

The Homebound Librarian: Connecting and Delivering Curriculum in a New Environment

Editor's Note

I've rethought this post many times over the last few weeks because my reality as an elementary school librarian has undergone a dramatic shift, as has everyone else's. I went from not being sure if my school would close, to wondering *when* it would close, to rapidly preparing for the closing itself.

Now, I'm at the beginning of a new reality, working as an elementary school librarian from home. The structures that used to provide order to my typical school day are no longer present. Asynchronous learning, for many, is a new normal that we all must become accustomed to. Physical distance, which we used to work so hard to bridge with our students in our attempts to bring them into the library space, is now necessary.

It's All about Connection

It's something that we all know as educators: striving for connection should drive our decisions. It's inherent in what we do, but my new work environment caused a panic. Not dissimilar from others emptying their grocery store shelves, my instinct was to gather as many online resources as I could. Surely they would prepare me.

As I inched closer to my new "first day of school," the need to connect resurfaced. I needed to connect with students and teachers. I needed to help my students connect with literature and information. Luckily, my district was able to pull devices from carts and send our lower elementary students home with iPads and our upper elementary students home with Chromebooks. As I type this, families without internet service have hotspots in the mail or upcoming appointments with our local ISP for free internet service for the next two months. During this time, we must do all we can to ensure everyone has equal access to this connectivity.

Connecting Students with Literature

Our initial days have been important times to reconnect to my students through literature. It's how we connected when school—and the library—was in a defined space, so it makes sense that it's how we connect now. I've had to rethink certain parts of how I connect. Here are some of the ways I've begun the process:

- Read-alouds are recorded following publishers newly requested guidelines. Students can watch these when/if their schedule allows for it.
- Guidelines for accessing our ebook and audiobook offerings have been sent out to families again. New videos now accompany them so that students and parents can follow along to access, search, and check out these books.
- Authors and illustrators have stepped up and are offering read-alouds, talks, drawing times, and Q&As with students. These provide a unique opportunity for a student to connect with a favorite book creator.
- Some companies that offer books online are making their products free through the end of the school year. This can extend digital offerings to students at a time when there may not be school or district dollars to meet the new demand.
- I'm preparing ebook and audiobook recommendations for grade levels and will be holding open hours where students can request personalized book suggestions.
- In working on making personalized book suggestions available to students, I am also conscious of district rules about not meeting one-on-one with students in an online environment. I'm utilizing others as thinking partners to envision how this can work while following district guidelines.

Connecting Students with Information

Opportunities to connect students to information is slower in coming. That follows the idea that this is, in a way, a new school experience. In August, literature is always the first thing in demand. Connecting to databases and other information comes soon after. When students are working on a device and may have limited supervision, they need reliable sources for credible information more than ever. To prepare for this new environment I am:

- Sharing usernames and passwords for databases that students may not have needed to sign in to when using from school.
- Inquiring if digital publishing companies are willing to extend their services during the next two months.
- Creating videos to refamiliarize teachers with databases that they have not used recently and offering to make videos specific to an online learning experience or lesson.
- Initiating conversations on how students can interact with online informational resources independently and collaboratively, given our current learning environment.
- Vetting digital services to make sure none of them ask for student information or violate their privacy.

Staying up to speed on copyright issues to help guide teachers through the process of sharing published works with their students.

Not Being Restricted or Distracted

There are two other realities that librarians in my district and I are coming to terms with. First, things are not going to look the same in an online learning environment as they did in our face-to-face environment. We should not be confined by the constructs that helped to provide structure to our school day if those same constructs now create limitations or barriers.

"Meeting" with students on letter days doesn't make sense. Read-alouds can happen every day. Grade level resources should be targeted across all classes at once, not on the letter day when they had seen me. This is an instance where asynchronous learning can benefit students. Another benefit to asynchronous learning can be delivering content at specific times. Our school's delivery format allows me to schedule my sharings in the early afternoon after teachers and students have started for the day and at a time where I won't overwhelm students. I don't need to post things at all hours of the day. Second, we must push against gathering every shiny free service being offered and carefully examine the benefits and drawbacks of every piece of hardware and software in relation to how it serves our students' learning.

When it comes to delivering curriculum to our students, many of us are trying something new. Technology, always something important to us, is playing a new role, and former systems have to be rethought for our current environment. With these new challenges in mind, the handout "Thinking about Online Learning for Elementary Librarians" (<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2245081?&view=community>) offers questions we can keep in the forefront to make sure we continue offering the best possible resources to our teachers and students.

Best practices may not yet exist, but over time, we'll be creating those practices together.

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