

# INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, there was no manual for leading schools and school systems during a pandemic. Instead, leaders across the world worked to figure things out as the crisis unfolded. Collectively, we made a number of good decisions and some that were not so good. But we developed knowledge, sometimes through trial and error and sometimes based on evidence and experience from the past. There is not a lot of information about supporting and guiding the learning process when our teachers and students were not physically present in our buildings. Teacher leaders, site administrators, and central office leaders all engaged in learning to ensure that schools still delivered on their promises to provide quality learning experiences for students. And this book is for everyone involved in the leadership of schools.

When schools shifted to digital in a matter of days, leaders' first worries were equity related. Did students have access to technology? Did they have food? Did they have support for learning? Slowly, we moved to ensuring that the instructional experiences were sound. And we worked to maintain the well-being of the staff and students. We realized that we need to increase teachers' access to professional learning and that new instructional frameworks would be required. It's really quite impressive, the amount of information that has been collected about leading schools from a distance. In fact, this book is based on the lessons learned from eighteen schools whose leaders shared their experiences with us. This book is also based on the vast **Visible Learning**<sup>®</sup> research collection ([www.visiblelearningmetax.com](http://www.visiblelearningmetax.com)). For those of you unfamiliar with the Visible Learning research, John Hattie has been collecting meta-analyses for many years. At this point, there are over 1,800 of them.

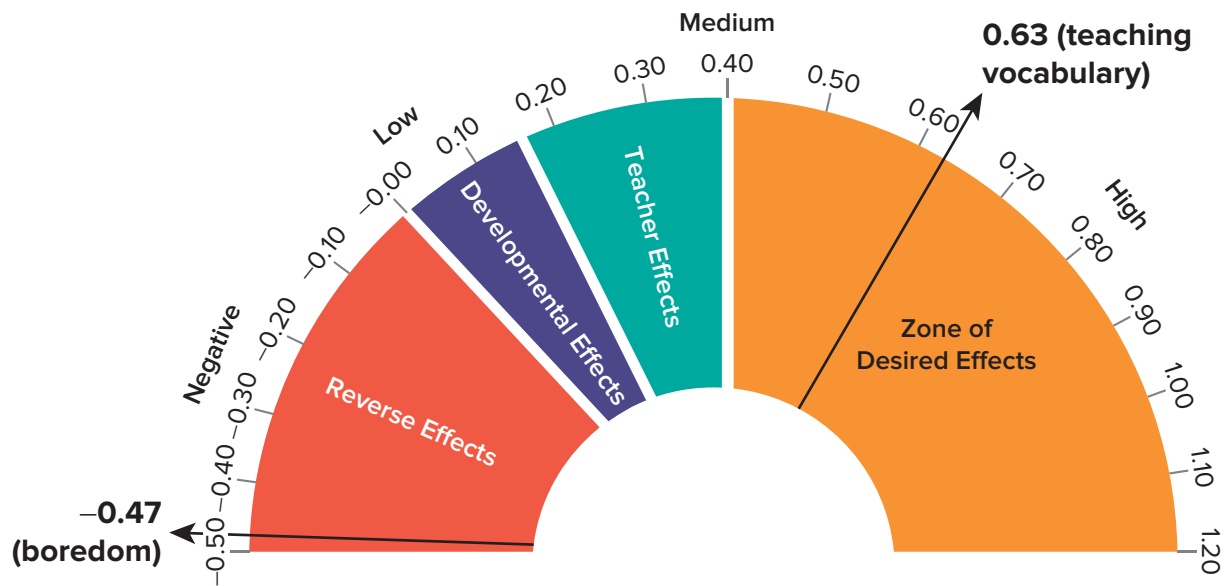
Meta-analyses are collections of studies, sometimes hundreds of them, that allow researchers to determine an effect size, or the overall magnitude of a specific action, intervention, or influence. For example, boredom has an effect size of  $-0.47$ . In other words, a very significant negative influence on learning. Compare that with teaching vocabulary, which has an effect size of  $0.63$ , a pretty strong influence on learning (Figure 0.1). We use the Visible Learning database to make some of the recommendations in this book. For others, we draw on the experiences of leaders who have evidence of their impact during distance learning.

This brings us to the effect size of distance learning itself. We know the effect size of technology remains low and has been so for the last fifty years.



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**Figure 0.1** Visible Learning Barometer



Source: Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge: New York, NY.

As Dylan Wiliam has often said, technology is the revolution that is still coming! The effect of distance learning is small (0.17) but that does not mean it is NOT effective. In fact, the studies on distance learning, which compare learning from a distance to learning in a physical school, indicate that the setting is not the determining factor for learning. That means it does not matter whether teachers undertake teaching in person or from a distance over the internet (or, as when John started in his first university, via the post office). In other words, distance learning is not an accelerator or obstacle of learning. What teachers and leaders *do* matters, not the medium in which they do it.

As Paul Manna (2015) reminded us, leaders can be magnifiers and multipliers of effective instruction. That did not change during distance learning. We still have to engage in instructional leadership. We must ensure that there is a strong climate for learning. We must work to deliver on the promise of equity. Teachers still need opportunities to learn, just like their students. In fact, we may need to accelerate teachers' access to professional learning. Interestingly, professional development programs have an effect size of 0.37, slightly below the average of all influences in the entire Visible Learning database (0.40). Why is that? It's probably obvious to you. So much of the professional learning provided to teachers is "sit and get" or compliance related and does not allow for sustained interaction with ideas. We can change that, if we want.

Although this book will include apps, programs, platforms, and tools, it's not a book about software. Technology tools will change. In fact, there will be new tools out by the time this book is published. Tech tools are not the important thing. They are necessary and teachers need them to do their work from a distance, but as Beaudoin (2015) noted in his article on distance learning leadership, "Manage change rather than technology" (p. 36). That's what this book is about. And that's the reason we end this book with a focus on the mindframes for leaders. We will adapt the mindframes presented by Hattie and Smith (2021) for distance learning as we believe that practicing these mindframes will serve you well in any instructional setting, well after the pandemic. In doing so, schools will come back better than they were before.