Preface

The number-one investment an instructional leader can make is in strengthening teachers. Our goal in writing this book is to clearly communicate the case for implementing quality feedback—improved teacher practice leading to increased student learning—a timely message in the ever-changing and evolving context of accountability and teacher evaluation. This book serves as a helpful guide for practitioners to know how to transfer knowledge into practice in order to support teacher growth that leads to student improvement.

With the current polarity in the field of education and tension between professional learning and evaluation and accountability, the ensuing reforms will call for changes to teacher practice as well as changes for the instructional leaders who support teachers. Professional learning must be adapted to prepare teachers for these reforms. We must all engage in professional learning that has an effect on teacher and student learning. Many districts and schools are struggling to balance ways to both develop and evaluate teachers. We encourage taking a formative approach to teacher evaluation that is focused on growth and improvement versus evaluation. Instructional leaders need scaffolds and supports to get to the level of providing quality formative feedback, and this book offers a framework for guiding the process.

Although we reference relevant research, the majority of our advice stems from our combined 31 years of working in the field as educators and instructional leaders. This book is really about creating a system of feedback where it is offered to teachers in all realms of their profession, not just through the occasional observation. In turn, we discuss the expectation that feedback operates best in a cyclical nature—a give-and-take between instructional leaders and teachers. Teaching is not just a job where you amass a list of strategies; leadership is not just a role where we *do* to others. Our focus on feedback is designed to improve teacher practice, which will ultimately increase student learning, as well as build the capacity of all educators involved.

Districtwide and schoolwide professional development can sometimes seem disjointed as educators go about addressing varying needs. Instead of trying to put all of the pieces together, do one thing really well: create a cycle driven by quality feedback among the professionals in the school or district. All school districts can implement the ideas in this book to enhance their existing teacher support system. This text takes a flexible approach to preparing and strengthening teachers professionally. As instructional leaders ourselves, we have written this book with instructional leaders in mind. We hope to provide tools and strategies that will enhance the great work you are already doing.

OUR FEEDBACK CYCLE

After submitting our prospectus to write this book, we got to experience first-hand the brutality of feedback. A reviewer wrote this exact statement, in all caps: "ARE THESE TWO SERIOUS. THEY MIGHT AS WELL QUIT NOW."

Our default reaction was to take it personally, but once the initial shock wore off, we were more determined than ever to strengthen our writing. The feedback was something we could address, work with, respond to, and use to make our content even better. Those first reviews solicited an emotional response. We absolutely experienced a touch of feeling emotionally hijacked, which Goleman (2005) described as a neural takeover in the amygdala (p. 14) but we described as being kicked in the gut. After the sting wore off and we checked our emotions, we were able to respond cognitively and get down to the business of making the recommended changes based on the feedback provided.

Feedback played a major role in how we revisited the manuscript while writing this book. More than a dozen blind reviewers provided written feedback after submission of our manuscript and prospectus—plus we received feedback from Corwin editors. In addition, Dr. Pam Robbins (author of several books, including *Peer Coaching to Enrich Professional Practice, School Culture, and Student Learning*, and *The Principal's Companion: Strategies to Lead Schools for Teacher and Student Success*) offered verbal feedback during phone conversations.

Ultimately, it was our choice to incorporate the feedback, for it was not mandated, and there were no severe consequences if we chose not to use the feedback provided. We actually used our Characteristics of Quality Feedback chart (Figure 1.2; also found in Appendix A) and filtered the feedback through that lens. The manner in which the feedback was delivered mattered to us. When the feedback was clear, specific, detailed, action-oriented, we were more likely to incorporate it. Accountability mattered,

too. Did we trust the feedback provider? In Pam's case, we have a relationship with her. When it came to the blind reviewers' feedback, because we were privy to the job titles of reviewers, we were receptive to that feedback as well. We filtered and compiled feedback that was in common first—we figured if a handful of reviewers made the same statements that we should pay attention. It came to a point where time was a factor, so we also had to decide to prioritize and just let some things go that we felt would not have a large impact on the overall vision of the book.

What if our reviewers, editors, and mentors offered feedback that only sounded like this: *Great job! Cannot wait to read your book! It must have taken you forever to write this. It seems like a good read.* This type of short, nondescript, solely positive feedback would not have helped us edit or make adjustments to our writing.

Our own process with receiving feedback must be akin to how teachers dissect and disarm the feedback we offer as instructional leaders. Do they trust us and the feedback we provide? Are they more likely to incorporate feedback that is action-oriented? Do teachers prioritize the feedback they are offered and pay attention only to the top items they can attend to in a given time frame? With these questions in mind, we provide learning structures through which instructional leaders can offer quality feedback in a manner that strengthens teacher practice.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The organizational structure for the book is designed to appeal to instructional leaders, including principals, administrators, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, mentors, and induction facilitators. This book may also be used in higher-ed principalship programs and teacher leadership programs as a text for coaching future instructional leaders regarding how to provide quality feedback to strengthen teacher practice. Research is interwoven with practical advice, artifacts, and authentic scenarios, allowing the reader to easily envision theory into practice.

Chapters 1 through 3 create a compelling case for the immediate implementation of the ideas in this book through the integration of impact data and related research and studies. We discuss effective ways to increase the caliber of instruction through quality feedback and share beliefs about professional learning and creating the conditions within a school or district that allow for the cycle of feedback we describe throughout the book to occur.

In Chapters 4 through 6, we describe "categories" of teachers and acknowledge the belief that teachers can move along a continuum of

professional growth. Labels, either self-imposed or otherwise, do not have to become or remain a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is simple human nature that people have the urge to improve. This section provides instructional leaders with the tools necessary to grow teachers along the professional continuum.

In Chapters 7 through 9, we provide evidence from both personal experience and research that quality feedback is the key to teachers improving their practice. Each chapter in this section focuses on a different avenue for professional learning: teacher-created assessments, classroom observations, and videotaped observations. Numerous professional learning opportunities are described in each of these three chapters.

Each chapter contains the following items:

- A brief summary of research and related studies to provide context and set purpose for the chapter.
- Detailed descriptions of professional learning opportunities to support teacher growth are provided.
- Anecdotes from the authors' experiences and the experiences of teachers we have worked with, framed as Administrator's Turn, Coach's Turn, and Teacher's Turn.
- Artifacts of the quality feedback we have provided for teachers with whom we've worked over the years are included in relevant chapters.

Unique features of this book include the following:

- Examples of specific feedback drawn from practice in authentic settings.
- Different points of view (administrator, coach, and teacher).
- Clearly articulated definition of quality feedback, sample artifacts, and conversation exchanges between teachers and administrators.
- Artifacts (in the Appendices) comprising documents and examples of quality feedback that instructional leaders may use to guide their professional learning.
- "From Words to Action" graphics at the end of each chapter in order to provide a simple, visual planning tool.