

Building a Culture of Kindness: Piloting ThinkGive at my School

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At Dedham Country Day School, we launched our ThinkGive pilot in February 2020. I was intrigued by a program that invites students to use kindness as a way to engage with the world around them, and our fifth grade students were ready to move beyond our weekly mindfulness practices (breathing, movement, etc.) and be a part of something new.

The ThinkGive curriculum is simple, straightforward, and easily customizable. Among the wide range of topics there are lessons on gratitude, empathy, self-esteem, and social justice. Through a combination of discussion, books, videos, and collaborative activities, students develop ideas on the types of acts (“gifts”) that demonstrate kindness to themselves and others in many different contexts.

I am happy that the timing of our pilot allowed for a few weeks of in-person instruction before our teaching circumstances changed. As a result, we were able to establish a foundation of trust and rapport which created a space for honest conversations and reflections.

In late March, when the world transitioned to virtual everything, it did not feel as if we missed a beat with ThinkGive. Weekly materials continued to arrive via e-mail, and the staff was responsive to my questions. Our Zoom meetings offered a familiar place for students to gather and continue to build on what they had started together in the classroom. The open-ended prompts encouraged students to be thoughtful, and helped them to bring their personal interpretation into our conversations.

As we wrapped up ThinkGive in May, I reflected on the success of the pilot. The “ThinkGive Three” moved students’ kindness meters beyond buying or making gifts for people they knew.



They came to understand that kindness to themselves breeds kindness to others, and simple acts that don't cost anything often have the most impact. Not only did they give a large number of gifts over the eight weeks of the program, but they also had nearly perfect attendance during the five weeks of virtual learning.

ThinkGive offered our students a break from the challenges of distance and disconnection, provided opportunities for self-discovery, and encouraged them to recognize and act on ways in which they can make a difference in their daily lives and the lives of others.

