

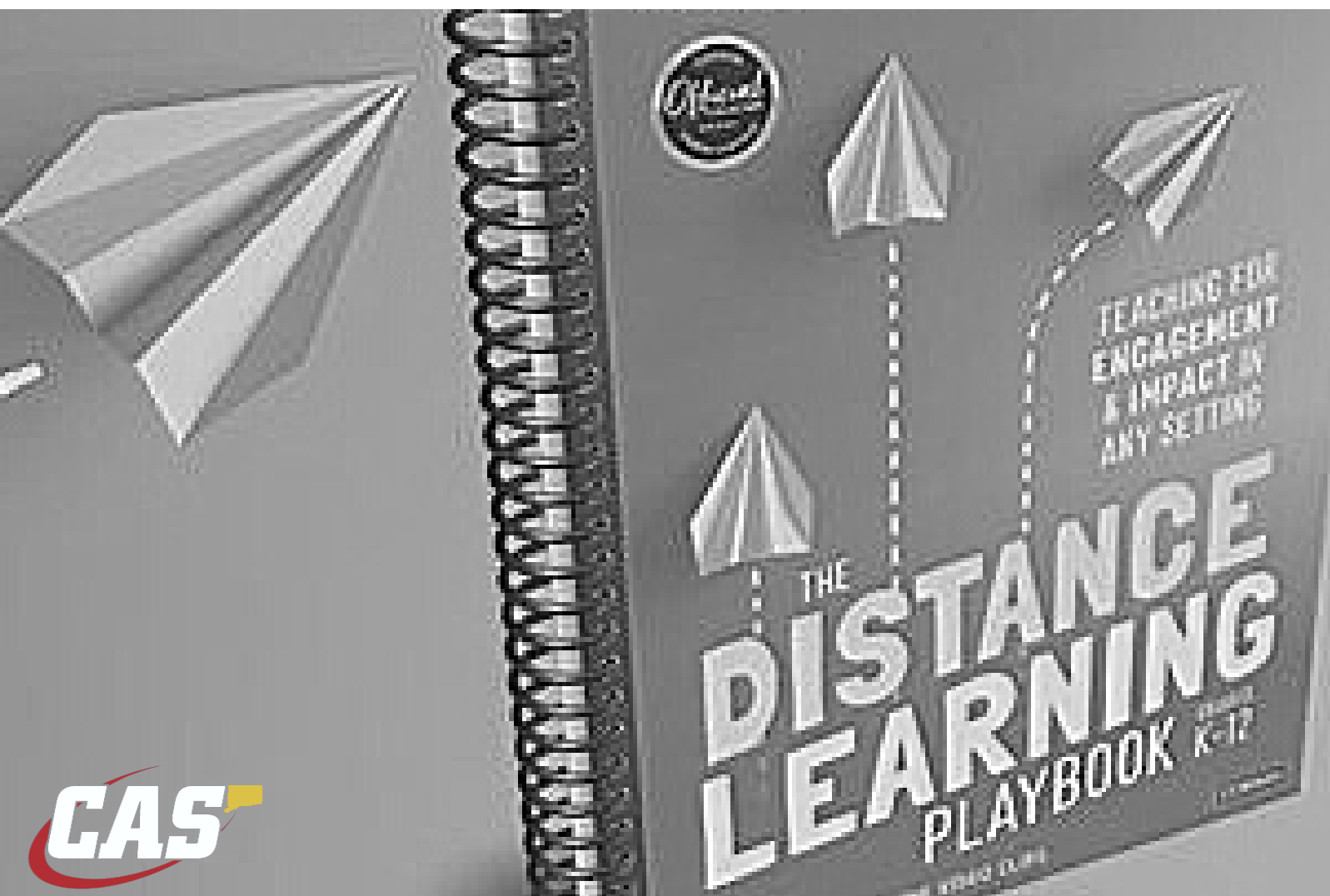
THE DISTANCE LEARNING PLAYBOOK K-12: TEACHING FOR ENGAGEMENT & IMPACT IN ANY SETTING

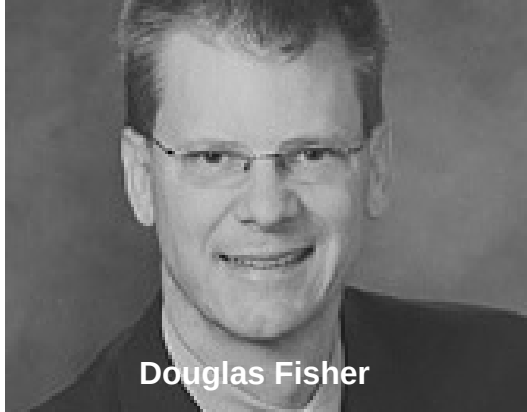
Authors: Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Hattie

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A BOOK REVIEW

By Dr. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek, Assistant Executive Director





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Education in Connecticut, as we all knew it, came to an abrupt halt in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, causing many schools and districts to struggle; and leaving some educators still trying to find their way. Districts did their best to deploy devices, connect with students, and find ways to keep students engaged in learning. But, as authors Fisher, Frey and Hattie state (p.2), “To be clear, the pandemic teaching of 2020 was really not distance learning. It was crisis teaching.”

Schools are opening this fall using a variety of learning models ranging from an in-person, remote, or hybrid design. Along with closing the digital divide by ensuring all students have equitable access to technology devices and connectivity, the keys to educational success going forward will be flexibility, adaptability, and a deep understanding of what, when, why, and how pedagogical methods can be used effectively to provide high quality teaching and learning for all students, especially when using distance learning.

As the pandemic continues to invade our lives, there isn’t a book that is more timely and critical for K-12 educators than *The Distance Learning Playbook K-12*. This book is based upon the research and findings from over 1800 meta-analysis and 300 million students that are the foundation for John Hattie’s Visible Learning work. The premise of this book is how Visible Learning research-based pedagogical methods for teaching face-to-face can be used effectively when teaching and learning in remote and in hybrid environments. The purpose of this book, according to the authors, is “to apply the wisdom of Visible Learning research to distance learning.... [and] to understand which pedagogical strategies work best to accelerate students’ learning” (p.2).

As the authors explain, no matter which learning model is being used (e.g., remote, in-person, or hybrid) it is not the tools or the setting that determines whether the instruction is effective, but rather how the teaching methods spark and engage students in learning. They stress that the choice of task along with teacher clarity and a keen sense of what students already know and what they need to know next is what will build complexity and advance their learning. Far too often in online environments peer interactions are difficult and teacher’s observations are different from in-person instruction. This leads to an “overemphasis on content and repetition” (p. 6).

Online it is often difficult to meet the needs of students with special needs and other vulnerable populations. The authors state, “All students, and especially those who are at greater risk of not making expected progress, must be targeted for proactive supports that address their equity needs and build their capacity to learn at a distance” (p. 7). This book is filled with research-based knowledge, strategies, and examples to help teachers meet the needs and actively engage all students to achieve targeted learning goals.

The best part of this book is that even though educators may be new to remote learning the authors acknowledge that they are not new to teaching and learning. The book builds upon the knowledge and skills educators already have in their repertoire. Throughout the book the authors describe instructional strategies that can be used when teaching face-to-face as well as effective ideas, tasks, and methods for using the strategies when working with students remotely. There are numerous resources, ideas, and video QR links that share not only what the technique or design looks like, but the planning and thinking behind it, why it works, and the criteria needed for it to be implemented and used successfully.

The book does not need to be read cover to cover. In fact, the authors suggest that you pick the area that interests you most and start with those topics. The chapters/topics are arranged into nine modules beginning with: (1) Take Care of Yourself; (2) The First Days of School; (3) Teacher-Student Relationships From a Distance; and (4) Teacher Credibility at a Distance. Two of the modules I found to be very interesting and informative were: (4) Teacher Clarity at a Distance; and (5) Engaging Tasks. However, the other three modules are also filled with effective research-based strategies and best practices that educators will find very useful and will most likely use for years to come. These chapters include: (7) Planning Instructional Units for Distance Learning; (8) Feedback, Assessments, and Grading; and (9) Learning, Distance or Otherwise. No matter if you are a novice or veteran teacher, a school leader, coach and/or administrator, there are so many great nuggets and takeaways for making schools, teaching, and learning better for everyone.

If you are a teacher this book will help you hone your craft and seamlessly integrate technology and effective instructional strategies into your classroom no matter what environment you are working in. If you are an administrator or school leader wondering how to coach, supervise, and support teachers who are working remotely or in a hybrid learning environment, you will find this book to be a lifesaver filled with tips and ideas you can share with teachers.

Most of all, if you are an administrator, school leader, coach, mentor or professional learning provider, this book is also filled with techniques that will work with students of all ages, including collaborative work with your faculty and staff during professional development sessions. My favorite parts of this book include: the videos that can be used as a springboard for quality discourse among educators and can provide insight into the use of the various ideas, tasks, and instructional strategies; and the “Note To Self” and “Drawing on My Expertise” pages designed for educator self-reflection and planning.

This book is an excellent choice for school administrators and leaders to use as a shared reading experience with faculty and staff to provide a deeper understanding of effective research-based pedagogy, create equity and provide fidelity of instruction across all classroom environments no matter which model of learning is being used, and to help educators build the capacity and complexity for teaching and learning in a digital remote environment.

In the end, the more purposefully teachers design learning experiences based on high-leverage, research-based Visible Learning techniques, the more likely students will be to actively engage in their own learning and achieve high levels of academic, social and emotional success.

Doug Fisher is the keynote speaker for the CAS “Closing the Digital Divide: Access, Instruction, Equity” conference on September 17, 2020. Register to hear him speak at: <https://casci.ac/5999>