

Tell Me So I Can Hear You

A Developmental Approach
to Feedback for Educators

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CHAPTER 1

A Developmental Approach to Feedback

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

—HELEN KELLER

Feedback is more important in education today than ever before. As high-stakes decisions in schools and districts increasingly rely on performance evaluations and other standardized measures of success, educators across the system—principals, assistant principals, coaches, teachers, district leaders, and more—are being asked to help other adults improve their practice through feedback. Indeed, there is a growing sense that feedback can and should be a powerful tool for educational change. When done well, for instance, feedback can directly inform and support improved instruction and instructional leadership. It can also help educators across roles more effectively create and sustain cultures of learning in their schools, districts, and teams. Put most simply and profoundly, feedback can help all of us grow.

Yet providing effective, meaningful, and actionable feedback can be challenging for teachers and leaders throughout the system. After all, doing so requires complex organizational, theoretical, pedagogical, and content-area expertise, and—less frequently recognized but just as important—it requires the ability to deliver and relay feedback *in ways others can actually hear and take in*.

Toward this end, this book introduces a new, developmental approach to feedback that we call *feedback for growth*. Drawing from and extending Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory, which outlines the process and trajectory of development in adulthood, our conceptualization of feedback for growth is grounded in the premise—borne out by research—that adulthood is not a monolithic or static life stage.¹ Adults are not “done”

learning and growing simply because they've reached an age of maturity. In fact, there is great developmental diversity in terms of how adults make sense of their work, lives, and relationships. We often describe these different orientations to thinking, perceiving, understanding, and being—or ways of knowing—as the *lenses* through which adults see and interpret their worlds.

You will learn more about the different ways of knowing throughout this book, but for now it might be helpful to know that adults with different ways of knowing orient to and prioritize different things, such as meeting concrete needs, the expectations of valued others, or their own ideals and judgments. A developmental approach to feedback recognizes that adults with different ways of knowing will need different kinds of supports and challenges in order to fully hear, understand, and implement feedback as they grow and learn over time. Similarly, adults with different ways of knowing will have different styles of providing feedback—which may or may not dovetail with the developmental needs of the people on the receiving end.

To be most effective, then, feedback must take into account the different developmental capacities of *both* feedback givers and receivers. It must help us to meet each other where we are developmentally, and to nurture a deeper awareness of how we and others are making sense of the exchange. Yet, despite the great promise of a developmental perspective for enhancing feedback and communication, these ideas—and their implications—have been largely missing from the feedback literature. Accordingly, this book offers practical, developmental strategies for improving performance and building capacity in our schools and organizations through our feedback—and in our lives more generally.

With this in mind, we call our approach *feedback for growth* because it explicitly recognizes the expansion of our own and others' developmental capacities as central to the experience of good feedback. By “developmental capacities” we are referring to the cognitive, affective (emotional), intrapersonal (self-to-self), and interpersonal (self-to-other) abilities that we bring to problems of practice, relationships with others, and the larger value propositions we generate and encounter every day. These capacities—which you might also think of as our stores of internal reserves and perspectives—likewise influence how we orient to feedback; the kinds of feedback we need to grow, learn, and improve in our work; and our abilities to manage the mounting complexities of learning, teaching, leading, and living. Promisingly, when provided with the appropriate supports and challenges, we can continue to grow our developmental capacities over

time—regardless of our roles and hierarchical positions—in order to more effectively see into and manage the complex challenges associated with improving education.

As we will share throughout this book, our conceptualization of feedback for growth stems from and expands our previous work about learning-oriented leadership and leadership development, and offers a close-up look at feedback as an ongoing process that can both strengthen performance and build internal capacity.² For example, and as we will continue to explore, a developmental approach to feedback can help you:

- better meet adults “where they are” developmentally, so that communications can best be heard and understood;
- offer more constructive, helpful, and effective feedback during evaluations and other meetings (both formal and informal) that attends to both performance and developmental capacity;
- bolster collaboration so that it is even more meaningful and productive—and so that teachers and other educators can work together more effectively and constructively (e.g., in teams, in peer-to-peer observations, and in professional learning communities [PLCs]);
- understand how your own development influences your capacities to give and receive feedback; and
- grow through the processes of giving and receiving feedback to support internal capacity building and performance (these are intimately connected), both for yourself and others.

Ultimately, by highlighting the ever-present but underrecognized developmental dimensions of feedback that operate just below the surface of almost any feedback exchange, this book expands the conversation about feedback and presents a promising roadmap for making feedback more meaningful, actionable, and growth-enhancing for all participants.

NEW FEEDBACK IMPERATIVES

In our work with educators and leaders of all kinds, we have experienced what feels like a universal urgency around feedback. More specifically, as mounting policy initiatives and practical imperatives push this vital aspect of leadership and collaboration front and center, principals, assistant principals, district-level leaders, teacher leaders, coaches, mentors, university professors, and professional developers emphasize that they want and *need* to get better at this important work.

In particular, today's policies around new teacher and principal evaluations, the Common Core State Standards, Race to the Top funding, and other initiatives have heightened the exigencies of giving and receiving feedback for educators within schools and across the system to achieve instructional excellence.³ For example, between 2011 and 2013, almost every state in the US ushered in dramatic changes to its teacher evaluation systems—and, in ways both big and small, collaboration continues to infuse our educational milieu as part of the “New Normal” of contemporary life.⁴ Everywhere one looks, new feedback measures and approaches—such as 360-degree feedback, S.M.A.R.T. goals, mini-observations, the Danielson framework, peer-to-peer feedback in teams and PLCs, instructional “rounds” and learning walks—all seek to improve student learning by framing, structuring, and delivering feedback to educators in strategic ways.⁵ Within the realm of teacher education, too, administrators and evaluators have been found to use more kinds of feedback and outcome measures to assess program performance than leaders in any other profession.⁶

Despite this proliferation of feedback (formative and summative, formal and informal) throughout the education world, there remains a growing sense that we need to do something *different* in terms of feedback, not just something *more*. For one thing, the impact of the growing emphasis on professional feedback seems mixed at best.⁷ In a recent empirical analysis, for instance, Hallinger, Heck, and Murphy pointed out that “there is remarkably little evidence that associates the new generation of teacher evaluation with capacity development of teachers or more consistent growth in the learning outcomes of teachers.”⁸ Importantly, this mixed bag of results extends beyond formal evaluation systems to include other forms of mentoring and collaboration—as educators often report that they are thrust into collaborative scenarios with little support or training about how to best work together in these new and essential ways.

Speaking to this point, research is beginning to suggest that educators in some contexts may be getting *too much* feedback, as it is not uncommon for teachers to receive different (and sometimes even conflicting) feedback from supervisors, mentors or coaches, colleagues, value-added measures, and other data streams (e.g., student and parent ratings, self-assessment tools).⁹ Practitioners, too, increasingly report that these mountains of feedback do not necessarily translate into improved performance, as it can be difficult to filter, make sense of, prioritize, or even understand the large amounts of feedback they encounter, let alone act upon it.¹⁰

In other cases, a *lack* of quality feedback seems to be creating a different kind of problem for educators hoping to grow themselves and others.

For example, not too long ago, a staggering 74 percent of teachers who participated in a study of twelve large US districts reported that they received virtually *no* feedback or suggestions on their summative evaluations.¹¹ Likewise, research has documented the steadily disappointing dearth of feedback for teachers containing actionable specifics or meaningful opportunities for reflection and analysis.¹²

While these different feedback challenges inarguably have multiple roots and causes, we find it significant that teachers and administrators—like so many of us—describe a lingering uneasiness with feedback as an authentic process. Regularly, for instance, educators express that they find it difficult to make their feedback “stick” despite their best and most earnest efforts.¹³ Some confide that they feel uncomfortable giving honest feedback to colleagues, as they worry it may damage relationships or cause tension. Others struggle to break the habit of giving feedback just as they themselves would like to receive it—even when their preferred feedback styles (e.g., very direct, crisp feedback, or feedback cushioned by positive affirmations) don’t always work for everyone in their care. Still other educators explain that they repeat their feedback messages over and over again, striving for consistency and fairness, but repeatedly run up against what feels like resistance and frustration on the part of colleagues. Despite these educators’ best and most thoughtful feedback efforts, they concede that things are not working as well as they’d like. Given the growing awareness that ineffective feedback can actually push employees to be *less* committed and/or more withholding of their best ideas, looking anew at feedback through a developmental lens can help all of us do and see feedback better as we strive to reach common educational goals.¹⁴

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

It is our contention that a developmental perspective can help shed light on the very important feedback challenges, patterns, and statistics just described. Time and again, when we work with educational leaders of all kinds, we notice that their questions and concerns about feedback have developmental dimensions. For example, leaders frequently report the following feedback challenges:

- “It’s hard for me to care for both the emotional and intellectual aspects of feedback in the moment.”
- “Sometimes I don’t feel comfortable sharing my honest thoughts and feelings with my supervisees.”

- “Giving unsolicited or informal feedback is really hard, especially when I’m not in a supervisory role.”
- “I find it challenging to refrain from criticizing or judging.”
- “I’m working to remain mindful of my own internal states and capacities during feedback exchanges.”
- “I want to get better at approaching conflict and difference as opportunities for growth, rather than moments to be avoided.”
- “I want to learn more about how and why others interpret my feedback so differently.”
- “One big goal I have for improving my feedback is balancing supports with constructive challenges.”
- “I’m coming to see that my feedback style and preference may not suit everyone equally.”
- “It’s hard to simultaneously support *and* evaluate my colleagues’ practice.”
- “I’m never quite sure how best to follow up after giving feedback or receiving feedback.”

As we will describe, these and other challenges related to giving and receiving feedback can actually be developmental in nature. By this we mean that these challenges can stem from a mismatch or misunderstanding of the internal, developmental capacities of the feedback giver and/or receiver. Accordingly, a deeper understanding of the developmental dimensions of feedback—and the qualitatively different ways of knowing in adulthood—can help us to effectively differentiate the kinds of supports and challenges we employ during feedback to best support the adults in our care.

Importantly, though, “appropriate” supports and challenges will look and feel different to people with different ways of knowing. To further illustrate this key point, it can be helpful to think of one’s way of knowing as the audio frequency with which one speaks or hears. Put another way, you could imagine the range of feedback an individual receives from others as the different radio stations on an old-fashioned dial radio (remember those?). When not broadcast in ways “tuned into” the recipient’s developmental orientations, feedback might sound more like static—or those in-between channels that don’t quite come in clearly. On the other hand, when feedback is offered in ways that adults with different ways of knowing can actually hear and understand, it’s more like finding that magical place on the dial where, suddenly, the music comes in loud and clear. And, if you’re lucky, your favorite song is playing!

Like one's taste in music, ways of knowing can feel more like a manifestation of who one *is* than something one *has*. Yet, unlike our musical preferences, human development seems to follow a particular progression and order throughout the lifespan, with each way of knowing reflecting an increased capacity to stand back and reflect on oneself and one's work. While each way of knowing in adulthood has both strengths and limitations (and adults will move to and through these stages at different rates and trajectories), the transition to each new way of knowing reflects a significant expansion of a person's internal, developmental capacities. Because the mounting challenges we face in education today call for increases in these capacities over time, understanding the patterns of meaning making in adulthood can inform how we support and challenge each other—so that we *all* have deeper wells of self and interconnection to draw from. The real hopefulness of this approach and this book, then, rests on the fact that adults can and, most often, *want* to grow and learn—both when giving and receiving feedback and in general. Supporting growth, development, or transformational learning (we use these terms interchangeably) *is* possible and necessary in our schools and districts. And employing feedback for growth is one very promising path toward this essential and hopeful outcome.

INTRODUCTORY EXAMPLE: LEDA'S FEEDBACK CHALLENGE

To ground some of the developmental dimensions of giving and receiving feedback in a real-life example, next we share the story of Leda, a district-level leader who bumped up against a very common feedback challenge in her important work supporting and coaching school principals. While the internal challenge Leda experienced resonates in profound ways with the stories and experiences of many of the principals, teacher leaders, and coaches with whom we've had the honor of working, her example also helps to highlight the key point that enacting a developmental approach to feedback involves looking inward—toward our *own* developmental capacities and preferences as feedback givers—just as much as looking outward, toward recipients'.

When Leda first assumed her position as a district-level coach, she confided that she felt uneasy offering direct feedback to her principals. While she had a great deal of expertise and insight to share, she worried that being too direct might upset her new colleagues or otherwise damage her ability to be genuinely helpful and supportive. Because of her hesitations,

however, Leda found herself holding back her best ideas and suggestions, and felt increasingly torn about her effectiveness.

After a conversation with Leda, it became clear that her worries about giving feedback were influenced as much by her own internal sense making—her underlying assumptions and constructions about feedback, authority, and relationships—as they were by her experiences with the principals themselves. More specifically, Leda had not yet developed the internal capacity to step back from her relationships with the principals, as her sense of self and success were so closely bound up with their affirmations and approval. Accordingly, “conflict” with these valued others felt too threatening and uncomfortable to her, and sharing her true thinking and feeling felt like too big of a risk. Yet, after several months of developmental coaching, Leda gradually came to realize that sharing her honest thinking with the principals wouldn’t destroy her professional relationships. In fact, she realized, it could help her to push the work further! Learning and experiencing this—by “trying it on” in practice in safe ways over time—proved to be a great relief for Leda, and also a promising opening to her own growth and improved coaching and feedback giving.

CAPACITY VERSUS EXPERTISE

As evidenced in Leda’s example, leaders’ internal capacities to offer feedback can be just as important as the content of what they share and the nature of their expertise. For example, Leda often had the skills, knowledge, and information needed to support principals to be more effective in their supervisory work with teachers, yet it was only *after* she developed her internal capacity to share what she was actually thinking (and to understand that the principals in her care were themselves ready for this kind of exchange) that she could most effectively help the principals improve their practice. In Leda’s example, just as in life, expertise and capacity *both* matter immensely when one is giving and receiving feedback—and they need to work in tandem in order to strengthen an organization’s or system’s complex network of relationships and expertise.

As an alternate example, a school principal could be an expert on literacy initiatives, interpreting achievement data, or mathematics pedagogy, but if the principal did not have the *capacity* to communicate ideas and suggestions in ways others could understand and ultimately implement to improve practice, the students, staff, and school community would not benefit from this expertise. Likewise, if a teacher leader felt comfortable sharing best practices with only a few teachers, many colleagues would

miss the opportunity to grow and learn from this leader's most effective work. Ultimately, then, while we need to understand key content and skills in order to guide another's improvement and practice (i.e., we need a good handle on the *what* of feedback), we must simultaneously build capacity around *how* we give feedback in order to harness and maximize educators' diverse gifts across the system.

Let's dive a bit deeper into this distinction between expertise and capacity, as it can shed light on two different but equally important kinds of learning needed to grow and improve our feedback. As we have discussed, expertise is a fundamental part of good and effective feedback. As leaders and feedback givers, we must keep abreast of the most recent and relevant content in order to be of best help. This is what we refer to as *informational learning*—and it is related to increasing our funds of knowledge and skills.¹⁵ Put another way, informational learning is learning that relates to leveling up the knowledge, content, skills, and information we have—or *what* we know—and this is vital to being able to offer feedback that can help improve practice. While this type of learning is necessary in order to bring about changes in adults' skills, knowledge bases, attitudes, and competencies (e.g., employing higher-order questioning techniques, developing assessment rubrics that align with the Common Core State Standards, interpreting value-added scores or student data reports, or even learning the fundamentals of adult developmental theory), knowing more *may not be enough* if it is not coupled with an internal capacity for change.

Just as we saw with Leda's experience offering feedback to principals, sometimes what is most needed is an increase in our internal leadership capacities—or what we call *transformational learning*.¹⁶ This different kind of learning involves changes in *how* we make sense of and interpret our experiences (including the ability to give or receive feedback), and is characterized by increases in our cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and/or intrapersonal capacities.

When transformational learning or growth occurs, there is a qualitative change in the structure of a person's way of knowing, not just what he or she knows. Psychologically speaking, this person has grown a larger and more complex self. Such growth enables adults to take a bigger and broader perspective on themselves, others, and the relationship between the two. Importantly, the more perspective we can take on ourselves (i.e., the deeper we can see into and understand our thinking, feeling, being, and acting), the more perspective we can take on others and our relationships with them. Related to this, the more perspective we can take on ourselves in relationship to and with others, the better able we are to manage

the enormous challenges and opportunities of teaching, learning, leading, and exchanging feedback in today's world.

ADAPTIVE VERSUS TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Related to the important distinction between informational and transformational learning, Harvard psychiatrist and leadership development scholar Ronald Heifetz, who has devoted many years of his professional career to increasing capacity in organizations and societies, makes a valuable and powerful distinction between what he refers to as “technical” and “adaptive” challenges.¹⁷ In fact, he and his colleague Martin Linsky maintain that leaders are increasingly encountering adaptive challenges in today's world.¹⁸

So what are technical and adaptive challenges? And what kind of learning—informational or transformational—can help us manage these and the many kinds of challenges mentioned previously (new teacher and principal evaluation systems, the rollout of the Common Core State Standards, new policy mandates, etc.)?

Technical challenges, Heifetz, Linsky, and Alexander Grashow explain, are challenges for which we can clearly identify both the problem and the solution.¹⁹ In these situations, even if we do not have the skills, knowledge base, expertise, tools, or training to address the challenge ourselves, we can discern *what* the problem is, and we can find someone—such as an expert or specialist (or even an Internet poster!)—who knows how to address and fix it.

Undeniably, though, in today's complex and ever-changing educational world, we are facing an increasing number of adaptive challenges, which Heifetz characterizes as murkier and harder to define. For these problems and situations, no one—not even an expert—has a ready-made solution. To meet these profound and complex challenges, he and colleagues maintain that new approaches, capacities, and tools are needed. We must, for instance, have the internal capacity to manage the enormous complexity and ambiguity that are hallmarks of adaptive situations.²⁰ In addition, we must be able to solve problems *in the act of working on them*.²¹

It's important to note that informational learning, as you might suspect, can help us to manage the many important technical challenges we face in our work. It is also vital to understand that we need transformational learning (i.e., changes in *how* we know rather than *what* we know) to most effectively manage the mounting adaptive challenges in our current educational context—as well as those on the horizon. Significantly,

research suggests that only 20–25 percent of us can spontaneously exercise the kinds of higher-order internal capacities needed for adaptive teaching, learning, collaborating, and leading today.²² As this startling statistic makes clear, supporting adult development in our schools and organizations can make a big difference—but we cannot do this work alone. We need each other’s help to grow and learn, and we need to support both informational and transformational learning through our feedback in order to develop the capacity to embrace and enact change.²³

A NOTE ABOUT CONTEXT

Of course, effective feedback (both in terms of content and a developmental approach) needs to take place in some *context*, so it is also important to consider the many organizational roles and structures that can influence a school’s larger culture of feedback—including hierarchical relationships as well as how and by whom feedback is used. In addition, the culture of power in schools and districts is important to consider, since we know that feedback can feel different when it is tied to different sources (e.g., authority figures, policy makers, department chairs, leaders of PLCs, coaches, parents, students, trusted colleagues, or newcomers to an organization).

Likewise, we know that feedback can take place in many different ways—including formal observations and walkthroughs, informal encounters, private and public meetings, and various administrative routines. In all of these cases, the interpersonal and group dynamics can be multifaceted and multidirectional in terms of who is positioned as both the giver and receiver of feedback. A principal, for example, may give feedback to a large group, such as a department, or to a small group, such as a PLC. This sort of feedback is different from the intragroup feedback that occurs when members of a school improvement team or department are attempting to give feedback to each other. While all of these are important, we begin this book with the assertion that *the relationship between two people is the most important starting place for considering feedback for growth*. Toward this end, this book begins by illuminating the developmental underpinnings of self and other on an individual level, and then moves toward a more global approach for supporting larger groups and communities of adults.

In the end, however, and regardless of one’s organizational or positional context, our construction of feedback for growth rests on the fundamental belief that growth is a worthy and noble aim of feedback—that it is indeed something worth giving and getting feedback “for.” We hope you find the ideas, processes, and strategies outlined in this book helpful

as we work to meet the pressing and unprecedented challenges at our door, and as we carve out—together—new possibilities for education and school improvement.

A BRINGING TOGETHER OF VOICES: OUR FEEDBACK COLLABORATION

We want to emphasize right up front that we have seen a developmental approach to feedback work! I (Ellie) have had the honor of investing more than twenty years into teaching, researching, and consulting with thousands of educational leaders around the globe about the promise and power of leadership that supports adult development. A big part of this work, as you might imagine, involves talking and listening. It involves sharing and taking in—in the most earnest ways possible—new ideas, perspectives, and points of view, and it involves learning with and from educators of all kinds and from all over the world, together. I couldn't be more delighted to share the very best of what I've learned from my research and all of these treasured explorations with educators here with you. I am truly honored.

For more than seven years, Jessica has accompanied me in this journey as a research collaborator, teaching fellow, coconstructor, and writing partner. In all of these different contexts, Jessica has been learning about, employing, and contributing to the kinds of developmental feedback discussed in this book, and it has been our great pleasure to combine our perspectives and expertise to bring this promising feedback approach to life on the page.

Our hope, ultimately, is to raise up the power of developmentally oriented feedback as a tool for helping people grow, and for building instructional and leadership capacity throughout schools and school systems. Accordingly, this book builds upon our research, practical experiences supporting adult development, and key learnings from the feedback literature. And it adds another important layer: it offers educators of all kinds a new approach to improving and diversifying feedback (i.e., differentiating with developmental intentionality) so that others can better hear, take in, and grow from it. This is something that leaders yearn for—and something that we hope supports you, too, in your noble and important work.

We also want to share that, while we present many examples and anecdotes in this book, they draw from experiences and interactions that Jessica and I have had both together and independently. In many instances, we combine real-life details from our teaching and practice with different educators into single, representative scenarios that illustrate a particular

aspect of feedback for growth, and we use pseudonyms or anonymously attributed quotations throughout to protect confidentiality, except when someone has asked us to use his or her name.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Put most simply, this book is designed to guide you through the theory and practice of exchanging feedback for growth. Each step of the way, we draw from on-the-ground examples from educators and leaders of all kinds (principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, etc.) and describe practical, research-based strategies that you can use to deepen and enhance your practice of growth-oriented feedback. In addition, we include a series of reflective questions in each chapter to help scaffold your thinking and enhance your practice.

We begin this journey by exploring the wider feedback “landscape” and literature in chapter 2. More specifically, given the mounting pressures pushing feedback front and center in educational reform efforts today, chapter 2 highlights many important lessons researchers and practitioners have already taught us about effective, actionable feedback. In addition, it begins to preview how a working knowledge of adult developmental theory can help *complement, deepen, and extend* this critical knowledge base and our practice of giving feedback for growth and improved performance.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5, we introduce the foundational principles of Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory, which sheds light on the qualitatively different ways adults make sense of their work and the exchange of feedback.²⁴ In particular, these chapters focus on (1) the four ways of knowing (or developmental meaning-making systems) found in adulthood, and their connections to our capacities for offering and taking in feedback; (2) the importance of a safe and productive holding environment (i.e., the context or relationship in which growth occurs) when adults are exchanging feedback; and (3) the kinds of supports and challenges (or developmental stretching) that adults with different developmental orientations will need in order to feel *well held* when engaging in any part of the feedback process. We pull these practical and theoretical threads forward and together throughout these chapters (and throughout the book more generally). More specifically, though, chapter 3 introduces key elements of this theoretical base; chapter 4 focuses on the ways our internal capacities will influence our propensities and preferences for taking in feedback; and chapter 5 focuses on how these same internal capacities inevitably connect with our abilities to offer feedback to others in our care.

In chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9, we look more closely at effective feedback approaches, strategies, and processes that can help you meet adults where they are developmentally—before, during, and after feedback. In chapter 6, for instance, we focus on the importance of nurturing the preconditions of trust, safety, and respect *before* engaging in feedback, and we offer a series of suggestions for developing, modeling, and sustaining a genuine culture of feedback that can build capacity in your school, team, or organization.²⁵ In chapter 7, we highlight the important distinction between constructive and inquiry-oriented feedback, and describe how understanding—and being intentional about—the continuum of purposes underlying feedback can help us frame our messages in the most meaningful, growth-enhancing ways. In chapter 8, we share seven key strategies for offering effective, actionable, in-the-moment feedback that others can truly hear, learn from, and implement. Connected to this, we emphasize in chapter 9 the great importance of following up on feedback in developmentally appropriate ways to support growth over time, and to help the adults in your care bridge feedback and action.

Next, in chapter 10, we stress the foundational importance of seeking out and receiving feedback as a leader (of any kind) in order to grow one's practice and internal capacities. Coming full circle, we present powerful strategies that can help you ask for and learn from feedback of different kinds (e.g., formal, informal) and from different sources (e.g., supervisors, colleagues, supervisees, students, families, and other stakeholders). Seeking out feedback with an open heart and mind, we've found, is one of the most powerful ways to grow as a leader and human being.

Finally, in the epilogue, we offer a few summative reflections about the power and promise of feedback for growth, and introduce a structured opportunity to synthesize and apply learnings from the book to your own practice. It is our hope that this and all that comes before (and after) supports you and your very important work.

BEGINNING OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

In the next chapter, we draw from our ongoing research and teaching with educators of all kinds, as well as from the literature about feedback in both the business and education sectors, to further unpack the possibilities and challenges of feedback for growth. In particular, we dive deeper into *why* a developmental approach to feedback is so important and needed at this very moment, and we highlight what researchers, theorists, and educators in the field say about feedback that works (and the challenges that can get

in the way). For each focus point, we consider how a developmental lens *complements, deepens, and extends* key learnings with another layer of understanding. More specifically, we offer insight about why, with all we already know about feedback, many still wonder, *Why is feedback so hard—and how can I get better at it?*

Very recently, for example, at the close of a semester-long developmental institute for leaders in New York City, Katie, a principal of a very large middle school, raised her hand to offer this reflection:

Over the course of the semester, one of the most important things I realized—and my colleagues [fellow principals] here at my table agree—is that supporting adult growth needs to be an even bigger part of our work as leaders. But while it's so important, it's also so hard. We've been talking about how, before this institute, we just sort of expected the adults in our schools to know what to do for kids and how to do it, or at the very least we assumed they'd be ready to give and receive feedback with open hearts. Now, we see that, really, our work—and our challenge—is to help our teachers build capacity so they can build capacity in others. There's nothing more important—or more adaptive—than that!

We share Katie's courageous reflection here, as a next step into our learning journey, because it shines a bright light on the challenge *and* the opportunity of a developmental approach to feedback. It also accords with the sentiments and excitement leaders of all kinds express to us in workshops, university seminars, conferences, and other professional learning sessions that feature developmental ideas. In all of these contexts, educators emphasize and agree that we must exchange feedback that is meaningful, timely, and developmentally oriented if we want to effect the greatest change in our schools.

Now, more than ever, we need each other to learn, and we need each other to grow. Supporting one another *as best as we possibly can* is the promise—and the hope—of feedback for growth.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we introduced a new, developmental approach to feedback that we call *feedback for growth*. Given the increasing importance of feedback in education—and the mounting number of adaptive challenges on our doorstep and on the horizon—feedback for growth offers educators

and leaders of all kinds a timely, promising approach for building capacity in individuals and organizations. This chapter also included an overview of the book's organization, and a few orienting examples to help illuminate the important connections between feedback and our internal capacities.

As we will explore in chapter 2, a developmental lens also sheds new light on the feedback challenges and strategies currently documented in the wider literature. Specifically, we describe how our developmental approach extends and enhances key learnings from the business and education sectors, and can help all of us give and receive feedback that others can even more effectively hear, take in, and act upon.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Please take a moment to consider the following questions, which can be used for private reflection and/or group conversation. You may find it useful to reflect in writing independently first and then to engage in discussion with a colleague or team. These questions are intended to help you and your colleagues consider the ideas discussed in this introductory chapter and how they might inform your practice of giving feedback.

- ◆ What are two of the more important technical and adaptive challenges you encounter in your work?
- ◆ What kinds of informational and transformational learning opportunities do you have to help you with meeting the different kinds of challenges you listed in response to the first question? What additional kinds of opportunities might assist you in managing the complex challenges you encounter?
- ◆ After reading this chapter, what are two or three insights, learnings, or connections that stand out for you about the process of giving and receiving feedback?