

M2-S2: Creating Welcoming and Affirming Communities

CLH	Hello, Gina, and welcome listeners! This is the second session in Module 2 of your TALE Academy learning experience. Today we are going to explore how you can apply the four elements of a welcoming and affirming community within your own classroom.
GK	Hello Christina. Let's start today with a reminder from American poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou, who once famously said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."
CLH	That quotation is the perfect concept to root ourselves in this session as we learn more about cultivating welcoming and affirming communities across learning environments. If there's one word that sums up the goal of this culturally responsive-sustaining education principle, it's belonging. As educators, we want to do our best to make our classrooms – whether physical or virtual – places where students not only feel a sense of belonging, but also feel like they can show up fully as their authentic selves.
GK	<p>Imagine the opposite, right? I don't belong, and I can't be myself here. Can you imagine that? In the previous session, we introduced the New York State Education Department Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework and its four principles. In this session, we will take a deeper dive into what welcoming and affirming communities are and how we cultivate them, especially across learning environments.</p> <p>As a reminder from Module 2, Session 1, the four elements of a welcoming and affirming community are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collective responsibility to learn about students' cultures and communities -Close relationships with students & families -Social-emotional learning programs -Materials that represent and affirm student identities
CLH	Let's kick it off with collective responsibility to learn about students' cultures and communities. One strategy to use this in your classroom is to proactively reach out to families to gather information about their children's cultures, goals, and learning preferences through surveys, emails, and/or calls.
GK	Yes, clearly signal your interest– that seems so closely tied to the second principle of prioritizing close relationships with students and families. Personal calls do seem challenging to me from the middle or high school perspective, these teachers might have over a hundred students. That's where technology can come to the rescue. To create close relationships with students and families, we can connect and build

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	<p>rapport through “meet and greet” videos, digital communication, and follow it up with in-school engagement and meaningful parent-teacher conference agendas.</p>
CLH	<p>You snuck that one in! I know you have a thing about student-led conferences and centering the parent-teacher relationship around student success. Okay, so collective responsibility to learn about family culture is the first principle of a welcoming and affirming environment, followed by prioritizing relationship-building. Then the third principle is to foster social-emotional learning programs. This doesn't have to be taking on a whole SEL program starting Monday morning. We can use the strategy of incorporating welcoming routines and welcoming rituals, such as greeting every student at the door and posting an agenda on the board that conveys expectations for the flow of the day.</p>
GK	<p>Welcome routines seem really manageable to me, they take minutes a day. And finally, we are asked to leverage materials that represent and affirm student identities. You can use the strategy of presenting content, such as literature, current events, and articles, that includes the intersectional identities of students and presents issues that will resonate with students' cultures and interests.</p> <p>So, to recap...the 4 elements of creating a welcoming and affirming environment include...? This is a formative assessment, by the way.</p>
CLH	<p>Got it,</p> <p>Building collective responsibility to learn about our students' cultures and communities</p> <p>Building close relationships with students and families</p> <p>Social Emotional Learning Programs.</p> <p>Making sure we have materials that represent and affirm our students' identities</p> <p>So that's the big picture. Let's take a deeper look at how we can help students feel welcomed and affirmed in our classrooms by looking at five key statements a teacher can make to help students feel a sense of belonging. This is adapted from the SchoolCues Blog titled, “How To Create a Sense of Belonging in the Classroom” – I'm sending it over to you now. Wait! I want you to make a prediction before I hit send. This is to make up for that formative assessment you dropped on me back there.</p>
GK	<p>Okay, my prediction is “I'm really glad to see you today. I'm so glad you're here”. That kind of thing. OK, here are the real ones.</p>

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	<p>Our first statement is, "I'm so glad and excited you're here today!"</p> <p>This seemingly small but quite impactful statement allows students to feel valued as a person, which creates a deeper connection with you.</p> <p>Our second statement is, "I would love to know what you think about this topic."</p> <p>This statement lets students know that you value their opinions and ideas, which makes them feel like an important part of the class, and it also encourages future sharing. Bonus points if you're able to ACT on those ideas in some way!</p> <p>Our third statement is, "I'm inspired by what a hard worker you are!"</p> <p>This statement promotes a growth mindset, as it emphasizes effort over innate ability and makes it clear that you actually notice their efforts, which will enhance their sense of belonging and prompt continued action and perseverance.</p> <p>Our next statement is, "I believe you can be and do anything you want."</p> <p>This statement helps to give students a healthy boost of confidence in their capacity to excel, and feeling confident in your class will increase the likelihood of their engagement with and ties to your community.</p> <p>Our final statement is, "Thank you for [whatever they have said or done]."</p> <p>This statement expresses your gratitude for their unique contributions and likely leads to them feeling appreciated and valued in their community.</p>
CLH	<p>I love that and we encourage everyone to put their own spin on that. That's a nice set of statements to keep in your back pocket: I'm glad you're here today, I'd love to know what you think about this, I'm inspired by how hard you're working, I believe you can do what you set out to do and just plain old THANK YOU for that contribution.</p> <p>Because this is the TALE Academy, it's important to examine how we can extend our existing brick-and-mortar classroom environment to the virtual classroom. Here are some ideas you can think about when you're designing a virtual classroom.</p> <p>You know how we work with the floor plan of a physical classroom and designate different areas for different activities? (GGK, Oh, like the reading nook or the maker space?)</p> <p>Yup! In a virtual classroom, you can ask, What are different ways to re-create diverse physical spaces within digital ones? For example, do you create "static" digital space</p>

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	<p>that students can “enter” and engage in, like a “reading nook” that shares various reading recommendations or links to digital libraries? What are visual ways to signal a virtual classroom? For example, do you designate certain background colors for certain activities? You’re making sort of visual cues for students.</p>
GK	<p>Oh, this is great. I love setting up a classroom, and this is opening up for me that our virtual classrooms can be fun to set up, too. A room that’s a reading corner is a set of hyperlinks to cool things to read. Love this.</p> <p>Our second example is thinking about the types of seating arrangements you have in a physical classroom where teachers seat students in traditional rows, U-shape, or in clusters, etc. in order to facilitate certain types of relationships and interactions.</p> <p>Let’s take that to the virtual classroom, you can ask yourself, What are the different types of interactions I want my students to have with me and with one another? That leads you to different types of virtual arrangements. What types of “breakout rooms” can I create to promote particular kinds of conversations, relationships, and dynamics? Would this topic be better if we were all in pairs or is this best for the whole group? And how can I consider students’ cultural backgrounds and personalities when selecting protocols to promote stronger communities...for example, how can I incorporate a mix of spoken and written communications that will allow students to leverage the traditional ways that their cultures prefer to communicate? And I’m thinking always have the chat available as an option.</p>
CLH	<p>Breakout rooms are such a game changer. What did we do before them?</p> <p>Next, we’re going to look at the decorative, informational, and celebratory visuals on the walls of a classroom where teachers tend to hang up encouraging messages or important reference materials or showcase samples of exemplary student work. To create your virtual classroom, ask yourself, What are different ways to create a mood or “vibe” using digital tools, like a variety of fun backgrounds to convey or elicit certain emotions that also provide an opportunity to affirm students’ cultures. Gina, do you have an example for that?</p>
GK	<p>I love the tradition of teachers asking students to take turns doing a daily dedication for the day. It literally takes two minutes and it sets a great mood for learning. You learn so much about each other. In this protocol, the student whose turn it is to offer the daily dedication, dedicates their learning to someone real or fictional, and provides an image that can go on a slide or background. I think it just lights up the virtual space with somebody’s important person.</p>
CLH	<p>And that framework can go beyond the opening of the day to be the basis of how classroom materials are organized. You can yourself: What are the various reference materials I want to share, and what’s the best way to digitally organize these reference materials? For example, is it in digital folders? Is it through hyperlinks on a</p>

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	<p>teacher page/classroom website? Are the docs fixed, or do they allow for student customization? What are different ways to celebrate student wins and successes, as well as their intersectional identities? For example, is there a digital newsletter that honors a “student of the week” or includes exemplary student work? Do students get to share their pieces orally with other students during class time, etc.?</p>
GK	<p>Yeah if you open that up to be more student driven, kids probably have a lot of great ideas for how they want to see their reference materials organized and what would be fun and cool and attractive.</p> <p>This is making me excited to build a virtual classroom.</p> <p>Next, let’s look at classroom routines and rituals in a physical classroom where teachers establish a variety of systems and procedures for how to enter and leave the room, how to communicate/participate, how to submit work and/or retrieve missed work, how to greet students, how to prepare for visitors, etc.</p> <p>To create this in a virtual classroom, we can start by asking ourselves: What are the various routines and rituals you as the teacher should engage in, such as greetings, check-ins, conferencing, etc.? What are the various routines and rituals your students should engage in, such as “room entry/exit” protocols, submission of work, use of sentence starters, etc.)? What are the ways you can promote positive student-to-student interactions to enhance community? How can you incorporate more student agency and leadership?</p>
CLH	<p>Great. Finally, let’s look at those getting-to-know-you activities used in physical classrooms where teachers tend to include activities that will allow students to share more about themselves with one another and help to build community.</p> <p>To create a virtual classroom, you would ask yourself: What are the digital equivalents of name tags? What are some virtual icebreakers that can be included, such as people scavenger hunts?</p> <p>Sort of starting to see how I can create a welcoming environment online, and how closely it resembles the kind of planning I do in my physical classroom.</p>
GK	<p>Me too. As we conclude Session 2, let’s remember that while rules are important, relationships are one of the biggest drivers of student success.</p> <p>We have to prioritize cultivating a welcoming and affirming community across learning environments that ensures students not only know they are safe and free to be themselves, but also that they are valued by and connected to a community.</p>

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	<p>You now have some great tools to help you create welcoming and affirming learning spaces across learning environments and some ideas on how to adapt the practices you use in your physical classroom for your virtual classroom.</p>
CLH	<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're on your way to learning how you can apply CRSE in your classroom and make sure every child feels welcomed and affirmed.</p> <p>Now it's your turn!</p>
GK	<p>Thanks for listening! You can now return to Canvas to continue with this session.</p> <p>Bye Listeners.</p>