




 FROM THE MAGAZINE

Powerless Dynamics

School has long been rife with power structures. Recently we've come to discover that learning is done best when power is placed with the individual. Putting a belief in the individual – the teacher, the learner – ensures that ownership is felt in each role. But, unfortunately, structures and dynamics haven't caught up with our knowledge yet.

JENNIFER GUNN

 9 min read





For over a century, *compliance* has been considered central to the learning process. We tell students when to sit, when to stand, when to move and when and how to do assignments. Students who do not comply face consequences — both immediate and long-lasting. It's a deeply rooted tradition that communicates that students must be strictly disciplined in order to learn. At last count, the Department of Education reported that 2.5 million students received one or more school suspensions in 2017-2018.

We can do better. We'll have to do better to stay relevant.



leading the charge away from the old-school compliance-and-punishment model to focus more on building bridges to learning that include social-emotional learning, a focus on engagement, real-world applicability, and relationship-building. We caught up with some of the most familiar personalities of TikTok's #TeacherTok to weigh in on the absolutely transformative, awesome power of **connection over compliance**.

Meet Hannah-Gio Sinclair AKA @senoraxamora on TikTok

Compliance vs. Connection:

Hannah-Gio Sinclair, M.Ed., is a high school Spanish teacher in San José, CA, but she's also an outspoken TikTok educator with 97,000 followers. In Sinclair's classroom, rules are secondary to relationships. "In my opinion, you can have all the rules and procedures in place, but you don't have anything until you build relationships with your students," she says. "From day one, my main goal is to get to know as much about each and every student as possible. When students know you care about them and when you have mutual respect for one another, they'll do anything for you and wouldn't even think about misbehaving."





long list of rules that are rooted in compliance and are just going to keep students out of the classroom if they are broken, I find it is way more effective to talk about clear expectations and build rapport. Lastly, amongst everything else, establishing an open line of communication, building relationships based on trust, and genuine interest in their lives and personalities are what has completely transformed my classroom management for the better.”

Note: We have permission to use this image. I will send along a higher quality file in a separate email.

Definitely Smile Before December

“Every year, I overhear veteran teachers telling other new teachers ‘Don’t smile until December to let them know you mean business.’ Or ‘I’m not here to be their friend.’ Of course I’m not here to be their friend, but that doesn’t mean I can’t care for them or get to know the in’s and out’s of their life.”



Ms. Sinclair’s Connection Activity

“Something that I do at the beginning of the year on the first day of school is have my students write a letter to me using the prompt ‘I wish my teacher knew....’ They have as long as they need to write anything and everything about themselves. Some write about their hobbies, music, friends, family, sports teams they love; some even open up to me about their personal lives. After, I take them home and read every single one, and I make it a point to mention one thing each student mentioned in their letter when I see them throughout the next few classes.

One year, when I mentioned to a student something I read in their letter, they looked at me with complete shock. Their eyes were wide and their jaws dropped. They asked ‘You actually read all of those?’ I responded, ‘Of course! It’s my



good teacher.’ Fighting back tears, that’s when it really hit me these kids just want to be noticed and cared for more than anything else. Public school systems are so focused on trying to get students to comply, turn in their homework, to follow the rules, that they don’t stop to think about all the lives of the individuals that are sitting in front of them for 180 days of the year. Stop and think what’s going on outside of the classroom because it most definitely has a direct correlation to classroom performance and behavior.”

Meet Ty Tiger, Teacher, Author and Coach from Beaufort, SC AKA @kindasortateacher on TikTok

The Relationship Bridge



Ty Tiger is known on TikTok for sharing relatable and funny teacher experiences, as well as helpful tips on becoming a teacherpreneur to her nearly 48,000 followers. She’s also an advocate for using human connection as a bridge to learning. “The idea of building relationships is one that is often touched on in PD, but seldom carries over in true practice once the hustle and bustle of the school year begins. When the year starts, it is essential that teachers take the time to build relationships with their students;





know some [educators] think students don't need to 'like' them to be a successful teacher, but that's far from the truth. If a student likes you, they will work their darndest during their time with you."

Trust Is Earned

"Many people struggle with how to build these relationships early on. They cannot be forced, so I started thinking about things that I would feel comfortable talking to strangers about. I took these ideas and began creating digital resources that encompassed these very topics to get the kids not only engaged, but comfortable to chat. This included ice breakers with interactive elements where students would build their Netflix library, share their favorite apps and websites, add their favorite snack items to a virtual grocery store belt — and the conversations that can come off of these simple things alone are endless. Teachers find commonalities with students and start building meaningful relationships day one without the typical forced 'What is your favorite color?' activities that we once filled out as kids."



Keep It Real with Rules

When it comes to classroom management, Tiger thinks rules can be a true learning tool if done right. "Rules are a hard one. As a teacher, I have lots of rules to follow. I would be lying to my students if I told them I never broke any myself. In school, students are learning the ropes of what rules are non-negotiables, what rules can be bent, how to walk a fine line while walking in their truest form. And to walk in one's truest form, not all rules can always be followed in their entirety. That's a lesson it's best to navigate in high school — not as an adult. Rules are practice for real life and once you have built relationships with your students, it's so nice to be able to keep it real with them and talk about these things. In addition, once you have established that solid



Meet Garrett Talcott, Kindergarten Teacher, Redmond, WA AKA @vividmichael on TikTok

Engagement Is the Cornerstone



Garrett Talcott is a kindergarten teacher in Seattle, who's become internet and TV famous for his remote learning virtual field trips and for going above and beyond to engage and dazzle his young students from the corner of his kitchen. In his now viral TikTok videos, watched by over 101,000 followers and filmed by fiancé Michael, you can hear the totally-excited little student voices on the laptop he totes to places like the top of the Space Needle, the zoo, or to meet the Seattle Mariners mascot — all live during class. For Talcott, engagement is the pathway to learning. “It all comes down to engagement and students wanting to come back for more — this is the cornerstone for learning. But what is engagement? Is it bright



colors and loud sounds? Sure, visuals and spectacle can be a part of it. Is it the camaraderie and community from a class family? Yes, a shared interactive experience is unforgettable. But I truly believe that what makes students come back for more is the indelible experience of feeling something — connection, emotions, joy, laughter, wonder – and realizing you're sharing that experience with others at the same time. You can't forget that ever, and you want to come



Love Makes the Learning Go 'Round

“Love is the foundation of my classroom. Love of self. Love of others. Love of our living planet. Love of learning. It all comes down to love. My partner Michael captured Tik Toks of my remote classroom where you can actually hear student responses to various activities – and I wish I could share them all. One activity I loved was where we were doing a Magic Milk science experiment and infused it with Love of Self questions ... I asked students what they loved about themselves and as they each called out answers – ‘I’m fast,’ ‘I’m making friends,’ ‘I can read’ – I would trigger the colored drops to blossom into beautiful expansive shapes on the white milk canvas – ultimately leaving a beautiful, colorful, and connected piece of art. And that was the lesson – all the things YOU love about yourself add to our world and make our world beautiful, just like this magic milk canvas.”



Building Emotional Skills for Life

“Incorporating SEL into my classroom allows for students to understand who they are along with their own variety of feelings and emotions. I teach students to build an invisible backpack of SEL tools they can use throughout life – and as a foundation for education. It’s important for students to know that it’s okay to feel, that feelings are normal, and how we handle them makes us stronger and who we are as a person. Relationship-building is so important as it can be the key thing that determines whether their year is successful or not. A classroom and a school does need rules and structure, but if these are grounded in love, and students understand how they benefit the classroom and each person including themselves, then it just becomes part of the essence of community and just part of the foundation for the fun and learning they want to have.”



JENNIFER GUNN

Jennifer L.M. Gunn spent 10 years in newspaper and magazine publishing before moving to public education. She is a curriculum designer, teacher, teaching coach, and educator in New York City. She created Right to Read, a literacy acceleration program for teens, steeped in social justice. She also created the progressive learning models, The Big Idea Project and We the Change. Jennifer is also co-founder of the annual EDxEDNYC Education Conference for teacher-led innovation. She is a regular presenter at conferences and frequently writes about education, adolescent literacy and innovation. Connect with Jennifer on Twitter: [@jenniferlmgunn](#).



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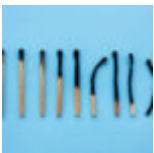
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RECOMMENDED

Getting the Most Out of Online Professional Development





Getting the Most Out of Online Professional Development

Over the course of the pandemic, it seems like every organization has pivoted to offering virtual conferences, events, and webinars. We've all been to them – some of which we suffered through, others which energized us – and I'm guessing we've all got a ton ahead of us.

SUZANNE WILLIAMS

🕒 4 min read





factors within my control that directly impact how effective the professional development opportunity is for me. Here are some tips for making the most of your virtual professional development experiences.

Prepare yourself

Before a virtual conference, make sure you have access to the Zoom link, a schedule, a computer, charger, and headphones. Prepare anything else that might make you more comfortable, like a blanket, snack, or drink. Don't forget any materials that you need in order to participate in the conference, as well as a writing utensil and notebook to jot down ideas that you might want to take back to your classroom.



Dress for success

Depending on the type of conference and your role in it, different wardrobe choices might be appropriate in different contexts, but allow plenty of time to get dressed in a way that suits the situation before your event begins to avoid distractions. Keep in mind that you will be sitting in front of the computer most of the day, so something that looks professional while remaining comfortable might be a good option; like a t-shirt and blazer with leggings for women, and a twill button-down and jeans for men.

Make a goal

Before any professional development opportunity, it is best practice to think about what you are hoping to gain from the experience in order to pick appropriate sessions and ask the right questions. Take it a step farther by writing this goal down so you are able to reflect upon it and measure it after the event.



The growth mindset isn't just for your students; it's important throughout your whole life. It's easy to settle into a rhythm and think of your teaching skills as static. Even at a PD event, it's easy to think that you won't get better, you'll just learn a new tech or strategy. Approach each new event with your mind wide open. Remember that you are growing, improving, and always becoming better at your craft.

Resist the urge to multitask

We all have full lives, and it can be difficult to resist the urge to fold a quick load of laundry, grade a few papers, or play with your kids as you half listen to a virtual conference. I have found that I tend to get a lot more out of conferences when I block off the time for it and focus on being present. Just as if you were going to an in-person event, plan to focus your energy on the workshop for that block of time. Similar to how we ask our students to participate in virtual learning, find a quiet place, turn on your camera, and focus on the task at hand. You're much more likely to walk away feeling as though you've learned something.



Actively participate

Some of the best online professional development sessions I have ever attended were the most interactive. Even if the speaker does not do a great job of embedding these opportunities to engage, make it a personal goal to do so in each session. Drop a question in the chat, raise your hand, volunteer, respond to questions asked — something. Engage with the speaker, the participants, and the content in any and every way possible to maximize the effectiveness of your time.

Build connections



feedback to help you better your practice. Being able to connect with like-minded educators is one of the most important parts of professional learning, so be sure to take every opportunity that you get.

Reflect on what you learned

Most of us leave conferences with many notes about the great ideas we heard and are eager to implement them into the classroom. Plan some time post-conference to sit down, review those notes, and pick a couple of new things you are most excited to try. Then, file your notes away to reflect on later. After you have implemented them, it will be easier to try and bring something new into the mix.



Online professional development certainly has both benefits and drawbacks, but it remains important to connect with like-minded educators and content to help you better your practice, even amid the pandemic. Sign up for an upcoming professional development opportunity or two this semester, and use these tips to maximize the takeaway. You'll be glad you did; it's remarkable what spending the time to connect with other educators and the content can do to maximize effectiveness and minimize burnout in the years to come.



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