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Preface

Many people have asked us in the course of writing this book: Why feedback? And in particular, why now? What motivated you to tell this story, together?

A Shared Passion for Assessment for Learning

When Brent and I first met over a decade ago, we were both teacher educators at a large public university in California, where we still teach today. Despite our differences in age, gender, and where we grew up—in my case on the East Coast and in Brent’s on the West Coast, we had a lot in common. Most significantly, we were both products of having taught in promising high schools that believed deeply in the sacred right of all students to learn.

I taught my first English classes at Wilcox High School, a Title I school in the Bay Area. I was passionate about writing, literature, and mentoring young people in their journeys to express their voices. My time at the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP) with esteemed faculty and practitioner-scholars such as Larry Cuban, Lee Shulman, and Linda Darling-Hammond made me aware that school reform was never easy but was always necessary to achieve what is best for kids at the margins whose voices need to be heard.

When I found out from the department chair at San José State University (SJSU) that I had an office mate, Dr. Duckor, I didn’t think much about it. I thought it might be nice to talk shop about working with pre-service teachers in the credential program with him. From that first day, however, as Brent and I started talking, it became clear we shared the same core values in teacher education and the teaching profession: Strive to teach teachers to find the power of their ideas in the work of activating and honoring the habits of heart, mind, and work of the young people they serve. There was a strange familiarity to the way Brent talked about what he called “the work.” We also discovered we shared a vision about the power of formative assessment, the importance of formative feedback, and fostering curiosity with learning to learn. Key to it all was a passion for authentic classroom projects, tasks, and activities. It was uncanny to share so much in common with a colleague I had just met.

And then Brent shared with me that he taught at Central Park East Secondary School in New York City—a school that literally formed the core curriculum of our teacher education program at Stanford. My jaw dropped. I got it! Brent and I spoke a similar language because we shared a similar experience of progressive democratic education. We both connected to the

promise of education to make a difference for children who've been marginalized and, too often, left behind by those seeking more accountability and results but not always real, authentic improvement in the lives of actual children and young people.

It was clear from the start that Brent and I both believed strongly in authentic assessment and the crucial role of using meaningful tasks to bring school to life for all children. Our conversations moved quickly in those days. We believe today, as much as we did in those days, in new ways of working and thinking about schools and schooling. We believe at our core in growth, change, and development—what today some call *continuous improvement*. We hold these beliefs and values today because of the mentors who guided us in the past. In the buildings where we began our careers, we saw and learned from professionals in every department. Faculty, staff, and parents helped to form us. We now recognize that because we were supported as beginning teachers—at Wilcox and at Central Park East Secondary—by phenomenal colleagues, staff, parents/guardians, and administrators, we became better teachers over the years.

Looking back on our service to the teacher education program at San José State University, we realized we had met for a reason. We had stories to share about our deepest convictions about what the purpose of schooling is. Then and now we maintain: Feedback is a purpose—perhaps *the* purpose—of why we teach.

Connection Through a Special School: Central Park East Secondary School

I didn't meet Brent until 2011. As it turns out, when I was a graduate student at Stanford in the mid-1990s, I was introduced to Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS), the acclaimed small school in East Harlem founded by Deborah Meier, in our “Foundations of Learning” course. The instructor was none other than Lee Shulman. He spoke reverently of CPESS, a school centered around helping young Black and Hispanic teens use their hearts and minds well. By embodying and exercising five habits of mind (connection, perspective, evidence, supposition, and relevance), these young people were accomplishing tremendous things in a world that seemed to (and at times, did) stand in their way.

In Dr. Shulman's class, we watched the documentaries, read the books, and discussed the implications of reforms in this small school in East Harlem that captivated the world. How did these public school teachers do it? Who were they? Why were they successful? These questions burned as we discussed them in our seminar that featured *The Power of Their Ideas* (1995) by Debbie Meier.

We decided that everything came back to the ways students were positioned to question the world they lived in. These students were invited daily, even pushed at times, to ask in every classroom

- ▶ How is this event or idea connected to others? What causes what? (Connection)
- ▶ From whose point of view is this being presented? (Perspective)
- ▶ How do we know what we know? (Evidence)
- ▶ What if things were different? (Supposition)
- ▶ Who cares? So what? Why is this important? (Relevance)

As an organizing principle and anchor for all formal and informal assessments, the habits of mind fascinated me. I had never been to such a school nor was my experience of any curriculum quite like theirs. Was this part of the secret of deeper learning in places like the Coalition of Essential Schools, a movement we learned started with Ted Sizer and Debbie Meier as they advocated for the deeper educational purposes of private and public schools in a thriving democracy? Dewey started making more sense in these school examples than much of the content of my own—quite honestly—privileged, comprehensive, mainstream, traditional education.

Teachers at CPESS, Professor Shulman told us, cultivated a culture of revision with their students, an ethos that was schoolwide. Teachers knew all their students well; they worked tirelessly on cultivating relationships built upon foundations of trust, respect, and resilience. Every teacher had a number of advisees they were responsible for mentoring and with whom they forged deep connections over the years. One of those former advisees reached out to Brent recently and we remarked how everyone's lives were *still* being changed by their experience at CPESS!

Assessment was by portfolio in these high schools, and students defended their work publicly—in front of other faculty, adults, parent/guardians, and peers. Revision was a key to the students' and therefore these schools' success. That much became clear as we read about what students at CPESS were expected to know and be able to do with their middle and high school work. Hearing all this while I was student teaching at Wilcox—a large, traditional, comprehensive high school in Northern California—I wondered, “What would it be like to teach young people using these five habits of mind in different circumstances?”

By the time I joined SJSU's department of secondary education (now the department of teacher education), I had already had half a dozen student teachers and had been coaching beginning teachers for years after having left Wilcox High School. While working as a coach with beginning teachers as part of a nationally recognized induction program, I noticed that assessment for learning was as important as content knowledge or what some called classroom management skills. In fact, it was utterly clear to me that the practice of formative assessment was the way to improve, as Lee Shulman calls it, the development of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

Teaching pre-service teachers in a single-subject credential program across eight academic disciplines forced me to step outside of my own

subject matter expertise (English language arts) and start coaching others in science, math, art, music, history, world languages, and physical education to engage their students with authentic assessment practices. We talk a lot about the meaning of engagement in my courses and field supervision seminars at SJSU. I found that real engagement starts when we begin learning how to learn from our students—the power of their ideas as they exhibit their habits of mind and heart. Again, giving and taking up feedback is indispensable to authentic engagement with the content and processes of learning.

After many years of working as a teacher educator and mentor, several questions emerged in my own professional practice: How can I help novice teachers become better at differentiating feedback with their students than I had been with my own students when starting out? What tools and scaffolds do my credential candidates need to know and be able to do to lean into the art of feedback without becoming overwhelmed or exhausted? Can teachers' learning processes with formative feedback be accelerated? Can teachers feel more connected with their students by experiencing the processes and cycles of feedback?

Working with all sorts of teachers from a multiplicity of backgrounds and orientations in our diverse dynamic communities, I soon realized we needed to work together as a teaching profession to answer these questions. Importantly, we also bring different perspectives and expertise on what makes feedback so powerful. We need to dialogue about feedback as educators in our communities with policymakers and leaders. It is time to put feedback at the center of policy talk about what matters. Achieving our dreams of equity and excellence requires that we start getting real about feedback—its importance to students' growth and lives—and that we are given spaces and time to do the work, both individually and in teams.

Connecting With Every Student

Brent and I write together because we hope to achieve a balance: part provocation and part invitation. You will notice that we take risks. We are co-authors because we believe in shared voices born from different experiences and dispositions. We want you to understand that we understand we are making claims that are subject to dispute.

Even as you may argue with—and potentially reject—some of the ideas or suggestions in this book, I want you to trust that what we've put forth here is offered in the spirit of continuous improvement in the classroom *for all*—not only students we may connect with easily, not only students who may be like us in one way or another, not only students we may find especially interesting, not only students who may be easygoing or make our lives easier—but for *all* students. Each student is a unique, precious human being. And everyone has something to teach their teacher.

Feedback is, in point of fact, for all. Feedback can open up new possibilities for children, adolescents, and young adults. And it can be just as satisfying for us, their guides, as it is for the next generation of students

who teach us. In public schools in democratic nations especially, feedback for all (skillfully practiced) can play a critical role for the common good. Feedback for all can also change the trajectories of the lives of individuals for the better. This, too, drives our passion for feedback as we press everyone in these pages to leave the world a better place than we found it.

Our Wish for You

May the new things you try with feedback—whether inspired by this book, your colleagues, or something else altogether—be imbued with curiosity, care, creativity, and new possibilities. May you connect with young people over projects, performances, and authentic learning experiences in ways you had not yet imagined. May feedback help you influence lives in positive and profound ways.

—Carrie

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