CHAPTER 2

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CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

A New Lens on Social Justice Capacity Building

There is no question that the work of school leadership is challenging or that achieving high-quality education for all children in schools is strongly tied to the capacity of education leaders.

—Michelle Young, Ann O'Doherty, and
Kathleen Cunningham (2022, p. 1)

As leadership scholars Michelle Young, Ann O'Doherty, and Kathleen Cunningham (2022) argue in their book, *Redesigning Educational Leadership Preparation for Equity*, educational leaders require sophisticated capacities to meet the urgencies and imperatives of educating for greater justice and equity. Yet, what *are* these capacities—and how do leaders develop them? Although research is beginning to surface factors that can influence the knowledge, skills, and dispositions educational leaders bring to social justice practice—such as race, culture and identity, lived experience, and explicit training (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Brooks, 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2008; Sleeter, 2016)—less is known about the role that leaders' *internal, developmental capacities* play in this important dimension of their leadership. As the collective body of social justice scholarship makes clear, it is not just what educators *do* in classrooms, schools, and districts that counts, but also their *thinking, feeling,* and *sensemaking* that matters for effective practice (e.g., Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Crowley, 2016; Gooden & O'Doherty,

2015; Khalifa, 2018; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010; Sleeter, 2016; Sue, 2010; Zembylas, 2010).

In this chapter, we dive deeply into constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016) as one promising lens for considering social justice capacity building *on the inside*—as well as the connection between inner meaning making and external action. Like theories of racial and social identity development, constructive-developmental theory posits that development progresses in a cumulative though fluid order—like a building wave—with gradual movement from one way of knowing (or meaning making system) to the next reflecting increases in a person's cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). As we will discuss, growing our ways of knowing involves changes in what we know, how we know it, and how we understand ourselves and others. We have also found in our research that ways of knowing hold implications for how leaders—and adults across all levels of the educational system—orient to and understand equity and diversity and what it means (from their perspectives) to lead for social justice.

GROWTH—AND GIFTS—ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

One of the gifts of constructive-developmental theory is that it helps us to look closely at an individual's meaning making system—or how they take in and make sense of their experiences. It also gives us a language to discuss things that we may have observed before but could not name. There's a whole internal system that exists in each of us, and it can be incredibly powerful and helpful to understand that we might have different internal capacities than our neighbors. Understanding this can also, we hope, help more people find ways into the vital work of centering justice in schools and society—and grow their practice with even greater intentionality.

In this spirit of finding new entry points—and new possibilities and pathways for growth—constructive-developmental theory also serves as an important reminder that, as adults, our learning journeys are never "done." Despite the care and attention educators often devote to child and adolescent development, it is only fairly recently that the education sector has begun to recognize the parallel importance of supporting *adult* learning and development—because of its inherent value *and* its promising link to improved student outcomes and experiences (Donaldson, 2008; Gill, 2019; Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021; Guskey, 1999; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Mizell, 2007; Wagner, 2007).

Just a few decades ago, adulthood was conceptualized as a life stage in which brain development was largely complete (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016). We certainly understand that, by age 25, certain parts of the human brain have likely reached a maturity of sorts, but could you imagine if adults *really*

stopped developing with so much potential life ahead? Fortunately, recent advances in psychology and neuroscience suggest an incredible range of neural plasticity in the adult brain, as well as a general increase in mental complexity as we age (Immordino-Yang, 2015; Immordino-Yang & Knecht, 2020; Immordino-Yang et al., 2018; Johnson, 2022; Kegan & Lahey, 2016; Rock, 2010; Rock & Grant, 2016; Rock & Page, 2009). We see this as the best news, in that all of us—everyone—can keep learning and growing.

As the educators in our graduate classes and professional development institutes often attest, there seems to be a shared sense in schools that adults can—and must—keep learning new facts and information, but there is also a unique exasperation that can bubble up when working with adults who don't meet expectations or seem to push back against very important requests and nonnegotiables, especially when it comes to (in)equity. Given educators' positions of great responsibility, we completely understand (and have certainly shared at times) the impulse to ask, "Shouldn't you know or be able to do this already? Aren't you a *grown up*?" Or, "If you know X to be true, how come you can't do Y?" And the fact is, sometimes people can't—yet. *But*, and we want to underline this, we can continue to grow *if* we have *both* supports and appropriate pushes or developmental stretching, and in this there is great hope. This matters in general—and it matters for justice-centering leadership and social justice in particular.

Without diminishing the urgency, we have come to see constructive-developmental theory as an underutilized roadmap for seeing into, reframing, and addressing resistance; better understanding the gap that can exist between knowing and doing; and (re)investing in human potential. For example, though not a guarantee of any particular moral commitment, value stance, or political leaning, developing in the ways described in this chapter and book can help educators bring a greater *readiness* to equity learning—including the intrapersonal reflection, emotional vulnerability, critical humility, and intellectual flexibility required to embrace discomfort and more transformative possibilities. Letting go of old ways of thinking and seeing is never easy. Development, however, can arm leaders with the prerequisite capacities needed to risk real change—in themselves, in their practice, and in the world. As leadership scholars Karen Osterman and Robert Kottkamp (1993) reminded us long ago, real change in organizations truly does begin with us.

Ultimately, and as we will continue to explore, constructive-developmental theory can help us differentiate the supports and challenges we offer to each other as we work to manage complexity, examine assumptions, and more fully center justice in schools and society. It can, as one leader recently shared with us after learning about these ideas, "help infuse a compassionate, purposeful pause" between one's first reactions and external responses. It can also, as Robert Kegan (1982) argued when first articulating the theory, help us move "further into life, [and] closer to those we live with" with our new understandings because "what the eye sees better the heart feels more

deeply" (p. 16). We hope that—by making more visible some of the under-the-surface aspects of developmental diversity—the explorations in this chapter can, indeed, help us look about and within with ever more compassionate ways of seeing, feeling, connecting, and being.

THE ROOTS AND BRANCHES OF CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

The Roots: An Expansively Inclusive, Integrative Lens

Pioneered by developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1982, 1994, 2000) and extended into schools by professor and leadership scholar Eleanor Drago-Severson (1996, 2004b, 2009, 2012), constructive-developmental theory draws from more than forty-five years of research about how people learn and grow—and posits a shape and trajectory of development across the lifespan that traverses cultures and continents (e.g., Basseches, 1984; Baxter-Magolda, 1992, 2009; Belenky et al., 1997; Drago-Severson, 1996, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016; Knefelkamp & David-Lang, 2000; Kohlberg, 1969, 1984; Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1952).

In pursuit of a kind of "metapsychology" (Kegan, 1982, p. 14) that would break down some of the intellectual silos between academic studies and clinical practice, Kegan—when first articulating the theory in the early 1980s—strove to look *across* prominent theories of development at the time to more holistically describe the "fundamental motion" of life or, more specifically, what he called the "evolution of meaning" (p. 15). Integrating biological, cognitive, psychological, social, and affective lines of study and thought—and drawing on insights from Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jane Loevinger, Abraham Maslow, David McClelland, and Erik Erikson (as well as many lessons about the human experience from poetry, literature, the visual arts, and spiritual thinkers)—Kegan worked to bring together the principles of *constructivism* and *developmentalism,* which were regularly discussed in the field but typically considered separately.

By bringing these two big areas of focus together (and hence the hyphenated term *constructive-developmental*), Kegan helped foreground the idea that although all people actively *construct* their realities—meaning that their ways of seeing, feeling, thinking about, and understanding the world all stem from their personal interpretations of the phenomena around them (as opposed to, say, there being one objective truth)—the complexity of these constructions can continue to *develop* when people benefit from the right combination of supports and challenges. In other words, even though people construct their worlds in one way one day, they are still free to construct—and make sense of—their experiences differently tomorrow, and also the day after that, and the day after that, too.

This, as we will continue to discuss throughout this chapter and book, is all possible provided that growth-enhancing conditions exist. Importantly,

constructive-developmental theory helps us see that adults will need *different* kinds of supports and challenges—or developmental stretching—to grow. We offer our deep and sincere gratitude to and for Robert Kegan for underscoring this foundational developmental insight for the world.

The Branches: Theoretical Extensions and Connections

Today, constructive-developmental theory has been studied and applied across sectors—and tested with thousands of adults from around the globe. In our own teaching and research, for instance, we have found constructive-developmental theory to be an incredibly powerful lens for enhancing school leadership, leadership development, collaboration, feedback, coaching, mindfulness, supervision, and the design of professional learning experiences, just to name a few (e.g., Drago-Severson, 1996, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Drago-Severson, Roy, & von Frank, 2015). Although we certainly would not argue that constructive-developmental theory, as a singular lens, explains *all* of experience, we do find the theory flexible, fluid, and epistemologically roomy enough to serve as one organizing, integrative framework for many diverse and distinct streams of thought and areas of focus. Constructive-developmental theory's capacity to bring and hold together ideas from different fields has felt especially important and exciting as we explored its applicability as a lens for growing social justice leaders (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Brooks Lawrence, 2020, 2021, 2022).

More specifically, as we re-immersed ourselves in the literatures about identity, development, and justice in schools and society, we were eager, like Kegan, to look *across* academic, psychological, and critical theories—and we sought to cast an even wider net in relation to the ideas and lenses that could inform our theoretical perspective. With an eye out for potential connections, parallels, synergies, and discrepancies, we looked to the following (by way of a few examples):

- different pathways and conceptualizations of racial identity development (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 2013, 2017; Cross, 1995; DiAngelo, 2018, 2021; Helms, 2020; Holvino, 2012; Singh, 2019; Tatum, 2013, 2017; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012);

- the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970/2000);

- diverse cultural and epistemological conceptualizations of knowledge and selfhood (e.g., Merriam & Associates, 2007);

- frameworks for developing racial literacy and engaging in conversations about race and identity (e.g., Magee, 2019; Price-Dennis & Sealy-Ruiz, 2021; Singleton, 2014; Vulchi & Guo, 2019);

- women of color feminisms and threshold theorizing (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2002, 2015; Collins, 2022; Keating, 2013);

- the directionality of social movements and advocacy (e.g., Almeida, 2019; Harro, 2013; Staggenborg, 2016); and

- articulations of culturally responsive/sustaining teaching and leading (e.g., DeMatthews, 2018; Gay, 2010; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Although each of these important areas of study reveals different and vitally essential aspects of life, teaching, leadership, and experience—and, together, they represent just the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it comes to the vast universe of ideas, lenses, and thinkers important to cover and consider within and beyond these disciplinary foci—looking across different literatures helped us to recognize the ways constructive-developmental theory could potentially serve as one integrative *meta-story* of development that could weave together key parts of justice-centering leadership and offer a kind of sequence and pathway toward growing one's capacities and greater effectiveness. Just like people, theories can also grow to hold and include more!

In particular, we found that constructive-developmental theory offers a clear and simple language for naming—and bringing together—some of the important concepts that run across different theories and approaches. Though certainly not the *only* words or terms we could use, we once again recognized, in different parts of the social justice literature, the importance of both *constructivism* and *developmentalism*—as well as the vital role of *perspective taking* (on self, others, history, the educational system, and society) when leading for greater equity, inclusion, and justice.

For example, Glenn Singleton's (2014) pioneering work around *Courageous Conversations* has made mainstream the idea that people often, and sometimes unknowingly, enter into conversations about race, identity, and social justice with different epistemological and affective constructions—namely emotional, intellectual, moral, and/or action-oriented "compass points" (p. 29). Likewise, theories of racial and social identity development (e.g., Cross, 1995; Helms, 2020; Singh, 2019; Tatum, 2013, 2017; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012) illustrate how disentangling oneself from—and taking greater perspective on—externally imposed, hegemonic narratives about one's racial group and developing a positive racial identity is an ongoing process that will develop and unfold differently for different people at different times, just as the trajectory will be different for people of color and white people in a racist society. Both bodies of literature underscore how bringing under-the-surface, less-visible orientations into more conscious awareness—for individuals and groups—can help people more intentionally come together and scaffold justice work, as it presupposes the need for different entry points, supports, and contexts for ongoing learning.

Likewise, in *The Inner Work of Racial Justice*, law professor and restorative facilitator Rhonda Magee (2019) makes a compelling case for mindful practices

as a way to continually see race, history, and identity "through a wider aperture" (p. 114). By recognizing race as a construct, she argues, and by examining our own constructions as engineered (rather than absolute or universal), we can begin to deconstruct and reconstruct historical and personal understandings in ways that wake up "a new power for navigating the world" with and for one another (p. 37). Doing this inner work, she explains, is intimately connected to the broader healing action that is or is not possible in society.

Although constructive-developmental theory may use different terminology and framing than some of the theorists above, running underneath and through the different lenses, we argue, is an emphasis on expanding one's capacities and consciousness as a vehicle for more transformative action (i.e., moving from the local and immediate to broader and ever more inclusive ranges of vision, agency, and understanding; moving away from the unconscious acceptance of societal expectations toward more interconnected understandings of self, society, and the world). As we will discuss next, constructive-developmental theory gives further shape and form to these developmental processes, as it is predicated on the idea that as we grow through the different ways of knowing, we are actually shifting—in a particular order—the balance between what we are run by, in the psychological sense, and what we can actively take a perspective on and hold out as object about ourselves, others, and society. When we shift our *subject-object balance* in these ways, we are less controlled by unconscious assumptions, worldviews, norms, and patterns of acting and feeling that no longer serve us or others well—and we are more free to be the biggest versions of ourselves.

THE SHAPE—AND PACE—OF GROWTH

When Kegan (1982) first visualized constructive-developmental theory, he depicted it as a helix, with development involving the gradual movement upward and back and forth along a spiral. There is so much we love about this shape. The implied flex of a helix, like a spring, mirrors the ways we can sometimes stretch up toward greater capacities (especially with help) and also those times when we may fall back and feel more compressed, unable or uninvited to lead (for any variety of reasons) with our most complex ways of being in the world. Often, when teaching about constructive-developmental theory, we like to encourage educators to imagine the helix as a spiral staircase: Moving "up" doesn't make you an intrinsically better or more valuable person, but it *does* give you a different view of the world and yourself. It also helps capture the idea that, no matter where you are on the "staircase," you can look back to remember what it was like to be standing on a prior step, and you can look up—even if you can't yet peek fully around the bends and curves of the steps ahead—to see what it looks like to demonstrate capacities you might not yet have. As we gain perspective, we are able to see more, without and within.

Building on and expanding these ideas, we have come to see the shape of constructive-developmental theory more like a *gyre*—a conical helix—in

which each upward return on the spiral not only moves higher, but also gets bigger, as it holds more. We see this particular kind of spiral—which we depict in Figure 2.1—like a fractal, a special kind of *growing shape* that is mirrored on the smallest and largest of scales in the world around us, in the swirls of shells and ancient fossils, the expanses of distant galaxies, and the precision of mathematical proportions found all throughout nature.

FIGURE 2.1   THE PATHWAY AND SHAPE OF DEVELOPMENT AS VISUALIZED IN CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY
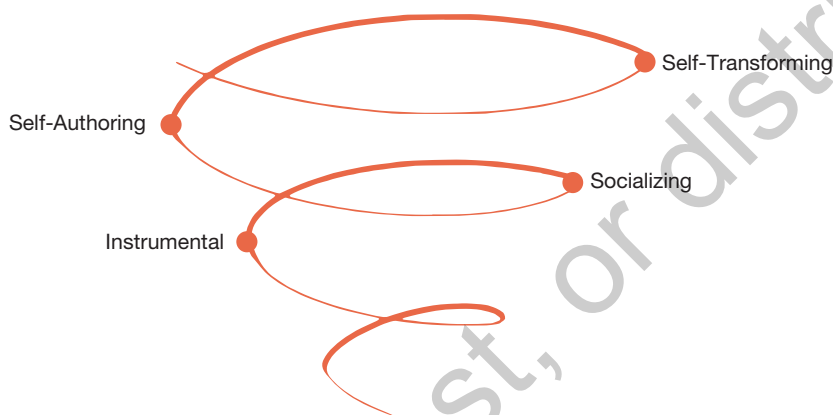
Perhaps most importantly, the gyre makes clear that development is not a linear process, but rather iterative and cyclical. As we grow, we revisit different tensions—between self and other, thinking and feeling, learning and unlearning, knowing and doing—again and again and with new eyes. You might relate, for example, to the experience shared by many people of redefining the boundaries and parameters of adulthood as you move through it. It's so easy to feel like a "real adult" as one first reaches different milestones and lives through life-shaping events, only to look back later at your younger self and think, "Ahh, if I only knew then what I know now. *This here* is adulthood." And then to repeat the process again (and again)! The same holds true, we find, for explorations of self, identity, and justice. As we grow and learn, we come to see these parts of ourselves and experiences from new heights and different vantage points, and in ways that help us build on, extend, and redefine what we'd come to know before.

Growing on Our Own Timelines

The way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one.

—Sandra Cisneros, "Eleven" (1991, pp. 6–7)

Of course, development—as we're talking about it here—doesn't happen with the snap of a finger. It is a process that unfolds over time and with incredible variation within and across people. Much like running a marathon—during which athletes adjust their pace to sprint forward, hold steady, or fall back to recharge as needed—development is a process of continual motion, the pace of which is nonetheless interactive with and continually influenced by circumstances both external and internal.

Central, however, to constructive-developmental theory is the idea that, at different points in life, adults tend to spend significant time in or around particular ways of knowing. In the next section, we will dive more deeply into the four ways of knowing most common in adulthood, which we refer to as the instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming. Before doing so, though, we want to recognize them here as pause points—or plateaus—that punctuate the developmental gyre (quite literally in this case, since they are "dots" on Figure 2.1). Because human beings cannot keep growing (or running, as in a marathon) infinitely uphill, we tend to find temporary "evolutionary truces," as Kegan (1982, p. 28) called them, or adaptive balances that let us rest, in the psychological sense, as we grow into a way of knowing that suits us well. We call this match between a person's meaning making and the demands of the world around them "goodness of fit" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 310). When a way of knowing helps us navigate the challenges and opportunities of our current life circumstances, there is less pressure for change. However, when the limits of our current capacities bump up against external demands that outpace our knowing and doing (as can often happen when working to center justice as a leader), we can find ourselves growing—or wanting to grow—in ways that help us reach a new, more complex balance or plateau.

For this reason, and as we depict in Figure 2.2, moving from one way of knowing to the next isn't a simple or even straightforward jump "up" or ahead. Like the Xs on the diagram, adults can spend a good deal of time *in between* any two ways of knowing, when the earlier way of making meaning is gradually becoming incorporated into the next. For example, as you can see in Figure 2.2, there are three Xs in the space between the socializing and the self-authoring ways of knowing. Growing from one way of knowing to another is a *process,* and in that process of growth there are increases in one's cognitive, affective, intrapersonal, and interpersonal *internal* capacities. Like the beautiful image of aging *as the accumulation of layers of years* that author and Presidential Medal of Arts winner Sandra Cisneros (1991) helped capture in her short story, "Eleven," each new way of knowing incorporates the former into its more expansive system as one grows—from one X on the gyre to the next.

Again, the pace of these transitions is different for everyone and can be different even for the same person at different times in their lives. The hopefulness, though, is that we can all keep growing. And, sometimes people can surprise us by showing us new capacities, understandings, and previously unseen sides of themselves.

FIGURE 2.2 THE WAYS OF KNOWING AND TRANSITIONAL PHASES

Self-Transforming

Self-Authoring

Socializing

Instrumental
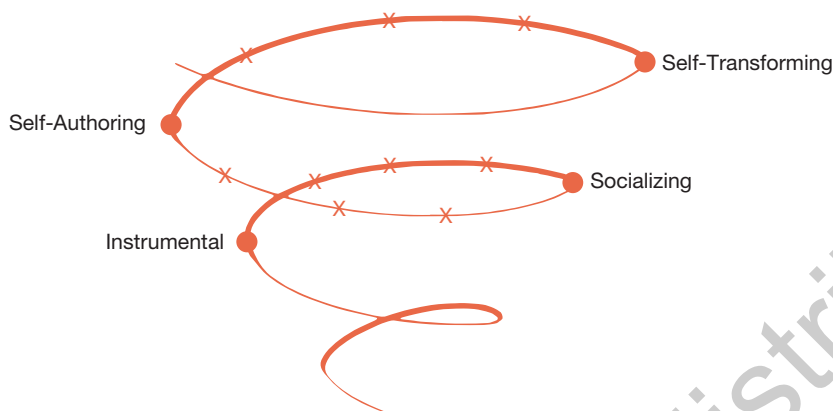
About Growing and Bamboo

Of course, there are certain situations, life events, and experiences that can slow down our growth—and others that can accelerate it. Just as we can care for bamboo for days, weeks, months, and even years and it may look like nothing is happening, all of a sudden, bamboo plants can grow many feet. Sometimes that is what it feels like when we notice new capacities in ourselves or others for the first time. We can look back at our old selves and recognize how much we've grown, on the inside, and see with fresh eyes the new selves we've become and are in the process of becoming.

In the next section, we will continue to explore the different ways of knowing and their connections to justice-centering leadership. First, though, we invite you to engage with the following reflective prompts. We offer them as opportunities to pause and consider your own experiences, as well as what's at the top of your mind and heart right now. You might want to respond to them privately first and then engage in dialogue with a partner and/or group of colleagues.

REFLECTIVE INVITATION

1. What does growth look like for you? What does it feel like? How would you draw it, describe it, or define it?

2. What theories/theorists of growth and development have most influenced your understanding of how people learn and change?

3. Which ideas resonate most for you so far?

4. What questions are you holding?

5. What, if anything, does not coincide with your own thinking and feeling about development?

6. How, if at all, do the ideas presented so far connect to other frameworks that you use in your leadership, your justice-centering leadership, and your life to understand yourself and others?

WAYS OF KNOWING

The only true voyage of discovery . . . would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is.

—Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*

As we have begun to explore, a way of knowing—according to constructive-developmental theory—is a developmental meaning making system that underlies and informs how someone sees, understands, feels about, and orients to the world. Put another way, it's the (often unconscious) internal lens through which a person filters all of life's experiences. Understanding the different ways of knowing more common in adulthood (i.e., the instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming) can help us recognize how our own and others' actions are fueled in large part by our current cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities. In the case of justice-centering leadership, for instance, familiarizing ourselves with the ways of knowing can help us better pinpoint some of the reasons *why* educational leaders may orient to and conceptualize their work differently. In addition, it can help us to understand better why some colleagues *can* do certain things (e.g., take a strong stand on behalf of a personal belief system—even when facing resistance), and others cannot yet do this. Because in any team, organization, or system, developmental diversity will exist. *How* we engage with ourselves and each other will vary qualitatively, and the kinds of supports and stretching we will need to grow on the inside will as well. As such, understanding ways of knowing also helps us carve out pathways for desired learning and growth.

Importantly, although each way of knowing has common strengths and growing edges that live under the surface in our meaning making, the way people "wear" ways of knowing—on the outside—can be as infinitely diverse and unique as the people making meaning with them.

More specifically, a person's way of knowing is *not* correlated with intelligence, kindness, personality, happiness, belief system, or leadership style

(Kegan, Broderick, Drago-Severson, Helsing, Popp, & Portnow, 2001). A person can be incredibly intelligent, happy or unhappy, introverted or extroverted, and make meaning with an instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, or self-transforming way of knowing. Research with people from around the world has also shown that ways of knowing are *not* dictated by race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, socioeconomic status, or any other element of our personal identities. People from all walks of life can make meaning with any of the ways of knowing we will describe. It is also the case, though, and very important to underscore, that the supports and challenges we experience in life—which in turn influence our development—*are* intimately connected to the many intersections of our identities, as are the capacities we are encouraged (or not) to bring to our relationships and professional work. We discuss this confluence and interrelationship, briefly, next.

ON HIGHWAYS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

As pioneering scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2013, 2017) demonstrated in her powerful articulations of intersectionality, people live lives not just in one domain of identity, but at the intersections of all of the different parts of their being, both internally and externally defined. And, especially for people living, learning, and leading from multiply marginalized positionalities, the impact of oppressions can be magnified exponentially. As Crenshaw (2017) explained,

> Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power
> comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not
> simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and
> a class or [LGBTQ] problem there. Many times that framework
> erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these
> things. (paragraph 4)

Yet, just as research has begun to explore how race- *and* gender-based trauma, alongside poverty, can complicate development and thriving for the most vulnerable and marginalized in communities without additional support (e.g., Bridwell, 2013), so too have people speaking and leading from the intersections of oppression (e.g., as Black women) proven to be some of the most wise, needed, and prescient guides for transformation and justice, both historically and today (see Collins, 2022; Muhammad, Dunmeyer, Starks, & Sealey-Ruiz, 2020; Love, 2019). Development, in other words, is *not* predetermined by identity, although identity—along with many other aspects of experience (such as family, culture, education, resources, location, and community)—provides significant context *for* development, in that it can influence the supports, challenges, and opportunities people receive (or not) in the outside world. When thinking about greater justice, then, both in schools and out—as well as development and the human journey of becoming—there exists a call to look, as clearly as possible, at *all* the factors that influence a person's experiences and life chances over time and to make more visible

those parts of experience that can be hidden or obscured, even as things are in flux all around us.

Put another way, when thinking about all the complex, moving parts of development for the people in any team, group, faculty, community, or world, growth in motion can be likened to driving on a mega highway where all different kinds of vehicles are moving at various speeds, eager and ready to get to their destinations. It can be hard, sometimes (and especially when you're in the midst of it), to know or guess where someone else is heading or from whence they came—although it's clear that people are going all kinds of places at many different speeds for many different reasons.

For any one person, it is an exercise in *readiness* to get to a place other than the one you left. However, as you move, you hold onto what you know about the last place you were, adding a layer of understanding of what is to come. This is not a tangential journey of learning and discovery. It is fluid and incremental—and personal—such as when construction pylons are before you and your travel on the highway suddenly becomes a bit slower, allowing for convergence into fewer lanes. For some, this can be a most frustrating delay. For others, it can become an opportunity to take advantage of the slower pace to enjoy a more detailed view of the environment—so much so that when you reach your entry ramp, you do so with a greater appreciation of the uniqueness of the journey.

Sometimes, in development, slowing down is speeding up. At other times, we are ready to rev our engines. Understanding more about adult development and ways of knowing, we hope, can help us see more deeply into the pacing of another's journey and be of good company along the way.

DIFFERENTIATION IS ESSENTIAL

As we will continue to explore, understanding adults' different ways of knowing can help us *differentiate* the kinds of developmental supports and challenges we offer to those in our care as we work to build the internal capacity needed in individuals, schools, and systems to more effectively center justice and human dignity. We truly hope that, in this complicated and complex world, appreciating and deepening our understanding of developmental diversity can help us see ever-greater promise in ourselves and each other and flourish forward.

As illustrated in both Figure 2.1 and 2.2, there are four ways of knowing most commonly found in adulthood—the instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming. Each has strengths and limitations—gifts and growing edges. Currently, research suggests that the socializing way of knowing remains the most common among adults (Kegan & Lahey, 2016; Officer, 2018; Thoma, Caretta-Weyer, Schumacher, Warm, Hall, Hamstra, & ICBME Collaborators, 2021), although more and more people are gradually developing higher-order capacities as a result of the increasing complexities

and demands of modern life (e.g., expanded access to information and technology, increasing awareness of systemic inequities, shifting professional norms toward greater collaboration, proliferation of new media).

For example, the fourth way of knowing—the self-transforming—was rather rare just a few decades ago. In the mid-90s, according to meta-analyses (Kegan, 1994), only 3–5 percent of adults in the United States were making meaning with some form of this way of knowing. Today, that number has jumped to approximately 8–11 percent, which amounts to nearly 40 million people in this country alone making meaning with self-transforming capacities (Kegan, 2013, 2018).

In the next sections, we turn to describing the strengths and growing edges of the different ways of knowing. As you read, we invite you to consider the ideas on multiple levels, as encouraged in the reflective invitation that follows. We offer these questions as opportunities to pause and consider your own experiences, as well as what's top of mind and in your heart right now. You might want to respond to them privately first and then engage in dialogue with a partner and/or group of colleagues.

REFLECTIVE INVITATION

1. How, if at all, might you see yourself in one or more of the ways of knowing? Your colleagues and other important people in your life?

2. What questions and/or insights come up for you?

3. What do you see as some of the bigger implications for practice?

THE INSTRUMENTAL WAY OF KNOWING: PRIORITIZING CONCRETE, RIGHT/WRONG ACTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEADING

Developmental Strengths

Adults with an instrumental way of knowing can bring many strengths to their work, teaching, leading, and relationships, including deep content expertise, tremendous work ethics, a strong sense of right and wrong, great loyalty, and even genuine commitment to social justice. In the psychological sense, instrumental knowers are able to hold out their impulses as "object," meaning that they can reflect on their impulses, take a perspective on them, control them, and manage them. Because of this, instrumental knowers can be quite purposeful and deliberate in their actions and in taking steps to reach their goals.

Perhaps most characteristically, instrumental knowers orient to the world and their work in concrete, dualistic ways (i.e., "Is this right or wrong?")—and through the filter of how things will impact them, personally. As depicted in Figure 2.3, we sometimes find it helpful to think of the instrumental way of knowing as a "me" orientation. This is not because instrumental knowers are selfish or self-centered (they are not!), but because they have not yet grown the capacity to see the world more fully through others' eyes. Internally, they are still subject to (or run by) their own individual needs, interests, and understandings of how the world works. So, for instrumental knowers, new initiatives, ideas, and ways of working tend to be filtered through the lens of personal impact. "What would this mean for me?" is a question often at the fore. Or, from their particular perspective and vantage point, "How does this align (or not) with what's *right*?"

FIGURE 2.3   THE INSTRUMENTAL WAY OF KNOWING AND GROWING STEPS JUST BEYOND
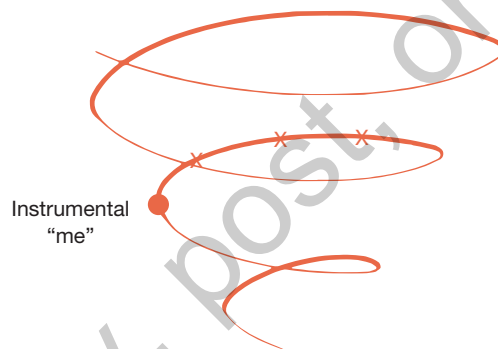
Instrumental
"me"

Growing Edges and Developmental Stretches

Although, again, instrumental knowers can care deeply about equity and justice—especially if these values are part of how they understand doing "right" or being "good" in the world—a growing edge of a "me"-focused orientation (when it is at the fore or running the show psychologically) is the tendency to generalize one's personal worldview as if it should be universally applicable to others, regardless of circumstance, positionality, or experience. Here, for instance, you could call to mind educators who, with the best of intentions, uncritically teach or lead in the ways *they* found most helpful—guided by the idea that there's a particular right way to be a teacher or leader and that changing that way would somehow be wrong or harmful.

Similarly, instrumental knowers tend to demonstrate kindness or compassion by treating others as they would like to be treated, often through concrete demonstrations of care (e.g., giving tangible items, direct expressions of support, doing things for others). Although this echoes the golden rule of

"do unto others as you would have them do unto you," when educators act with the assumption that students, families, colleagues, and community members feel just as they would in a particular situation—rather than, say, seeking to really join others in their feeling and experience—it can limit, or even negate, the impact of intended kindnesses. Moving toward an internal world of feelings is a growing edge for adults with this developmental orientation. Similarly, they have not yet grown to have the internal capacity to stand in someone else's shoes—so to speak—or to deeply take on another person's perspective and consider it.

Another expression—and growing edge—of instrumental knowers' more concrete, right/wrong orientations is a generalized struggle with abstraction and uncertainty. Because there is not yet room for much "gray" in instrumental knowers' constructions of the world, they can struggle when there's not a clear answer or one correct solution, action, or directive to solve complex challenges (like social justice). Without the capacity yet to really critically examine the worldviews they've inherited and grown up with, they can also seem quite fixed in their convictions and decisions. From their view, if everyone would just do the right thing, there wouldn't be a problem.

Here, for instance, we are reminded of a teacher who recently confided to us that he wished his administration would just tell him what he needs to do to "get equity right." "Give me rubrics, or directions, or a blueprint I can follow," he explained. "I need that! If they would just tell me I would do it."

Of course, even though there are many powerful models, resources, books, articles, and curricula that could absolutely help educators learn about and scaffold justice-centering practice, supporting instrumental knowers means both providing these just-right supports *and* helping them stretch to explore some of the less visible, less tangible elements of looking beyond oneself and seeing more deeply into others.

In Chapter 3, we will dive deeply into ways leaders can bring and apply the internal capacities connected to an instrumental way of knowing to their justice-centering educational leadership practice—as well as the developmental supports and stretches that helped leaders continue to expand their approaches and understandings.

THE SOCIALIZING WAY OF KNOWING: FOREGROUNDING THE AFFECTIVE, RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING AND LEADING
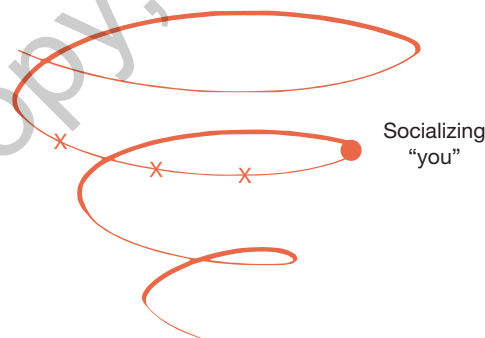
Developmental Strengths

Educators who make meaning with a socializing way of knowing have grown the internal capacity to more fully recognize and take into account others' feelings and experiences. As such, they can bring great relational strengths

and sensitivities to their teaching and leading—in general and for justice. In a snapshot, adults with a socializing way of knowing often orient strongly to the inner world of feelings, and they can bring great capacities for loving, caring, and joining *with* other people. Socializing knowers want very much to make people feel valued and celebrated. Moving up and out on the developmental gyre beyond the instrumental way of knowing, they have also grown to take a perspective on the fact that there is no one, universal way to live, learn, teach, or lead—and they are no longer run by their individual wants and needs in the psychological sense.

That said, without the anchor of an instrumental knower's certainty, socializing knowers tend to orient strongly to others' expectations of them—so much so that, as depicted in Figure 2.4, we often describe the socializing way of knowing as a "you" orientation. Whereas before socializing knowers could look to the "rules" for the "right" way to think, feel, and act, they now turn outward, to valued others like family, friends, partners, colleagues, supervisors, and even societal norms, to co-construct new understandings, expectations, and definitions. Although socializing knowers can care deeply about others in their wholeness and complexity—and also justice—they have not yet developed the capacity to disentangle their own sense of self from their perceptions of how others see them. It's as if they are saying, often and unconsciously, "What you think of me, I think of me." It's almost as though other people serve as mirrors to how these knowers see themselves.

FIGURE 2.4   THE SOCIALIZING WAY OF KNOWING AND GROWING STEPS JUST BEYOND

Growing Edges and Developmental Stretches

Psychologically speaking, socializing knowers are run by others' opinions and assessments of them because others play such a large role in their very understandings of self. Because of this, exposing inner uncertainties and vulnerabilities and engaging in conflict can leave socializing knowers feeling very distressed and even torn apart. When it comes to sensitive and sometimes

difficult conversations about race, equity, and identity, for instance, socializing knowers may struggle to take risks or engage fully for fear of jeopardizing relationships. "What would happen if I shared what I was really thinking and feeling?" stands out here as a representative question. "If I say something, will I disappoint you?" is another.

By way of a more specific example, a school principal recently shared with us her struggle to confront colleagues she felt weren't buying into or respecting the school's equity efforts. "I'm ashamed to say that I often avoid those conversations, or kind of talk around them," she confided. "I know I need to speak up, and I'm working up to it, but I'm afraid that if I say something to them directly, they'll undermine me with my other teachers. They have a lot of influence. How can I lead the school without my relationships?"

Because the socializing way of knowing remains the most common in adulthood, understanding and honoring the qualitative experience of adults who make meaning in this way can be an especially powerful support for their social justice capacity building. For example, socializing knowers will often feel supported when mentors, supervisors, and trusted others make them feel valued as they are learning. By coupling constructive feedback with affirmations of confidence and care and encouraging socializing knowers to begin to look within, share their thinking and feeling, and more fully stand in their own truths, leaders can help socializing knowers feel secure in their professional relationships while trying on new capacities. Creating these kinds of relationships and spaces for socializing knowers can help them—over time—to share their perspectives and build their own internal benchmark of judgment and standards.

In Chapter 4, we will take an even deeper dive into the strengths and growing edges that educators demonstrating socializing capacities can bring to their justice-centering leadership, as well as the experiences that helped them stretch forward.

THE SELF-AUTHORING WAY OF KNOWING: DECIDING FOR ONESELF—AND ADVOCATING FOR—WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Developmental Strengths

Growing from a socializing to a self-authoring way of knowing involves moving up even "higher" on the developmental gyre to be able to take a new perspective on—and not be run by—one's relationships and other people's feelings. It's not that self-authoring leaders care less about other people than socializing knowers (remember, their socializing capacities are still there, operating as part of a larger meaning making system), but rather that they've now grown the internal capacity to consider others' expectations, assessments, feedback, and ideas in relation to their *own*.

More specifically, the shift from the socializing to the self-authoring way of knowing involves transitioning from being made up by people or judgments *outside of oneself* to being able, on the inside, to author one's own values, standards, and long-term purposes. In fact, for self-authoring knowers, leading, teaching, and living in accordance with self-determined values and standards is of the utmost importance—so much so that, as we depict in Figure 2.5, we often think of this way of knowing as an "I" orientation.

FIGURE 2.5 THE SELF-AUTHORING WAY OF KNOWING AND GROWING STEPS JUST BEYOND
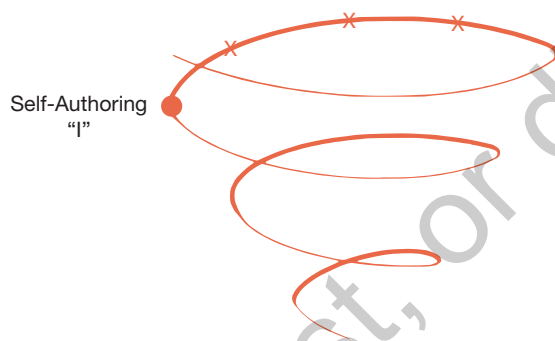
Self-Authoring "I"

For self-authoring leaders, questions at the fore include, "Am I living up to my own values and standards for performance?" and "Am I demonstrating my competencies to the best of my ability?" Even though, like instrumental knowers, self-authoring knowers—from the outside—can seem quite resolute in a particular position or ideology, their sense of assurance is qualitatively different because the *source* of their certainty is different. Self-authoring knowers have come to see their position not as "the one right way" for everyone, but as a personally significant value system carefully curated over time. In other words, self-authoring knowers recognize that people will have different opinions, orientations, and ideas about teaching, leading, and living—but they've developed a personal philosophy, vision, or way of working that they've decided, strongly, is the best for *them*.

Because of this, self-authoring knowers have grown the internal capacity to think systemically about larger organizational challenges and the roles they can play, and they can engage in necessary conflict without feeling torn apart. Even when self-authoring leaders hold collaboration and relationships as core values (and many do), they are able to speak their truths, challenge authority, and stand up for things that feel important to them and others. It is almost as if, we like to say, self-authoring knowers have grown a developmental *suit of armor* that nurtures and protects important capacities for leadership, advocacy, and promoting social justice.

For example, we were recently talking with an assistant principal about the current political challenges she was facing in her district regarding curriculum and equity learning. "I will never, *ever* do anything that undermines the dignity of my students, particularly my students of color," she explained. "That is just way too important to me personally and professionally, and I *will* find a way to make sure they feel seen, represented, and valued in our curricula. I'm willing to take the heat."

Growing Edges and Developmental Stretches

Although, like this assistant principal, self-authoring knowers can feel more comfortable advocating for their beliefs—as well as their students, colleagues, and themselves—they have not yet, psychologically speaking, grown the capacity to see into and critique the ideologies and value systems they hold so close or to see the inevitable partiality of their perspectives. Just as a suit of armor can serve as a protective shield when charging into (metaphorical) battle, so too can it block out different ways of thinking—and even possibilities for more inclusive connections and initiatives.

Accordingly, to be of good developmental support to self-authoring adults, it can be helpful to encourage them—not to let go of their convictions, but to consider them through an increasingly wider lens, and as part of a larger constellation of "best" practices.

In Chapter 5, we further explore how the capacities associated with a self-authoring way of knowing have served justice-centering leaders, as well as the supports and stretches that have helped them continue to grow on the inside and to enhance their practice even more.

THE SELF-TRANSFORMING WAY OF KNOWING: SEEING DEEPER INTO ONESELF, OTHERS, AND INTERCONNECTION

Developmental Strengths

Like self-authoring knowers, self-transforming adults have the internal capacity to take a firm stand on their values and principles. However, they have also grown to recognize the necessity of regularly looking *beyond* themselves—of opening up their metaphorical suits of armor to explore an ever-wider spectrum of points of view, possibilities, and ideas. Just as developing self-authoring capacities involves a turn back on the gyre toward the individualistic side of meaning making, but with new perspectives and capacities (i.e., the difference between "me" and "I"), growing toward a self-transforming way of knowing involves a more inclusive revisiting of a collective orientation to the world—in this case, moving from the socializing "you" in Figure 2.4 to a self-transforming "we," as depicted in Figure 2.6.

FIGURE 2.6   THE SELF-TRANSFORMING WAY OF KNOWING AND GROWING STEPS JUST BEFORE


Self-Transforming "we"
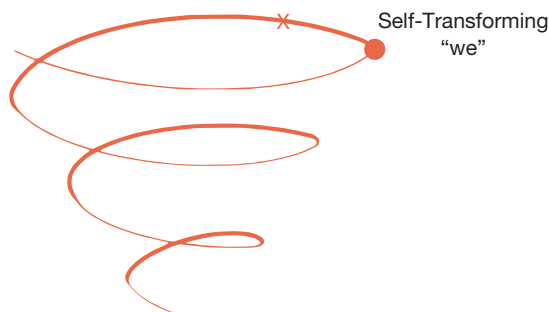
In fact, as we illustrate in Figures 2.7 and 2.8, depicting development as a gyre or helix also helps make explicit the cyclical tension—a kind of dance, so to speak—that persists throughout life between filling up and focusing within, on the individual self, and situating and understanding that self as part of a larger whole or collective. As we shared earlier, development—in and across many different domains—is made up of just this kind of revisiting and re-exploration.

Because of their enhanced capacity to look both without and within, self-transforming knowers orient to interconnection and psychological intimacy as a way of enhancing their self-understanding and the collective reach of leadership and justice efforts. More specifically, adults with self-transforming capacities recognize plurality as a necessary support to and component of human progress. And they aspire, continually, to explore and grow the many different parts of their identities, understandings, and ways of being in the world. For the most part, they do this

FIGURE 2.7   REVISITING, IN A DEVELOPMENTAL SENSE, THE CORE TENSION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

Focus on the Individual

Focus on the Collective
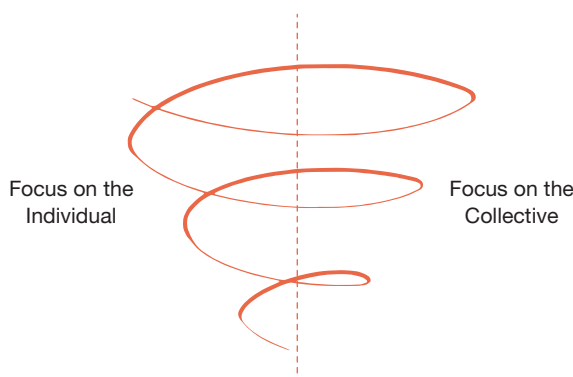
**FIGURE 2.8   A FULLER VIEW OF REVISITING, IN A DEVELOPMENTAL
SENSE, THE CORE TENSION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL
AND THE COLLECTIVE**
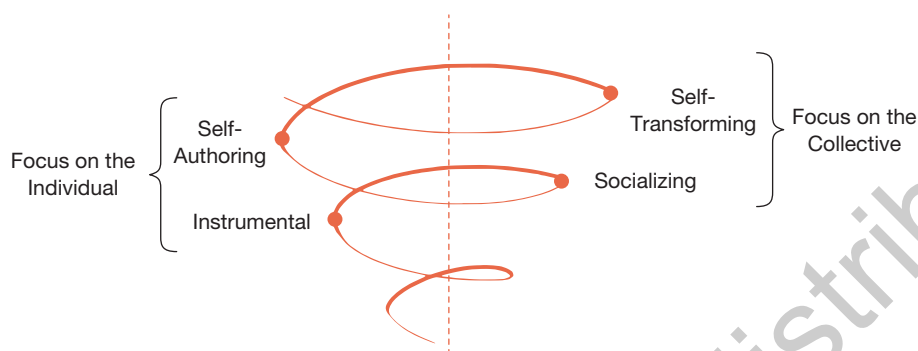
by being in relationships with others. Questions now at the fore include, "How can we learn from each other and grow together?" and "How can I develop more parts of myself—and help others do the same—through mutual collaboration?"

Growing Edges and Developmental Stretches

Toward these ends, self-transforming adults often seek out others with whom they can engage in deep dialogue—especially about the paradoxes, complexities, and inconsistencies all around and within themselves. However, it can be harder for self-transforming knowers to turn back toward concrete action amid many competing tensions and possibilities, especially with their new, internal capacities that enable them to think and feel that any solution is only partial and/or temporary. It can also—especially without an awareness of development and developmental diversity—be a lonely way of knowing to inhabit.

As another assistant principal recently shared, she finds it difficult to stretch and grow in the ways she'd like to on the job because she's so busy caring for other people's learning needs. "I can't often be on *my* growing edge," she confided. "While it gives me a lot of joy to hold and care for others, sometimes it's harder to find people to connect with in the way I'd like to." She also felt confined by what she experienced as restrictive professional norms in her building that made it harder to bring her fullness and complexity to work. "I often think about the parts of me that aren't allowed on the job," she explained. "Why is that?"

As we will continue to explore in Chapter 6 and throughout this book, the capacities connected to a self-transforming way of knowing can help leaders bring important—and frequently less understood and demonstrated—capacities to their justice-centering work. Seeing more deeply into the

experience of making meaning in this way, as we will explore, also raises important questions about some of the structural and organizational conditions that could make the education sector even more supportive of interconnection and mutuality.

Now that we have explored all four of the ways of knowing more commonly found in adulthood as a cumulative progression—or evolving story—of development, we invite you to engage with the following reflective invitation, to connect big ideas from this section to your personal experience. You might want to respond to them privately first and then engage in dialogue with a partner and/or group of colleagues.

REFLECTIVE INVITATION

1. What do you see as your developmental strengths? Your growing edges?

2. What kinds of supports do you have to help you to exercise justice-centering leadership?

3. What kinds of supports do you *wish* you had to further grow your practice?

4. What might help you—if you feel the need to or the desire—to move to the next layer of capacities?

HOLDING ENVIRONMENTS FOR WHOLE PEOPLE

Recently, we received one of the most precious compliments we could imagine when a school leader said to us, "I feel like I can tell you anything—that you understand, see, and value me." Perhaps, more than anything else, it is our hope that, in exploring constructive-developmental theory and its extensions, we can share one more lens for looking deeply into ourselves and others—into the gifts, vulnerabilities, and beautiful potentialities we each carry within us, as well as our growing edges—and to help everyone feel more recognized and cherished. Although no two people enter into equity conversations from exactly the same spot—and, as you know, there exists a vast continuum of understandings, experiences, commitments, and orientations to justice-centering leadership influenced by all of our intersectional identities, experiences, and constructions—we truly believe that everyone is needed.

Though development—as we've outlined and defined it in this chapter—is certainly not a guarantee of effectiveness in or even commitment to justice-centering educational leadership, we feel that the different internal capacities we've been exploring in our discussion of ways of knowing can

serve as prerequisites that help leaders more readily enter into and make contributions in different domains of justice-centering leadership. These internal capacities can, we argue, help us be more open to learning, to being in relationship, to reassessing former certainties, and to seeing how things—and people—connect, diverge, and overlap.

In the next four chapters, we will learn from leaders making meaning all across the developmental expanse depicted in Figure 2.8, and we will zoom in on four qualitatively distinct areas of justice-centering leadership practice: the concrete, the interpersonal, the system-focused, and the interconnecting. Through the real-life stories, reflections, and experiences of leaders from across the country, we will make further connections between these different layers of practice and the internal, developmental capacities they brought to their justice-centering work.

Ultimately, we hope these explorations will help further illustrate how all educators—no matter their ways of knowing—can benefit from just-right combinations of developmental supports and stretches when growing as individuals and justice-centering leaders. Just like the youngest of humans, who thrive best in holding environments and nurturing relationships that hold them closely enough to feel safe and offer gentle release to encourage new development (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Winnicott, 1965), adults can benefit from individualized care and attention that honors all of who they are throughout their lives.

The Origins and Three Functions of a Holding Environment

By way of further context, the term *holding environment* was originally employed by pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1965) to describe the different forms of physical and psychological holding infants need from birth into toddlerhood. Extending Winnicott's concept of a holding environment to adult development, it becomes clear that good holding environments serve three important functions.

First, a good holding environment must hold well, meaning recognizing, confirming, and accepting who someone is and how they go about making meaning in the world. We often refer to this function as *meeting people where they are*. We are not, it is important to underscore, dismissing the urgencies of our world—nor the urgent need for progress. Rather, we emphasize this kind of deep seeing and understanding as a first step to making change possible.

Second, when a person is ready to try growing beyond or outside of their current meaning making, a good holding environment needs to "let go," permitting and even encouraging a person's growth. This second function of the holding environment emphasizes the importance of stretching—and differentiating our stretches depending on one's way of knowing.

Third, a good holding environment for adult development "sticks around" to provide continuity and stability, even as those within it continue to grow and

evolve. By this, we mean caring for and continuing to be present for people as they—and we—are changing.

Powerfully, a holding environment can be a relationship, a team, a family (broadly defined), a coalition, an organization, and/or a system. Good holding environments—in any of these forms—can help us grow. They can help us to feel well held as we benefit from the just right (i.e., developmentally appropriate) supports and stretches we've been highlighting in this chapter. Doing so will help us to grow—individually and collectively—as we strive to meet the pressing urgencies of justice *together* in our world today.

We hold as a mantra the idea that *growth happens at the intersection of support and challenge*, as people really do need both. Too much support can obscure the need for change. Too much challenge can block or slow down progress. But just the right amount of both? Well, that's where the magic happens.

It's equally important to underscore that like most things—the things that seem to *really* matter in life—we need to be patient with ourselves as we practice offering the appropriate mix of supports and stretching for others and for ourselves. We've found it helpful to think about it as building our developmental muscles. How do we get in shape psychologically and physically? We work at it. We try.

Toward this end, in Table 2.1, we provide an overview of the orienting concerns of adults with different ways of knowing and zoom in on key supports and stretches that can help you meet educators where they are. After all, both are needed to nurture growth.

TABLE 2.1 WAYS OF KNOWING, ORIENTING CONCERNS, AND SUPPORTS AND STRETCHES FOR GROWTH

WAY OF KNOWING	ORIENTING CONCERNS	SUPPORTS AND STRETCHES FOR GROWTH
Instrumental *"What does this mean for me?"* *"Is this right or wrong?"* *"What, exactly, do I need to do?"*	• Orients to and is run by own needs and inherited worldviews. • Filters experience through the lens of personal impact. • Understands the world in concrete, dualistic terms. • Sees others as helpers or obstacles for meeting goals and needs. • Does not yet have the capacity for abstract thinking in the psychological sense.	**Supports:** • Concrete models, examples, rubrics, protocols, resources, and readings. • Discussions about what went right and wrong. • Timelines with clear action steps and measurable deliverables.

(Continued)

(Continued)

WAY OF KNOWING	ORIENTING CONCERNS	SUPPORTS AND STRETCHES FOR GROWTH
Instrumental (Continued)	• Is most concerned with tangible consequences of own and others' actions. • Makes decisions based on what the self will acquire and on following the rules.	**Stretches:** • Managing leadership or teaching challenges that do not have a clear answer or solution. • Making abstract connections. • Seeing things from another's point of view. • Looking beyond own understandings of the "right" thing to do and how things "are."
Socializing *"What you think of me, I think of me."* *"What would happen if I shared what I was really thinking and feeling?"*	• Orients to inner states (feelings). • Is "run" by valued others' expectations, assessments, and opinions. • Adopts others' standards, values, and judgments. • Feels responsible for others' feelings and holds others responsible for one's own.	**Supports:** • Demonstrations of appreciation. • Affirmation of what's going well (e.g., hard work, effort, progress). • Recognition of growth and contributions. • Feeling accepted as a person and a colleague. **Stretches:** • Encouragement to share authentic thoughts and feelings. • Taking in—or giving—critical feedback without feeling torn apart. • Engaging in difficult conversations with valued others or supervisors. • Turning toward conflict and high-risk situations with support.
Self-Authoring *"Am I living up to my own values and standards for performance?"*	• Orients to internally curated values and systems of belief. • Evaluates criticism according to own standards. • Is ultimately concerned with personal competence and performance in alignment with values.	**Supports:** • Autonomy and self-direction in goal setting and professional practice. • Leadership roles. • Recognition of competence and expertise.

| WAY OF KNOWING	ORIENTING CONCERNS	SUPPORTS AND STRETCHES FOR GROWTH
Self-Authoring (Continued) *"Am I demonstrating my competence to the best of my ability?"*	• Can take perspective on relationships. • Views conflict as a natural part of life, work, and leadership.	• Opportunities to offer feedback and ideas. **Stretches:** • Considering and finding value in ideas and viewpoints that feel diametrically opposing to one's own. • Critically examining one's own carefully curated values, beliefs, and philosophies about teaching, leadership, and the world. • Sharing leadership or authority with others.
Self-Transforming *"How can we learn from each other and grow together?"* *"How can I develop more parts of myself— and help others do the same— through mutual collaboration?"*	• Orients to inter-individuality, mutuality, and interconnection. • Can take perspective on own value system. • Recognizes the need for plurality and the continual renegotiation of beliefs and actions. • Wants to grow, improve, and better understand different aspects of self. • Is able to understand and manage tremendous complexity and ambiguity.	**Supports:** • Mutual, collaborative conversations. • Open-ended opportunities for connection and reflection. • Time to listen to and discuss multiple viewpoints and ideas. • Exploring paradoxes, internal and systemic inconsistencies, and different alternatives. **Stretches:** • Managing the loneliness of making meaning in a way that is often different than colleagues. • Balancing the desire for interconnection with the fast pace of education and traditional understandings of leadership. • Turning back toward action amid competing possibilities. • Carving out sustainable spaces for growth and community.

CLOSING REFLECTION AND TAKEAWAYS

Development and Butterflies

On a closing note, we'd like to acknowledge that, as much as we may sometimes wish to rush development in ourselves or others—especially when so much is at stake—growing one's constructions and perspectives takes hard work, investment, and time. Like a butterfly who needs to use *all* its might to break free from its protective chrysalis, it is often the struggle itself that builds the capacity for what's to come. Sometimes, we can see another person's wings before they do, but the best we can do is create the conditions that invite them to fly—we can't break the chrysalis on their behalf. And sometimes, we need others to help us recognize, remember, or reinvest in our *own* wings, especially when things get hard.

As justice-centering leaders, we are all butterflies and growers of butterflies—caring across so many different phases, heights, and flights. Though it would be wonderful, in some ways, to wave a wand that could help everyone become who they most want to be in a moment, there's wonder, too, in loving people as they learn, in witnessing transformation unfold, and in building connections that allow us to pay forward the holding—and love—we've benefited from in our own lives. In our experience, this kind of love is some of the best fuel for growth, and it doesn't require letting go of urgency. The urgency is a part of it, as love can be a radical act. May the ideas featured in this chapter and book help you on your journey to care for and guide others, and may it help us ever more effectively nurture one another as we step forward together in the struggle for a better future.

In Figure 2.9, we offer an image that brings together the developmental gyre with the domains of leadership we are about to explore in Chapters 3

FIGURE 2.9 THE RANGE OF CAPACITIES DEMONSTRATED BY LEADERS IN OUR STUDY, ATOP THE DOMAINS OF JUSTICE-CENTERING LEADERSHIP
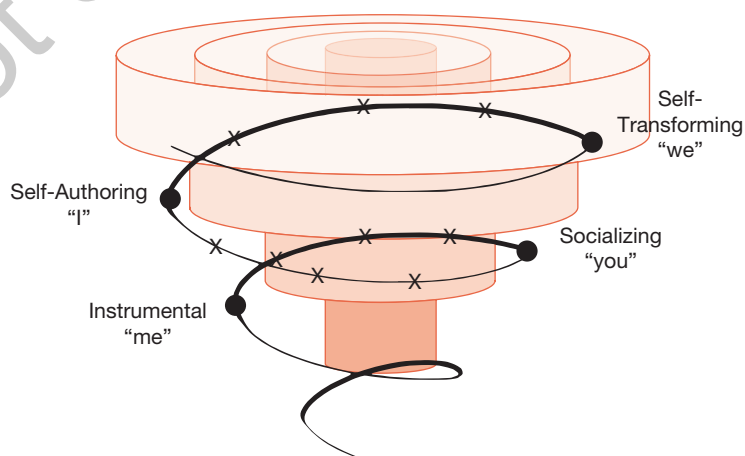
through 6. In Figure 2.10, we offer a series of summative takeaways to help spotlight key ideas from this chapter. We close with a reflective invitation that serves, once again, as an opportunity to connect ideas from the chapter with your own experiences and to tune into or revisit any ideas, questions, or implications that emerged for you as you read.

FIGURE 2.10   CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.

—Maya Angelou

- Understanding constructive-developmental theory provides language to name things we see in ourselves and others and to connect external behaviors to the meaning making underneath.

- Differentiation is key. It helps us to meet each other where we are.

- Appreciating and understanding our ways of knowing also helps us to appreciate and understand a less-visible kind of diversity—developmental diversity—which is important to recognize, acknowledge, and care for, just as are other forms of diversity.

- In reviewing different lenses and theoretical perspectives, we found that constructive-developmental theory offers a clear language for naming—and bringing together—important concepts that run across different theories of and approaches to social justice. For example, although expressed in different terminology, both *constructivism* and *developmentalism*—as well as the vital role of *perspective taking* (on self, others, history, the educational system, and society)—are prevalent concepts in the literatures about equity, inclusion, and justice. A developmental lens helps bring these ideas together in new ways.

- Understanding constructive-developmental theory can help us to appreciate that adults make sense of the world in qualitatively different ways—and that our ways of knowing influence how we think about and exercise our justice-centering leadership.

- We can grow throughout our lives provided that we can benefit from different kinds of supports and stretching when needed.

- It is important to differentiate the kinds of supports and stretches—or developmental challenges—that we offer to those in our care.

- Developmental diversity will likely exist in any team, school, organization, and system. Therefore, developing an understanding of how to differentiate our supports and stretches can help us to build internal capacity in ourselves, others, and organizations.

- When we grow from one way of knowing to the next, we are able to take a perspective on, understand, and manage more aspects of ourselves, others, the relationship between ourselves and others, and society.

- Development is not a linear process; instead, it is iterative and cyclical. As we grow, we revisit different tensions—between self and other, thinking and feeling, learning and unlearning, knowing and doing—again and again and with new eyes and new internal capacities.

- Each way of knowing has both strengths and growing edges. Adults will move to and through these stages and transitional spaces—please remember the Xs on the gyre—at different paces and rates.

- Being physically and psychologically *present* and *open* to educators as they offer questions, insights, and ideas enables leaders to create contexts in which adults are and feel cared for, respected, listened to, and heard.

- It is important to consider the underlying structural and organizational conditions that could make the education sector even more supportive of interconnection and mutuality.

> *What is most personal is most general. . . . [W]hat is most personal and unique in each one of us is probably the very element which would, if it were shared or expressed, speak most deeply to others.*

—Carl R. Rogers (1961, p. 26)

Before journeying forward, we invite you to reflect on the following prompts as opportunities to pause and consider your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings and any connections you are making at this time. We also invite you to jot down questions you're holding and anything else that feels helpful to you. You might find it meaningful to consider these questions privately and then with colleagues and partners.

1. Why is the work you are leading important to you? Who are the people you rely on for support?

2. After reading this chapter, what feels like it's on the front burner for you? What questions are you holding?

3. What stands out for you in this chapter? What do you find yourself curious about? Wondering about?

4. How, if at all, has the discussion about ways of knowing helped you to understand yourself and/or others in new ways?

5. What—at this time—do you see as your biggest strengths as a leader, teacher, and/or a partner and collaborator? What do you see as your growing edge at this time? After reading this chapter, where do you see yourself on the developmental continuum?

6. What conditions enable you to actively engage in justice conversations? What makes it hard or challenging for you?

7. In your work context—or one of them—how do you and others make spaces to listen to each other? When and where do you have time and space—and create time and space—for educators to engage in private reflection and dialogue about justice-centering leadership? Supports for building capacity? Areas for growth—at the individual and organizational levels?

8. What are the interpersonal, structural, and organizational conditions that exist currently in your team? Organization? System? What else would help you and your colleagues engage more effectively and be more supportive of interconnection and mutuality?

9. What do you see as the critical components that need to be infused when creating conditions for justice-centering conversations with educators—whether in a team, a faculty meeting, or any kind of learning conversations?

10. What, if anything, do you think you will you share with colleagues about ways of knowing and/or other ideas presented in this chapter to build a shared language and/or to grow your practice, teams, and/or organization?

11. What are one or two ways you might be able to build your practices to help those in your care more intentionally come together and scaffold justice work? What different entry points, supports, and contexts for ongoing learning already exist in your work for you and for others? How, if at all, might some of the ideas in this chapter inform and/or influence how you are thinking about them now?

INTERLUDE I

CARRYING CARE FORWARD

IMAGE SOURCE: istock.com/tatadonets

Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word and the symbol is, "It is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind."

—Carter G. Woodson Center, Berea College (n.d.)

Before venturing forward into the next chapters of the book—which feature leaders' stories of advocating for justice across roles, geographies, identities, and the developmental continuum—we are moved to honor the history and resonance of Sankofa. Depicted, as in the symbol that opens this interlude, as a bird heading firmly in one direction but turning back, purposefully, to cradle and carry forward a precious seed or egg, the Sankofa epitomizes valuing the learning and wisdom that came before us and taking hold of that as we go forward (Milton & Brooks Lawrence, 2022). It's about drawing strength and guidance from the past, from ancestors, and from loved ones and cherished guides as a fortifying practice for ourselves, and in honor of those who helped, as Fred "Mr. Rogers" Rogers (1997) explained in a different way, "love us into being," both directly and indirectly.

For the leaders in our study, this practice of looking back—with gratitude and grace—proved an important and ongoing motivation and a deeply personal entry point for their justice-centering work. In addition to carrying the strength, courage, and inspiration others had shared with them in heart, many of the leaders in our study looked back with love to honor family members, teachers, and guides of all kinds—or "catalyst individuals," as one leader dubbed them—who'd impacted their lives in treasured and enduring ways. We share some of their impactful recollections here, as one small way of honoring their forebears' important contributions.

First, we celebrate Thea's reflections about her mother. Thea—a district-level leader focused on teacher leadership development, who identified as a married Black woman, with ten years in education—described how she sees much of her work as a tribute to her mother's support and way of being in the world. As she explained,

> [My mother] helped me see parts of myself that I didn't understand or I denied at a very young age. She always motivated me to know that I was brilliant, that I could do anything that I put my mind to. In times of my life when I was very insecure and did not see that for myself, she motivated me that way. . . . I'm a part of her legacy and I don't ever want to lose that part of me. . . . It's just important for me to keep her alive through what I do and how I live and how I treat people, because she was a very kind, giving person, and I too want to emulate that kindness and giving spirit that she had. So it's important for me to continue that legacy and keep that voice.

We also feel humbled to share Lisa's special connection with her grandmother. Lisa—an early childhood director who recently opened her own center, and who identified as a thirty-seven-year-old Black female of Haitian descent, with seventeen years in education—spoke lovingly of her grandmother's influence and modeling:

> When I look back on it now, I feel like it's in my DNA because, like I said, my grandmother had that nurturing child care, like that

teaching way about her, even though she was not a teacher. But I feel like if she was given the opportunities, she would have been a teacher because my grandmother, she had to drop out of literally elementary school to help raise her three younger sisters when her father died. So you know, she didn't have the luxury of going to school, but I feel like if she did, I think she would have been an educator, so I feel like that's something that she kind of passed on to me. . . . Growing up, my house was always filled with children because she was the person that the neighborhood would trust with their children. . . . She kind of like planted that seed in me . . . and that's why I named the business after her. So I did that as something to remember her by, but also to . . . continue her legacy because this is something that I'm sure if she had the proper channels, if she had the opportunities, she would have done it as well. I mean, she was an immigrant, you know? And I was the first child she ever watched because she emigrated to the United States because I was being born. . . . She did not only impact my life, but she impacted so many people.

This kind of profound gratitude and admiration was similarly expressed by Kristina—an educational consultant who identified as a faith-driven, married Black woman, and a native of a Southern city well-known for its civil rights history—as she spoke of her grandparents and other advocates who stood up to injustice:

I've known a deep sense of appreciation and respect for generations of people that have come before me. . . . So my grandparents . . . participated in the civil rights activities, and part of it is growing up and knowing that my grandmother got hit in the head with a billy club because of trying to vote, and there's just so many things. I've always known about people sacrificing their literal lives and physical safety for a cause that they believed so deeply in. . . . It just gives me a lot of courage to know the courage that they had. . . . They've always kind of lifted me in that way, if that makes sense. And made sacrifices for me.

Others connected their gratitude specifically to teachers and their reasons for being in education. Amaia, for example—a teacher leader and coach who identified as a Mexican American female with eleven years in education—said,

I'm a teacher because, literally, when people talk about education changing their life, I've lived it, and I continue to live it with my students. So I am teaching because I'm experiencing daily the effects of what it can do for you.

Jack—an assistant principal who identified as fifty-four years old, Eastern European/Slavic, and an immigrant—similarly recalled the importance

of affirmations from academic mentors during his own journey as a student. "After years of thinking I was a bad student," he explained, he had the opportunity to work with a group of archaeologists on an excavation project. The professors there saw something in him and helped him imagine new possibilities for his future:

> I remember being there and people telling me, "You're really smart." I'm, like, "What? Naw, my friend is smart." They said, "No, no, no, you're really smart, we know you're smart. The way you talk." And I was, like, "Really, 'cause I have shitty grades, so I don't know where you're getting this from." And they said, "No, I think you should go to college." And I was, like, "What is college?" . . . So they inspired me, so I went back and, a few years in a row, kind of caught up [on] all the studying that I hadn't done.

Eventually, Jack was accepted into a prestigious program, and carries with him the memory of that accomplishment. As he said, "Up until this day . . . it's just like the best, the biggest achievement in my entire life."

As one last example, we share the gratitude Shokry—an educational consultant who identified as a person of color with Dominican and Egyptian heritage—expressed for the teachers who helped him chart new paths. Recognizing that "we are [all] the recipients of models of inspiration," he offered the following:

> I'm a first-generation college student of two people who immigrated to the United States. . . . I'm the recipient now of three master's degrees and then finishing a doctorate and that feels completely like the result of the kindness of others to me. I think about the effects it's had upon my family. My younger brother attended college shortly after my attending graduate school because it felt like a possibility. It felt like an opportunity. And I mean we think about how wide this has gotten now, right? And it began with someone saying something as simple as, "You can do it." And being present to hear my frustrations or my fears. If I can do that for someone else, that to me feels like—I mean it sounds cliché but that feels like our purpose in the world, right? To champion others. The way that people have championed us. So that everyone can seek the opportunities they dream of.

As these stories help illustrate, for many of the leaders in our research, engaging in justice-centering educational leadership, broadly and inclusively defined, meant opening vistas of possibility with and for others, and in honor of those who'd helped them grow into the biggest versions of themselves. We feel similarly fortunate to share and pay forward participants' stories and wisdom with *you*, and we also celebrate the significant people in your lives who've helped you lead with love.

Before turning to the leaders' different strengths, insights, accomplishments, and challenges in the next four chapters, we invite you to pause and take a moment to honor the people, traditions, histories, and experiences that bring *you* to justice work. If you'd like, please take a moment to consider the questions that follow. You may find it helpful to consider them on your own and/or share experiences with a partner or small group.

A REFLECTIVE INVITATION

1. Who do you honor with the work that you do?

2. What legacies are you carrying forward with love?

3. Who inspired you in your life? Helped "love you into being"?

4. What are a few of the experiences you've lived and grown through that inspire your justice journey today? What else informs your "why"?

5. What are you hoping to learn from the chapters that follow?