶ Grammar
  - ▶ Have students identify “writing with an accent”
  - ▶ Use translation to explore ways different languages organize thought, and how that relates to worldview
- ▶ Vocabulary
  - ▶ Go beyond “how do you say this in your language?” and require certain words in certain languages
  - ▶ Create bilingual vocabulary journals not only as a tool for learning English
- ▶ Content
  - ▶ Include achievements of non-White, non-Europeans in all subject areas
  - ▶ Create math story problems that incorporate different cultural perspectives, such as “Mr. Yang was outside gardening with his three children, picking squash to sell at the farmers market...”

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- ▶ “Ultimately, my responsibility as a teacher educator who works primarily with young, middle-class, White women is to provide them with the examples of culturally relevant teaching in both theory and practice. My responsibility as a researcher is to continue to inquire in order to move toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 484).

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