

M2-S4: Putting Relationships First

GK	Hi Christina, welcome listeners! This is your fourth TALE Academy session in Module 2 focused on culturally responsive sustaining education, or CRSE, across all learning environments. It's called Putting relationships first, and you're going to want to take notes!
CLH	<p>Hey Gina, yes this one is really packed. But just as a reminder, you can find all of the resources mentioned in the session resources.</p> <p>Okay Gina, let's start with a question: How likely are you to run into one of your students at the grocery store, a restaurant, or the dentist's office?</p> <p>(GGK) umm not likely</p> <p>Okay, Second question: Do you live and teach in the same community where your students live and go to school? There is no right or wrong answer.</p>
GK	I don't but what makes you ask?
CLH	It's helpful to start with the easiest way to know our students - for us to live where they live, shop and eat in the same places, wait at the same bus stops. Our students would really see us as "real people"; they could know a little something about us.
GK	I get that. And in return, I would also have a greater understanding of the community culture, youth culture, popular culture, and all the other forms of home culture that my students bring to school. I could use this cultural knowledge to develop multiple means of engagement, expression, and representation in my lessons.
CLH	<p>In other words, you would have a huge head start on the essential task of building positive relationships with your students.</p> <p>While living and working in the same neighborhood simply isn't possible for every teacher, another inroad to knowing our students better is to increase our cultural competence. The collective and ongoing effort to increase cultural competence is a key factor in the impact teachers have on the lives of students, whether we see them in the grocery store or not. We can still make our knowledge of culture--the "C" in "CRSE"--a top priority. The New York State CRSE Framework is also very clear about the words <i>responsive</i> and <i>sustaining</i>.</p>
GK	<p>Yeah I want to go to that place, what's the difference? Responsive and sustaining. Let's unpack those two terms more. To <i>respond</i> to a cultural context, we have to know, understand, and value it as an asset in students' lives. That's the response part, to know, understand and value our students' cultural context as an asset. However, to <i>sustain</i> a cultural context, we have to recognize cultural pluralism and not attempt to change our students' fundamental identities.</p> <p>So that's the difference: we're not trying to make them more like ourselves.</p> <p>(CLH) Can we unpack cultural pluralism?</p> <p>Cultural pluralism is huge; it underpins the sustains part. It exists when minority groups within a society can maintain their distinctive cultural identities, values, and</p>

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	practices provided that they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society. They get to be themselves.
CLH	So it sounds like the opposite of cultural pluralism is cultural assimilation , the process in which an ethnic minority “adopts the beliefs, languages, and customs of the dominant community, losing their own culture in the process.” A stark and horrific example of cultural assimilation is the historical practice of removing Indigenous children from their homes to enroll them in publicly funded boarding schools from 1819 to 1969. The purpose of these schools was to forcibly assimilate American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children into the dominant culture by prohibiting them from speaking their languages or practicing their religious and cultural traditions.
GK	I can see why pluralism is the goal in New York. The New York State CRSE framework has this to say on the subject, “Culturally responsive education is about teaching the students in front of you. To do this requires that one work to get to know their students and develop meaningful relationships with students while engaging in the students’ communities. However, culturally responsive education must also be sustaining, that is it must work to encourage cultural pluralism and not cultural assimilation. Home and youth culture should be welcomed into the classroom as areas ripe for discussion. Differences should not just be seen as strengths, but they should also be maintained because they are what make our students and families unique.” What do you think of that?
CLH	Yeah, this is a call to be both <i>responsive</i> and <i>sustaining</i> , right, and I’m assuming that applies in both our virtual and our in-person classrooms. In Module 1, Session 3, we explored the ways that relationship-building extends far beyond the “team-building time” in that first week of school. We need to know what our students are interested in and what their goals are for themselves in order to make responsive decisions about curriculum, materials, teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessments. We need to <i>know</i> our students before we teach them. Seems kind of basic right?
GK	It does. It's hard because that takes time and we're always in such a time bind, but there's good evidence for what you're saying. Research from the American Psychological Association indicates positive teacher-student relationships can add an incredible amount of value. Here's the list: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthen academic achievement, - reduce chronic absenteeism, - promote self-motivation, - strengthen self-regulation, and - improve goal-setting skills.

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	<p>That's the why of relationship building—improved academic achievement, social development, positive classroom climate, and equity in education. So now let's go look at the how. Ready?</p>
CLH	<p>OK, so I'm going to lay out all of these three foundations of building culturally responsive and sustaining relationships, and then we'll go back and explore each of them a little more.</p> <p>One - Start with yourself. Begin with critical reflection, self-awareness of unconscious bias, empathy development, and cultivating self knowledge.</p> <p>Two - Cultivate curiosity. To build relationships, we should stay curious about our students, their families, and communities.</p> <p>And three - Center learning. Actively focus on the assets of students to build greater student ownership of their learning.</p> <p>Let's start digging into each of these foundational building blocks, beginning with Start with yourself.</p>
GK	<p>"Start with yourself" , building block one, means do your own work. We all have a lot of work to do.</p> <p>CRSE begins with the process of self-awareness, specifically, awareness of our own implicit biases – these are the attitudes or stereotypes that we may not be fully conscious of that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. While the influence of social messages affects everyone, we can <u>mitigate the effects</u> of our biases with mindfulness, empathy development, consciousness, and increasing and cultivating self-knowledge. There's a practice called critical reflection that has been shown to impact the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of pre-service teachers. We have to get to the pre-service teachers and get them to practice self awareness and critical reflection is the tool that G. Faith Little, a professor of Columbia University's Center for the Professional Education of Teachers has laid out some core principles of critical reflection in this way– I'm sending it to you now:</p>
CLH	<p>Okay, Little says "Critical reflection includes meta-cognition, self-awareness, and considering multiple viewpoints — features which result in reflective action. Individuals who are able to reflect critically on their experiences are better positioned to learn from their successes and missteps so that they can be constantly improving their practice."</p> <p>So this is just...journaling?</p>
GK	<p>I think so but with hard journal prompts. Sometimes it is helpful in this kind of practice to have guided self-reflection. That's what the program at Columbia is doing, providing these new teachers with the opportunity to dig deep into who they are before they become teachers. So if you're listening to this podcast you already are a teacher so there are other ways to cultivate this self-understanding. We want to point you to the eTeachNY, we've talked about it before. This is a website that contains numerous resources and professional learning experiences for teachers that reflect the best of what was learned probably in 2020-21 during the shift to emergency</p>

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	<p>remote teaching. Let's look at a couple of tools designed to take our self-reflection across learning environments.</p> <p>There is a set of activities on the eTeachNY site called Countering bias in remote learning that gives us a chance to reflect on our own unconscious bias and structural systems of bias in the remote learning and teaching space. This resource challenges us to examine the roots of the digital divide that was revealed that became extremely apparent to us during the shift to ERT.</p>
CLH	<p>A related activity developed by eTeachNY helps us uncover biases to address stereotype threats across learning environments. This self-assessment is an action step we can take to improve our remote teaching environments.</p> <p>As we noted, the eTeachNY website offers a wealth of self-guided resources for teaching in remote and hybrid learning environments. You can go to www.eteachny.org to learn more.</p>
GK	<p>OK, so the first principle was Start with yourself. Next, let's look at the second principle, which is cultivate curiosity.</p> <p>Understanding ourselves can open up new channels of interest, curiosity, and respect for others. This is foundational if we want to form positive relationships with students and for creating an environment that helps students build positive relationships with each other. To persevere in spite of differences and build relationships, we have to stay curious about each other.</p> <p>To fully engage with our students, we have to engage with their families and home communities, as well. This is all in the name of healthy curiosity. Curriculum resources such as this Community Tool Box or Respect for Diversity can expand our understanding and appreciation for how complex cultures and identities are.</p> <p>These resources are linked in the session resources and also in the transcript of this podcast, right Christina?</p>
CLH	<p>That is correct, indeed!</p> <p>And I want to address the question our listeners might be having: how do I actually leverage curiosity as a teaching strategy? I can read minds and I'm pretty sure some people might be thinking that.</p> <p>Research by the University of California at Davis informs us that curiosity is a powerful driver of learning. So no matter which learning environment we are working in, we can also leverage curiosity to increase mutual understanding and empathy in our classrooms. And the good news: these activities are portable across learning environments.</p> <p>Let's take a look at a few tools, and how they can be applied across learning environments..</p> <p>In a Million Words or Less... is an activity teachers can use to get to know their students better. This can be made more portable by leveraging hard copies, Google docs, and Flip.</p>

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	<p>A class scrapbook can be made portable through StoryboardThat or Google slides.</p> <p>A student interest inventory can be made more portable through Google forms, Socrative, or Kahoot.</p> <p>Finally, a community-building circle can be implemented in-person, via Zoom or Meets, or through VoiceThread, which is like an asynchronous circle.</p>
GK	<p>I'm such a big fan of doing community building circles as often as possible, like on a weekly basis. The more people can get to know each other the more they can become a learning community together.</p>
CLH	<p>Yeah, that's a lot of portable practices that support learning about each other's lives. So let's take a look at the principle of centering learning.</p> <p>(GK: That's the third one, and I think that means as opposed to centering teaching?)</p> <p>That's correct. So engaging with identity and diversity, modeling curiosity and interest, and partnering with students to make instructional choices, these are all part of the journey of centering learning rather than teaching.</p>
GK	<p>I get that and that's so challenging because we're teachers and in our heads we center teaching. And we're being called upon to center learning which might mean that we step aside to create the conditions for positive relationships, and look at our own mindsets about learning and Language or teaching behaviors that reflect deficit-based thinking – a focus on the problems we perceive students to be experiencing – can reinforce low expectations and low relationality between students and teachers.</p> <p>If you hold someone to a low bar, I think they get that and that's probably not good for your relationship. So actively focusing on strengths, assets, and opportunities that our students bring to school is an ongoing personal and professional practice that supports mutual respect and trust. One more thing, It always kind of comes down to who you are in the classroom. There isn't a silver bullet.</p>
CLH	<p>I think there's something about not assuming there's very rigid answers, maybe being open. Students can be authors of their own learning. In a true asset-based approach, we center the thinking of our students to drive their own deeper engagement. We make a lot of decisions as teachers! To center our students as the authors of their own learning, we can decide on learning routines, cognitive-demand levels, and discussion formats that send a powerful message: "You've got this." Your role: coach and cheerleader.</p>
GK	<p>It's kind of a relief because the burden on teachers is to be all knowing and able to meet every student exactly where they are, but if we start to develop a more student centered approach we empower students to be in control of their own learning, we set the conditions for them to find their own way. It just seems more sustainable than teachers having to meet every single student all the time, exactly where they are.</p>
CLH	<p>I think there's real value to this, I kind of see this in coaching, you can yell, –I've been coaching softball this season– but when you actually get down to it, the kids have to do it themselves, they have to be invested in it, make their mistakes, learn from it and</p>

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	we have to say “I know you can do this on your own, with this help”.
GK	<p>Yes, student-centered. So this is backed up by research from The Institute for Learning, that reports that these three practices can promote greater student ownership of learning and shape students’ identities as capable and empowered. Here are the three things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly convey that you value divergent thinking and reasoning by assigning cognitively challenging tasks with multiple entry points. Students should know that you trust them to reason using their own background knowledge, skills, and insights. 2. Choose learning routines that de-emphasize the teacher’s role of telling and explaining. Encourage students to ask questions, develop and use models, make meaning, support their conclusions, and think critically. 3. Open the floor to discussion and use discussion facilitation formats such as academic conversations, online or in person, to formatively assess learning and support participation.
CLH	<p>While we should continue to expose our students to historical knowledge about people from all walks of life and while we should not shy away from the difficult task of teaching the history of oppression, as culturally responsive educators we have to avoid tokenism. That means avoiding projects that put forth a single well-known individual, such as Sitting Bull, Stephen Hawking, Harriet Tubman, and Harvey Milk, as representatives of their entire culture. It also means not singling out students to “represent” history. Our CRSE lens asks us not to inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by focusing on single individuals. Non-stereotypic portrayals can reduce prejudice and negative attitudes toward people unlike ourselves.</p>
GK	<p>More reasons to do it. To review, we’ve now looked at the three foundations of building culturally responsive and sustaining relationships with our students, this is all in service to academic achievement, social development, positive classroom climate, and equity in education. They are::</p> <p>One - Start with yourself. Begin with critical reflection, self-awareness of unconscious bias, empathy development, and cultivating self knowledge.</p> <p>Two - Cultivate curiosity. To build relationships, stay curious about our students, their families, and communities.</p> <p>And three - Center learning. (De-centering teaching). Actively focus on the assets of students to build greater student ownership of their learning.</p>
CLH	<p>To circle back, building strong relationships with students doesn’t require living in the same neighborhood, walking the same paths, or even speaking the same language. It requires our heartfelt commitment to knowing each student as a whole person, valuing the cultural assets they bring with them, and prioritizing <i>knowing</i> our students before <i>teaching</i> our students.</p>

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GK	<p>OK, so 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 now added a few more tools to your toolbox when you put relationships first.</p> <p>We thank you for listening. You can now make a choice board selection to continue your learning! You will hear us in the next session!</p>
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