McREL
INTERNATIONAL

To Make Big Changes for Students, Teachers Should Think a Little Smaller

By Glen Pearsall

About the Author

Glen Pearsall was a teacher leader at Eltham School and board member of the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority in Australia. He was also a research fellow at the Centre for Youth Research, University of Melbourne. Glen is the author of the best-selling *And Gladly Teach* and *Classroom Dynamics*, and co-author of *Literature for Life* and *Work Right*. He works throughout the world as an educational consultant, specializing in instructional practice, teacher coaching, and workload reduction for teachers. He is a Cambridge Education associate and a master class presenter for the Australian professional development organization TTA, and has a long association with the Teacher Learning Network. Glen is also the founding presenter of the widely popular PD in the Pub series for graduate and pre-service teachers. His most recent projects include *Toon Teach*, an animated series on classroom management, and *Fast and Effective Assessment: How to Reduce Your Workload and Improve Student Learning*, which was published internationally by ASCD.

About McREL

McREL International is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to improving education outcomes for all students through applied research, product development, and professional learning services to teachers and education leaders. We collaborate with schools and school systems across the U.S. and worldwide, helping educators think differently about their challenges and providing research-based solutions and guidance that help students flourish.

McREL
INTERNATIONAL

To Make Big Changes for Students, Teachers Should Think a Little Smaller

By Glen Pearsall

Change in education tends to focus on the systems level. This makes sense. Policymakers have to ensure that reforms address the needs of massive numbers of children, and teachers need clear strategic direction and deep research upon which to base their work. Yet if the theories and research are to be meaningful, these initiatives need to be taken up by teachers as everyday practice.

This can be a challenge. Sweeping reforms and schoolwide initiatives might offer teachers broad pathways of action, but this doesn't mean that these new approaches are easy to adopt in the hectic environment of a busy classroom. After all, it is easy in teaching to change your mind—what's harder is to change your habits.

Indeed, sometimes concentrating on large-scale reforms is actually a barrier to everyday change. Some schools and school systems are so reform-minded (Harvard education professor Richard Elmore famously said schools change "routinely" and "promiscuously") that they miss opportunities to refine teaching and learning through small, incremental change.

This paper and the book it is based on (*Tilting Your Teaching: Seven Simple Shifts That Can Substantially Improve Student Learning*) do not focus on these big-picture reforms. Instead, we will focus on realizing change through small adjustments of instructional practice—subtle alterations in how we interact and respond to students.

I label these adjustments "Simple Shifts" because, while they are quick and easy to adopt, they also represent an entry point into new systems of practice. Habit acquisition expert

> *There is a wealth of information on best practice for teachers, with new studies and the changing needs of schools and students guaranteeing that teachers will never be short on advice for how to optimize their practice. How does anyone manage to navigate the plethora of recommended techniques, habits, skills, and practices that teachers are presented with? By focusing on a few skills that matter.*
>
> Pearsall & Harris, 2020

Charles Duhigg has said that if we want to bring about personal and organizational change we should target "the habits that matter most . . . the ones that, when they start to shift, dislodge and remake other patterns" (Duhigg, 2014, p. 108). The Simple Shifts discussed here are powerful not only because they are effective classroom techniques but because they drive mindset change precisely in this fashion.

Before we get to what these Simple Shifts look like in practice, a note on the current environment. As I write it's the beginning of the 2020–21 school year in the US while here in Australia, the end of the third term of 2020 is approaching. Many teachers will find that their teaching has to take place largely online. The Simple Shifts outlined in this paper are focused on face-to-face teaching but the broad principles behind them can be applied when teaching remotely. Throughout this paper you'll find suggestions for adapting the shifts to online teaching, many of them gleaned from my experience coaching teachers who have been successfully working this way for years.

Simple Shift 1: Low-Level Interventions

Dealing with low-level off-task behavior is, for many teachers, a routine part of teaching. The key to dealing with these distractions is to find the lowest-level intervention that works to steer students back to their learning.

The golden rule of creating a positive classroom culture is to "catch your kids behaving well." **On-task praise** refers to various ways you might do this. Suppose you've got a student who is off task but many others who are doing the right thing. Why not start by addressing the latter rather than the former? "Reuben has started, and Devin is already up to question two" could do double duty as praise for Reuben and Devin *and* as a nudge to the student who is off task. On-task praise even benefits students who simply overhear the comment by elevating the culture of the entire room (Clear, 2018; Moore et al., 2010).

It's the subtlety of on-task praise that appeals to me, but some teachers are uncomfortable with it because they feel it is indirect or inauthentic. "I don't go in for that warm and fuzzy stuff—I just tell it like it is," one teacher told me in a seminar. The problem with that line of thinking is that by limiting your commentary to things that go wrong, you are *not* telling it like it is for the large number of students who are on-task most of the time. By remaining silent when things go well and only piping up when there's a problem, you may inadvertently communicate that these negative behaviors are more common than they actually are.

When issuing on-task praise it is worth drawing on Kegan and Lahey's (2012) work on feedback. They argue that most effective praise features three elements: It should be addressed directly to the person doing the right thing; it should be specific; and it should be nonattributive,

meaning it should describe your experience of the student's actions rather than try to describe the student's character.

Two other powerful examples of low-level intervention are **proximity without eye contact** and **cross praise**. Standing about an arm's length from an off-task student while continuing to speak with other students will often subtly cue the student to get back to their work. There are many variations of this strategy—gently tapping their table, for instance, while your attention remains fixed on the other students—but all of them require you to avoid looking directly at the student you are trying to prompt so that they don't feel as though they have been directly targeted.

Cross praise, meanwhile, is a variant of on-task praise in which you strategically praise a student who is working well in a manner that catches the attention of the off-task student. (The on-task student doesn't need to be seated close to the student doing the wrong thing—this works even if the student you are talking to is right across the room.) Often, this will work without the student realizing what has changed their behavior. I once taught a seminar that included an ex-student who'd gone on to teach, and he approached me afterwards and said he wasn't persuaded cross praise would work. I had to point out that I used it with him daily for the two years he was in my class: "You are probably the most cross-praised student in Australia," I told him. It is this subtlety that makes cross praise such an effective low-level intervention.

Obviously, there's a good deal of instructional nuance required to implement these strategies effectively. However, opting to "nudge" off-task students back on track with a low-level intervention—rather than using more direct intervention as your first recourse—is a powerful example of a Simple Shift that can change the dynamics of your classroom.

Simple Shift Two: Pivoting and Reframing

Of course, even if you use low-level interventions effectively, it doesn't always mean students will comply with your instructions. Indeed, it is not uncommon to face some verbal resistance from our students. If you find yourself in one of these encounters, the key is to find a way to de-escalate the situation. Pivoting around student resistance and reframing these conversations is an effective way to do this.

Pivot phrases are also called "micro scripts" (Dix, 2017) to indicate that while they may sound impromptu, they need to be well rehearsed and ever-ready to deploy. I observed one teacher pivot around a student's cry of "This is boring!" by responding: "I welcome feedback, just not at the start of the lesson." The student decided not to share anything further, and the lesson proceeded. When I asked the teacher how long she had been using that response, she responded with a laugh: "Seventeen years."

Pivots are designed to help you avoid distractions and disputes, and return to the learning. The utility of pivot phrases dawned on me my very first week of teaching, when I challenged a student for throwing a rock in class and then proceeded to let myself get drawn into an argument over whether the projectile was actually a rock or a stone. This was a powerful lesson for me: "Students are going to misbehave as they learn and grow—it's how we respond to their misbehavior that matters," wrote D. Smith et al. (2015, p. 3).

What could I have said better? Pivot phrases like "nevertheless" and "that's not the issue right now" have a wide number of applications: "Sit down, thanks, Lee." "That's not fair—*he's* standing up!" "Nevertheless, sit down, thank you."

Or: "Finish your work, Sam." "I got all the section B stuff done." "That's not the issue right now. Complete that last question, thank you." Of course, there are lots of others. The key to using pivots is identifying a wide range of them that suit your context. Be on the lookout for phrases that you can use to address potential conflicts in this fashion.

Reframing is useful when a student attempts to personalize an issue by claiming to have been unfairly singled out: "This is so unfair. Why are you always picking on me?" "I'm not talking about *who* you are—I'm talking about what you are choosing to do."

Being able to reframe a student's argument is a powerful way to recontextualize contested issues. If you can alter the underlying presumptions that support a student's arguments, you may be able to avoid the conflict altogether. For example, if a student thinks you are being unfair because you are differentiating work for a classmate, don't buy into this debate. Instead point out the flaw that underpins this thinking: Being evenhanded does not necessarily mean having to treat each student uniformly. "I am fair to everyone, but I

don't treat you identically because you are not identical," you could say.

Nor is it necessary to always refute a student's argumentation entirely. Sometimes common ground can be found with **partial agreement** or **acknowledging**. A student confronted head-on will likely become defensive, asserting their "individual, private integrity" (Keegan & Lahey, 2012, loc. 1122). Partially agreeing with their self-justification could defuse this feeling of being disagreed with, leaving them more open to suggestion (Rogers, 2015). If the self-defense is "I wasn't calling out!" a better reply than "Oh yes you were" would be, "Maybe you weren't, but I'll need you to listen carefully now to what Bethany is saying."

Similarly, acknowledging moves the conversation to safer ground by demonstrating that you understand there may be a deeper reason behind an outburst and that you care about the student, not merely the behavior. My favorite acknowledgment technique is the **open response** (Mackay, 2006), in which you lead with an empathetic observation such as "You seem frustrated" or "You look upset," giving them a chance to express the deeper issue. Avoid further comment, just offer the student a gentle prompt to encourage them to reflect on what's driving their behavior. It may not lead to a breakthrough, but at least it's a signal that you are trying to understand their perspective.

Sometimes, when student talk is intended to distract from the learning ("How old are you?" "Are you married?") you may wish to signal that the question isn't worth a verbal response, for example by raising your palm slightly, in a gentle "not now" gesture. In the spirit of finding the lowest-level intervention, you should ask yourself before attempting a pivot phrase if words are even necessary. The goal is not to "win" but to let everyone save face and proceed with learning.

When conflict arises in the classroom, there is a temptation to dwell on the student's role in that conflict. The Simple Shift of pivoting and reframing will help reinforce your own sense of agency—and get you thinking about what small changes of practice might help you defuse these encounters before they really begin.

Simple Shift Three: Instructional Clarity

Securing your students' attention before introducing a task or when transitioning between learning activities is an emblematic example of a Simple Shift. Ensuring you do this effectively takes only small adjustments of procedure but can lead to a significantly more efficient classroom culture.

The key technique here is the **rallying call**—a prearranged signal for garnering attention without having to raise your voice. A rallying call can be either verbal or nonverbal, and there are variations for different age ranges. With an older class, you might simply hold up your hand to indicate it's time for quiet, and wait for the students to do the same. Note the subtle peer pressure involved: students who put a hand up tend to look around to be sure others are doing likewise, and I have observed that the last student to put a hand up in one class is often among the first in the next. Younger students will respond well to call-and-response rallying calls. Or you might use an electronic chime or other noise that signals students they need to focus on you. Over time, a familiar beep or buzz can be more effective than a spoken request because it externalizes the request: It's not *you* asking for attention, it's just time to pay attention. Countdowns, Simon Says-style rallying calls, and "bell ringer" activities are other familiar variations.

Introducing rallying calls often requires some troubleshooting. Don't, for instance, presume that all students will instantly comply with your instruction. Anticipate some being slow to respond or even demonstrating outright resistance, and be ready to calmly reiterate the rallying call in a low key till they comply. I often

use a technique called "narrating," in which I thank students for cooperating and call out how many have already done so: "Thanks guys, I can already see three hands up. . . ." Without naming names, which is always risky, you've managed both to acknowledge the cooperative students and to make it perfectly clear that others need to come around. Note also that students (and teachers) will sometimes balk at rallying calls because they see them as something only used with young children. One way to address this is to "badge" them as age-appropriate: "I take it that as Year 12s you are responsible enough to follow a routine that college students use. . . ." You also need to be mindful that rallying calls lose their effect over time, so establish a variety of calls you can use to ensure this technique doesn't become staid.

Once rallying calls are a well-established routine, you can embed them into a more elaborate sequence of steps for transitioning not just *into* but *between* learning activities. Classroom transitions can be a flash point for off-task student behavior and one of the simplest ways to avoid this trap is to get the sequencing right.

Teachers, for example, often make the mistake of starting their explanation of a collaborative learning activity by telling students that they will be working in groups or pairs—and *then* describing the nature of the task. However, in the social clamor of trying to determine who they will work with, this subsequent instruction is often lost. Instead, make sure that after securing the class's attention, you explain *when* they are making a transition, *what* they are doing—and then *with whom* they are working (Bennet & Smilanich, 1994). Add a crisp "move now" signal ("OK, go!") so students don't drift off in a haphazard way. Once the transition is over, review the transition with students to make explicit what worked and what could be improved about the process.

Scaffolding your transitions in this fashion will help ensure orderly student conduct and allow you to build other classroom procedures on top of this embedded routine. Instructional clarity is all about consistency. Getting it right can require a rather substantial investment on the teacher's part, but it's worthwhile because once we have our students' undivided attention, there is so much we can do with it.

Online Adaptations: Simple Shifts Two & Three

Anticipating student resistance and formulating a micro-script on how to pivot around it is useful in any form of teaching. With online learning you might want to give particular emphasis to those pivot phrases designed for dealing with distraction and disengagement ("That's not the issue right now," "Let's concentrate on what we can control") and those designed to remind students that your expectations about learning haven't changed ("This is not our normal classroom but it is our class—the same rules apply"). Establishing clear conventions on how students engage with online learning—with a particular emphasis on getting their undivided attention when you are introducing a task or transitioning between activities—should mean that the occasions for having to use these pivot phrases are reduced.

Simple Shift Four: Wait Time

Questioning may be the most important teaching technique there is, yet evidence stretching back decades shows that teachers don't give students nearly enough time to respond (Marzano et al., 2010; Rowe, 1972; Stahl, 1994; Tobin, 1987)—often a mere second

(Cazden, 2011). Increasing your wait time can improve both the quality and quantity of student responses. It can even reengage students who would otherwise sit passively in class, unable to comply with the teacher's expectation of quiz-show-like rapidity.

Usually only a small, self-selecting group of students have the speed and self-confidence to routinely answer quick questions put to the whole group (Black & Wiliam, 2014). Adding wait time for responses can boost this number (Marzano et al., 2010). Teachers I coach almost immediately see gains in the detail and sophistication of student responses as well. This may be in part because easing up on time pressure can make students feel freer to offer speculative answers (Rumhor, 2013)—a benefit that was noted in the earliest work on questioning (Rowe, 1972) but has sometimes been overlooked since then.

Involving more students in answering obviously aids the goal of being able to transfer responsibility for learning to students, something that just can't happen if the teacher dominates the conversation—which can be a real trap for teachers (Hattie, 2012). By getting answers from more students, you may even be able to establish a feedback loop that shows you where each student's point of need is and helps you improve the quality of your questions even more. "Who'd have thought making sure the kids were doing the thinking and not just me would make for better lessons?" one teacher

observed to me with a broad grin. Reducing the dominance of the teacher's voice is a key characteristic of high-performing teachers, according to John Hattie (2009).

There are several techniques for boosting wait time without bringing the conversation to a screeching halt. **Turn and Talk** (a shortened version of the standby Think Pair Share) is probably the easiest: Rather than call on individual students, present the question to the whole class, then give students 45–90 seconds to discuss possible responses with a partner. You can't let the pause go much longer because students will begin discussing other things, but even these few seconds represent significantly more thinking time for students. Then, rather than ask an individual student for *the answer*—which again raises the risk of shutting out the less-confident students—you can ask, "What did you and your partner talk about?"

Also worth adding to the repertoire are several small adjustments for managing time in the classroom. These include **pre-cueing**, in which you either pre-cue individual students before the rest of the class because they need a lot of extra processing time or merely give everybody a heads-up about the questions to come ("I'm going to ask Kieran to explain the role of the Senate, then Kyle, and finally someone from the back-table group"); **prompting** ("I can see five risk-takers with their hands up! Who else is going to offer a response?"); and **cold-calling**. In cold-calling, you pose a question so

that everyone considers it and then name the student from whom you'd like to hear, taking care to explain to students that you are doing this to help them put their wait time to good use; avoid using this as a form of punishment against students who are zoning out.

Providing only cursory wait time is likely a habit you unconsciously picked up from your own teachers (Wiliam, 2006) so reversing it takes some thought. But I'd consider this a classic Simple Shift in that it takes little time or additional preparation (Pearsall, 2018) yet has the potential to dramatically change the level of engagement of your students.

Simple Shift Five: Pause and Elaboration Time

If pausing after a question can help students participate in class, how about pausing after they give the response? It's the same theory: By reexamining the ingrained compulsion we all have for filling in quiet moments as short as a few hundredths of a second (Stivers et al., 2009), we can come to recognize that the "use of silence is critical to deep and productive discussion" (Walsh & Sattes, 2016, loc. 480). Over time, students learn to keep their answers short because of the asymmetry of authority in classroom discussions (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Maroni et al., 2008) and to undo this, they'll need a clear signal that they can discuss their thinking at length rather than anticipate a binary correct/incorrect reaction from the teacher (Reznitskya, 2012). Pause time, which is sometimes known as Wait Time Two, provides such a signal and allows for student voice, which, after all, requires a listener (Pekrul & Levin, 2007). I like how one of my coachees put it: "Pausing after a student answers is a constant reminder that what matters is not how much of the curriculum I covered but how much of it my kids took in."

You may not be the only one who finds pause time unnatural at first; students accustomed to

rapidly being told they're right or wrong can be confused by your momentary silence. If you find it difficult to begin incorporating pause time, try an **elaboration cue**. One type, a **placeholder statement**, also known as a **minimal encourager**, is a brief, noncommittal response like "Oh?" or "Go on" that invites further comment but does "not imply agreement or disagreement" (I. Smith, 2009, p. 51). Some teachers like to go a step further by feigning confusion or offering a deliberately incorrect restatement of their response: "So the Russian Revolution wasn't at all shaped by World War I?" This technique, called a **blank response**, is generally associated with elementary-age children, but I've found that high school students like it too because it provides an opportunity to prove the teacher wrong. And of course teachers like the way it helps a student transition from "knowing" a fact to building a reasoned argument.

Employing extended pause times can feel counterintuitive but with practice it can become something that you use not just routinely but instinctually. This is the power of habit: It gives us a way to take something that is important but challenging to do and turn it into something we do without thinking.

Online Adaptations: Simple Shifts Four & Five

If it is hard to remember to wait before and after your students answer in the classroom, it is even harder when connecting via video chat or conference call. However, it is just as important when you are teaching online to use wait and pause time to encourage more students to answer, and in greater depth and detail. Pre-cueing questions before the remote lesson starts and using chat rooms as a forum for questions and responses is a good way to do this when teaching online.

Simple Shift Six: Snapshot Feedback

Snapshot feedback is a type of formative feedback, but it's got to be fast—think of the real-time course corrections basketball coaches offer their players during a practice or game. Or, think of your own work life. Would you rather have a principal who does frequent walkthroughs and offers tips that might improve your performance right away, or one who waits until a year-end review to enumerate every single thing you did wrong? That's what is so transformative about adopting a feedback culture: It helps us evaluate not just our students' progress, but our own (Hattie, 2009), creating in-the-moment opportunities to assess depth of understanding rather than mere factual recall.

So, what would be the classroom equivalent of "Try straightening that elbow on your free throws"? You could start by letting each student create a **private replay signal**—something unobtrusive like a hand on the upper arm or on the heart. (We call them "private" because they represent a one-to-one communication between student and teacher, but we introduce them to the whole class.) Without drawing attention to her inability to grasp something you've said, a student can tip you off that you could have done better and give you a chance to immediately clarify what you meant: "We are exploring how juxtaposition is used in Les Murray's poetry." (Student replay signal.) "We are going to look into how Murray often put two images close together in his poems to create a contrast between them." Different students have different processing speeds (Braaten & Willoughby, 2014) and replaying what you've said can aid accessibility. I've found students to be very enthusiastic about commenting on the clarity of my teaching!

When you're ready to take this technique to the next level, consider the distinction that Fisher and Frey (2014) draw between "background knowledge" prompts and "process" or "procedural" prompts. Does the student need you to repeat a bit of information, or to clarify a procedure? I once video-coached a phys ed teacher, for example, who instructed the class to line up, practice shots, and "please be conscious of the offside rule." A student requested a replay, but instead of explaining the offside rule—which I'm pretty sure is what the student was after—the teacher merely told them again to line up. If you consciously divide replay signals from your students into these categories, it will help clarify your response but also allow you to see patterns in what students find confusing about your delivery.

There are also **public display signals**, which are often adopted schoolwide. Hand signals are quite common; one school I work at asks students to signal with a thumb if they understand and a little finger if they need assistance. Traffic light signals work, as do cards with W for "well explained" on one side and N for "need to explain better" on the other. As with replay signals, I find public displays work best when they are explicitly about the teacher—another reminder that the snapshot feedback we want is about the *impact* of our teaching.

Employing snapshot feedback is a Simple Shift that provides an ongoing reminder about a deep truth of teaching: It is not the *intended* curriculum that matters but the *attained* one.

Simple Shift Seven: Reflection Time

You may provide the most thorough, thoughtful feedback, but if your students don't apply it—or don't even read it—what good is it? "The most important feature of effective feedback . . . is that it leads to useful action on the part of the student" (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015, p. 109). It's easy to see why a time-crunched teacher might want to deliver their chosen method of feedback and keep moving, but failing to ascertain

whether the feedback has had its intended effect would be to skip an important step.

To get a handle on this, you and your students will need to have established *the learning purpose* for the lesson. Students need to know what they are expected to learn and when they have achieved their goal (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). They also need to distinguish between the activity, and the learning it is designed to lead to: "It's easy for students to lose sight of the *why* that underlies *what* they're doing in the classroom" (Goodwin & Hubbell, 2013, p. 28). Reflection time is an opportunity to quickly *demonstrate* that they understand the learning purpose.

Highlighting is one of my favorite ways to accomplish this. Traditionally, highlighting has been the preserve of the teacher. Given a learning intention of "We are learning how to revise our topic sentences to remove ambiguity," the teacher might say, "The key word here is 'revise.' Please highlight that for me." But what if a student knows the word "revise" but has questions about "ambiguity"? A way to uncover that would have been to request instead, "Can you please underline any word that you think someone else might find unclear?" This is a safe way for them to tell you about something they found unclear, and it gives you feedback on how successfully you are communicating the learning intention.

You could also ask students to **rank** or **rate** the success criteria you give them, for example how hard they think they'll be to achieve on a scale of 1–10. This prompts them to take a serious look at the criteria and to give you feedback about which they are least confident of achieving. Asking students to **rewrite** a learning purpose in their own words is another great way to gauge how thoroughly they've understood it, as is asking them to **co-create** a learning purpose with you or to **personalize** one in a way that is particularly interesting to them. Two techniques for eliciting reflection time

involve model responses: Students can rank several examples from strongest to weakest, or you can give them a deliberately weak model and have them critique it. These are powerful exercises because they recast modelling tasks from an exercise where students review a single, narrow model of success (which often leads to them simply copying this response), to an examination of the underlying *qualities* of a successful response. This helps students see success criteria not as abstract information handed out by the teacher, but as something concrete that they can emulate.

Students can be drafted into the marking-up process as well. Marking up student work consumes a huge amount of teachers' time, but there is remarkably little research on how effective this is (Elliot et al., 2016). You can save yourself some time as well as be assured you're getting through to students with **minimal marking** or **double ticking**, in which you identify a particularly strong or weak aspect of student work and then expect students to explain what went well (or change what did not). Similarly, you may engage in **partial marking**, where you mark up a section of student work and then ask them to apply this learning in other sections of their response. Or you might closely annotate a response and then—instead of doing it yourself—ask the student to write a summary comment synthesizing this advice.

One of my favorite examples of these correction techniques is to mark up a student's response and then ask them to use an **error cluster** to review and categorize any mistakes they have made—a powerful way to help students see underlying patterns in what they are getting wrong. All of the learning from these reflective exercises might also be extended into a **reflection journal** activity. There are further variations, but what they all have in common is the aim of getting students to actively engage with the learning purpose and assess their success at reaching it.

Conclusion

If you find the argument in this white paper persuasive, you might want to look at one further aspect of the Simple Shifts: The importance of capturing micro-data to accelerate this habit acquisition. I use the term micro-data to distinguish it from all the other data we collect in schools. Much of this data—diagnostic and literacy testing, end-of-year exams, system-level assessments—is collected annually or over term and semester cycles. While essential in other contexts, this information is not as useful if you are trying to establish a new routine or skill.

What is required is a habit tracker. A Fitbit is a good example of how and why habit trackers work: Each of the legions of people who use the device already knew the benefits of a more active lifestyle, but recording a simple metric like the number of steps taken in a day encourages them to become more aware of what it takes to realize this goal in their everyday lifestyle. Similarly, using a micro-data tool to record, for example, the length of your wait time silences, the number of opportunities you offer students to respond, or the ratio of verbal versus nonverbal behavioral interventions you use, offers you a "nudge" to use these techniques as well as a fast feedback loop on how well you are embedding them.
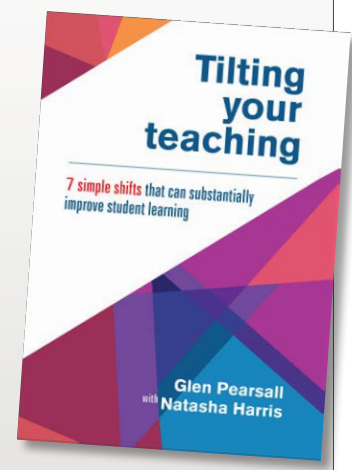
Research on implementing a change in practice or behavior confirms that choosing a few pivotal skills to work on—skills that are discrete, manageable, and measurable—is actually the best way to bring about major change. This is a powerful insight on how we can most effectively implement changes to our everyday teaching practice. ■

References

Bennett, B., & Smilanich, P. (1994). *Classroom management: A thinking and caring approach*. Bookation Inc.

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2014). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. Learning Sciences International.

Braaten, E., & Willoughby, B. (2014). *Bright kids who can't keep up: Help your child overcome slow processing speed and succeed in a fast-paced world*. Guilford Press.

Cazden, C. B. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Heinemann.

Clear, J. (2018). A*tomic habits: An easy and proven way to build good habits and break bad ones*. Penguin Random House.

Dix, P. (2017). *When the adults change, everything changes: Seismic shifts in school behavior*. Independent Thinking Press.

Duhigg, C. (2014). *The power of habit: Why we do what we do in life and business*. Random House.

Elliott, V., Baird, J., Hopfenbeck, T. N., Ingram, J., Thompson, I., Usher, N., Zantout, M., Richardson, J., & Coleman, R. (2016, April). *A marked improvement? A review of the evidence on written marking*. Education Endowment Foundation, University of Oxford.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). *Checking for understanding: Formative assessment techniques for your classroom* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Goodwin, B., & Hubbell, E. R. (2013). *The 12 touchstones of good teaching: A checklist for staying focused every day*. ASCD.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.

Hattie, J., & Zierer, K. (2018). *10 mindframes for visible learning: Teaching for success*. Routledge.

Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2012). *How the way we talk can change the way we work: Seven languages for transformation*. [Ebook]. Jossey-Bass.

Mackay, J. (2006). *Coat of many pockets: Managing classroom interactions*. ACER Press.

Maroni, B., Pontecorvo, C., & Gnisci, A. (2008, March). Turn-taking in classroom interactions: Overlapping, interruptions and pauses in primary school. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 23*(1), 59–76.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Heflebower, T. (2010). *The highly engaged classroom*. Marzano Resources.

Moore, T., Robertson, R., Maggin, D., Oliver, R., & Wehby, J. H. (2010). Using teacher praise and opportunities to respond to promote appropriate student behaviour. *Preventing School Failure 54*(3), 172–178.

Pearsall, G. (2018). *Fast and effective assessment: How to reduce your workload and improve student learning*. ASCD.

Pekrul S., & Levin, B. (2007). Building student voice for school improvement. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School* (pp. 711–726). Springer.

Pope, G. (2013). *Questioning technique pocketbook*. Teachers' Pocketbooks.

Reznitskaya, A. (2012). Dialogic teaching: Rethinking language use during literature discussions. *The Reading Teacher, 65*(7), 446–456.

Rogers, B. (2015). *Classroom behaviour: A practical guide to effective teaching, behaviour management and colleague support*. SAGE.

Rowe, M. B. (1972, April). *Wait-time and rewards as instructional variables: Their influence in language, logic, and fate control* [Paper presentation]. Annual meeting of the National Association for Research on Science teaching, Chicago, IL, United States.

Rumhor, F. (2013). Reflection and inquiry in stages of learning practice. *Teaching Artist Journal, 11*(4), 224–233.

Smith, D., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2015). *Better than carrots or sticks: Restorative practices for positive classroom management*. ASCD.

Smith, I. (2009). *Assessment and learning pocketbook*. Teachers' Pocketbooks.

Stahl, R. J. (1994). *Using "think-time" and "wait-time" skillfully in the classroom*. ERIC Digest. ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education.

Stivers, T., Enfield, N. J., Brown, P., Englert, C., Hayashi, M., Heinemann, T., Hoymann, G., Rossano, F., de Ruiter, J. P., Yoon, K.-E., & Levinson, S. C. (2009). Universals and cultural variation in turn-taking in conversation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106*(26), 10587–10592.

Tobin, K. (1987). The role of wait time in higher cognitive level learning. *Review of Education Research, 57*(1), 69–95.

Walsh, J. A., & Sattes, E. D. (2016). *Quality Questioning: Research-based practice to engage every learner*. Sage Publications Inc.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design* (2nd Expanded edition). ASCD.

Wiliam, D. (2006). *Leadership for teacher learning: Creating a culture where all teachers improve so that all students succeed*. Learning Science International.

Wiliam, D., & Leahy, S. (2015). *Embedding formative assessment: Practical techniques for K–12 classrooms*. Learning Sciences International.

Support your professional growth journey with learning, coaching, and consulting from McREL

McREL provides a variety of professional learning experiences for teachers, principals, and district leaders. Based on a solid foundation of research and evidence, our sessions deliver valuable insights and practical, ready-to-use strategies to help educators make an even bigger difference for every student.

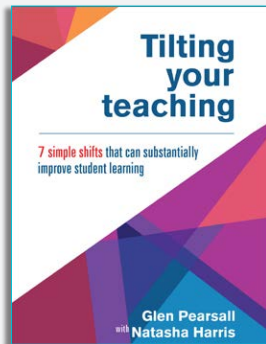## Collaborative, contextualized sessions with flexible delivery options

Online   On-site   Hybrid

Call 800.858.6830 or email info@mcrel.org to learn more

## Available at McREL's bookstore
store.mcrel.org

Tilting Your Teaching: 7 Simple Shifts That Can Substantially Improve Student Learning

How can you improve your classroom's learning climate *right now*? With these research-based, practice-proven techniques, every teacher can gain students' cooperation, engagement, and focus.
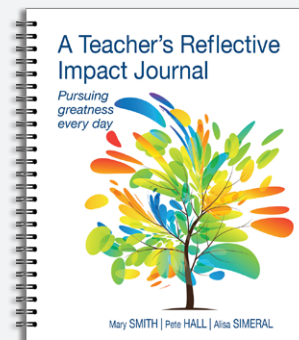
A Teacher's Reflective Impact Journal: Pursuing Greatness Every Days

Filled with quotes and prompts, this journal will help you develop reflective habits, focus on your goals, improve what needs improving, and celebrate what you've gotten right.
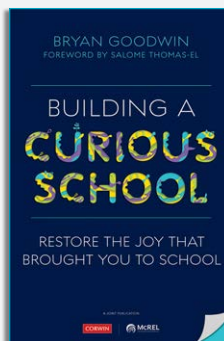
Building a Curious School: Restore the Joy That Brought You to School

Grounded in research, *Building a Curious School* shows educators how to intentionally cultivate inquisitiveness and wonder in teaching and learning.
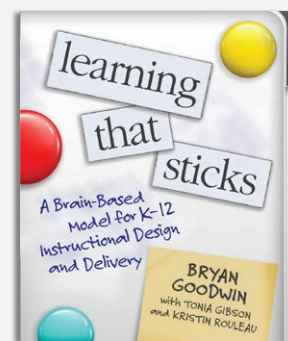
Learning That Sticks: A Brain-Based Model for K–12 Instructional Design and Delivery

Bryan Goodwin and his coauthors unpack the cognitive science underlying research-supported learning strategies to sequence into experiences that challenge, inspire, and engage your students.

McREL
INTERNATIONAL
curiosity for better learning