

## Supporting Distanced Teaching and Learning Through Feedback that Feeds Forward A 4-part Series by Amy Tepper & Patrick Flynn

### Part 4: Cultivating a Culture of Learning

**Mindfully plan for effective observation and feedback** (*Learner-Focused Feedback Strategy 1*)

**Understand how learners learn** (*Learner-Focused Feedback Strategy 4*)

**Understand how teachers create outcomes** (*Learner-Focused Feedback Strategy 5*)

**Build on teachers' needs and strengths** (*Feedback to Feed Forward Strategy 31*)

Whether we are in the physical halls and walls of our schools, virtual environments, or somewhere in between, the cultivation of a culture of learning remains essential to our students' success because we strive for the following attributes:

- 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 (Tepper & Flynn, 2020)

At the outset of school closures, everyone was in a much-needed response mode—working to ensure teaching and learning could continue. We were all in crisis management. (And sadly some will remain there until larger solutions are found.) However, for those schools who are able, it is important to now shift from a survival, short-term response that was required for immediate implementation, and begin to take action toward a longer-range vision and plan. It is time for those schools (teachers, coaches, and administrators) to reflect on the impact of the teaching and learning and support teachers and students now, and toward our next new normal, building a culture of learning.

The better informed we are about elements such as,

- levels of student participation and engagement
- quality of instruction and assessment
- needs of teachers in adapting to virtual environments to meet student needs
- student mastery of concepts
- levels of success in implementation and learning

And **why** and how we are creating the outcomes,

- the more impactful our feedback to teachers will become, ultimately influencing student success
- the more realistic and attainable our vision, plan, and goals for teachers and learners will become
- the more we can continue to cultivate a culture of learning even in challenging times

In Part 2, we provided you with a critical resource for supporting your teachers—*The 4 Stages of the Shift to Online Teaching and Learning*. In Part 3, we provided strategies for gathering information about the teaching and learning occurring to help you collaboratively identify stages as entry points, promote teacher reflection, and provide feedback for next steps. We are finding many teachers and leaders have moved beyond “Acceptance” or our Stage 1 and are ready to think about “What’s Next.”

**A Culture of Observation & Feedback**

Administrators, coaches, and peers have been supporting teachers through classroom visits and through video-based observation for years, on a journey towards open doors and open minds. Now with purposeful adaptations, and collegial and collaborative discourse using our tools and strategies, opportunities to provide feedback for growth can be maximized and a culture can be shifted (or further cultivated) along with practices. We can continue to build a culture of observation and feedback for growth.

Learner-focused feedback that feeds forward is a key driver of a culture of learning, but never before has feedback to support teachers been more essential. Teachers need feedback that

- Goes beyond summarizing events to engaging in an analysis of effectiveness
- Allows them to accurately and clearly see how they are impacting learners
- Leads to improved reflection, instructional practices, and outcomes.

(Tepper & Flynn, 2019, 2020)

Regardless of whether you are providing written or verbal feedback or whether your students are working asynchronously or synchronously (or a combination of either), you can still ensure the above criteria is met.

In our feedback examples provided below, pay close attention to our aligned strategies

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**Understand how learners learn** (*Learner-Focused Feedback Strategy 4*)

**Understand how teachers create outcomes** (*Learner-Focused Feedback Strategy 5*)

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and how we promote analysis, understanding of impact, and improved reflection and practices.

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**Example 1 Written Feedback - Synchronous Learning**

Coach's written feedback sample supporting a teacher moving from Stage 2-3

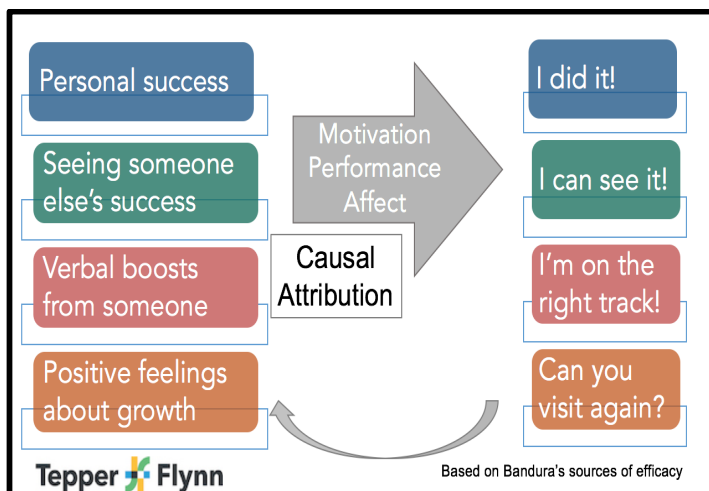
(based on information gathering and analysis in Part 2)

**Example 2 - Verbal Feedback - Asynchronous Learning**

Assistant principal's pre- and post-conversation thinking/notes supporting a teacher moving from Stage 2-3

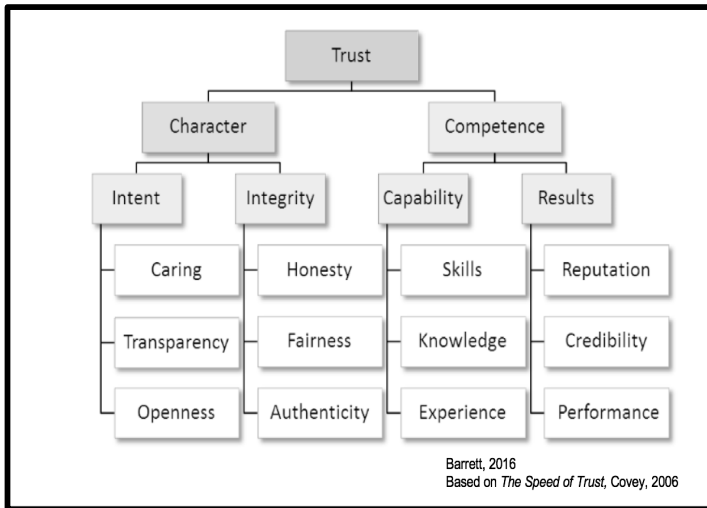
**The Power of Feedback**

Feedback from peers, coaches, and leaders that meets our criteria drives a culture of learning because it ensures foundations are built: trust, self- and collective-efficacy, and support in times of challenge. We



**Increase Efficacy**

**Teachers on their own and on their teams must believe their actions in the virtual world can have a positive impact on their learners, even though many feel like first-year teachers in the shift.**



## Increase Trust

Teachers need to trust that anyone “visiting” their classrooms has positive intentions, and visitors must be honest and accurate to serve as valuable resources and think partners.



## Increase Support

In times of challenge, teachers require frequent, individualized, and collaborative feedback about their impact on learning. In times of stress, “support” is needed more than ever, looks different for each teacher, and includes ongoing wellness checks.

## Steps to Take

As you move forward begin with planning and communication. Mindfully plan your observation and feedback and communicate with staff to build a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning (Parts 1 & 2 of our series), ensure transparency about process and set protocols and expectations for your classroom visits (Part 3 of our series). You will achieve this through the following 6 steps:

1. Collaboratively review and unpack [our 4 Stages](#) to:
  - a. Identify entry points and team needs and strengths (celebrating successes).
  - b. Set goals and expectations and create a vision of what is possible ahead.
  - c. Allow teachers to self-reflect.
  - d. Identify “look fors” to support leaders, coaches, and peers in their information gathering.
  - e. Explore learners’ actions and needs as virtual or blended learners and how they are learning currently.
2. Help teachers identify one standard or learner outcome that challenges them and offer support as they work to grow in that focus area.

3. Help teachers make connections to their professional goals/ongoing professional learning (those from before the school closures).
4. Design professional learning days in alignment to needs, behaviors, and standards in our stages to organize and target resources and support.
5. Create opportunities for teachers to share effective practices, tools, and strategies to help each other move through the stages and meet learners' needs together (e.g. a virtual pineapple board).
6. Create opportunities for peers, coaches, and administrators to engage in virtual visits, information gathering, and student work review to provide feedback to teachers using similar modalities teachers are using for providing feedback to students (e.g. video conferencing, voice Memos, emails, in groups, through peer feedback).

## Conclusion

We created this 4-part series to address the immediate impact of COVID-19 and the dramatic shift schools were making to online teaching and learning. However, as states and districts grapple with short- and long-term decisions for the future, and some implementation of virtual school remains as a reality, you will find our tools and strategies will carry you well into your next new normal.

We ended *Learner-Focused Feedback* with a set of belief statements that remain true within our new world.

- We believe that every student deserves the opportunity to thrive inside a culture of learning that cultivates motivation and the confidence to learn.
- We believe that every school and classroom environment can and should be set up to provide students with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and tools they need to truly own their own learning.
- We believe all teachers deserve the feedback they need to learn and grow as professionals, building their own knowledge, skills, dispositions, and tools to ensure that all students have access to high-quality teaching in the classroom.

Regardless of where we provide instruction, we can meet our learners and teachers where they are and create a culture of learning for all.

## Suggested Reading

Our Blog [The Times They are a Changin'](#)

*Feedback to Feed Forward: 31 Strategies to Lead Learning* (2019), Amy Tepper & Patrick Flynn  
Systems & Leadership Chapter 1, p. 9-10, Chapter 7, p. 190-193  
Building on Strengths & Promoting Reflective Practices Chapters 5 & 6

*Learner-Focused Feedback: 19 Strategies to Observe for Impact* (2020), Amy Tepper & Patrick Flynn  
Building a Culture of Learning Chapters 1 & 6

## References

Tepper, A., & Flynn, P. (2019). *Feedback to feed forward: 31 strategies to lead learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Tepper, A., & Flynn, P. (2020). *Learner-focused feedback: 19 strategies to observe for impact*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.