

Creating Connection and Promoting Kindness In a Virtual Classroom

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I recently celebrated a birthday and was delighted to discover that it was both National Gummi Bear Day and National Give Something Away Day. I felt that both were a fitting reflection of my lifestyle and my personality. I rank Gummi Bears as a top tier candy treat and I value the art of giving. And yet I wondered, "Why limit giving something away to one day only? Shouldn't every day be 'give something away' day?" The answer is, of course, yes! The way in which we can make that a reality is the cornerstone of the ThinkGive program.

ThinkGive offers the opportunity for a much-needed paradigm shift in what giving looks like. The first day of the program is called "Give to Yourself" and students are challenged to focus on themselves – which may be antithetical to their previous understanding of acts of kindness. By the end of the program, students realize that giving gifts is not reserved for special celebrations alone – and that even the slightest show of compassion can reap greater dividends than they might ever know. They are inspired to continue looking outward, beyond themselves, and plug into the communities and spaces they occupy. They discover the multitude of invitations extended to us daily to spread kindness. In this way, giving becomes an ingrained part of everyday life.

Facing the Challenges of Virtual Learning

Our year was turned upside down when the circumstances of Covid-19 shuttered our school doors. I could not imagine teaching without continuous interaction with my students. When I was asked to implement ThinkGive remotely as a way to maintain connection with and among my students, I was at once optimistic and skeptical about how it might work. I was excited for my students to take part, and I predicted that it would not mirror the experience I had in the classroom.

Promoting the remote challenge was itself a challenge. I informed parents and students through email and in my daily morning messages. I was disappointed when there was not an overwhelming level of participation.



I blamed myself but then realized this unique situation wouldn't allow me to move forward as I wished – I was not in the classroom and I did not have a captive audience. I had to let go of my preconceived notions of what it might be and refused to let these obstacles rob me and my students of the joy and transformative benefits that ThinkGive offers.

The ThinkGive Difference

So I proceeded as I had before and poured my personal energy into making the most of it for me and my students. As the ThinkGive Team Page filled with pictures of acts of kindness, it became clear that this program had achieved its goal.

I created a “zen den” for myself as a place of quiet reflection to combat the isolation and stress of quarantine. One student discovered her talent for baking. Another managed to share his rationed stock of toilet paper with a friend. I filled lunch bags for the homeless. Another student coordinated a community clean-up of storm drains in his neighborhood. I continued my annual tradition of awarding a tree in a contest intended to raise awareness about the world's water crisis. It yielded the greatest number of student entries in nine years.

ThinkGive was a beacon of light as we navigated through some murky, dim, uncharted waters. We were reminded that even in times of crisis and uncertainty, we all still have the capacity to put others first in small, everyday acts of love and generosity. It is that powerful and empowering quality of this program's philosophy that will always compel me to welcome the ThinkGive Project.

