



Building Relationships in a Digital World

Marcia Baldanza

A really smart friend reminded me that when children (or adults) are “attention seeking,” they are really “connection seeking.” What a shift in how I work with my students and parent with my teenager. Connecting with others is a significant human need. This has become abundantly clear over these last ten months. Connection with others keeps us centered, grounded, and grateful—the common human thread. It also keeps us seeking ways to be together to celebrate, grieve, and love. This pandemic has taken lives, memories, and time from us all, especially our children. With a vaccine in sight and optimism rising for some sort of return to normal life, continuing to build and maintain trusting relationships continues to be priority. The focus of this issue is on helping us connect (or connect better) in a digital world.

Connect, Connect, and Connect Again.

There are a few different and creative ways to connect with remote students that stood out to me this week. If one method doesn't work, try another. We cannot give up and must find ways to connect that work for our students. George Couros posted “**10 Ideas to Meaningfully Connect**” on Twitter [@gcouros](#)



In October 2020, Rebecca Fennel offered on *Teacher Vision* “**10 Ways to Build Relationships with Remote Learning Students.**” I love her idea of having lunch with a different student every day.

In Jennifer Gonzalez’s “**Creating Moments of Genuine Connection Online**” on *Cult of Pedagogy* (one of my favorite sites), teacher Dave Stuart Jr. shares simple ways to develop relationships with students, even in a digital classroom.

Another source that caught my eye was a Laura Lee article on *Edutopia* titled “**5 Ways to Build Connections with Students Online.**”

William Arruda, senior contributor for *Forbes*, authored a 2018 piece called “**How to Build Real Relationships in the Virtual World**” that is remarkably relevant a couple of years later during a global pandemic; it offers tips for connecting via social media.

Video Conferencing Connecting.

We know we cannot just move our in-person teaching online. Using synchronous time for coaching, mentoring, clarifying, and checking in can have much better results. Learning to hold small flexible groups based on data observed in asynchronous learning tasks will ultimately serve students better. Whatever platform you use, start with the purpose for which you’re communicating. The world of work has changed since the COVID pandemic but was changing before then. With the growth of technology, we’re no longer required to go into an office (or a school) to access the files and information we need to do our jobs. In fact, according to **a report from CNBC.com**, 70 percent of professionals around the globe work remotely at least once a week, and 53 percent work remotely for at least half the week. In K-12, this has not been the past norm, but for business, this is not new. While all of this can be good for productivity, it also poses some challenges. Because remote workers aren’t just down the hall, can’t go to lunch with the group at a moment’s notice and can’t just pop into your office to brainstorm, it can be complicated to get to know them on a personal and professional level. Plus, it can be tough to include them in meetings. Use video conferencing to boost morale and build relationships by meeting for morning coffee, eating lunch together, and having a routine time to catch up.

Keep Learning and Practicing.

This “**Free Micro Course: Building Relationships in Online Learning**” gave me some new insights into building and maintaining relationships. Also, I learned about the 2×10 strategy. It goes like this: identify a student or two who might need some support. Talk with him/her for 2 minutes 10 straight days about whatever he/she wants.



This free micro course enables educators teaching in an online classroom to:

- Create strategies for building and maintaining relationships.
- Plan ways to foster relationships with staff members, colleagues, family members, and caregivers.
- Establish routines and strategies for practicing self-care when delivering non-traditional instruction.

Finally, you have to see this. John Spencer provides us in “**Seven Big Ideas as You Shift to Online Learning**” graphics, slides, and little videos that illustrate these concepts brilliantly.

Resources and References

Curous, George. “10 Ideas to Meaningfully Connect.” **Twitter**.
<https://twitter.com/gcouros/status/1256966254037958657>

Fennel, Rebecca. “10 Ways to Build Relationships with Remote Learning Students.” **TeacherVision**. October 13, 2020.
<https://www.teachervision.com/blog/morning-announcements/10-ways-to-build-relationships-with-remote-learning-students>

Gonzalez, Jennifer. “Creating Moments of Genuine Connection Online.” **Cult of Pedagogy**. August 16, 2020.
<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/genuine-connection-online/>

Lee, Laura. “5 Ways to Build Connections with Students Online.” **Edutopia**. September 4, 2020.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/5-ways-build-connections-students-online>

Arruda, William. “How To Build Real Relationships In The Virtual World.” **Forbes**. November 9, 2018.

Browne, Ryan. “70% of People Globally Work Remotely at Least Once a Week.” **CNBC**. May 30, 2018.

“Free Micro Course: Building Relationships in Online Learning.” **Advancement Courses**. April 17, 2020.
<https://blog.advancementcourses.com/free-courses-3-pd-hours/building-relationships-online-learning/>



Spencer, John. "7 Big Ideas as You Shift Toward Online Teaching." **John Spencer**. March 16, 2020.

<https://spencerauthor.com/online-teaching/>

"Building Relationships in a Digital World"
was originally published as the January 15, 2021 EmpowerED 3.2.1 brief.

