

**BCPTA**  
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SESSION S2

1:00 -2:30

**Self Regulation:**  
**Practical Possibilities for All Students**  
Colleen Politano

You can contact me at [jcpolitano@gmail.com](mailto:jcpolitano@gmail.com).  
I love sharing practical possibilities for self regulation  
and enjoy coming to schools, district and conferences.

"Self-regulation is the ability to manage your own  
energy states, emotions, behaviours and attention,  
in ways that are socially acceptable and help achieve positive goals,  
such as maintaining good relationships, learning and maintaining well being."

Stuart Shanker

**Supporting Calm, Alert, Focussed, Engaged Living and Learning**

I believe that we can help students develop self regulation by:

- having inquiring attitudes toward students' behaviour
- adjusting environments to meet students' needs
- helping students learn possibilities they can use independently

## Background Information

### Self Regulation Is More Than Self Control

Two distinct concepts, with different conceptual histories:

Self-control:

- Plato's view of resisting temptation
- Develop self-control in the same way as any muscle
- Child who lacks self-control is somehow weak

Self-regulation

- seeks to understand the causes of problematic behaviors, not suppress them!
- helps people learn ways to cope with challenges.

Stuart Shanker

Link to the Stuart Shanker's PowerPoint:

<http://www.ernweb.com/StuartShanker.pdf>

"There's a big difference between "bad behavior" and "sensory overload."  
 Learning what overloaded behavior "looks like," and  
 what actually helps to avoid getting overloaded in the first place is helpful.  
 While needs vary from child to child, opportunities to obtain  
 the sensory input a child's nervous system craves and  
 to avoid noxious sensory experiences should be provided across the board.  
 We all need to "wake up" by moving after sitting for a long time, and an occasional break  
 from the intense sensory stimuli in noisy, busy environments such as school,  
 but for kids with sensory issues, brief respites may be crucial  
 in order to remain  
 focused, calm, and attentive throughout the school day."  
[www.sensorysmartparent.com](http://www.sensorysmartparent.com)

Self regulation gives us a different way to look at and respond to behaviour  
that gets in the way of learning and 'doesn't work' in public settings like schools.

It gives us the basis for building better relationships,  
making children's experiences better  
and BONUS

making things better for ourselves.

It isn't a cure-all but it offers possibilities for  
making learning better for everyone.

Dealing with stressors takes huge amounts of energy  
and depletes the reserve of energy  
needed for learning.

We can make environments  
that are more self regulation friendly  
and

we can help students learn ways to deal with stressors.

**"When will what we know, change what we do?"**

Mike McKay has a excellent blog <http://mikemckay.ca/>

## **Practical Possibilities: Creating Supportive Environments and Routines**

### **Avoiding 'T.I.C.'**

I try to plan to avoid 'Teacher Initiated Crises,' Caren Cameron's term for:

- keeping kids sitting too long
- not giving them time to move and process
- carrying on with topics that are not engaging.

### **Age Plus 2 Minutes**

During discussions, stories and other sitting times after about 7 minutes I build in a quick movement/process time. When students know they are going to need to respond they become more focussed and engaged. I might ask students to STAND, STRETCH THINK, CHAT or mime a part of the story or non-fiction selection, do a quick sketch or write 3 words that connect to a topic.

"I can have my learners' attention or they can be making meaning."  
Eric Jensen

### **Classroom Guidelines**

Coming into a class with lists of ready made rules can elicit the response, Rules are made to be broken."

Guidelines take care of 99% of the rules most classrooms have but are more effective.

I tell my students that we each have 3 jobs:

"It is my job:  
to do everything I can do to keep you safe,  
help you do your best learning  
and help make this a place where everyone can learn.  
It is you job:  
to be safe,  
do everything you can do to be a learner  
and help other people do their own learning."

### **Co-regulation**

Energy is contagious! Even though some situations can challenge our ability to remain calm or summon enthusiasm when we can be aware of our own state we can make adjustments that help individuals and groups manage their energy. Simple adjustments like pausing, lowering our voices, scheduling breaks and refocussing can be keys to helping students choose productive behaviour.

### **Voicing Our Own Self Regulation**

It helps students to know we all have times when we need to self regulate. When we share own challenges to STOP doing things that are not productive and START what we need to do we give students a window into the decision making process. Consider telling your students about times when you stopped yourself from doing something unproductive and talked your self into doing something you need to do but weren't feeling like doing.

### **Group Meeting Zones**

Many classes sit on the floor/rug for discussions, stories and presentations. Sitting is difficult for some students and some develop a range of behaviours that are not productive for them and often disruptive for others. Some teachers have found success by giving their students the choice of sitting in zones. I begin with a sitting and standing zones. I explain to the students that they have a choice but whatever they choose they need to keep that choice for the duration of the activity. Other possible choices include kneeling or laying down.

**Making Sitting More Self Regulation 'Friendly'**

For some students a semi-inflated rubber chair cushion with bumps which provide sensory input can literally give some wiggle room -- giving the feeling of movement without disruption. Many students who need to move find all-in-one desk-and-chair furniture challenging and sometimes have problems because rocking the chair results in rocking the whole desk. A desk with a separate chair; may be safer. If there are funds available there are chairs that rock, desks that allow students to stand or have built in fidgets. It is possible to wrap the bottom legs of a standard chair with Thera-band or rubber tubing. The student can push against the band and gain some movement without providing a distraction for others.

**Sit or Stand**

Many students can be much more able to be focussed and alert if they can stand. When I observe students who have difficulty focussing while sitting we have a conversation about trying standing at a table or desk to work but I make it clear that their part of the bargain is to be engaged in their work.

**Time-in or Take a Break**

Time Out is punishment and not productive. For students who need a respite from all the activity in a classroom a break in a quiet space can be useful. It can be as simple as a desk with quiet activities or Stuart Shanker's suggestion of a classroom library in a quiet space. I prefer saying, "You can take a break." and applause the mom who explained she says to her kids, "When you feel better, you do better."

**Arranging for Focus**

2 friends have had great success in helping students be more focussed during discussions and during independent work time by arranging the furniture so that students are looking at each other. Betty a university instructor has her students arrange their chairs in a circle so students make eye contact and leave phones 'stowed' during class. Despite a very small class room Jen arranged her students work spaces in a rectangle with a space for movement in the center. The feeling of being in a 'public space' led students to be more courteous to each other. She observed that when students could see each other during independent work times so they tended to be more engaged in their own projects

**Classroom 'Makeovers'**

Many teachers are rethinking the physical set up of classrooms and are adding more natural materials and moving toward more neutral backgrounds with the purpose of providing a more calming environment. One thing that has been effective in promoting self regulation at a classroom level is doing a 'makeover' because clutter, color, crowding and sounds can put some students on sensory overload.

If our goal is to have students clam, focussed and attentive consider:

Walking around and taking a thoughtful look at the classroom. Take photos.

Decide:

- what can I get rid of?
- what can be done to de-clutter?
- what can be put in containers?
- where neutral could neutral colors make the room more restful?
- what can be done to provide quiet spaces?

### **Fidget Tools**

I have been collecting things that students can use to keep their focus. We make it clear that these are tools and need to be treated as a tool rather than a toy. My recent focus has been to look for **tools students can use without risk of embarrassment**. For older students I've collected various rings and bracelets that are inconspicuous. When students are listening it may work for them to doodle or use modeling materials.

When we began introducing the use of fidget tools questions like, "Why does he get to have that?" "Isn't she just playing?" or "Couldn't he just pay attention like the 'other kids' do?" came up.

We needed to have conversations about why some of us can be better learners when we have something to handle or do that keeps us more focussed and alert. The important thing is that we reach an agreement that fits with the guidelines of:

"We do everything we can do to be learners and let other people do their learning."

**Fair isn't everybody getting the same thing ...**

**Fair is about everybody getting what they need to be successful.**

Arnie and His School Tools Jennifer Veeneland  
Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Jennifer Veeneland

### **Tie Ons**

After a recent visit to the Self Regulation Classroom in Nanaimo, B.C. a colleague shared how effective the simple placement of yarn tied around the leg of a chair or desk made a highly effective fidget tool. Cut 3 pieces of yarn. (approximately 40 cm) Tie around the top of the leg of a desk or chair or simply put out yarn on desks or tables

### **Spinner or Meditation Rings**

Spinner or Meditation rings are small metal ring made with a piece that spins around the outside of the inner ring. I got one in Stainless steel for under \$.10.00 Amazon is the best source I've found for inexpensive rings.



### **Acupressure Rings**

Acupressure Rings are small metal ring made of little triangular shaped points that stimulate fingers and can help concentration. They are listed on Amazon. Most teachers don't have a budget for such items but I found soft pony tail elastics at the \$ Store which make inexpensive, quiet fidget tools.



## Practical Possibilities: Helping Students Learn and Use Independent Strategies

We can introduce activities in class that can be adapted for students independent use.

### Reflection

Students need to learn to recognize their feelings. We check in daily to have students think about what zone or state they are in. We talk about how to get to a productive learning state.

### Mood Meter

The program uses engine language and a colour gauge.

The gray zone is:

when we feel lethargic or tired.

Our engine is running "slow" or "low".

I say it is a little like our engine is stalled.

The 'green zone' is:

when we feel calm and alert, ready to learn and to listen.

Our engine is running "just right".

I say it is a little like our engine just humming along.

The 'red zone' is

When we feel stressed,

our engine is running "high" or "fast".

The 'red zone' dose not always mean negative indicate a negative state.

It can just be excitement.

I say it is a little like our engine is revved up.

You can make a class 'mood meter' or individual 'mood meters' out of tag board.

Some teachers put 3 colors of paper on a magnet board and have students put their name magnet in the space that matched their state. They talked about what they could do to get into a good learning state. During the day they could move their magnet to show their learning state.

I learned about the Alert Program ([alertprogram.com](http://alertprogram.com)) from Marc Landry  
([www.marclandry.ca](http://www.marclandry.ca))

### Link Ups

Cross one foot in front of the other foot. Cross one wrist over the other while interlacing your fingers then drawing your hands up to your chest. I say, "Arms out in front, thumbs up, thumbs down, hands together and fold them in to your chest. Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Breath deeply. Uncross your arms and legs and place your fingertips together while continuing to breath deeply.

With very young students or students with special needs I give them the alternative of simply crossing their arms on their chest.



### **Why Movement is Crucial Learning.**

Loren Shlaes an occupational therapist blog on [www.minds.in.bloom.com](http://www.minds.in.bloom.com) gives an excellent explanation of why sitting still is so challenging for many people.

She explained:

- the vestibular nerve in our inner ear helps us be upright, aroused and attentive.
- movement activates the vestibular nerve
- when children have trouble staying still they are unconsciously trying to activate the vestibular nerve.
- when we have to sit still we are either in an 'just right state' or a 'sensory needs state.'
- when we are in a 'sensory needs state' we need movement to keep our brains alert and ready to learn.

She recommends showing students discrete ways to give their brains the movement necessary to help them be attentive.

### **The RAS**

The RAS is the attention-activation switching system which alerts the brain to changes in the environment.

The RAS is key to 'turning on' the brain's level of response and alertness.

### **Possibilities to Help Students Be Calm**

#### **Square and Circle Breathing**

Students breathe in through their noses making a square shape in the air in front of them.

Students breathe out through their mouths making a circle shape in the air in front of them.

#### **A Breath of Calmness**

A great calming activity adapted from yoga class.

Hold both fists loosely in front of you.

"Smell the flower, blow the bubble."

Do 3 times

Once we do this and other activities as a group we talk to our students about how to use the same technique 'invisibly'.

#### **Hoberman Sphere**

You can use a Hoberman Sphere to demonstrate breathing rate.

As you slowly pull the sphere out and push it back in students breathe in and out in rhythm to the movement.

<http://www.hoberman.com/fold/Sphere/spheres-choice.htm>

Once students have seen the Hoberman sphere we show them how to transfer to 'invisible' breathing regulation.

#### **Elevator**

Students hold arms at sides and clasp hands in front of body.

Raise arms slowly to above the head as you breathe in.

Breathe out slowly as arms come down slowly.

Go up and down 2 or 3 times to be calm. I show students the 'invisible elevator.'

They learn to 'turn away from trouble', breathe and do the elevator without using their arms.

### **Stretches**

Many people have found it very helpful to do yoga stretches with students. Some teachers have received negative comments about doing 'yoga' in school so they have learned to call the activity stretching. You might like to check <http://www.yogacalm.org>

### **Compression Exercises**

Compression or stretching help restore balance to our nervous system when we are stressed and anxious (over aroused) or bored and sleepy. (under aroused).

Push on a wall with both hands, feet firmly planted on the ground.

Hold for the count of five. Try to make the room bigger, or move the wall.

Sitting in a chair, place both hands together, elbows extended.

Push hands together as hard as you can. Try to pull them apart.

Sit on a chair, Grip the sides with your hands. Push down. Try to lift yourself up.

David Booth said "Is this good use of student's time." With curriculum pressures, it is easy to think, "How can I add one more thing?" or "I don't have time to stop and do movement activities!" Building in a 2 to 3 minute in a 'brain break' yields 20 to 30 minutes of productive learning time and improved behavior. Breaks help us deal with stress, help very active students be able to focus on tasks and lethargic students find energy. Rather than taking time from learning, breaks result in more productive time.

### **Knees, Knees**

Knees, knees, shoulders, shoulders, (cross hands, tap opposite knees then opposite shoulders)

Knees, knees, shoulders, shoulders, (cross hands, tap opposite knees then opposite shoulders)

Knees, 1 shoulder, knees, 1 shoulder, (cross hands, tap opposite knees then opposite shoulders)

Knees, cross-over, knees, snap (tap knees, cross arms above head then snap fingers)

Brush, brush, (brush hands in front of you)

Elbow, elbow, (tap opposite elbows)

Nod, nod, side, side (nod head then rock head back)

Wax on, wax off, wax, together. (circle one hand then the other then end by circling both hands)

Repeat!!!

(Use the tune to Old Man River or I use Build Me Up Buttercup by the Foundations)

We can make practicing rote skills more fun and give students movement activities.

### **I'm Alive, Awake Alert**

I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic, yeah!

I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic, yeah!

(Do crossovers with arms for alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic)

(Arms in the air above head for yeah!)

I'm alive, awake, alert, I'm alert awake alive.

(Do crossovers with arms for alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic)

(Crossovers hands behind back and touch alternate feet for alert awake alive)

I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic, yeah! With very young students or students with special needs I give them the alternative of just doing the same motion throughout the chant.



**2 for 20****Cross Crawls**

Raise one arm up and across your body. Repeat on the other side. Lift one knee and touch it with the opposite hand or elbow. Then lift the opposite knee crossing over and touching it with the opposite hand or elbow. Raise one foot behind your body and touch with the opposite hand. Repeat. Cross Crawls can also work sitting or laying down.

**Disco Spelling or High Frequency Word Practice**

Try this for practicing frequently used words.

Vowels go up and across. Consonants go down and across.

Try crossovers for frequently used words, skip counting, times tables, rote facts.

**Mirrors**

The children stand in pairs facing each other.

Children take turns to be the leader.

What ever the leader does the other child does.

Try it! It takes real concentration and it is fun!

**Cooperative Rock, Paper Scissors**

Children stand back to back with a partner.

Show the signs for Rock, Paper Scissors.

When you say, "TURN" partners try to send each other a silent message so they both show the same sign. This results in lots of laughter and all to do it again.

For older students try: Tiger, Alien, Salesperson.

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## **Supporting Social Regulation**

We give students opportunities to develop their social skills when we give them self directed play time at ALL grades. In play students develop relationships and learn for them selves what works in social settings.

### **Play Power**

There are many possibilities to help students develop self regulation, relax, be engaged and deal with stress. One of the very most effective ways to learn and practice their emerging capabilities is within self directed play and activities.. Ensuring that students have big blocks of time, open ended materials, choices of activities, people to interact with and support gives them the context they need to develop self regulation. Play is a forum for creativity, problem finding and solving, experimentation, language development and social interaction. Children need daily opportunities to play both indoors and outside. Natural and 'found' materials lead students to be more imaginative and creative, enriching the play and inviting creativity, exploration and problem solving.

### **Exploration Time**

We found that scheduling Exploration Time early in the day gave students opportunities to:

- Start the day with success
- Develop relationships
- Negotiate social situations and make choices
- Demonstrate personal strengths
- Follow interests (exploration can be the spark for emergent curriculum investigations)
- Practicing skills in context

We can enhance the time by making sure our centers or activity areas are open ended, invite creativity and problem solving. I try to include more 'found' and natural materials and took the 'number limit' off centers to give students opportunities to learn how to make it work for everyone.

We also invite students to create their own centers and activities.

### **Outdoor Time**

When we give students daily opportunities for outdoor activity they have opportunities for:

- Fresh air and contact with nature
- Exercise, improved balance, movement and 'heavy work'
- A different social 'playing field' than the classroom offers
- Increased concentration and observation skills
- Stress reduction and enjoyment

## Helping Students Develop Habits of Self Regulation

Helping students develop productive habits challenges us as teachers to be 'relentlessly persistent and positive.' Because habits are built by repetition we need to make sure students are practicing productive habits. The brain likes the security of routine.

My process for establishing habits is to:

- Model or demonstrate the process.
- Have students follow my lead as we do the process.
- Have students do the process independently
- Review how it went and discuss what went well and what we might have to work on.
- Set criteria WITH students.
- Post and review the criteria
- Use visuals to reinforce the message
- Give students feedback so they know their areas of strength and support them in working on areas to be strengthened.

I do it. We do it. They do it.

I start with setting routines that are most necessary for a harmonious classroom environment.

The habits we establish together become the 'givens' for our classroom routines.

If some students do not pickup the routines I take them aside and check that they understand what they need to do and why.

If there are students who still don't pick up the habits I have them come up with a plan.

### References: Books, Articles, Sites and Slides on Self Regulation

Calm, Alert and Learning: Classroom Strategies for Self-Regulation Stuart Shanker  
Tools of the Mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education Elena Bodrova, Debra J. Leong  
Developing Self Regulation in Kindergarten Elena Bodrova, Debra J. Leong  
Developmental Pathways Scaffolding for Early Learners Stuart Shanker  
At Risk Children Who Display Self regulation Have Better Academic Performance G. Fernandez  
Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills Alex Spiegel

To purchase a set of Self Regulation Posters please contact Gilda Whitworth: [gwhitworth@sd43.bc.ca](mailto:gwhitworth@sd43.bc.ca)

These laminated posters are being sold at cost for \$30.00 per set.

Kids Have Stress Too! Other posters and a course on helping children deal with stress

[www.psychologyfoundation.org/kidshavestresstoo](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org/kidshavestresstoo)

Calm, Alert Learning Stuart Shanker  
The Zones of Regulation, Leah Kuypers  
The Whole Brain Child Daniel Siegel  
Developing A Learning Classroom Nic Cooper & Betty Garne  
The Mind Up Curriculum The Hawn Foundation Scholastic  
How Your Child Learns Best Judy Willis  
The Serious Need for Play Scientific American Mind FEB/March 2009

### **Favorite Children's Books to Support Self Regulation**

There is a growing source of books on self regulation for younger children but unfortunately, few for older students.

Carlson, N. Life is Fun  
 Carlson, N. How To Lose All Your Friends  
 Cook, J. A Bad Case of Tattle Tongue  
 Dey, J. M. Agate  
 Espeland, P. Verdick, E. See You Later, Procrastinator  
 Everitt, B. Mean Soup  
 Kluth, P. Pedro's Whale  
 Konrad, M.S. I Like to Play  
 Lyon, G.E. Together  
 MacLean, K. Moody Cow Meditates  
 McCloud, C. Have You Filled your Bucket Today?  
 McCloud, C. Fill a Bucket  
 Meiners, C. Cool Down and Work Through Anger: Learning to Get Along  
 Meiners, C. Talk And Work It Out  
 Munson, D. Enemy Pie  
 Otoshi, K. One  
 Otoshi, K. Zero  
 Penn, A. Leonard Gibson, B. Chester Raccoon and The Big Bad Bully  
 Pransky, J. What is a Thought?  
 Rath, Tom How Full is Your Bucket for Kids  
 Renyolds, P. The Dot  
 Renyolds, P. Ish  
 Romain, T. Verdick, E. Stress can Really Get on Your Nerves  
 Rosenthal, A. The O.K. Book  
 Roth-Fisch, M. Sensitive Sam: Sam's Sensory Adventure Has a Happy Ending  
 Saltzberg, B. Beautiful Oops  
 Seuss, T. My Many Colored Days  
 Stroker, J. If Everybody Did  
 Veeneland, J. Arnie and His School Tools  
 Veeneland, J. Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears?  
 Waber, B. Courage  
 Walsh, E.S. Hop Jump  
 Watt, M. Scaredy Squirrel

Kids Have Stress Too! Other posters and a course on helping children deal with stress  
[www.psychologyfoundation.org/kidshavestresstoo](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org/kidshavestresstoo)