

Why Observe for Impact?

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“Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.”

—Socrates

Educators are a unique breed. We get up at the crack of dawn every day to make a difference, to kindle flames, to inspire, not just our students but our colleagues, our leaders, and teachers around us. If you are an educator reading this, you are seeking answers for how to make a greater difference in the lives of the learners around you, including yourself. You are working to drive change and promote growth, and we welcome you to this journey.

We wrote *Feedback to Feed Forward* (2019) with a sense of urgency in order to ensure that teachers everywhere received the high-quality feedback they needed and deserved and that their instructional leaders could develop the skills to provide that feedback. Readers of that book are now *feeding forward*, meaning their observation and feedback

- go beyond summarizing events to providing an analysis of effectiveness,

- allow teachers to accurately and clearly see how they are impacting learners, and
- lead to improved reflection, instructional practices, and student outcomes.

But we knew we had much more we could share. We wrote this new book to extend the skills of instructional leaders and concentrated on what we were noticing about continued skill gaps and challenge areas, responding to what those leaders were requesting of us—new strategies to build on their capacity, especially for the interaction with students during classroom visits. In addition, we are inviting a new reader—teachers who attend to student learning every day and who ideally support each other through peer-to-peer observations.

Frequent classroom observation and feedback—whether conducted by a supervisor, coach, department chair, or peer—that is learner centered (focused on our students) and learning focused (focused on the teacher as a learner) can drive change and growth in our schools. The skill set required for collecting evidence from students is a difficult one to master. We wrote this book to provide guidance for that work.

Here you will find nineteen strategies that will allow you to determine

- to what degree learning is occurring during lessons and, most importantly,
- why or how the teacher is impacting observed outcomes.

We expect whether you are a leader, coach, or teacher, you will find this book to be a highly accessible how-to guide. In several of our districts, teachers are participating in the same rigorous observation and feedback training as their leaders to ensure they too can serve as highly impactful supports. Beyond this, teachers who learn the skills of observation, evidence collection, and feedback and observe for learning in each other's classrooms can refine practices for their own ongoing checks for understanding and develop a new-found awareness with their own students. You will begin to analyze student learning in action more extensively and recognize the instructional practices and environments that serve to increase levels of student engagement and deeper learning. These are the first steps toward the creation of a culture of learning in a school that drives the actions and beliefs of all who impact students' lives each day.

Building a Culture of Learning

How can we ensure that teachers, coaches, leaders, and students are interacting within and supported by an environment of learning, ensuring a collective mission, purpose, and implementation towards student success?

We have been inspired by the educators who ensure that every experience (from the classroom and building to the district level) is focused on learning and what is best for learners. In order to understand and cultivate this type of culture of learning, we must first define school culture. Great Schools Partnership (2013), a leading school reform organization in the northeast United States, defines it as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions.

In a school with a strong **culture of learning**

- ✓ There is a firmly rooted *collective belief* that everyone has the ability to learn (Hattie & Zierer, 2018)
- ✓ A *growth mindset* (Dweck, 2006) permeates the school halls and walls
- ✓ Staff's *perception of their current performance and understanding of their impact* is accurate
- ✓ Staff and student *relationships* are based on a collaborative approach to learning
- ✓ *Policies and procedures* are designed through the lens of supporting systems and structures that ensure learning for all

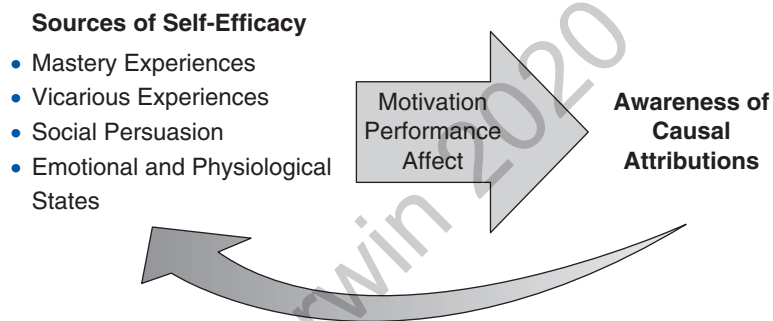
A **culture of observation and feedback** drives a culture of learning. The strategies in this book directly support the first three items by building the capacity of all observers to provide accurate assessments of teacher effectiveness through observation and feedback. This collective ability, in turn, serves to promote the development of the fourth and fifth bulleted attributes. In Chapter 6, we leave you with specific suggestions related to all five attributes so that limitations in relationships, collaboration, or systems do not go unaddressed as these can surely impact the growth of a culture of learning.

Impacting Self-Belief

Fundamental to the establishment of a culture of learning, leaders and teachers must possess a belief in their own abilities related to student success.

Albert Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as *the belief in one's capacity to execute the courses of action that will lead to attainment of an outcome or some achieved success*. We know from Hattie (2017) (and our own time in classrooms) that the practice of building student self-efficacy leads to positive outcomes, with a significant effect size (.92). Through high-quality observation and feedback, we have found we can directly address and provide opportunities to promote what Bandura (1994) identifies as the four sources of self-efficacy. Let's break down the relationships demonstrated in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1: PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



According to Bandura (1994), one's self-efficacy is determined by the following:

Mastery experiences: Opportunities to engage in actions with success. When we do something well, we continue to build our confidence and capacity.

Vicarious experiences: Opportunities to witness others engaged in actions who are successful, especially those people we consider similar to ourselves.

Social persuasion: Opportunities to receive boosts of verbal encouragement about our capacity to succeed.

Emotional and physiological states: Opportunities to reduce the stress associated with potential failure and to improve physical and emotional states of mind and being.

As individuals experience or interact within each of these contexts, they experience increases in motivation and performance, along with a positive affect.

As we are seeking to support teachers' self-efficacy through our approaches to observation and feedback, we must seek to draw conclusions with teachers about the causal attributions—or how they are causing or impacting observed

student outcomes. These moments, over time, can act as efficacy boosters. For example, an observer may help a teacher understand how her use of a small-group intervention during a math workshop increased the number of students able to successfully complete independent work. This provides her with a new level of understanding as she engages in that strategy again and an increased level of efficacy from the mastery experience. If she is provided with an opportunity to see others engage in that same teaching strategy vicariously, she is now seeing it with a new level of understanding and so on. New learning becomes cyclical in its influence on efficacy. Teachers become more aware of and empowered by an understanding of causal attributions (impact). They recognize what is within their control, and self-efficacy increases.

Unfortunately, many teachers receive often cursory, general, or nonactionable feedback in the form of a summary of teaching that does not promote reflection or analysis of impact as a result of observations, and this can set them up for failure. They may be given action steps or be told to *differentiate*—an enormous endeavor for most—without being provided with the necessary data to reflect on or discuss which students require differentiation and why, nor any support or resources as to how to meet those students' needs. *To differentiate* is not a bite-sized and attainable next step (nor is “develop clear and rigorous learning targets” or “turn learning over to students”).

Though never an observer's intent, you can actually decrease efficacy through feedback. This will occur when teachers who seek to grow do not know how to move forward or recognize why they need to make a specific change. Additionally, you can diminish belief in ability when teachers lack a clear understanding of necessary building blocks or long-term steps to achieve desired outcomes. The real diminisher can lie in a lack of understanding *in how long it might take* for new instructional practices to become refined to fully influence student outcomes.

It is more difficult to instill high beliefs of personal efficacy by social persuasion alone than to undermine it. Unrealistic boosts in efficacy are quickly disconfirmed by disappointing results of one's efforts. But people who have been persuaded that they lack capabilities tend to avoid challenging activities that cultivate potentialities and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. By constricting activities and undermining motivation, disbelief in one's capabilities creates its own behavioral validation. Successful efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals. In addition to raising people's beliefs in their capabilities, they [observers/feedback providers] structure situations for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing people in situations prematurely where they are likely to fail often (Bandura, 1994).

Two important lessons should be derived from this research as you begin your journey toward creating a culture of learning through observation and feedback. We can increase teachers' levels of self-efficacy if we do the following:

- ✓ Devote energy and resources toward building the skill set of the observer to ensure high-quality observations are rooted in specific evidence and lead to honest, specific, and practical feedback. Up to this point, we are consistently failing observers by inserting them into a feedback cycle without proper training and ongoing support—hence the urgency for both *Feedback to Feed Forward* (2019) and this book.
- ✓ Recognize and convey to all stakeholders that the consistent execution of high-quality observations and feedback within a cycle will take time to establish and that no shift in culture within a school occurs simply or without challenge.

Impacting Collective Belief

We know that we are more powerful together. We also know from Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2004) and John Hattie (2017) that **collective teacher efficacy**—a collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students—has a significant effect size (1.57) and is, in fact, the greatest influence on student achievement as of this date. It is important to note that simply having an individual on a team with a high level of self-efficacy does not necessarily translate to a collective belief in that group or in collective teacher efficacy. But leaders can support teachers who collaborate from a place of high self-efficacy who are equipped with an understanding of *why* they are being successful or not. Imagine the potential of, say, PLCs and data teams when the group is focused on the causal relationships being identified routinely in classrooms through observation and feedback, building a more accurate picture of effective teaching and learning. The consistent identification of these relationships begins to form a basis of belief in one's capacity as well as the group's ability to impact students.

Hattie and Zierer (2018) identify a set of beliefs or “10 Mindframes for Visible Learning” that serve to influence collective teacher efficacy. These should drive every decision and every action taken within a school. Five mindframes for visible learning that propel our thinking and work every day include the following:

Your teachers believe . . .

1. their fundamental task is to **evaluate the effect of their teaching** on student learning and achievement

2. success and failure in student learning **is about what they did or did not do because they are change agents**
3. it is important to **talk more about the learning** than teaching
4. assessment is about **impact**, and
5. they can have a positive impact on **all learners**.

These mindframes are rooted in a system in which everyone in the school is a collaborator in improving teaching and learning and are, in fact, “responsible for its success” (Hattie, 2012, p. 170).

These mindframes begin with a belief, prevalent in every action taken by adult and student alike, that not only *can every student and adult learn* but that *they indeed have the ability to do so*. Albert Bandura’s (1994) work has helped us to recognize the difference between the simple belief of “I can learn” and the concept of self-efficacy: “I have the ability to execute the courses of action that will allow me to successfully navigate that learning.” We often speak about the fact that we need to believe all have the capacity to learn, but what about the ability to learn? “This is built on skill, and students need to be taught how to think about their own thinking and how to act upon their learning” (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 98). Ability is based on application of the necessary skills, taking action toward new learning. While Fisher and Frey were speaking of students, the same applies to adults within our schools.

However, in our thinking about observation and what teachers have experienced through evaluation and supervision, we know observers, at times, default to the negative or nonimpact of the teacher (like a “gotcha”), citing only practices that produced less-than-effective outcomes. In fact, we see—and it is essential to highlight routinely—the positive impact of a teacher’s actions on students. Teachers need to build on their strengths, reflect on how choices and strategies are creating positive outcomes, and continue effective practices. Either positive or negative, effective or ineffective, significant or insignificant, these are the causal attributions we seek by asking “Why?” when considering outcomes and learners. These are at the center of what helps a teacher learn and grow. (We devoted two full chapters in *Feedback to Feed Forward* to the skills related to the practice of building on strengths, if this is an area of need for you.)

Stop and Think: How has feedback you have received about your performance helped you to change practice and impacted your level of self-efficacy? Were you able to understand cause-effect relationships and shift your practice as a result of the feedback? Why, or why not?

Building a Culture of Observation and Feedback

Quality observation of classroom practice with resultant feedback is a key driver in the shift toward a culture of learning if—and only if—the focus of the evidence collected is on student learning and teacher impact and it occurs frequently. Marshall and Marshall (2017, pp. 26, 27) recommend frequent “10- to 15-minute classroom visits” (miniobservations) in order to ensure we, as observers, understand “what is really happening in classrooms,” building coaching points and “spreading suggestions over 10 or so visits throughout the school year.”

Administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers who become fluent in strategies of evidence collection, especially when evidence is generated through interactions with students, will develop a clear understanding of what is happening for learners in the classroom. These observers will then be able to use that evidence to make connections between teaching and learning for the observed teacher, building a deeper understanding over time of the courses of action that lead to success.

However, though we continue to see the goal for observation simplified as whether students are learning or not, the driving question behind this book, which arises time and again, reminds us of the complexity of this task:

How can teachers, coaches, and leaders alike observe learning in action and provide feedback that supports understanding of causal attributions?

To answer this question, this book highlights nineteen strategies (and recalls the thirty-one strategies from our previous book). Furthermore, the importance of core dispositions and key cultural attributes cannot be understated. In order for a culture of observation and feedback to collectively permeate a school, teachers must willingly open their classroom doors to any observer and be willing to receive written and verbal feedback. Observers need to organize their time to ensure observations occur frequently and strive to improve their evidence collection and analysis skills to ensure that these observations lead to accurate and actionable feedback.

In Chapter 2, in order to observe teachers’ impact on learners, we dive into how learners learn. This will help inform and drive your evidence collection practices. Chapters 3 through 5 provide the steps and strategies to plan for and then adapt your evidence collection as learning unfolds. Chapter 6 pulls all of your work together into the development of feedback and provides guidance as you begin to apply these strategies toward the establishment of a culture of learning.

Observing for Impact

We often take larger groups into a classroom (leaders, coaches, or teachers) to observe a lesson and watch as some will choose to stay against a wall while others move quickly to see what students are doing. Not too long ago, we visited a second-grade reader's workshop lesson with a team of observers. Observers lined the back of the room, though students were gathered on the carpet. Within minutes, all students began talking to partners, yet not one observer moved to determine what was being said. Had the observers chosen to remain removed from the learning, their feedback to the teacher would likely have been something like this:

10:10 Teacher showed students the new strategy through modeling in a mentor text.

10:15 Teacher led a turn-and-talk where students shared with a partner when they would use the new strategy in their own story.

10:20 Teacher had students go back to their seats to try on their own.

However, because we utilize our sessions and group classroom visits as learning opportunities for observers, we waded them closer to the learners so that they would be able to answer the following questions:

- What were the students saying to each other?
- What was the depth of the responses? How many partners gave only one-word answers or didn't share?
- How many were way off track (off topic or not accurate/misunderstanding)?
- How many were engaged in a high-level conversation, demonstrating they understood the new strategy?

Without evidence to answer these questions, observers would not be able to provide meaningful feedback regarding this teacher's impact on the students.

Why didn't those observers move in closer to students? Consistently, observers share that they worry they are bothering students or disrupting the lesson. We think that perhaps

- they do not know what to look for or collect, so they are missing the value or need, or

- they do not know how to collect evidence of engagement and learning.

For years, evaluation, observation, and the support of teachers through feedback only focused on the *teaching* occurring in the classroom. Much of the feedback consisted of summaries, narratives, or lists of evidence. As a result, feedback was not conveying information about how teachers' practices were leading (or not leading) to learning or how teachers were creating outcomes through their choices, strategies, and tasks. We have come to find that many observers still do not have the skills to collect evidence to support this type of thinking or understanding or to observe for impact. Nor have states, regions, professional-learning providers, or thought leaders offered solutions or provided the specific and comprehensive training and support required to do this work well—until now!

Observing for Learning

“If you want to understand teaching, you need to understand how children learn.” —Nuthall, 2007, p. 154

Consider this:

The standard view of the classroom is that the teacher provides students with a set of activities. Some students do the activities well and learn more. Others do not complete the activities or do not do them as well, and consequently do not learn as much. The assumption seems to be that all students experience essentially the same activities, and perform them according to their motivation or ability. It is assumed that learning is more or less the automatic result of engaging classroom activities. Research shows that almost none of that is true. (Nuthall, 2007, p. 103)

One day, early on in their transition from observing just teaching to teaching and learning, one of our groups was observing a sixth-grade writing lesson. The instructional leaders were thinking about the learners and were thrilled to see students working on a rigorous standard inside Google Classroom as the teacher had been making great efforts to integrate technology. Students were reading an argumentative piece of writing and were required to highlight in different colors the claim, supporting evidence, and introduction to the evidence. Let's look at feedback samples from each observer based on what was collected and determined about the lesson. Notice how these excerpts show varying degrees of attention to the learners in the room.

Here is a quick note about our samples: If you read *Feedback to Feed Forward*, you will remember that we begin the journey in our training of observers with the development of directive feedback. Taking the time to analyze and process the evidence and create impact statements also allows an observer to prepare for conversations, craft highly effective reflection questions, and be ready when it is time to shift stances and provide evidence, or more observer-directed statements, in feedback meetings.

Observer 1: The teacher modeled an example of how to complete the task and gave clear directions. All screens were visible, and nearly all students were actively talking to a neighbor and highlighting in different colors.

Observer 2: The observer asked students, "What are you doing?" and they listed the directions and color coding correctly. Clearly, students knew what to do, were engaged using technology, and were working in partnerships.

Observer 3: Nearly all students were attempting to complete the task correctly. The observer noticed three groups had multiple yellow highlights (claim) and questioned the students, "Can you have more than one claim?" and students were unsure. In two groups, when the observer grew closer, it was clear one partner was telling the other what to highlight, the partner complied, but it was incorrect. When following the teacher, the observer heard him reteaching what a claim was to different groups, as they had not gotten started after ten minutes. Based on this, clearly half of the class was not ready to begin the independent task, as they were missing foundational understandings.

Notice how Observer 3's attention to student understanding influenced the quality of the feedback. Observer 3 didn't want to stop there. She asked herself why students were struggling. The depth of her evidence allowed her to analyze cause-and-effect relationships and identify causal attribution for the outcomes.

Though the teacher started the class with a five-minute introduction about claim and evidence and highlighted a document as an example, he did not take the time to assess prior learning or ensure everyone had the basic understandings of each to begin the task. (The teacher polled three random students.)

The other group members admitted that it had not even occurred to them to determine if the students were highlighting correctly! Though, on this day, the training group was composed of administrators, this is a frequent occurrence, even when teachers are observers. Listening to Observer 3 share her findings allowed for great discovery learning for the other observers. As you read through our classroom examples and recommended strategies for effective evidence collection throughout the book and the questions we ask students, you will experience your own discoveries about how to engage with learners.

Stop and Think: When you consider the three feedback samples, which one represents one you have received? Why do you think that is? Is there one that aligns to your previous training?

Making the Shift

The examples from Observer 1 and 2 clearly lack evidence, resulting in feedback that lacks depth. This is directly tied to the observers' choices and actions in the classroom during the lesson. This book offers guidance on how to make more productive choices and actions that will result in richer evidence collection. But to understand what to collect and how to collect it, it is critical for you, as an observer, to truly understand *why* you are collecting evidence from learners.

Your goal as an observer is to develop feedback that helps a teacher understand three key things through *relevant* evidence, regardless of whether you are a peer, coach, or supervisor:

1. How and why you are making a claim about overall effectiveness of instructional practices (which could include clear and objective support of a performance level rating)
2. How the teacher is impacting student engagement and learning
3. How the teacher is progressing toward overarching goals—district/region, school, or professional

Through feedback, we can develop these understandings, build reflective practice, help teachers determine actionable next steps for growth, and continually improve outcomes for students, all of which lead to a culture of observation and feedback that drives a culture of learning.

The Skills of Observation

The process of observing is not as simple as gathering a clipboard or laptop, setting foot into a room (or hitting play on a video), and watching a lesson unfold. Instead, it is a complex process that requires high levels of cognitive and metacognitive processing executed in real time, when done effectively. To engage in this level of work and to develop high-quality feedback that promotes growth, observers must master a set of twenty-one core skills (Figure 1.2) and move toward proficiency in three core competencies:

1. Effective **observation and evidence collection**
2. Explicit **analysis of effectiveness** of instruction evidence
3. Development of **high-quality feedback**

FIGURE 1.2: **ReVISION LEARNING CORE SKILLS OVERVIEW**

3 Core Competencies	Observe and Collect Evidence	Analyze Effectiveness	Provide Written/ Verbal Feedback
21 Core Skills	Unpack a rubric	Analyze objectively	Recognize research-based strategies
	Describe look-fors	Analyze evidence	Build on instructional strengths
	Identify types of data	Determine student engagement levels	Scaffold next steps
	Collect qualitative evidence	Determine impact on engagement	Review for objectivity
	Collect quantitative evidence	Determine impact on learning	Compose feedback
	Collect evidence of student engagement	Determine performance levels	Create clear connections
	Observe objectively	Craft a claim	Develop reflective questions

Source: Tepper and Flynn (2019).

To support an observer's development of these competencies and corresponding skills, our organization, ReVISION Learning Partnership (RVL), developed six standards of effective observation and feedback housed within Domain 1 of the ReVISION Learning Supervisory Continuum. These standards outline expected practice for observation and *written* feedback, or the collection and processing of evidence that serves to prepare for an effective conversation. (We created Domain 2, which addresses expectations for verbal feedback, as well). "Though our ultimate goal as observers is to promote teacher reflection about these areas, many times the teachers we coach require directive or guided feedback, as they are not ready or are unable to arrive at their own conclusions about the effectiveness of their lessons" (Tepper & Flynn, 2019, p. 127). The standards serve as the backbone of our learning designs for observers, and through these, we are able to measure the quality of feedback while also leveraging growth, supporting the development of those skills necessary to ensure observers can develop and deliver feedback that feeds forward.

The standards are as follows:

RVL 1.A: Evidence cited is directly aligned to the appropriate indicators of practice on an instructional framework (evaluative or non-evaluative) and claims are clearly supported.

RVL 1.B: Qualitative and quantitative evidence cited in feedback is aligned, appropriate, and facilitates targeted growth and improvement.

RVL 1.C: Evidence cited in feedback connects teacher action with student engagement and intended learning outcomes.

RVL 1.D: Feedback contains areas of strengths and areas of growth explicitly connected to the framework indicator and observed practices/evidence and are developed based on indicator language and the key levers between ratings.

RVL 1.E: Evidence cited is objectively stated and without opinion.

RVL 1.F: Feedback report serves as a comprehensive learning tool containing clearly articulated evidence-based statements and explicit connections, with pre-planned reflective questions.

(For the full RVL Supervisory Continuum Domain 1, see Resource 1.1 in the Resource Center resources.corwin.com/learnerfocusedfeedback)

Feedback to Feed Forward was dedicated to building the capacity of instructional leaders (administrators, coaches, and department chairs) in all six standards. Standards RVL 1.A, RVL 1.B, and RVL 1.C are the primary focus of this book for *all observers* regardless of your role. However, each of the standards plays a critical role as they form the foundation of observer practice and high-quality

feedback. In this book, we focus on the capacity of observers to enter a classroom and recognize learning in action, to make decisions and take steps needed to collect both quantitative and qualitative evidence of how students are learning (RVL 1.B), and to analyze and help teachers to see how they are causing those outcomes (RVL 1.C). This allows for the observer to generate, either in a directive or reflective/collaborative manner, feedback that

- conveys claims (RVL 1.A) about the causal attributions (helping a teacher to recognize impact), ideally aligned to the district/region's expectations for teaching and learning,
- represents accurate assessments of teaching and learning, and
- generates honest dialogue about teaching and learning focused on next steps.

As a school seeks to build a culture of observation and feedback as a key driver of a culture of learning, training observers to become proficient in these standards of practice becomes crucial.

Essentials of Evidence Collection

Whether you are a teacher observing a peer, a coach, or a leader observing those you support, determining specifically *what* to collect may be challenging. Perhaps you are reading this book to improve *how* you are currently collecting evidence. The *what* will be directly related to your understanding of how students learn, which will drive *how* you collect evidence. We have come to understand that students need repetition, are influenced by peers, arrive with different background knowledge and experiences, and require monitoring. This means that “over time students achieve different learning outcomes even in the same classroom and from the same activities . . . learning does not come directly from classroom activities; learning comes from the way students experience these activities. What matters is what students extract from experiences—the sense they make of them” (Nuthall, 2007, p. 154, 155). Again, this validates the idea that observing for learning is complex!

It is this very idea—what students extract—that should drive all your evidence collection during a lesson, to better understand how students are making sense of the learning experiences. In Chapter 3 of *Feedback to Feed Forward*, we introduced ten strategies solely dedicated to evidence collection. As the chapters ahead will serve as an extension of those strategies, we thought it important to review the foundational strategies before we dig in. If you feel overwhelmed at any point, stop and return to the first book (but notice we provide those thirty-one strategies in the front of this book). Those foundational strategies from our first book will be cited with an “FF” as you read on. The use of [FF Strategies 7–9](#), shown in Figure 1.3, will enable you to become a more accurate and objective observer, whether you are observing live classrooms or watching videos of recorded lessons.

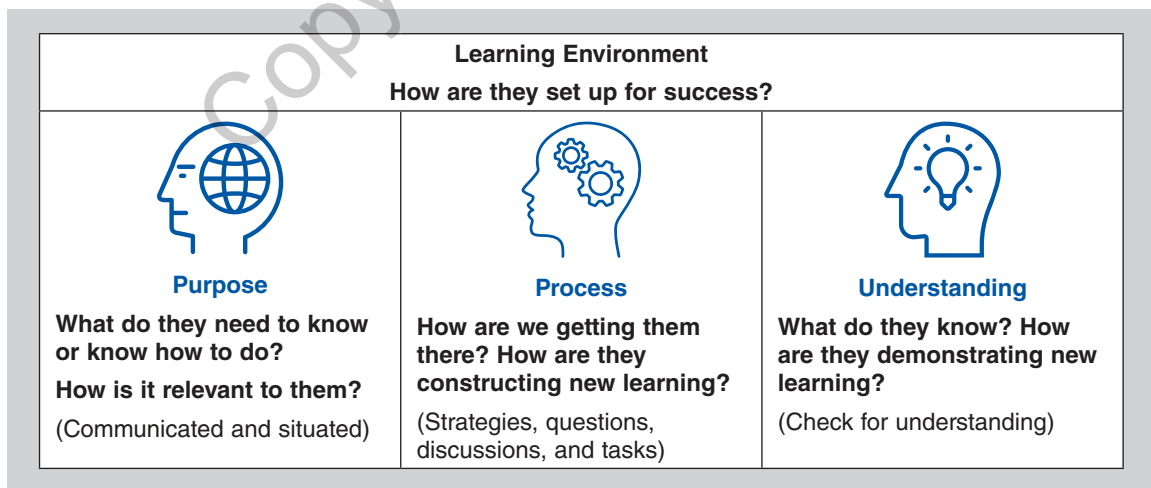
FIGURE 1.3: FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGIES FF 7–9

Strategy	Description
FF Strategy 7: Develop an awareness	Recognize the biases you bring into a classroom or might develop as a lesson unfolds
FF Strategy 8: Observe with a wide lens	Keep a broad perspective of overall teaching and learning during an observation (See Figure 1.4)
FF Strategy 9: Collect a balance of evidence with purpose	Be mindful of what you are collecting and why during an observation versus blindly scripting

Source: Tepper and Flynn (2019).

Your goal as an observer is to ensure you are measuring effectiveness in terms of how a teacher is impacting student engagement and learning. Even if you visit the same classroom multiple times or have been working with a teacher all year on a particular practice, such as refining a minilesson or checking for understanding at critical points, “it is still important to consider how that one particular practice fits into the context of what we consider to be the ‘big picture’ (Figure 1.4). Remember, this provides a framework for your evidence collection, development of feedback, and conversations with teachers” (Tepper & Flynn, 2019, p. 67).

FIGURE 1.4: BIG-PICTURE GOAL



Source: Tepper and Flynn, LLC.

(See Resource 1.2 in the Resource Center, resources.corwin.com/learnerfocusedfeedback, for a printable version of more big-picture questions.)

The **FF Strategies** shown in Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6 should be part of your everyday toolbox. Regardless of your goals for an observation or the content areas, grade levels, or time spent in a classroom, you should use these strategies for each observation. This will ensure you depart a classroom with the necessary evidence to analyze effectiveness and develop impactful feedback. **FF Strategy 12** is one of the most important. If you are only collecting evidence from a handful of students, your claims about practice (or ratings as an evaluator), your analysis of effectiveness, and/or your coaching points will be inaccurate.

FIGURE 1.5: **FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGIES FF 10–13**

Strategy	Description
FF Strategy 10: Place yourself where the learning is occurring	Follow the learning during an observation, as it may be occurring in multiple places
FF Strategy 11: Do what it takes to collect evidence	Use all of your senses, moving and attending to opportunities to maximize your time in a classroom
FF Strategy 12: Be comprehensive in your collection of evidence	Ensure you engage with a high number of learners
FF Strategy 13: Maximize the use of your notepad or tablet	Refine your use of your evidence collection tools for efficiency and effectiveness

Source: Tepper and Flynn (2019).

FIGURE 1.6: **FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGIES FF 14–16**

Strategy	Description
FF Strategy 14: Listen to teaching and learning	Pay close attention not just to teacher statements, conversations, and questions but also any time learners are speaking
FF Strategy 15: View learning in action	Watch learners and look at what is in front of them or what they are using. Watch the teacher's and learners' actions and movements
FF Strategy 16: Interact with learners	Engage with learners directly in authentic conversations about their learning and to make their thinking visible

Source: Tepper and Flynn (2019).

FF Strategies 14–16 form the basis for the chapters ahead, with a focus on how to comprehensively collect evidence from students (Figure 1.6).

FF Strategy 14 is powerful in that “the language we use when we think is closely connected to the way we talk socially.” You can listen to conversations to “confirm the kinds of processes most likely going on in students’ working memories. These processes are sort of implied when we say students are ‘making sense’ of experience, or ‘constructing’ their own meaning” (Nuthall, 2007, p. 75).

Though you cannot interact with students if watching a video, you can identify how the teacher was interacting and consider questions you might have asked during the lesson.

Teachers as Learners

In Chapter 2, we will explore the concept of students as learners—what they should be learning and how you will know if this is occurring. To begin our swim into the deep end, let’s wade into the concept of students leading their own learning—the goal in our classrooms every day, which will form the foundation of your evidence collection. Keep in mind too that teachers can lead their own learning as well. Frey, Hattie, and Fisher (2018) use the term *assessment-capable visible learner*, or a student who can answer three key questions at any given time.

- Where am I going?
- How am I going?
- What is next?

Assessment-capable teachers are those who can foster assessment-capable learning in a classroom, but in our work in schools, we have pushed this one step further. We see in a culture of learning that teachers can become assessment-capable learners themselves. Observation and feedback can drive their ability to answer the same three questions. Teachers can answer “Where am I going?” through the teacher performance standards or instructional rubrics that define teaching and learning in their school. They recognize “How am I going?” more clearly when they receive accurate assessments of their practice from an observer or conduct accurate reflections, especially when these are related to causal attribution. And when they are receiving feedback from an observer, the two are working together to answer “What’s next?” resulting in improved self-reflection along the way.

Teachers need to become collaborators as they engage in their own learning—with each other and with their students. They need to

think critically and remain cognitively flexible in their decision making inside the classroom. They need to cross curricular lines, breaking from their silos that often limit thinking about classroom environments and student interaction with learning. Teachers can build these skills and work toward becoming assessment-capable teachers and learners through professional learning, guided professional-learning communities, observation and feedback, and self-reflection.

What is important for an observer (and teachers themselves) to recognize is that certain skills, dispositions, and tools are at the heart of developing assessment-capable learning in the classroom that stem from common understandings and knowledge, (explored ahead in Chapter 2 and also in Feedback to Feed Forward Chapter 2). This continues to reinforce the evidence that needs to be collected to support teacher growth. We provide some examples of each in Figure 1.7, and we encourage you and your team to create a more extensive list together.

FIGURE 1.7: SKILLS, DISPOSITIONS, AND TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Teachers	
Skills Need to know how to . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build student capacity to work independently • Use appropriate scaffolding • Model self-monitoring, using criteria, making adjustments, and utilizing resources and evaluating effectiveness of resources • Plan/facilitate learning vs. delivering content • Give feedback to drive student-owned learning
Dispositions Need to be willing to . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn learning over to students • Allow good struggle • Have high expectations/belief that students can achieve and think at high levels
Tools Need to have available . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and specific daily learning goals • Clear and specific learning criteria • Time throughout each lesson for reflection • Time in each lesson to unpack goals and criteria

Stop and Think: As you look at the list in Figure 1.7, consider what may already be in place in your building or classroom.

Many of the practices teachers have employed in the past still remain relevant, and it is not necessary to change everything we do (something many fear). Remember, our observation and feedback should identify causal attributions or instructional choices that help teachers see “How am I going?” in terms of *effective* outcomes—those practices that are allowing students to reach goals—along with any of those practices that can be or need to be altered, slightly or significantly.

Leaders Leading Learning

Through no fault of their own, teachers often are not in a position to develop or utilize these necessary skills consistently, accurately, and with the passion that called them to the work in the first place. The skills of a leader to model and effectively monitor progress toward a compelling vision and mission for teaching and learning and to demonstrate capacity to provide relevant feedback along the way are essential to teacher and school success. In the simplest terms, leaders are the cultivators of the environment in a culture of learning, yet they often lack the skills and support from their own leaders necessary to embody this role. Leading learning for all is no easy task, and the solutions—and therefore, the skills—are not one-dimensional and cannot be oversimplified. Leaders must be prepared to

- increase teacher involvement/engagement,
- decrease teacher isolation,
- develop teacher skill sets for effective collaboration,
- create goal consensus among staff,
- determine the learning needs (at all levels—students, teachers, leadership, and organization), and, most importantly,
- **build capacity in their own practice and among their staff to observe for and collect evidence of the causal attributions that impact student learning.**

In this sense, leaders need to be able to cultivate teacher ownership of learning as they develop their own capacity as leaders. We often highlight this when working in a new district or region by saying that assessment-capable students are developed by assessment-capable teachers who are supported

by assessment-capable leaders. None of this can occur without purposeful planning and deepening an understanding of research about teaching and learning.

We know there is plenty of research about the importance and impact of planning and executing effective formative assessments in the learning process. We build on this thinking to help you take proactive steps to support teachers, to determine areas of strength and growth, and, finally, to build your teachers' understanding of the research through your feedback.

Generally, when research-based strategies or expected outcomes are observed in a classroom, they will be considered teacher strengths, as they result in desired actions, behaviors or dispositions, new learning, and/or high levels of engagement (or a teacher is moving in that direction). Think back to the second-grade English language arts example. The observer is aware of the structure of the workshop model and saw elements of the research-based strategies, even though the teacher was not 100 percent successful.

When we think about a lesson in terms of what the research says—what we know students need and what we do or do not see related to this—we begin to form the foundation of our feedback and next steps for the teacher. When you are developing feedback for growth, building a teacher's understanding of the related supporting research is critical because this serves to increase the objectivity of your feedback and validate your conclusions while also promoting more purposeful planning and future reflection on the teacher's part.

This leads us to our first strategy, purposeful planning in support of teachers. This should serve as the foundational step for leaders who should involve teachers in each part of the process.

Strategy 1: Mindfully plan for effective observation and feedback

There are many elements that can be prepared ahead of time as you begin your journey toward a culture of learning driven by a culture of observation and feedback, and Chapter 3 is focused entirely on planning for an observation. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the establishment of a culture of learning. However, regardless of your role, we wanted to briefly mention the steps leaders and leadership teams should take, either simultaneously as you shift to more learning-focused observation and feedback or before involving teachers in peer observations. These steps are critical and should not be skipped, as you may be engaging in dramatically different observation practices from previous years and/or your feedback (and, if you are an evaluator, your ratings) might

be radically different from what teachers in your building have seen or experienced. There's no "Gotcha!" in this formula!

Schools are forewarned that jumping into the observation and feedback strategies we are proposing without adequately preparing the staff can set you up for failure. Leaders may improve their own skills in their own roles and responsibilities, but without supporting the culture in all aspects, the pathway to a cohesive vision and a sense of collective efficacy will be met with challenges too daunting to overcome. We offer a few suggestions at this point (and many of these are reinforced throughout the book). Let's explore three initial steps.

1. Build a shared understanding and knowledge of effective teaching and learning.

Building a shared understanding begins with building a common definition of learning; this will then require that all members of the school understand how to recognize it in action (more on this in Chapter 2). As schools begin with the definition, they must remember they have access to a tool that helps to guide this process—their instructional framework or teacher performance standards. Teachers and leaders should work as teams toward understanding the outcomes associated with the standards and unpack the expectations in their instructional frameworks, ultimately building a common understanding of all aspects of effective teaching and learning. (And sometimes, this work results in the discovery that the standards do not outline the desired teaching and learning!)

2. Become transparent as observers.

Teachers should know what is being observed, what evidence is being collected, and how observations will be carried out. It is also imperative to

talk to your teachers about observations. They are often intimidated, unsure, or unhappy about an observer's movement in their classrooms and interaction with their students. For many who have been teaching for over five years, there is a significant change in an observer's behaviors. Be transparent and share with them how an observer's actions and interactions with students increase support for growth. They should in turn let students know visitors may stop and chat, listen, or read over shoulders, and why. (Tepper & Flynn, 2019, p. 74)

This should not be based on a broad communication such as, "We are observing Domain 1 of the Marzano Learning Map" (LSI, 2017). Teachers should

understand that observers will interact with students (without disrupting the normal learning cycle). And they need to be clear that you will focus your attention on identifying causal attributions for observed outcomes. Without understanding specifically how you will be collecting evidence inside the classroom, teachers may often see your interactions in the classroom as disruptive or view them through a lens of uncertainty or mistrust. This leads to Step 3.

3. Set protocols and expectations for your classroom visits.

Ultimately, when an observer visits a classroom, we want to ensure it is a positive experience and that a minimal footprint is left on the classroom and students. Whether you are a leader, coach, or peer, it is important for teachers to know that you are not in their rooms to complete a checklist or to catch them doing something wrong. But your actions will speak volumes. You need to follow through and demonstrate that your visits are about growth. All observations should result in some form of feedback and, ideally, a conversation.

Because of past messaging, previous experiences, or fear, teachers often feel pressure to put on a special show or create what they think you want to see. Who can blame them? Some become highly stressed anticipating peers' visits. Prepping for these experiences takes up too much of their valuable time and ultimately may not allow a visitor to give feedback that is applicable or useful. It takes time to build trust and for the one being observed to truly see that what we want them to do is to just keep teaching. We say this because of a few scenarios we have encountered.

Scenario 1: A group of observers entered a fifth-grade classroom, and the teacher stopped her instruction for four to five minutes and spoke directly to us: "Welcome! Class, can everyone say 'Welcome' to our visitors? Today, we are working on preparing for our interviews with someone from the previous generation. . . . Earlier we. . . . We are about to. . . ."

Though absolutely well meaning, the teacher was nervous (not at all strange with six of us arriving and because observations were highly infrequent in her building!), but she didn't need to interrupt her flow. In Edison Schools, Patrick recalled a student who was assigned to quietly greet visitors without disrupting the class and would orient the observer to the day's learning. Beyond this, when a teacher restates the directions or expectations for the entire class, it makes it difficult for us to discern if students understand the purpose and are making connections on their own.

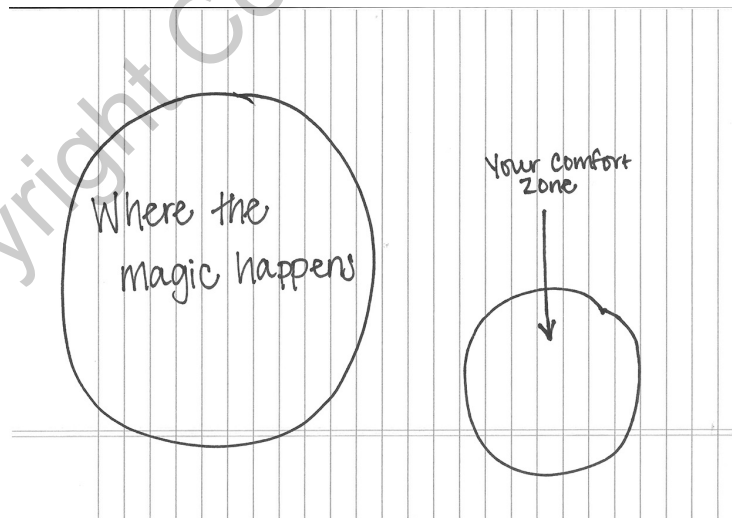
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Scenario 2: On a number of occasions when we have interacted with learners, a teacher or paraprofessional followed us, uneasy about what we were doing and what the students were saying. After a student said he wasn't sure how to complete his task, the para emphatically corrected the student: "You know this; we just did this!" "It's in your notes!" We have even had paras or teachers answer for students. They are often afraid that the student is providing "wrong" answers. Our big lessons learned was this: Make sure everyone knows that it is okay if a student is unsure or struggling when there is a visitor, and include paras in your vision building.

It can be stressful to open your door to visitors, but we ask observed teachers to remain as authentic as possible. Strive to build a culture where stepping out of comfort zones is part of everyday thinking as opportunities for growth (Figure 1.8).

FIGURE 1.8: THE MAGIC



We have seen some positive ways to integrate or acknowledge visitors, such as in the following scenarios.

Scenario 1: We have entered a classroom of kindergartners learning math on the carpet, and right away, the teacher integrated counting the visitors (as five adults staring down at them might have been very intimidating). We have also been in classrooms where we participated as respondents to student surveys in the moment. These are great quick events when frequent observation is a new experience.

Scenario 2: Often, teachers try to calm students when visitors arrive, “Oh, they are here watching me.” However, Patrick recently encountered a situation where the second-grade teacher was very transparent with the students that the visitor was interested in knowing more about the *learning*.

Student to Patrick: Are you the researcher?

Patrick: The researcher?

Student: You are here to watch us.

Patrick: I am! I am here to watch and talk with you about your learning.

Teacher to Students: Remember, as researchers we are always looking to understand what new learning is happening.

This resulted in an eagerness to tell Patrick what they were doing and learning throughout his whole visit.

Who and How Often

Additionally, as you look to apply observation and feedback beyond evaluation, begin to consider some questions to help you (and the teachers) mindfully prepare for an observation. To get the ball rolling, for leaders and coaches, look at a list of the teachers you support and think about the following:

- Who would benefit from more frequent observations? Why?
- What specifically is the teacher’s areas of growth, need, or focus? On what are you basing this?
- Is the teacher meeting expectations?
- When during a lesson or day is the best time to visit? Why?
- How could video be used in the process?

For teachers,

- Who would like peer support and classroom visitors?
- When can you go and visit your peers’ classrooms?

Stop and Think: Examine our three suggestions. What is your school/district level of readiness for each? Which are already in motion?

What's Ahead

While we are not suggesting that observation and feedback alone are the sole pathway or panacea to school improvement for teachers and leaders, what we have come to see—district after district, school after school—is that when you make feedback a key driver, focusing on the learning occurring within our classrooms and observing for impact, you can create change.

Feedback is the driver in perfecting our systems of talent development and professional learning with teachers and leaders, helping to create a culture of openness to ongoing, never-ending growth and excellence and environments of clarity, trust, and support (Dewitt, 2017; Hattie, 2012; Park, Takahashi, & White, 2014; Tepper & Flynn, 2019).

This will only occur when the feedback we provide supports a teacher's understanding of

- how/why you are making a claim about the overall effectiveness of instructional practices,
- how the teacher is impacting student engagement and learning, and
- how the teacher is progressing toward overarching goals (district/region, school, or professional goals).

And there is a focus on building self- and collective teacher efficacy.

As you progress through the chapters of this book, you will find the strategies you need as an observer to ensure you are able to focus on the learning occurring in the classroom. This is what will allow us, as teachers and leaders, to build deeper levels of understanding about how teachers impact students in our classrooms. As you turn to Chapter 2, you will dive into the core knowledge needed and definitions of student learning to help identify look-fors and to set the foundation for your initial strategies for evidence collection.

Chapters 2 through 5 offer strategies for observers to utilize, providing you with proven methods to apply before and during an observation. These will ensure you have the capacity to effectively plan for and adapt your evidence collection relative to the learning in the classroom. Each chapter ahead ends with role-specific suggestions, so whether you are a teacher, administrator,

or coach, you can personalize your application of the strategies to meet your needs. Chapter 6 will further support all educators in preparing to engage in the work through feedback samples and next steps in culture building.

As Socrates reminded us, you have the power to kindle the flames of growth and learning; how will you become the spark?

Turn the page to find out!

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