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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Assessment Playbook for Distance and Blended Learning* by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, Vince Bustamante, and John Hattie. This letter from the authors provides insight on the current state of education.

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Dear Colleagues,

Schooling has changed considerably over a very short period of time. In a matter of months, teachers and students have engaged in physical distancing, social isolation, and enhanced safety protocols. Yet schools remained a tried and true institution. Teachers and students were forced into new and different learning environments and while the rest of the world came to a screeching halt, schools persevered through unimaginable times. This highly commendable "pivot" should not go uncelebrated. Through the collective efforts of all those involved in education, students received the best possible learning experience in an emergency situation. In other words, we did what we could with what we had.

When the new school year started, the world still found itself in a mode of relative panic. Schools did not. Staff and students across the world collectively drew a line in the sand and broke away from the "pandemic teaching of spring 2020" and engaged in a new school year that presented unique challenges. "To be clear, the pandemic teaching of [spring] 2020 was really not distance learning. It was also not homeschooling, which is a choice parents make for very specific reasons (e.g., religious, safety, not happy with their public school). It was crisis teaching" (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2020, p. 1).

At the beginning of the new school year, teachers found themselves teaching in new environments and new ways. Some teachers are exclusively teaching online classes from home, some are engaging in socially distanced face-to-face learning, and others are engaging in a hybridization of both of those models. Regardless of which teaching environment we may find ourselves teaching in, one fundamental truth remains: We must consider what works best for student learning.

In an ever-changing educational landscape, we are now tasked with leading our students through a variety of learning experiences that have some (if not all) aspects of distance learning embedded within them. The fidelity we put toward the implementation of distance learning will pay dividends in the future. We are engaging in important work, and now is the time to be more purposeful and intentional with distance learning. Not only is this important now, but as our world continues to navigate through crises, pandemics, and other emergency situations, teachers will consistently be tasked with adapting their teaching.

Every day in class sessions teachers are making judgments and evaluating what are the next best teaching decisions. They observe, listen, talk to, and engage with students to diagnose and discover their progress, their understandings and misunderstandings. They assign tasks and tests and from this understand what they taught well and not so well, who gained from the teaching and who did not and appreciate how much learning or not enough learning has taken place. These are all the core of "assessment," and in teaching during COVID, this task becomes even more critical. Many of the usual cues and opportunities are not so available when students are not in front of us and we can walk the room, so we need to discover alternative ways to keep this form of evidence coming to teachers from their students.

As we look to shift our practice to a distance learning model, it is paramount that we do not forget about this important role of assessment.

Assessments, when done properly, can serve to inform both the student and the teacher about the impact a specific strategy has on student learning and achievement. The challenge we face now is in designing assessments that appropriately measure and target student learning both in face-to-face and distance learning environments.

That brings us to the purpose of this book. The reality is that assessments used in face-to-face environments are not always the most impactful or practical in distance learning. This book serves to provide examples,

strategies, and assessments that can be leveraged with rigor and fidelity regardless of learning environment. We seek to leverage the expertise and experiences of those teachers who are currently engaging in distance learning and experiencing success.

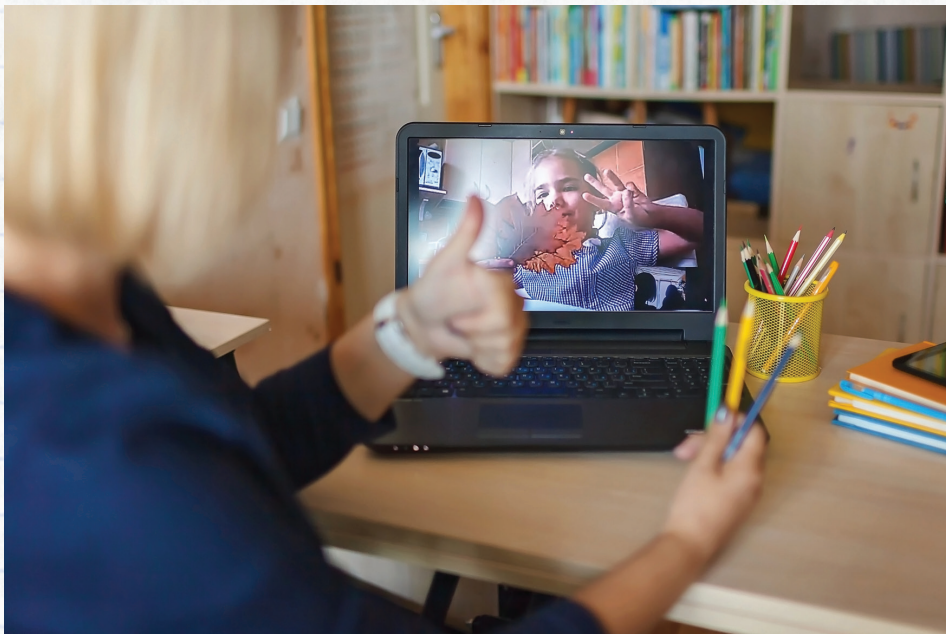
Our wish is that you see assessments as handmaidens to the all-important evaluative thinking that teachers engage in. Assessments can be part of adjusting how we see the evidence of each student's progress to higher achievement; as part of the evidence to critique or complement our observations and judgments while in the act of teaching, and as part of understanding the impact we are having on students. Assessments fulfill a critical role in these evaluations, and this places a premium on the quality of the interpretations we make from assessments. Assessments are not about the numbers, not about the grades and comments, but are about informing us and students about their progress and should lead to the very best next teaching actions. If we as teachers learn nothing or too little from students' assessments about our impact (about what, for whom, and how much), then these same assessments are probably not using student time and energies most effectively. And if students do not learn from assessments their next best learning moves, then we have a major job to teach them to become better interpreters of their test information.

Our hope is that you take the experiences of teachers highlighted in this book and apply the strategies with the understanding that we are building an educational future that is not considered "distance learning for now." When designed properly, assessments implemented through the lens of distance learning can yield significant impact on student learning and in many cases will transcend the learning environment in which they are applied.

Our intention is to provide teachers with assessments that can be applied in current and future contexts. While designing high-quality assessments

in a distance learning environment may appear daunting, we hope that by leveraging the strategies presented in this book that teachers everywhere will engage in high impact strategies. We also hope that you will discover how powerful some of these methods are while teaching from a distance and then consider how to adapt them when the students finally return to the in-class instruction.

Doug, Nancy, Vince, and John



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Assessments are not about the numbers, but about informing us and our students about their progress.

The Assessment Playbook for Distance and Blended Learning: Measuring Student Learning in Any Setting by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, Vince Bustamante, and John Hattie. Copyright © 2021 by Corwin Press, Inc. All rights reserved.