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## TASKS AS OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

Packed within mathematics tasks are messages about what mathematics is and what it means to do mathematics. Also implicit are ideas about context, that is, what is to be valued, and for what purposes. Our basis for creating CRMTasks lies in exposing students to as many higher-level tasks as possible. We see this in many ways as a fundamental element of CRT—that children have access to challenging opportunities through which to thrive and develop. This can happen in several ways. When students are asked to explore relationships between what is happening in real life and the procedure for finding a solution, they have the opportunity to make meaningful social and cultural connections.

In the early elementary grades, students are often asked to sort collections of objects. The opportunity here is to have students bring in items from home to sort or have students collect items at home, sort them at home, and then describe their process during carpet time. This type of activity provides an opportunity for students to share about their home life, which they love to do. It also helps students get to know one another. Students' roles at home are part of their identity, so it is important to allow students' whole selves into the classroom each and every day. In fact, celebrating their multiple identities helps in their identity development. Consider the following activity.



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Ask students to bring in the plastic tabs used to keep plastic bread bags closed. Most families eat some type of bread or product that comes in these types of bags. Use the tabs in a sorting activity and

then have a discussion about the type of bread families eat, such as various types of sliced bread (white, wheat, gluten free, etc.), cornbread, focaccia, challah, tortilla, baguette, pita, fry bread, and naan (to name a few). Explain to students that some people are unable to eat bread and may use a bread substitute like tostones (fried green plantains) or bread made from grains other than wheat flour.

Another way tasks provide opportunities for CRT is that they allow for exploring issues and contexts that arise in day-to-day living. By doing this, students can come to appreciate, acknowledge, and even learn more about the personal, community, and cultural things that help them thrive and develop. Tasks can also provide the means of helping students respond to challenges of the day, discerning patterns and taking stands for social justice and action, as illustrated in the example below.

#### **VIGNETTE 7**

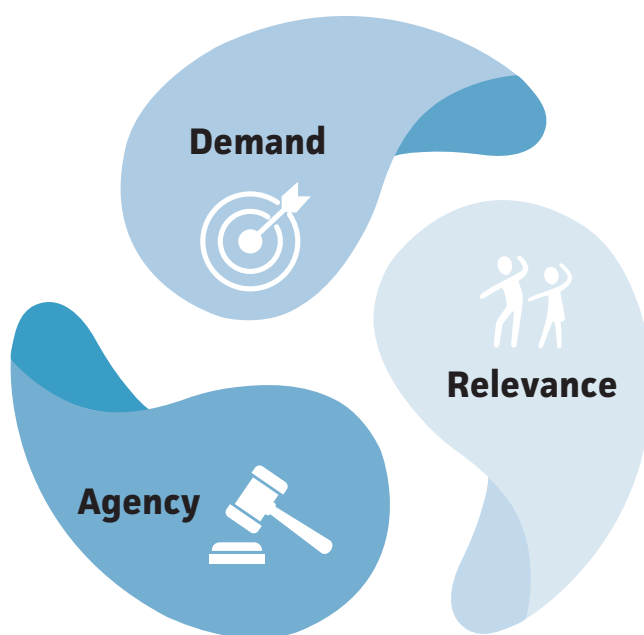
Mr. Gooding is planning to do a unit with his kindergarteners called Kindness Counts. The goal of the unit is to have students compare quantities and numerals in order to investigate an issue relevant to them and then be able to use mathematics to justify changes they feel are needed. He decided to do a unit on kindness because some of his students had been expressing concern over their peers' lack of kindness. At the start of this unit, students will identify what kindness is, and then each student will share their thinking about the class's level of kindness. To evaluate the data that were collected, students will explore strategies to compare numbers and quantities with physical manipulatives and classroom tools. Students will then engage in goal setting and identify a number of kind acts they hope to see over the course of three days. They will work to compare numerals, and discover how counting can help them determine which is more, less, or the same. Later in the unit, students will engage in their own data collection by using mathematical tools to create their own way to count acts of kindness. This unit could be adapted to use with any easily observable problem kindergarten students may be having, whether it be kindness, safe actions, following a certain rule, responsible acts, and so on.

## FEATURES OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT MATHEMATICS TASKS

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Based on the importance of high-level, cognitively demanding mathematics tasks and CRT, let's define *culturally relevant mathematics tasks* as tasks (1) with high cognitive *demand*, (2) where culture and community are the source of mathematics inquiry (*relevance*), and (3) where individual and collective *agency* are the intentional outcomes (Figure 2.3).

**FIGURE 2.3.** ● Culturally relevant mathematics task dimensions



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As a more comprehensive list, CRMTasks

- are mathematically rich, higher-level, cognitively demanding, and embedded in cultural activity;
- explicitly require students to inquire (at times problematically) about themselves, their communities, and the world about them;
- include content drawn from students' community, cultural identities, and experiences;
- affirm student belonging and culture—an empowerment and learning orientation (vs. deficit or color-blind orientation). A task may explicitly seek to add to this knowledge through mathematical activity;

*Engaging in Culturally Relevant Math Tasks: Fostering Hope in the Elementary Classroom* by Lou E. Matthews, Shelley M. Jones, and Yolanda A. Parker. Copyright © 2022 by Corwin Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

- ask students to respond to, overcome, and challenge discontinuity and divide between school and their own lives;
- require students to use mathematics to discuss and make sense of the world around them. The stated goal of the task is to make empowered decisions about themselves, their communities, and the world.