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## Shift This! How To Implement Gradual Changes For Massive Impact In Your Classroom

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## Shift This! How to Implement Gradual Changes for MASSIVE Impact in Your Classroom

by Kirr, Joy

Dave Burgess Consulting

2017

200 p.

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### Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused schools to shift to distance learning and made educators recognize the need for change in their pedagogical practices. Arguments for change in teaching methodologies have long been made, even before the coronavirus pandemic, and an example of this is Joy Kirr's book *Shift This!* which emphasizes the need to shift the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the students. This shift creates a dynamic classroom that encourages students to take charge of their own learning. The ideas and inspiration presented in this book come from the author's the many years of teaching experience.

Joy Kirr has been teaching for 25 years and is currently a Grade 7 English Language Arts teacher although she has held various other teaching positions. She holds a Bachelor's degree in special education and a Master's degree in reading. She is most well known for her workshops on implementing the *Genius Hour* in the classroom. Joy Kirr wrote *Shift This!* to share her experience of changing her teaching style from a rigid, structured approach to an open, flexible methodology. This was accomplished by making small shifts in her classroom management and teaching practices.

### The Book

In her book, Joy Kirr offers educators tips on how to effect beneficial changes to their teaching practices and gives useful tools to implement gradual changes in the classroom to redesign their existing approaches and make a positive impact on student learning. The book has 10 chapters in total with the first three chapters discussing her initial motivation for changing her classroom and how she made those changes. The following six chapters discuss how to shift specific areas of teaching such as homework, grading and the classroom environment to the use of social media. The final chapter discusses how to deal with



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resistance to the changes teachers are making in the classroom whether from students, fellow teachers or other stakeholders.

In the first chapter of the book, the author shares the *Catalyst*, i.e., what encouraged her to try shifting her own classroom and she introduces the idea of how small shifts can lead to a greater impact. Joy Kirr explains you don't have to dive in all at once to make huge positive changes (p. 4). The main focus is how to shift the classroom from being teacher-driven to becoming student-centered and student-led. She then transitions to the process of asking questions and how to adopt a growth mindset in order to improve and be willing to try something new. She emphasizes the importance of analyzing why we do or do not do certain things in our classroom. She then highlights that our students are changing too, showing a heavier use of social media and a need for instant feedback. Therefore, educators must, in turn, adapt to be able to reach their students. She then encourages educators to think about why and how they want to change their classroom practice. This method of inquiry is the corner stone of Joy Kirr's ideology to change her classroom practice. The why questions help to clarify the problems educators face in the classroom and would like to fix. These questions will then be changed into how questions to help educators solve the classroom issues.

In order to bring about self-directed learning, Joy Kirr wanted to transform her class from being teacher-centric to student-centric in every aspect of teaching: from classroom environment to classwork, from homework to grading, etc. Instead of the teacher offering all the solutions or even some of the problems, she tells the reader how she asks open ended questions to guide the students to these endpoints.

Joy Kirr then discusses how students should have more choices and voice in specific areas of teaching. She begins with the shift in the classroom environment to establish a culture that makes it a space owned by students, where they can thrive and prosper. She allows students to decorate or bring in their artwork. In the chapter about classwork Joy Kirr mentions gamifying lessons to shift how educators teach or review lessons with students. She has great suggestions on how to choose groups by using random name generators and changing groups for every activity to build a sense of community in the classroom. Class discussions are also a way to increase community in the classroom by opening up the discussion to students and allowing them to have a voice. In the chapter about homework, Joy Kirr suggests giving students a choice board where they choose 3 out of 4 items from a list. This will encourage students to complete their homework while allowing the teacher to appreciate student skills and diversity. Joy Kirr introduces reflection as homework giving students a chance to reflect on their learning and how they can improve. A tip, that some might find radical, in this chapter is to give a grade of incomplete for any homework that is not submitted. Joy Kirr argues how unfair it is to give a grade of zero for homework that has not been assessed. In the chapter on grading, she suggests using homework as a type of formative assessment to guide instruction instead of a means of punishment. Another innovative tip in the chapter on grading is shifting problem-based learning into passion-based learning giving students a chance to share their interests with their class. These innovative interventions continue in all areas of teaching discussed in this book. Finally, the author emphasizes on the power of students' voice and students' choice. It drives student curiosity and instills lifelong learning principles. Overall, it isn't a typical and easy process but one that requires a lot of time, effort and patience from both, teachers and students.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

*Shift This!* is an excellent motivational book that is easy to read. It encourages the reader to rethink the way he/she teaches by keeping the students in the forefront. The author reminds

the reader of the importance of reflecting on the things they do as educators, to pause, reflect and then change. *Shift This!* brings about innovative practices which allows students to become better problem solvers. Such a result is vital to students' success in the workplace once they graduate. This book challenges the traditional way of teaching which is teacher-centric and does not focus as much on the students. The book suggests the most impactful way to educate today is to incorporate more of a team effort where the students bear some responsibility for their own learning. From the title of the book, *Shift This!*, to the use of "why" or "how" questions, the author encourages the reader to adopt a growth mindset. Even though the book is intended for educators in schools and not for higher education, some of the suggestions addressed in the book, is a conversation opener for educators to re-evaluate the teaching and learning process to better serve the needs of their students at any educational sector. The author provides countless choices to practise a shift in teaching: applications, teaching strategies, and more. She makes change look easy and almost difficult to say 'no, I can't do this'. With so many choices and examples, the author really makes the reader believe that change is possible and necessary to be an effective educator. In addition to the Further Reading list provided at the end of each chapter of the book, countless external resources are listed throughout the book from websites to online links to social media tools.

While these techniques are innovative, incorporating them fully may not be ideal in a university environment where there is a timeframe that must be met. Such a technique could hinder the completion of the material in one semester. There may also be restraints to how an instructor can evaluate their students because these methods may lack the objectivity required in some academic courses. In the case of teaching English Language Learners, an educator would need to spend a great deal of time developing student skills to be able to use the *Genius Hour* effectively. Even with these challenges, there are so many ideas presented in the book making it easy for educators to shift their classroom.

Our society and education is changing more than ever before with the shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world adapts to a new norm, our students need new skills to help them thrive in the workplace and their future. Passionate educators need to connect and collaborate to reimagine how education will look like and what shifts need to be made to empower students and cultivate a culture that is student driven and student led.

Educators need to evaluate their practices and this book is a great tool to start that process. A revolution in education is imminent, therefore it is essential for educators to adapt and adjust to incorporate best practices by using social media and technology in the classroom. By incorporating such tools educators can demonstrate to students that learning is part of everyday living, fostering lifelong learners. With the shift towards online education, we cannot remain stagnant with the techniques we use in the physical classroom. It is our responsibility to our students to be adaptive and give them the best education that we can provide. Students now more than ever need to learn to take the initiative and be independent and the techniques used in this book do a great deal to achieve this!

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