

**Action Research**  
**Within the Classroom**

**Student Attitudes within Education:**  
**Making Self-Regulation a Practical Habit in**  
**Learning**

By Mark Bennett

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I am an experienced teacher who has witnessed many enormous innovations during my career. In the area of differentiated instruction, I have learned that students require teachers to optimize their understanding of a subject based on their individual needs. Through his work on multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner has encouraged me to create a dynamic whereby teachers and students alike may 'synthesize our understandings for ourselves'<sup>1</sup> and lend a moral voice to the knowledge we learn from curriculum. I understand the need for tools and manipulatives so that students may achieve comprehension on strands within a given subject. Embracing such breakthroughs in pedagogy, I still neglect one group of students in my classroom. These young individuals appear adrift from education, stuck within a range between apathy and inability to adjust their attitudes to success at school. Is it possible the missing piece may be self-regulation, the key to addressing the mind-set of students who have misplaced the ultimate purpose of education, the ability for students to use their conscious awareness as a touchstone for the fulfillment of their goals?

Self-regulation just may be a learning skill that has long been overlooked as one of the fundamentals from which teachers may utilize to help students reach their full academic abilities in life. By definition, self-regulation is the ability of students to monitor and control their progress, to achieve goals in life through self-knowledge intended to manifest personal interests. Self-regulation transcends curriculum itself; students must first come to terms with an understanding of their character (intrapersonal) and reflect on personal relationships (interpersonal) in order to seek out opportunities that meet their personal interests relating to formal education. Self-regulation involves metacognition and the critical thinking to identify one's relevance, plus the creativity to make goals accessible to fulfill a dream for one's life. In her work on critical thinking, the American psychologist Diane Halpern has characterized 'decisions as to which outcomes should be desirable,'<sup>2</sup> implying our pattern of reasoning

formulates the choices that define our personality. In effect, we are a sum of the conclusions that we personally draw on our lives.

The ramifications for self-regulation permit too many possibilities for an educator to ignore; students will need explicit instruction to develop critical thinking skills so that a learner may find their niche in the world. It is a context helping students to manage their behaviour so that they may construct the positive measures with the most efficiency to achieve their goals.

According to Dr. Stuart Shanker, a research professor of Philosophy and Psychology at York University, he has stated that self-regulation “is far more than IQ in not just what kind of grades a kid gets, but how often the kid goes to class.”<sup>3</sup> To hone my abilities as a teacher, I have set myself up for the task to bring this theory into practice within my classroom.

Baumeister and Vohs’ model for self-regulation became the focus for my action research objective: to improve a goal-oriented construct in students which in turn, may improve their academic performance through the course of a school year. At a school of 220 students—largely lower and middle-class students of Caucasian descent—I was very fortunate to involve my fellow teachers at a Primary, Junior, and Intermediate level for the purpose to improve not only grades, but the emotional intelligence of students to handle decisions facing them with the challenges of sexuality, aggression, and a drug culture prevalent in society.

My first task was to create posters for each classroom, using the Baumeister and Vohs model for self-regulation. The key concepts would help students set personal goals, identify and observe improvements in their goals, realize the resilience required to overcome decisions counter-productive to their objectives with the incentive to realize their full potential as individuals. From the grade two to grade eight levels, each poster would introduce students to Baumeister and Vohs’ concepts for self-regulation: ‘Setting a Standard’ meant the identification of a goal, ‘Monitoring’ would give the flexibility for a student to modify their original goal, while ‘Self-Regulatory Strength’ would afford students pause to wonder about what favourable ‘Environmental’ (internal or external) conditions may be helpful for the success of each goal. The conditions may include anything ranging from seating arrangements in a classroom to

effects such as space, sound, or lighting inside a classroom. The last concept was 'Motivation,' the personal incentive within a student to possess the attitude for positive change. These four concepts would fit together in a loop where students in peer groups may re-visit each concept to refine their critical reasoning and ensure success in their ultimate goals.

For each of the four concepts, student leaders would be chosen to guide peer groups in a similar way Literacy Circles are used in Language Arts. Students would become familiar with the tenor of questioning used as probing for self-regulation to provide a culture of respect and critical thinking in groups of four to five students. I have called these probing questions 'Ice Breakers' (see Figure 1), verbally non-intrusive method by which students would feel comfortable in an environment to express their ideas among peers whose goal is only for personal improvement. In order for self-regulation to work, it has to be conducted on a voluntary basis: to induce any positive change, students must want to involve themselves in a task in which they have reason to believe in success. Self-regulation involves the process for students to control and monitor their actions so that they may grasp the purpose behind their goals. A teacher's responsibility is to implement the critical thinking skills in students through which they make the choices befitting their individual ambitions in life. Keeping true to the definition of self-regulation, students must possess the critical thinking skills to appreciate the resilience needed to achieve success in their goals.

**Setting a Standard:**

***Keeping a specific purpose to your goal***

**Ice Breakers:**

‘I was wondering if you meant by your goal that...?’

‘I’m not sure what you mean...could you explain more?’

‘Would it help if you decided to change...so that...?’

**Choosing an appropriate verbalization...**

**Monitoring:**

**Keeping an open mind...being willing to make adjustments to your goal.**

**Ice Breakers:**

‘I agree with you because...’

‘I like how you succeeded in...but do you think it might help you...?’

‘Do you think you may wish to re-visit...because...’

**Choosing an appropriate verbalization...**

**Self-Regulatory Strength:**

**Thinking about where to sit, whom to sit with, and changes for the better.**

**Ice Breakers:**

‘I noticed that you...’

‘Do you think this could help?’

‘Have you tried to change...?’

**Choosing an appropriate verbalization...**

**Motivation:**

**Yes...Being open enough to change your attitude and grow into a new you.**

**Ice Breakers:**

‘Has any change yet helped you reach your goal? Don’t panics...be patient.’

‘With this positive change, I’ve noticed that...’

‘This reminds me of...when...’

**Choosing an appropriate verbalization.**

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Figure 1: A small laminated card to help students use deferential language with peers.

I also created something called a 'Self-Regulatory Circle Card' (see Figure 2), a type of rule card where students must follow basic guidelines ensuring for critical and creative thought. One of the rules for example, states that only 'the student holding the (i.e., Circle) card may speak.' A strong connection between metacognition and self-regulation exists to the point where the semantics of their definition blur: as for self-regulation, metacognition—something known as '*thinking about thinking*'—requires students to undergo a self-reflective probing, a means by which critical and creative thinking becomes the purpose for student initiative.

## **Self-Regulatory**

### **Circle Card**

A leader is chosen for each session and is responsible  
for the following expectations:

- 1. Only the student holding the card may speak.**
- 2. Tone of voice and choice of words demonstrates a positive respect for any discussion of student ideals**
- 3. Keeping the discussion on task**
- 4. Being inclusive enough to share this card with all members of the circle**
- 5. Nurturing an open attitude to positive growth**
- 6. Encouraging a responsible attitude from all members**

'We can spend our days bemoaning our losses, or we can grow from them. Ultimately the choice is ours. We can be victims of circumstance or masters of our own fate, but make no mistake, we cannot be both.'

Richard Paul Evans

**Figure 2: Self –Regulatory Card for student use only.**

Teachers must precede the teaching of critical thinking skills with their students before they may begin the practice of self-regulation. In effect, students undertake a process to refine their thinking skills to educate themselves in the context of life's challenges as well as the skills and strategies to comprehend the curriculum for which teachers are responsible. Time is required for any meaningful reflection and the purpose to my 'Self-Regulatory Circle Card' is to give a student the necessary interval of time to think constructively in a respectful circle among their

peers.

Goals for any one of us may be difficult to reach in one try. Self-regulation needs to be understood as a reflective journey, one in which perseverance is an undeniable attribute in order for any goal to reach fruition. Acknowledged throughout Stuart Shanker's book, *Calm, Alert and Learning: Classroom Strategies for Self-Regulation*,<sup>4</sup> resilience in great part requires students' self-awareness of their biology, psychology, and cognition. It is this range from personal diet to emotional intelligence where students may come to manipulate these essential strengths and siphon their positive influences to a purpose of individual achievement.

After peer discussions take place on a bi-monthly basis, the students who volunteer to participate in the self-regulatory circle will choose a goal, and a 'strategic plan' to help make their goals attainable. As an observation, the students who began to experience success with their goals along with the collegial respect from peers, demonstrated a willingness to participate as group leaders and volunteer responses beneficial to their groups. In turn, they were making observations on their own self-awareness—a clear indication on thinking about their thinking.

There are two reasons for inclusion of a strategic plan: environmental issues inside the classroom may need a change in order for a student to reach a goal and the use of peer pressure would require a positive connotation from all students if self-regulation is to be effective inside a classroom itself. Through the use of Velcro, each student will place their goal and strategic planning on the poster along with their names. In addition, to focus on empathy to create an inclusive classroom (see Figure 3), I chose another category, 'peer support' so that individuals may share in their support for each other's personal goals. If students decide not to volunteer for 'Self-Regulation' groups inside their classrooms, they will be free to read quietly, draw, or complete any school work while the students participate in the project. From my initial experiences within a Primary classroom, all the students volunteered with enthusiasm. In a Junior classroom, a student with a mild form of autism and oppositional disorder, resisted the group circle for four to five meetings until the third month. He then made the unexpected



decision to join a peer group; what I have observed about this student is that he has begun to recognize the respect and concern his peers have for him, helping to serve as a deterrent from his anti-social behaviours. As self-regulatory circles are voluntary to students, the only pressure rests on the teacher to make the sole purpose of self-regulation a milieu in which students experience the comfort of their self-image among peers with a common interest to seek improvement through personal goals.

<b>Student Name:</b>	<b>Personal Goal:</b> <b>(What goal is important to you now?)</b>	<b>Peer Support:</b> <b>(How might your peers support you?)</b>
<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

**Figure 3: Example of a Student Self-Regulatory Chart.**

For the grade levels of kindergarten and grade one, teachers would need to modify and run the self-regulatory circles, choosing only four to five students for a period of two months. Before the teachers began the process of self-regulation, I suggested that they read a story similar to the theme of Old Turtle,<sup>5</sup> by Douglas Wood, to their young students, discussing the meaning behind the story and doing an activity (e.g., each student gets a paperclip and joins a string to all clasps, representing unity). Recognizing the professionalism of my colleagues, I encouraged a collaborative process in which we exchange ideas for the purpose of a creative dynamic in our pedagogy. Old Turtle is a parable about the inclusivity we need to recognize in each other so that we may all live in harmony with each other. However, given its complexity for such a young age, their teachers may wish to choose a ‘just right’ book with a similar theme.

The connection for the students is primarily to see the relationship between cooperation with peers and the ability to support all the students in each other’s personal goals. With young children in kindergarten and grade one, physical and intellectual development are still an

ongoing process. Between the ages of five and twelve, children are only beginning ‘to take on new challenges, including reading, writing, arithmetic, and the world of *reason*,’<sup>6</sup> Thinking for example, is a labourious process for which the benefit of complex carbohydrates ‘metabolize more gradually and provide a steadier release of glucose for use by the body.’<sup>7</sup> Their age alone does not permit them to understand the need for energy in the form of complex carbohydrates for clear thinking. Children at this age rely on parental, or supervisory care to regulate their biological and cognitive decisions for them. Before motivation may become a factor for young students, cognitive and physiological development must reach a level of maturity where they may grasp the incentive for self-regulation.

For the young students using Old Turtle, I have included within the loop on their poster ‘My goal is,’ ‘How am I doing?’ and ‘My turtle helpers will:’ all written signs have pictorial clues to help students understand the purpose for the poster itself. On the poster, I have included something called ‘Old Turtle’s Suggestion Box,’ a list of ideas to help prompt student responses and collaborate with a common purpose of respect and cooperation. To help the younger students pay attention to a peer speaker, I have also attached a small bear to each poster: its purpose is to denote that only the student holding the bear may be the speaker while the rest of the students are to focus on their listening skills and wait their turn to verbalize a response. During the first week of school, I was able to arrange two instructional services with the students, both the primary group and the Junior/Intermediate group. I spoke to all the students about the meaning and benefits of self-regulation, including an improvement in grades and social skills. Modelling a Self-Regulatory circle group—akin to a Literature Circle in which students are provided instructions to guide them within peer-led discussions for the purpose to develop their critical thinking skills—I informed the students that a leader would be chosen each time to run a group of two to five students where language and tone of voice would reflect a positive attitude to student goals. My objective would be inclusive enough to hope that support for each other’s goal would expand not only to all the students in classroom, but the entire school itself.

In our culture students especially tend to circumvent their anxieties and hide their imperfections from their age group. Dr. Seltzer has stated that ‘in one way or another, virtually everybody dreams of standing out’<sup>8</sup> in a society where praise is given to an array of superficial concepts from an ideal image of a body to the opulent habits of entertainers. Fighting against society’s power over young students, is it possible for students to overcome the effects of peer pressure and admit their shortcomings in an open forum? If education has an obligation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to uphold critical thinking skills and metacognition—necessary elements of self-regulation— teachers then have no other recourse but to challenge these shallow values and teach students to delve more deeply for goals, authentic to their true selves. The process for which Socrates called ‘the examined life’ requires time for students to build trust in their peers and the critical insight to identify goals meaningful to their personal growth. Although this social barrier proved to take the most time (an interval ranging between two to six weeks on average) for students to overcome, the advantages became anecdotally apparent in their ability to question the very society that imposes insubstantial criteria on their personal happiness, something beneficial to the mandated obligation for teachers to instruct students on critical media in Ontario curriculum.

To monitor for improvement in critical thinking and behaviour, I asked all the teachers to fill out a questionnaire so that I may use anecdotal evidence and a criteria-based rubric (see Figure 4) to measure and support any progress in student development.

**Results from Teacher Questionnaire: January 2013:**

<p>J.K./S.K. Kindergarten</p>	<p>Higher levels of thinking: below average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: above average (S.K.’s more so)</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>
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Grade 1	<p>Higher levels of thinking: below average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: inconclusive</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: below average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: below average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: below average</b></p>
Grade 2/3	<p>Higher levels of thinking: above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: well above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: average</b></p>
Grade 3	<p>Higher levels of thinking: above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: well above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>
Grade ¾	<p>Higher levels of thinking: average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>
Grade 4/5	<p>Higher levels of thinking: (no response)</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: (no response)</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>
Grade 5/6	<p>Higher levels of thinking: average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: average</b></p>

Grade 7	<p>Higher levels of thinking: above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: well above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b></p>
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**Figure 4: My design for teacher assessment for their students on Self-Regulatory Ability.**

*\*The following teachers volunteered to support my Action Research Project. I am grateful for their time, dedication, and commitment.*

**Anecdotal Comments by Teachers in Project:**

**Grade 2/3 teacher:** ‘If self-regulation is to be a positive achievement, critical thinking skills are necessary to teach students in order for students to see the value of goals in their life. An ongoing attitude present in my classroom is an ethos of reflection where respect, risk-taking, and thoughtful responses are considered success criteria for everyone.’ \*Author is the grade 2/3 teacher.

**Junior Kindergarten/Senior Kindergarten:** ‘We have read the story Old Turtle, and God’s Wish, referring these moral lessons and Jesus’ lessons in modelling behaviour. I feel that now they are more ready to start using the ‘Old Turtle’ flow chart and I will implement it at show and tell time and let the two ‘Special Day’ students go through the process each day. Once they are more familiar with the process, I will implement it into the general discussion each day.’

**Grade 1 teacher:** ‘At their young age, students are only beginning to develop their critical thinking skills. Students lack problem solving skills.’

There is a trend in this classroom for parents to include the teacher, but not the student to resolve any problems or challenges facing the child at school. As a result, there is little opportunity for the gradual release of responsibility on behalf of the child to own part of the challenge and overcome it.’

**Grade 3:** No comments at this time.

**Grade 3/4:** ‘The students really enjoyed having one specific goal that they were focused on; it made sense to them. It was posted in the class for them to see as well. They were good at setting goals—they made them specific: for example, ‘I will stop talking out in class.’ Students were brutally honest at whether or not they had made progress. We evaluated our progress 3 times. Most had made significant progress. Interestingly—the first time hardly any progress—bet they thought this was an exercise we would do and not get back to again. By second time we did an evaluation, they knew that we were really making this part of our classroom.’

**Grade 4/5:** 'There are many academic and behavioural challenges this year in grade 4/5. I have made some adjustments to your action research: I have found it necessary to work in informal small groups so that students may be more accountable for the orientation of our self-regulated tasks. There are a number of students who find it difficult to focus and are easily distracted. I am seeing improvement, but there is still a long way to go for my students.'

**Grade 5/6:** 'I have done the self-regulation as a whole classroom activity; it's quicker, but I think it might be wiser now to have my students work in small groups. I use this self-regulation project once a week. I have seen marginal improvement.'

**Grade 7:** No comments at this time.

### **Analysis of Teacher Questionnaire: January 2013:**

During the early years of formal education, the program for junior kindergarten (JK)/senior kindergarten (SK) and grade 1 students emphasize skills in literacy and mathematics.

Metacognition, or critical thinking skills are incrementally introduced to students as the school year progresses for them. Judging by the analytical results from these grade levels, the initial steps for students are to progress toward setting goals that require a state of mind willing to exercise an attitude for metacognition and critical thinking skills. This attitude extends even beyond self-regulation to the pedagogical practice where teachers and students undergo an academic process called 'gradual release of responsibility,' a procedure in which teachers educate and shift the content of an academic lesson to the students' control. Socio-economic factors play a huge role in the challenges that these teachers face in the classroom. It is a quality from teachers that requires something more than a degree in education: a basic understanding of psychology. To help fulfil the promise of this self-regulation project, these teachers have demonstrated a plan to use student presentations such as 'show and tell' and self-assessments to stress both confidence and success criteria for students to exercise the practice of self-reflection in this project for the last part of the year.

Beyond the grade 1 classroom level, students have appeared to demonstrate at least an average score or better in their ability to use metacognition. The grade 5/6 classroom is the only group of students who expressed an average interest in self-regulation. Compared to the other classrooms from grade 2 to grade 7, these students have shown less interest in other

significant areas such as improvement in classroom behaviour and reflective thinking on goals. To strive for improvement, the grade 5/6 teacher has decided to initiate small group activities in which students may be arranged strategically with peers who complement their academic and social skills. The teachers at these grade levels have also expressed interest in self-assessment as a measure for student involvement and development in the setting of goals. As educators, they have demonstrated an understanding of their students and have reflected on methods of teaching to help benefit their students' progress toward academic and social success.

As any teacher would agree, each new set of students in a classroom is a unique challenge from all other experiences in the past. Pedagogy is like jazz music: we never teach the same because of the learning styles and distinctive behaviour of students from year to year. However, there are invaluable lessons teachers may learn from each other to expand our expertise as professionals. Our grade 7 teacher has expanded self-regulation to include a second goal for students: one is a personal goal for the student's personal life and the other an academic goal for the classroom. During parent interviews, the teacher had presentations of these samples available for everyone to see on display. This educator has recognized the two-fold challenge students need to recognize: learning is a process by which we strive to overcome challenges in both academic and social development. This idea has helped me modify my setting of goals for my students beginning in February.

My focus this year on self-regulation has helped evolve my thinking as well. While I must add that I have an exemplary group of students to teach, I did observe many conflicts taking place with them earlier this year. I decided to teach conflict resolution and create a list of written values that help effectively resolve conflicts between two individuals, or groups. We modeled examples of typical conflicts among students. After a period of time, I decided to include a literacy station where students work on conflicts typical of their age group and resolve them according to our list of values available to them in our classroom. I would present a written conflict to students on my board using anonymous names—but relative to their personal

experiences—and have them respond and present a thoughtful solution to the challenge. While there are still conflicts in my classroom, the rate at which my students experience these challenges has declined since November. Together with our classroom meeting and combining the ‘gradual release of responsibility’ with critical thinking, students have become more efficient advocates for their conflicts at school.

To support the teachers involved in this action research on Self-Regulation, I devised a Primary rubric for the JK/SK kindergarten and grade 1 students (see Figure 5) and a Junior/Intermediate rubric for students to support the development of their metacognitive skills. Part of what enables learners to improve in their critical thinking skills is the ability to reflect on the core issues that have an impact on positive results for their respective goals.

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**I am a Self-Regulator!**

I ask questions

So I may figure out a problem

I ask questions

So I can see what is wrong and right

I think for myself

So I can practise to be a good thinker!

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

And I am a thinker!

Use crayons to colour each part of the puzzle

as your teacher reads the instructions to you.

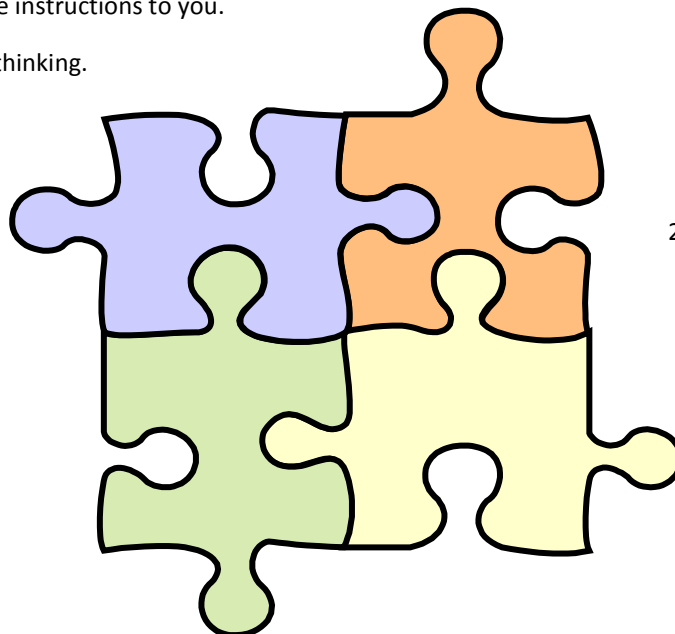
See if it fits your way of thinking.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_





*Discuss how honesty makes us feel about ourselves and how much respect we get from everyone when we are honest to others and ourselves*

**1. I have thought about a goal this year that will help me:**

- A. Blue: I have thought about it all the time
- B. Green: I have thought about it most of the time
- C. Yellow: I have thought about it sometimes.
- D. Red: Oops! I need to think about being a good thinker again.

**2. I have cooperated with all my friends in the classroom.**

- A. Blue: I have given personal space to all my friends.
- B. Green: I have mostly given personal space to all my friends.
- C. Yellow: I have sometimes given personal space to all my friends.
- D. Red: Oops! I need to think about being a good friend to others.

**3. I have been careful think about my problem so that my teacher never has to speak to me again about the same old problem.**

- A. Blue: Once my teacher has helped me out of a problem, she has never spoken about the same problem again.
- B. Green: Once my teacher has helped me out of a problem, she has needed to speak about it twice.
- C. Yellow: Once my teacher has helped me out of a problem, she has needed to speak about it more than twice.
- D. Red: Once my teacher has helped me out of a problem, she has needed to speak about it far too many times.

**4. A good thinker is someone who...**

- A. Blue: ask questions and thinks for himself/herself.
- B. Green: makes his mom, dad, or teacher think for me.
- C. Yellow: Let's their friends think for him/her.
- D. Red: doesn't think it is his/her job to think about a goal.

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**Figure 5: Rubric for JK/SK Kindergarten and grade 1 students.**

### Final Phase of Self-Regulation Research:

Questionnaires were again given to teachers in late May so that they may have sufficient time to assess their students during the last half of the year. I did not provide the teachers with their previous questionnaire responses because I wanted their focus only on what they measured in their students' social behaviour from late January to the present.

### Results from Teacher Questionnaire: June 2013:

J.K./S.K. Kindergarten	Higher levels of thinking: above average Risk-Taking in Students: above average Improvement in Behaviour: well above average Critical Problem-Solvers: above average <b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b>
Grade 1	Higher levels of thinking: well above average Risk-Taking in Students: well above average Improvement in Behaviour: well above average Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average <b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b>
Grade 2/3	Higher levels of thinking: above average Risk-Taking in Students: well above average Improvement in Behaviour: above average Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average <b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b>
Grade 3	Higher levels of thinking: (no response) Risk-Taking in Students: above average Improvement in Behaviour: well above average Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average <b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b>

Grade 3/4	<p>Higher levels of thinking: well above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: well above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>
Grade 4/5	<p>Higher levels of thinking: well above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: well above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: well above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: well above average</b></p>
Grade 5/6	<p>Higher levels of thinking: (focus not given to Self-Regulation this term)</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: (focus not given to Self-Regulation this term)</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: (focus not given to Self-Regulation this term)</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: (focus not given to Self-Regulation this term)</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: (focus not given to Self-Regulation this term)</b></p>
Grade 7	<p>Higher levels of thinking: above average</p> <p>Risk-Taking in Students: above average</p> <p>Improvement in Behaviour: above average</p> <p>Critical Problem-Solvers: well above average</p> <p><b>Interest in Self-Regulation: above average</b></p>

**Anecdotal Comments by Teachers in Project:**

**Junior Kindergarten/Senior Kindergarten:** ‘When you give opportunities to discuss problems and help each other figure out ways of solving problems (with guided questioning) behaviour and positive feelings improved greatly (fibbing stopped, too!).’

**Grade 1 teacher:** ‘We have been discussing what it means to be ‘problem solvers,’ and ‘problem creators.’ This seems to be working with my students in making appropriate and kind decisions in their day, especially with friends at recess.’

**Grade 2/3 teacher:** ‘As we continued to use self-regulation in the classroom, students were unafraid to acknowledge areas where improvement was required within each student. They were encouraged to reflect on ways in which they may improve toward behaviours that would help them academically and socially. Although conflicts did not disappear, students were able

to solve many their problems independently and only needed support for more sophisticated challenges with their peers.'

**Grade 3:** 'After reflecting on situations when self-regulation might occur, I realized that it was always the same group who were practising self-regulation strategies. About 25% of the class would routinely alter their behaviour independently.'

**Grade 3/4:** 'Yes they did—it is all about the awareness. The self-regulatory exercises provided a chance to model what it LOOKS like to control your behaviour.'

**Grade 4/5:** *\*Note: teacher reported that the focus was on individual support for self-regulatory practices in the classroom.* 'All students showed growth. Many were very interested and set appropriate goals. As the goals progressed, more time was needed to plan more complex strategies to achieve the goals and back-up plans.'

**Grade 5/6:** *\*Due to other demands in the classroom, teacher informed me that no time was spent on Self-Regulation this term.*

**Grade 7:** 'Self-Regulation—much reflection during prayer and communal sharing through verbal and written focus on positive observations of students' strengths. We took time to notice and verbalize. We used art and videos to see how students see themselves and how others see them through 'portraits.' "COOL."

### **Analysis of Teacher Questionnaire: June 2013**

The concluding analysis of this study has demonstrated an optimistic trend to improved behaviour by students at all grade levels. In the primary grades, particularly kindergarten and grade 1, students required time to become critical thinkers and use metacognition to reflect on their personal progress as learners. Both the kindergarten and grade 1 teachers made an interesting point that seemed to possess a common connection: the reduction of 'fibbing' and improved conduct at recess with the grade 1 students implies the incentive for these children to accept ownership for their behaviour. In fact, as this program continued to inform students on methods to solve conflicts, most of these children took the opportunity to seize on solutions—indeed, as the grade 3/4 teacher stated, 'what it (i.e., a conflict resolution) LOOKS like'—and use these skills with autonomy to handle their peer challenges.

The grade 3 teacher made an interesting observation concerning that only 25% of her students were using self-regulatory practices to improve themselves through personal goals. To attribute 75% of the other students with poor socioeconomic conditions, discrimination—

even under the umbrella of Special Education— would seem incredulous. One theory for such a high rate of poor self-regulatory practices may be something known as cognitive scripts where the students' under-developed method of thinking has become so unconsciously ingrained in their minds that as psychologist Daniel Goleman defines it, 'we can only change them by once again bringing them into awareness.'<sup>9</sup> Self-regulation integrates the theory of metacognition into its essential definition. Being *mindful* students is the first step to regulating their actions and goals.

In all classrooms, one area that showed noticeable improvement was in the area of 'Interest in Self-Regulation:' in Jennifer Katz's book, **Teaching To Diversity**, independence is seen as 'gradual release' whereby students develop 'an internal locus of control'<sup>10</sup> through a process of metacognition and social development. The fact that these teachers mentored their students to assume responsibility for their own behaviour indicates that learners are motivated to own their challenges. As the grade 4/5 teacher commented, 'her students were very interested and set appropriate goals' only to progress to more 'complex' challenges through support and explicit instruction of their teacher. As professionals, if we are to participate in self-regulatory practices in our classroom, we need to characterize ourselves for what we truly are, imperfect human beings on our own journey toward personal goals. My experience has taught me that students are not looking at me as a paradigm of perfection, but as a mentor who models integrity and equanimity toward the achievement of my objectives—a 'locus of control' in which I learn to instruct myself that whenever I find myself falling short of an aspiration, the reminder of my goal will re-focus my initiative to maintain its positive beacon. In our inclusive classroom we shared an empathy with these joys and challenges, supporting each one on their individual achievements. It is modelling our perseverance that grants us improvement. It is also as the grade 7 teacher reminds us, 'much reflection during prayer and communal sharing' that we are able to celebrate our goals and feel 'cool' about it. An important element to this teacher's work is the inclusion of all learners in the ceremony and celebration of oral discussion on student goals. If anything, self-regulation encapsulates this sentiment: the ability to feel

good about our social and academic achievement through resilience in an environment where our individuality is taken for granted by all in a classroom. In the category of 'Higher levels of Thinking,' the students provide testament to improvement in their academic performance, indicating a boost in critical thinking skills and prior knowledge through goal-setting reflected a higher acuity for curriculum study.

However, if we are expecting students to facilitate their control of self-regulation with teachers as their mentors, patience is an absolute requirement. One of my students—a strong-willed individual prone to bullying—shared the following piece of writing with me:

### **The Most Important Lesson**

***This is the most important lesson I learned this year. At the beginning of the school year to the end, we have learned all about self-regulation. Self-Regulation is about respect for yourself and others, staying on task, and keeping your goal. At the beginning, it was hard to do that. Then I tried Self-Regulating with work (instead with everything at once). I was the worker. Then after a couple of months of doing that, I realized that I'm not being very nice to people. It wasn't how I was working really hard or anything else, It was me. So I tried to self-regulate with work and with respecting others.***

***The next day, I tried very hard to be kind to others. I did succeed. I felt amazing. After a while it got easier to be kind to people and people liked me a lot better. Also, before I liked to get into people problems. So I learned if it's not my problem, don't bother with it. Over all, people like me better. Before I really showed self-regulation, I knew it. I knew what it took to be a self-regulator. Although I never showed it. Finally after months and months of trying and thinking about the months that passed I finally said, "I've had enough of this." I went to school that next day confident and strong. I was nervous, but ready to. By the end of the day people liked me again. So they were kind to me too. The lesson I learned from all this is: Don't get involved in something that you did not make, and be kind and calm and make others happy, you might not get what you want but people won't be mad at you. That's the most important lesson learned this year. \* By a former student.***

I have no doubt that in the past, my approach with a bullying incident would be confrontational—an exercise in control over behaviour damaging to peers. The problem was, however, that a resolute, but intelligent student would repel such authority and remain unchanged in their attitude. No longer the authoritarian, I have undergone the process of

mentor, appealing to a student's intelligence and empathy to see the negative effect that power has over their peers. I realize that students such as the one who shared her writing with me, may have adult influences in their lives who model severity in their own interactions, a negative influence toward positive interactions. What this student shared with me, however, was a glass half-full, an understanding of what respect means to peers and a personal willingness to progress from an attitude hurtful to peers. Do I risk emptying this student's glass and aggravate her anger at me, or do I continue to help fill the glass through counsel that draws on her desire for positive change?

Self-Regulation will build within students an awareness of their temperament and the means by which they may improve their performance through goal-setting. The ability to make positive changes in life requires attention to critical thinking skills, an ongoing cognitive process increasing confidence and autonomy within each child. With a pedagogically concerted effort, self-regulation may become a student's mantra, the ability to identify any personal challenges only to overcome them with the guidance of his or her own mind.

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