

***Building Relationships
and Breaking Barriers:
Culturally Relevant
Professional Development for
Secondary Educators***

PRESENTER: Lily Regan

CONTEXT

Especially in today's social and political climate, teachers throughout the United States are asking themselves how they can **break down barriers** across different backgrounds to connect more deeply with their students. Through my research, I hope to offer teachers **professional development** that will complement what they are already doing in their classroom to aid in **building relationships** and increasing **student engagement**.

METHODS

- A qualitative interview-based study
- n=10
 - Current practicing English teachers
 - Secondary educators (grades 6-12)
 - Milwaukee-area teachers
- Interview Length: 30-45 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- Synthesize data and available resources on PD and student engagement
- Plan a model professional development day
- Create an accompanying website with additional information

“We just spent an hour talking about a problem that I already know exists and no solutions have been suggested. This PD was a waste of my time.”

- Alexis G.



Take a picture to learn more about the project and check out my website!

PD FINDINGS

PD tends to be led by HR departments and administrative staff. This leads to a **disconnect** between what teachers want from PD and what is addressed in PD.

1/10 teachers said that they had experienced an “**unconference**” formatted PD, while 9/10 said that they would like to have PD organized like this. The unconference format allows participants to **suggest topics** of discussion.

10/10 teachers said that the best PD gave them **techniques and skills** that they could **immediately implement** in their classes; 8/10 did not appreciate PD that raised an issue without offering potential solutions.

ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

Find connections between course work and things that students know and care about. Whether it is a **hobby or current events**, 10/10 teachers said that making material relatable is key to student engagement.

Be **authentic and genuine** and connect with students in ways that reflect who you are. **Be vulnerable** with your students to encourage their vulnerability as well; connect with students' humanity.

Do not push **difficult conversations** about race, for example. Your students live the experience every day and you do not want to retraumatize them. However, **make yourself available** for students that want to talk.

