



Rethinking

**FAMILY
ENGAGEMENT**

Across Learning Environments

TALE Academy 
MODULE 5 – SESSION 1



Identity Begins With Family

Within 12-36 hours of hatching, a duckling imprints on the first moving object it sees. Inside the egg, a duckling has no idea what its mother looks like - she could be a feathery, swimming creature. She could even be a farmer, a barnyard cat, or an inanimate ball of string that you tug on to replicate movement. Whatever or whomever that duckling latches onto in this formative period becomes its lifeline - the set of clues that lets the duckling know how it should eat, sleep, walk, and act. In a beautiful example of the innocence of youth, nature allows this animal to form its identity based on the family that it is presented with.

We humans are not much different. Regardless of our caretaker, we form our identities based on the values and customs that we are raised with. Our families form our culture and infiltrate every aspect of our lives, from how we see the world to how we act, react, and interact. It is because of this that we as educators have a duty to ensure that our students' families, in all of their shapes and sizes, are 100% valued, engaged, and represented in our classrooms.



In her bestselling book, *Cultivating Genius*, Gholdy Muhammad names **identity development** as the first of the four parts of a **culturally and historically responsive equity framework**. The benefits of considering and fostering our students' identities are manifold, offering them not only the chance to strengthen their own sense of self, but to understand the strengths of others, as well.

Looking back on our work in Module 2: Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education, we know that our students' **intersectional identities** are foundational to their thinking and learning. When we partner with parents and families to create a more robust curriculum, we honor their identities and in doing so, strengthen relationships, learning, and a sense of community that will guide them through each step on their journey to adulthood.

What goals do our class families have for their children, and how can we integrate these goals within our current curriculum?



SESSION REWIND: THE FOUR CONSTANTS

1

PREDICTABILITY

2

FLEXIBILITY

3

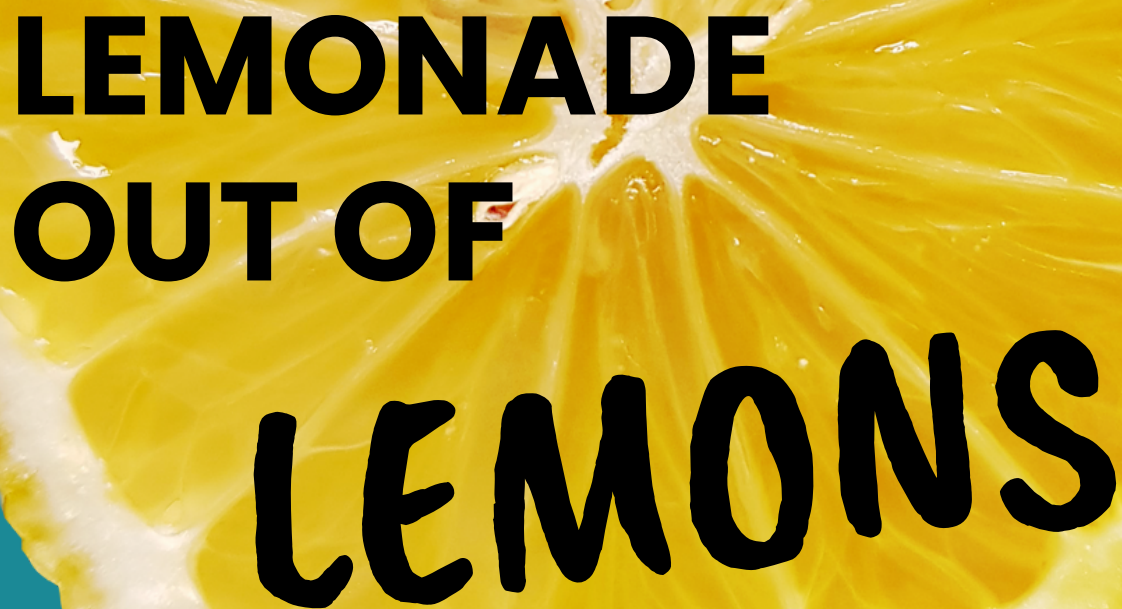
CONNECTION

4

**STUDENT
EMPOWERMENT**

Let's travel back to where it all began – Module 1. In Module 1, we introduced you to the four constants across learning environments: **predictability, flexibility, connection, and student empowerment**. Educator and researcher Alex Shevrin Venet proposes that these four priorities are essential to creating equitable, trauma-informed learning plans. But the four constants aren't limited to informing our planning. They can guide every aspect of our teaching, from creating assignments and assessments to – you guessed it – engaging with parents and families. That's because it was not just students that were affected by pandemic closures. Parents and families also suffered great trauma during those years, and our approach to parent and family engagement post-COVID must reflect that.

Applying the principles of predictability, flexibility, connection, and student empowerment to our work with parents and families can build a foundation of trust and transparency that we will talk more about in the next session. For now, we're going to focus on the last of those four constants: student empowerment. How can we leverage the knowledge, values, and wisdom of a diverse array of families to help empower our students in the classroom? What goals do our class families have for their children, and how can we integrate these goals within our current curriculum?



LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS

We can begin by making “lemonade out of lemons.” Sure, emergency remote teaching (ERT) caused a lot of sleepless nights and heartache for everyone involved. In addition to juggling Zoom schedules and spotty Wi-Fi, ERT brought to light other, more systemic issues around digital equity (which we will cover in Session 3).

Despite those pitfalls, we also gained an extraordinary arsenal of tools and technology that we can now wield across learning environments and start to turn our lemons into lemonade. Once we have the lemonade, what better way to use it than to quench the thirst of parents and families that are eager to be a part of their students’ education?

QUOTES FROM THE EXPERTS



It takes a village

“Educators and families should work together to define their shared challenges and improve the educational experience for children. Schools that take a codesign approach understand that families’ wisdom must be brought to bear on any problem the school encounters. Codesign models move beyond parent committees and compliance mandates to involve families in the day-to-day work of education. Educators are not afraid to hear what families think because they are secure in their relationships with families and appreciate their perspectives and skills.”
(Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

It's a Whole New World

“When used to enable blended-learning models, online learning resources can create flexibility in the time, place, path, and pace of learning for students...[M]any teachers who began using the Flipped Classroom model [during the pandemic] saw it as a powerful way to support absent students, adapt instruction to students’ needs and circumstances, and focus more class time on giving their students individualized support.”


(Arnett, 2021)



Options, Options, Options

“Fifty-one percent of parents surveyed by the National Parents Union in June 2021 indicated that they think schools should be rethinking how we educate students [and] coming up with new ways to teach children moving forward as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. And although most parents would prefer to have their children learn next year in person on their school’s campus, 19% want their children to learn remotely or online and 22% want hybrid learning options. Recent reports suggest that some parents found remote and hybrid instruction to work better for their children than conventional schooling.” (Arnett, 2021)





While the initial push to establish strong family engagement might require a bit more work, the end result will no doubt reap the benefits of those relationships nurtured early on. As Harvard Graduate School of Education Lecturer Karen Mapp noted in a 2018 interview:

I've seen teachers be very enthusiastic about [family engagement], especially when they realize engaging families makes their jobs easier, not harder. Yes, the investment in the beginning is time-consuming, especially because teachers already have so much on their plates... [S]ome people feel like family engagement is a burden or an add-on or an extra; these teachers will tell you, "This is an absolutely integral part of my teaching practice."

So how can we make our teaching practice easier by introducing families and parents into the equation? Simply by having them do what they do best: support, educate, and nurture their children. Using the rich technology that emerged during and post-pandemic, we can now Zoom grandparents in from India; we can collaborate with aunts and uncles in China; and we can set goals with families in the neighborhood on their time and on their terms. We had the lemons, we made the lemonade, and now we can refresh and rejuvenate our parent and family engagement..



Your Turn!

Next up, you'll read more on centering families to center students.

Works Cited

Arnett, T. (2021, August). *Carpe diem: Convert pandemic struggles into student-centered learning*. Christensen Institute. <https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Carpe-Diem.pdf>

Mapp, K. L., & Bergman, E. (2021, June). *Embracing a new normal: Toward a more liberatory approach to family engagement*. Carnegie Corporation of New York. https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/f6/04/f604e672-1d4b-4dc3-903d-3b619a00cd01/fe_report_fin.pdf

Muhammad, G. (2000). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic Inc.

Stringer, K. (2018, August 6). *The 74 interview: Harvard's Karen Mapp on ESSA, family engagement, and how schools and communities can partner to help kids succeed*. The 74. <https://www.the74million.org/article/the-74-interview-harvards-karen-mapp-on-essa-family-engagement-and-how-schools-and-communities-can-partner-to-help-kids-succeed/>

Venet, A. S. (2021, May 25). *Setting priorities in trauma-informed education*. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/setting-priorities-trauma-informed-education>

About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

The content of the TALE Academy was produced in whole or in part with funds from Contract C014452 and does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the New York State Education Department (NYSED), nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by NYSED.

In addition, NYSED, its employees, officers, and agencies make no representations as to the accuracy, completeness, currency, or suitability of the content herein and disclaim any express or implied warranty as to the same.

