
The authors of *Learning to Improve* were tired of witnessing educational reforms implemented haphazardly as a result of count­less new ideas. All too often, the reforms were not given time to work or were not data- or research-driven. Bryk and his colleagues decided to delve into some of the most trusted tenets of improvement science, found across a variety of professional fields, and break them down into how they can greatly impact the educational process—either with an individual student, or within a school.

*Learning to Improve* is based on six improvement principles for establishing better educational practices. Each chapter gives the history behind the strategy, provides detailed research to support the practice, and also includes real-world examples of the strategy in action. These practices range from the narrow view of focusing on a specific problem and being user-centered, to spiraling outward and using effective networking techniques.

One section that hit particularly home for me was a chart detailing all the responsibilities and relationships new teachers must contend within their first year. The chart reminded me of one of those styrofoam solar system models, with the poor teacher playing the part of the sun with numerous toothpicks sticking out, leading to other demands on his or her time. The chapter then points out that research shows that new teachers are either given feedback from too many unreliable sources, or given no feedback at all. The authors plead for new teachers to receive consistent feedback from a limited number of reliable sources.

*Learning to Improve* is not an easy read or a quick-fix book. The ideas are explained in true depth and the research vernacular gets a bit heavy at times. The book, however, boasts authors who are at the very top of their fields and who bring the principles back to the practical realm. I often found myself stopping to ponder a key point and then making notes about how it could relate to my school and my students. If you commit the same time and patience to *Learning to Improve*, you’ll find yourself doing the same.

Reviewed by Brian Bond, principal of Hunter Hills Elementary School in Corbin, Kentucky.


“The great thing about education is that the mindset about teaching and learning is constantly evolving.” One might think that this is a quote from mindset guru Carol Dweck. It’s not—it is the premise of *Interactive Student Centered Learning*. Author Edward Spooner takes readers through the history of different learning and teaching styles (from traditional to constructivist), ending with what he feels is the best way to learn and teach: interactive student learning.

The book is divided into six distinct sections and is heavily based on research. The first section, “The Learning Process,” is a review of the theories of learning similar to the philosophy of education courses we took in college. Piaget and his constructivist views are even mentioned.

Spooner, a long-time secondary teacher, uses his research and experience as an educator to discuss the pros and cons of the traditional views of teaching and learning by comparing it to student-centered learning (SCL). This flows into the next section in which he discusses the most used SCL methodologies: active learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and constructivist learning. In each of these chapters, the instructor’s role is addressed along with keys to remember and potential problems. I particularly enjoyed the “potential problem” section in each of these chapters because it allows teachers to be proactive when implementing these theories in the face of the pitfalls.

The fourth and fifth sections, Spooner’s main purpose of the book, are a deep dive into SCL. The chapters explain how educators can actually implement SCL into the classroom, explaining the process and including assessment ideas. As research has proved in recent years, students do not truly learn from a “sit and get” model, but need to talk about, write about, and apply what they are learning to make it relevant and to retain the information.

Although this book is more pertinent for secondary school education, I believe all teachers—with support from their principals—can use SCL techniques so that students become active members of their learning environment. By applying these techniques, students will be able to be truly engaged in the learning process, resulting in high student motivation and achievement.

Reviewed by Jenny Nauman, principal of Shields Elementary School in Lewes, Delaware.