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Connecting with Students *Online*

STRATEGIES FOR
Remote Teaching & Learning

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About the Online Resources

In the online resources for this book you will find a variety of videos with and for K–8 students recorded using Zoom, Clips, Loom, and/or Screencastify during the spring and summer of 2020. Some of them were filmed before I had envisioned this book, when I was supporting friends and family with virtual one-on-one and small-group instruction during the early months of the pandemic-initiated shut-down, or as examples for teachers in my Reading and Writing Strategies Facebook Community. A few were filmed during the summer, after school was closed, but children were still trying to continue independent writing projects and book clubs they’d started and enjoyed during spring. The students in the videos are the children of friends, my own children, or neighbors who graciously agreed to join me for some literacy work; I’m not their regular teacher. Though everything here shows examples of teaching and connecting through the screen, the structures you’ll learn about in this book (e.g., conferences, minilessons, small-group strategy lessons, and so on) work whether you’re in person in a classroom with children, you are working with them virtually, or some hybrid of the two.

How to Access Online Resources

To access online resources for *Connecting with Students Online*:



- 1 Go to <http://hein.pub/ConnectOnline-login>.
- 2 Log in with your username and password. If you do not already have an account with Heinemann, you will need to create an account.
- 3 On the Welcome page, choose
“Click here to register an Online Resource.”
- 4 Register your product by entering the code: **XXXXXX** (be sure to read and check the acknowledgment box under the keycode).
- 5 Once you have registered your product, it will appear alphabetically in your account list of My Online Resources.

Note: When returning to Heinemann.com to access your previously registered products, simply log into your Heinemann account and click on “View my registered Online Resources.”

Video List

Chapter	Description	Other Notes
2	Welcome video	A third-grade teacher welcomes caregivers and families to her online classroom. (3 ½ minutes)
2	Tech support video	A third-grade teacher provides a 90-second tutorial for students and families on how to easily join a Google Meet.
3	Tech support video	A third-grade teacher provides a 90-second tutorial for students and families on how to check comments in Google Docs to read and respond to her feedback.
6	Minilesson: writing, primary	Short minilesson video created with Loom (4 minutes)
6	Minilesson: writing, upper grades	Short minilesson video created with Clips (1 minute)
6	Minilesson: reading, upper grades	Short minilesson video created with Clips (2 minutes)
6	Small-group mentor text study lesson: writing, upper grades	Three rising eighth graders study a mentor text, name craft, and consider what they'll try in their own writing. (7 ½ minutes)
6	Conference: writing, primary	One-on-one conference with a kindergartener (7 ½ minutes)
6	Conference: reading, upper grades	One-on-one conference with a middle schooler (9 minutes)
6	Book club: primary	A first-grade book club discusses a picture book after viewing a recorded read-aloud video. (6 ½ minutes)
6	Book club: upper grades	A fifth-grade book club uses video to converse asynchronously. (5 minutes)
6	Small-group strategy lesson: writing, upper grades	Three fifth-grade students learn a strategy for coming up with their own writing topics and genres for independent projects. (11 ½ minutes)

Introduction

Who Is This Book For?

As I write this, schools throughout the United States and the rest of the world have spent anywhere from three to six months in forced remote instruction because of COVID-19. Some districts are making plans for the 2020–2021 school year, while others are already back to school. Though the plans vary, online instruction will undoubtedly play a role in every one of them, either by design or by necessity as the pandemic forces periods of quarantine.

Truthfully, I hope that the life of this book is short—that scientists deliver a vaccine soon, and that we can all get back into classrooms with students to learn in person. Until then, what we've learned from the past few months is that connection is crucial for our students and for us, and I hope this book helps teachers who want to find ways to connect, to hold true to research-based principles of good teaching, and who are looking for practical support to bring their classroom interactions and community online in ways that are beneficial to students and not overtaxing to teachers or caregivers. What I offer in this book is one vision for how to make this possible; I offer it knowing that we will all continue to learn together, share, and innovate with online learning in the months ahead.

No matter what model your district has chosen, or what needs to happen to keep everyone safe as the year progresses, here are some ways this book may be of help to you:

All Online

Schools offering an all-remote option, or teachers assigned to run a class fully online

This book will help you with all aspects of the job, from establishing connections and community in online spaces (Chapter 1), to partnering with caregivers (Chapter 2), to planning streamlined accessible curriculum (Chapter 3), scheduling (Chapters 4 and 5), and transferring various balanced literacy structures to the online space (Chapter 6).

Intermittent Periods of Online

Schools that are all in person, but need to shift to online instruction when suspected or confirmed cases of COVID crop up and the class needs to go into quarantine

Even though you're starting out in person, establishing strong communities with a trauma-informed approach and partnering with caregivers will be crucial foundational work (Chapters 1 and 2).

Setting up an online classroom Learning Management System from the beginning will be crucial to make the transition to all-online learning possible. Storing key classroom charts, recorded lessons, rubrics and skill progressions, and more will allow for a more seamless transition to at-home learning for students. Advice about unit planning and simplifying and streamlining will also be valuable in even an in-person, socially distanced classroom, and simplifying things now will make transitions to online go more smoothly (Chapter 3).

You can think about what children will need at home, and empty out classroom library shelves and writing centers as soon as you know you will be shifting to learning at home to set students up for independent practice (Chapter 5).

During the at-home period, you'll want to generously borrow ideas from the parts of the book that describe methods of instruction (Chapter 6) and how to schedule your time (Chapter 4). Look at them now, even though your students are in person with you, and consider what tech tools, norms, and routines might be good to establish and teach now as any shift to all online is likely to be unplanned and abrupt. The more you can do now to prepare for it, the more seamless the transition will be for you and your students. Consider also preparing parents for the possibility, and do some work with them now to help them get ready (Chapter 2).

Hybrid Models

Schools where children will be coming to school in-person five days a week for half days, with online learning happening each afternoon

Or

Districts where children will spend a couple days each week in school and a couple days each week at home

Or

Districts where some children will be in school in person, a camera in the classroom livestreams the happenings to those at home, and the teacher manages both simultaneously

The first chapter is about staying focused on priorities, emphasizing trauma-informed approaches sensitive to social-emotional well-being, and building community. This will be important no matter how many hours or days children are with you in the classroom (and in truth, it's something that should happen even if we are fully in school buildings).

Partnering with caregivers (Chapter 2) will be essential whether you're in person or online or toggling between the two. Setting up clear expectations for work at home and communicating clearly, among other things, will help make transitions smoother.

Advice about simplifying and streamlining unit planning will be valuable as children and you alternate between an in-person, socially distanced classroom and online learning. Time will be lost in transitions, and simplifying and clarifying curricular goals now will make transitions go more smoothly (Chapter 3).

You'll want to consider what you can do in person with children off devices, what lessons and activities you'll still want to do with devices even though you're in person, and which lessons and activities you'll save for the online portion of students' week or day (Chapters 5 and 6).

For example, even if children are in person for a portion of the time, the fact that they must remain distanced makes book clubs, conferences, strategy lessons, and more very challenging. Therefore, you might choose to run small groups and conferences when you're connecting with children online and do the whole-class (read-aloud, minilessons) and independent practice portions (Chapter 5) while students are in the classroom. You can also take advantage of the children being with you in person to provide them with supplies and books to take home for continued practice.

Additionally, you might find using some of the tools described in this book, such as shared e-documents, to work well in a socially distanced classroom, because instead of going over to a student (still six feet apart) as they write, you can comment in real time and chat by typing in their e-document to give feedback and converse.

The advice about managing time and scheduling (Chapters 4 and 5) may help you think about how to balance time and balance activities, though you'll likely begin by blocking out sections of your day for in-person and at-home instruction.

Is This a Book About Technology?

In the spring when everyone went to remote instruction, my first thought was, “I need to figure out some more apps, platforms, and tech tools.” Perhaps you can relate? My first effort to support teachers was to interview Katie Muhtaris and Kristin Ziemke, authors of helpful and practical books about digital literacy and incorporating technology (*Amplify* [2015], *Read the World* [2019]). Although maybe I expected them to teach me about a dozen new tech tools, the advice they shared instead was so helpful, and true: keep it simple. The technology is a tool.

They aren’t the only ones with that opinion. For example, Harvard University’s “Teach Remotely—Best Practices for Online Pedagogy” states:

Focus on your pedagogy, not the medium: the principles of pedagogy that are effective for online teaching . . . are similar to those that are effective in the residential classroom. They allow students to engage with material dynamically and across multiple learning styles. These principles apply not only to synchronous teaching but also, importantly, to asynchronous content creation.

Focusing too much on tech takes us away from what really matters—how you are teaching and connecting with students. Also, it’s overwhelming for you, students, and parents when you incorporate too many different tools with different log-ins, passwords, bells and whistles, especially if these tech tools are ones that children (and/or you!) didn’t already know how to use

TECH TIP

Be sure to explicitly teach children how to use any new tech tool, app, and so on that you plan to use for remote instruction; record a video for adults who are supporting students at home to teach what it is and how it functions; and provide support for the first week or so when students are using it.

independently. And if you work with middle school students who have multiple teachers, it's better for students and families if you all get on the same page with the few tools you'll use.

I think it's best to get to know and use a small handful of tools that can serve many purposes and use them over and over again for a while until everyone is as comfortable with them as you are with email and texting. Only then should you consider trying a new one (but only if you want to!).

Throughout Chapters 2 through 6 you will see boxes titled "Tech Nuts and Bolts" when there is technology to consider alongside the teaching strategy described. In these boxes I offer examples of tools, or tips about ways to use a tool, that are simple and effective to accomplish the teaching, learning, and assessing I describe. These are just suggestions; you may already be familiar with a different tool that does the same job, or your district may have set parameters around what apps and platforms you are allowed to use. You'll also notice I follow my own advice—you'll see me mention the same handful of tools that I know can do a lot and that I use over and over for many different purposes.

In the table on the following page, I've listed the main things you'll need to be able to do with online teaching to share content, connect with students, engage them, and collect feedback. Next to each are some examples of widely available, often free tools (that you'll see mentioned throughout this book) that help with that job. Choose one from each box, or pick a different one that serves the same purpose, but whatever you do, don't try to learn too many new tools at once.

Classroom Platform/Learning Management System (LMS) or Organization System
(choose one!)

Videoconferencing
(choose one!)

Examples

Google Classroom
Canvas
Schoology
Class Blog

Examples

Zoom
Google Meet
GoToMeeting
Microsoft Teams
FaceTime
Google Hangouts

Lesson Recording

(choose one at first, maybe add a second one as you become comfortable)

Asynchronous Communication

(choose one at first, maybe add more as you become comfortable)

Examples

Screencastify
Clips
Screencast-O-Matic
Loom
Zoom

Examples

Email
Seesaw
Flipgrid
Google Forms
Google Docs
Texting/Direct Messaging
Padlet
Marco Polo

Audiobooks, Podcasts

(optional, use if book access is challenging)

Texts

(optional, use if book access is challenging)

Examples

Overdrive
Stitcher
Apple Podcasts
Audible

Examples

Libby
Epic!
ReadWorks
Newsela
Scholastic Trueflix
YouTube (videos of texts being read aloud)
Storyline Online
Capstone Interactive
Reading A to Z

Other

(optional—remember, fit the tool to the purpose!)

Jamboard—create a collaborative whiteboard/online bulletin board

Toy Theater—use online manipulatives for math, phonics, and more

Edpuzzle—create your own interactive video lessons

Google Docs—create hyper-documents with many links to assignments or sites, organized in one place

Mentimeter—poll students live and share results in real time

iDocCam—turn your phone into a document camera

SurveyMonkey—elicit feedback from students and/or caregivers

Sign Up Genius—create a schedule with open timeslots, auto-send reminders

Calendly—sign up for meetings with automatic integration with various online calendars and videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom

Methods and Structures for Teaching Online

4

You know and rely on a variety of methods for teaching whole-class, small-group, and individual lessons when you're shoulder to shoulder with students in the classroom.

This chapter shows you how to adapt those methods for online teaching and is filled with ideas to make conferences, minilessons, guided reading, strategy lessons, read-aloud, and more as high impact as possible when you're screen to screen. With the different instructional strategies, you'll see how to make your teaching and feedback clear and explicit, how to monitor your students' progress, and how to sustain meaningful connections with your learners.

A really important point before you dive into this chapter: these are *options*. You will have to decide which strategies feel most comfortable for you and are most likely to engage your students; planning for multiple pathways is crucial (www.cast.org; www.understood.org). What you choose to reach and teach some children may not be what you choose for others.

Also, you don't need to implement this all tomorrow. Really. Browse through and find something that feels accessible to you right away, or something you feel is close to what you already do but you want to tweak, or something you think would have an immediate positive impact, or one idea that feels interesting—and give it a try. Just as you do with your students, you should set small, manageable goals for yourself. Check back to Chapters 4 and 5 to see how these pieces fit into a possible daily schedule.

Throughout this chapter you'll see that I suggest tech tools (e.g., Zoom, Flipgrid, Padlet) as well as tech functions (e.g., breakout rooms, chat boxes). I haven't tried to cover all the options with these suggestions; instead, I stick close to the few tools I've gotten comfortable using. I recommend you find your small set of tools and use them over and over again, too. The emphasis in this chapter, as I hope it is with you and your students, is on the art and craft of your teaching; the technology is just a tool.

TECH TIP

When choosing the tech tools you'll rely on most, learn the type(s) of device(s) your students will use and any limitations the tech may have on those device(s). For example, Zoom works best when a user downloads a software package which isn't possible on Chromebooks. With the browser version possible on the Chromebook, students can't use functions such as grid view, emojis, or click hyperlinks shared in the chat box.

Meet with a Small Group of Students with the Same Goal (Strategy Lessons)



▶ VIDEO 6.9

Watch this small-group strategy lesson with a group of fifth graders who are working to come up with topics for summer writing projects.

What is a strategy lesson?

Strategy lessons are versatile: they are a great choice in any grade level and can be used to teach strategies to support just about any skill or goal in any subject area, just like one-on-one conferences. In a strategy lesson, children are grouped because they would all benefit from instruction and guided practice around the same strategy.

How do I do it?

When setting up small-group strategy lessons, you can either form the groups based on your assessments and set a schedule (“Marcus, Shana, and Veronica—meet me online at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday and here’s the link”), or you could invite students to sign up for the topic(s) that most interest them and/or are aligned to their goals. (See more on scheduling in Chapter 4.)

During the lesson, a predictable structure helps you keep your lesson focused and impactful:

1. **Connect.** Spend a minute or two connecting with your students on a personal level. Let them do most of the talking and practice empathic listening.
2. **Teach.** Remind students of their goal, what the topic is that they signed up for, and/or why you’ve convened them. Be clear about the strategy you’ll offer (breaking it down into a step-by-step how-to), and make sure it’s not book or writing piece specific.

Advice!

Keep your coaching efficient so you can get to each student in the short session. Think more oscillating sprinkler versus gardening hose.

- 3. Coach.** Give students a chance to practice while you offer prompts, feedback, and support. I have found the best way to do this is to put each student in their own breakout room. Then, I can move from room to room and have conversations without distracting the other students. Another option is to have children turn down their sound (but not off) as they're working, then turn their volume up to participate in coaching. This method can be more distracting than breakout groups, but it does have benefits: you can easily keep an eye on the other children, and sometimes overhearing a peer's feedback is helpful.
- 4. Link.** After the coaching period, pull the students back together, repeat the strategy clearly, and set the expectation for what students will do on their own after the meeting. Add a visual for the strategy to a note-taking app, or ask older students to jot down the strategy in their own words and have them show you their notes.

TECH NUTS AND BOLTS

- **Breakout rooms:** Set them up ahead of time and remind students how the session will go. When you are with them in their "room," you will coach them; when they are working independently, they are working by themselves.
- **Note-taking:** Take notes in between coaching individual students or when the small group has ended and you are getting ready for your next one.



TIMING TIPS

Small-group strategy lessons typically take seven to ten minutes in the classroom, but online you may want to allot more like fifteen minutes. Students might straggle into the meeting room a bit late, there may be some tech glitches that need to be ironed out, there can be delays in audio or video feeds that cause you to have to ask students to repeat themselves, and so on.

When you're just starting out with synchronous differentiated teaching in the online environment, it may be easier to schedule individual meetings (conferences) rather than groups. Once you better know and understand students' needs, grouping them becomes easier.