M2-S1: Nurturing and Honoring the Whole Student

CLH	Hey everyone! Today we're looking at the first of eight sessions. I'm joined by Gina Karp.
GK	Hi Christina, hi educators and welcome to Session 1, Nurturing and Honoring the Whole Student.
CLH	Okay so Gina, I was looking at this infographic from the 2020 census. We actually posted it in the show notes so listeners can check it out.
GK	Okay and what was the consensus on the census?
CLH	It was New York State specific and it broke down the 20.2 million person population, it showed some really interesting trends.
GK	I'm thinking that it showed a pretty steady uptick in the shifting demographics of the state.
CLH	Right, but what was more interesting was what it didn't show. It didn't show the richness of language, religion, cultural practices and the human experience that accompanies having such a diverse mobile population.
GK	That's why we have today. Today we're going to focus in on that richness and how we as teachers can use it to help us serve our students as whole people with a huge variety of experiences and backgrounds.
CLH	So the first thing we need to do is break down what Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education or CRSE means. Gina I'm going to send you the quick definition.
GK	Culturally responsive and sustaining education is designed to help educators create student-centered, learning environments that affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities, prepare students for rigor and independent learning, develop students abilities to connect the cross lines of difference, elevate historically marginalized voices, and empower students as agents of positive social change. So while not actually a curriculum itself, CRSE can be used as both a lens and as a vehicle.
CLH	OK so a lens and vehicle, let's unpack that. So as a lens, CRSE helps us look at what we are already doing like lesson planning, curriculum culture, cultivation, instructional delivery, curricular choices, relationship building, etc. It ensures that it provides more inviting and effective entry points with which students can engage and excel.
GK	That's the lens, that's the way we look at everything we do.
CLH	Right, so for example, every school generally has a scope and sequence for grade level knowledge and skills that have to be covered and mastered. This is usually accompanied by a list of text, like books, short stories, poems etc., that teachers can or must teach.
GK	Yes, so when we're using our CRSE lens to approach this basic task, it helps us consider the intersectional identities of our students and the degree to which the

	existing text either reflects those identities and/or exposes them to identities that are different from their own.
CLH	What we as teachers can do is to look at our current scope and sequence and ask ourselves where we can offer our students choice, where we can invite students to make connections through personal relevance and resonance.
GK	Very nice so that's CRSE as a lens, what is CRSE when you say that it's a vehicle?
CLH	Right so as a vehicle CRSE can help us to better engage with our families and leverage our extended communities and partners by using a strengths-based approach that recognizes any differences in identities, experiences and perspectives and sees those as assets. So for example, the Learning for Justice website is a resource for professional development in family and community engagement and in an article on the NYSED website rural schools expert, Dr. Gretchen RYMarchyk describes the elements of Learning for Justices', family and community engagement module that are of value to her, so I'm gonna send you that quote.
GK	Got it. She says, "I am especially drawn to the second module, critical practices for anti-bias education, family and community engagement. It includes specific prompts for educators to consider on how to incorporate culture, guidelines for culturally sensitive communication and detailed questions to use for interviews with students and families to learn more about their cultures, traditions and languages. The modules emphasize how families and communities are usually willing to share their stories and perspectives with others, we just have to ask".
CLH	Hmm, okay so that makes sense. Another thing that really strikes me is this idea that to be known is a universal human need. So we can't be fully valued without being known and we can't be fully known without being seen and heard as sort of our true and authentic selves. So as educators it's important to recognize the significance of our students' social and cultural experiences and how those experiences inform the way that they think, learn, respond and engage. It's equally important to understand our students' cultural identities so the ways that they understand themselves in relation to cultural worlds, so that we can meet the needs of the whole student. We need to recognize and remember that culture and cultural identities are fluid and complex and there's often a lot of intersectionality across race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, abilities, everything like that.
GK	So people are complicated.
CLH	I think that's the gist.
GK	One size does not fit all. This is all stuff that we all probably on some level resonate with and understand, because people are complicated. But I can think of a couple issues.

	First off, teachers are already pretty strapped for time, how can we ask teachers to do two things? Rethink their lessons to reflect CRSE and across learning environments.
CLH	Definitely super true. Luckily New York State gives us a CRSE framework that helps teachers reframe our existing practices in ways that better enable us to connect with our students, honor their whole selves and maximize their learning to improve their social emotional and academic outcomes. It's designed to help grow student-centered learning environments. It includes these 4 categories : -Welcoming and Affirming Environments -High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction -Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment -Ongoing Professional Learning The whole module we're about to jump into is going to get into detail on these but let's do a quick overview of how we can implement these four categories across learning environments.
GK	Okay so Welcoming and Affirming Environments include inviting students to share a bit about themselves and model creative ways to share about various aspects of their life and intersectional identities. Remembering to provide students choice to promote student agency. So there are ways to do this in-person and virtually. For example, in person, students might create a visual name tag that includes pictures that will be articulated and elaborated upon aloud whereas online students might use digital sticky notes on a jam board for the same effect.
CLH	Yea, so then for High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction, one idea is to invite students to co-create expectations for classroom norms, academic performance and student ownership of learning, as well as promote critical thinking about modern day social inequities that have their roots in historical injustices. So provide structures that allow students to examine how power and privilege were at play then and are now and this can include guided discussions and breakout sessions during remote learning or if you're in person we can use the carousel strategy
GK	Right, and for the third, Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment, we can include different kinds of learning tasks that utilize various mediums and platforms to provide more opportunities for students to connect with content and apply it in authentic ways. We can consider how leveraging instructional technology can both increase student engagement and offer better ways to receive and return feedback.

CLH	Great, so lastly Ongoing Professional Development could look like conducting action research that includes how to better incorporate CRSE into our pedagogical practice. Action research yields the most benefits when it's done as a team because it allows us to see all diverse perspectives and leverages each of our individual strengths while benefiting from these collective efforts.
GK	So no fear, throughout the whole module each pillar of CRSE framework will have its own time in the sun.
CLH	For sure, yes.
GK	People don't have to be quickly memorizing the four pillars of the CRSE framework and how they can apply it. That was just a niblet. The CRSE framework encompasses all the standard elements of teaching we've already been practicing. It simply helps us reframe them in ways that enable us to connect with our students in this really conscious way, to honor their whole selves and maximize their learning to improve social, emotional and academic outcomes.
CLH	Alright well it looks like we've got a pretty solid start to this module and I'm really excited to see what we're gonna look into next!
GK	Me too, listeners don't forget to check out the show notes in order to view that census data infographic we mentioned at the top of this episode. We'll see you all next time!