

M5-S8: Family and community partnerships across learning environments

GK	<p>Hi Christina, and hello listeners! Welcome to Session 8 in Module 5 of your TALE academy learning experience, Family and community partnerships across learning environments.</p> <p>May I drop some knowledge on you?</p> <p>In nature, symbiosis is defined as the “interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both.” Take, for example, the honeybee and the flower: the bee gets her food from the flower, and the flower needs the bee in order to pollinate. The bee even learns to adapt to the many flowers in her field, learning rapidly which plants can offer her the best and most nutritious food. In turn, the flower sends out signals to attract the bee, knowing that more bees mean a better future. Each organism is majestic on its own, but together, they create a harmonious environment in which both not only survive, but thrive.</p>
CLH	<p>I get where you’re going with this. If we zoom out and look at the human world, we see that we are not much different from the bee and the flower. During the pandemic, we learned very quickly that our communities are our lifelines. As with the honeybee and the flower, the symbiotic relationship that we form with our communities can mean the difference between surviving and thriving.</p>
GK	<p>This concept was a no-brainer for the students, families, and staff of the Binghamton University Community Schools Regional Network, located in upstate New York. Since 2009, the program has been connecting Binghamton University, school districts, and community agencies to leverage their combined resources and provide greater access for students in their rural New York State county. On the flip side, the community invests in its most precious and valuable resource – children. By providing services for schools and partnering in children’s education, the community solidifies a promising future for itself. Because of the strong connection between community and schools, the network was well-positioned to address the needs of the district’s students during the COVID-19 crisis.</p>
CLH	<p>I think that’s just admitting that we – teachers – couldn’t do this alone. And if we do, we end up making everything feel like school.</p> <p>Luann Kida, director of Binghamton University Community Schools Regional Network, had something to say about community partners in an interview for a leader spotlight in Institute for Educational Leadership:</p> <p>“[Community Schools] were already collaborating about the needs of students beforehand. The students need relationships with people they understand and trust. Because we had that, we were able to reach out to families, who see school as being there for them. It isn’t an us or them, they are all in it together...When so many minds come together, good things happen.”</p>

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GK	<p>So how do we, as classroom teachers, form a symbiotic relationship with our local community and ensure that it holds up across learning environments? That is today's guiding question. Christina, you brought up that point that if we act alone, we may not be serving the actual needs of students and families. We may just be getting our own needs met. How can we see this coming and avoid it?</p>
CLH	<p>It starts with a comparison of needs and resources. Ideally, after a few months together, we teachers are hyper aware of our students' needs. To bring the assets of the community into our classrooms, we need to connect to the resources that local organizations and leaders have to offer.</p>
GK	<p>I know the TALE response by heart! We can collaborate with families on ideas through town hall-style Zoom meetings that allow everyone to attend, regardless of transportation issues. We can send out detailed surveys via Google Forms. Another option is to use Poll Everywhere, a resource that allows us to engage participants through live Q&A and polling, word clouds, and interactive meeting tools.</p> <p>By understanding what our students and families need and what our communities can offer, we can create the best possible partnerships.</p> <p>That makes sense. What else?</p>
CLH	<p>Next up: data application. Once we understand our needs and resources, it's time to put the two together. Depending on our students' needs, there are a plethora of ways to bring the community into our classrooms – both online and in-person. In the post-COVID era with so many digital options available to us, it is imperative we choose community partners that have the flexibility to meet the needs of our students in any learning environment. For example, organizations that can provide academic tutoring should be able to do so in person, remotely, and hybrid. Public libraries often provide teen book talks and virtual or in-person read-alouds. Looking to the wider community, many museums provide virtual tours and live programs for students.</p>
GK	<p>One surefire way to create a long-lasting, symbiotic relationship between our students and community is service learning. Service learning is different from community service in that it combines classroom learning goals with community needs in a way that benefits both.</p> <p>So it's not just, go out and log some hours at the soup kitchen.</p>
CLH	<p>It could be, if your students are interested in learning about food deserts, non-profit administration, or who is affected by hunger. To be service <i>learning</i>, there should be a curriculum-based reason for engaging in community service.</p>
GK	<p>Service-learning projects check every box on the teacher checklist: they elevate student choice and voice in their own education; they engage students in self-management, self-motivation, and social skills; and they empower young</p>

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	<p>people’s responsible decision-making, as students identify and solve problems in their classroom, school, and community. According to Youth.gov, service learning is different from community service, because service-learning projects allow students to go deeper, focusing on “meeting both the needs of the community and that of the learner through a mutually beneficial partnership.”</p>
CLH	<p>The Youth.gov site is great – I put a link in the transcript. This site also shares this piece of inspiration, “Service-learning can promote a sense of connectedness to the school and the community. A sense of connectedness includes feeling valued by community members; feeling responsible for the welfare of the community; having pride in one’s community; and a high tendency to take action for the benefit of the community.”</p> <p>Service-learning projects are inherently geared towards flexibility, making them easily portable across learning environments.</p>
GK	<p>For sure. Here are a few examples of service-learning projects that can be adapted to the in-person, virtual, or hybrid classroom:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Start a letter-writing club to students in other states or countries and share stories with the rest of the school. For younger grades, a tool like a letter-writing generator helps students identify the parts of a business or friendly letter, then generate letters from templates.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Research local service agencies and conduct a fundraiser to highlight and support one. Students can use tools such as Greater Good or One Cause to plan and execute an online auction. Tools such as Google Forms or SignUp Genius can help students across learning environments organize donations.</p>
CLH	<p>Find, interview, and write histories of diverse people in the community. Google Meets and Zoom are the perfect tools for virtual interviews and include recording options. Students can then use Google Sites or EduBlogs to share their interviews with the wider community.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Make reading or math flash cards for primary students. Using a tool such as Cram, students can create tutoring tools for younger grades, then tutor in person or virtually via Google Meets or Zoom.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Make maps of your town for newcomers and highlight useful community resources. MyMaps by Google and Google Earth both have easy-to-use features and map-making tools. MapMe lets users easily create interactive maps, while students with higher tech skills would benefit from Scribble Maps.</p>
GK	<p>The possibilities are endless. When we open up our classrooms to the resources of the community, the voice and choice of our students, and the desire to make a</p>

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	<p>difference in our corner of the world, we bring together the very best parts of education.</p> <p>In the choice board activities for this session, you'll have a chance to explore more than 50 service-learning project ideas and brainstorm how you can adapt these to your own community and classroom learning environments.</p>
CLH	<p>The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone—students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities—all have the opportunity to succeed. You've just added another tool to your toolbox when you foster community partnerships across learning environments.</p> <p>Thanks for listening.</p>