

Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation in West Vancouver Classrooms

by Kelly S. Thompson

If you have a child in the education system in Ontario or British Columbia, odds are you've heard of self-regulation. Self-regulation is designed to help children and adults recognize their needs and assume control of their behaviour, resulting in an enhanced ability to focus and engage.

In the lower mainland this new educational method is championed by Sandra-Lynn Shortall, District Principal of Early Learning for the West Vancouver School District. Shortall defines self-regulation as "looking at how we as humans, adults, and children, are able to match our energy levels to the demands of tasks or situations that we are placed in." Since implementing this method in her school district, resulting outcomes have been nothing short of impressive.

Shortall became interested in self-regulation after hearing Stuart Shanker, author of *"Calm, Alert and Learning: Classroom Strategies for Self-Regulation,"* speak at a provincial superintendent conference. Shortall and her district leadership team asked Shanker to serve as guest speaker at their district opening day and since that time, she has been on the forefront of promoting and implementing self-regulation in the classroom. West Vancouver is in its third year as part of the "first wave" district program in a national Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative. First wave schools are provided close access to lead researchers in the field to help implement appropriate and cutting-edge strategies.

This new education philosophy is popular with students, parents, and teachers alike, since the benefits extend beyond the classroom. Shortall notes, "Self-regulation is a way of thinking, and it's a way for our teachers to reframe how they're teaching and how they're presenting learning opportunities." In short, self-regulation allows teachers to respond to their students in a way that is adapted for each child, reducing conflict and boosting productivity for children and teachers. "When we can give children and adults the language to be able to express their needs," said Shortall, "it changes the conversation in regards to how we interact with each other." Self-regulation aims for the teacher to recognize the needs of their students while simultaneously showing children how to define what stands in the way of their own learning and focusing abilities.

When asked about how self-regulation has benefitted the children within her district, Shortall excitedly discussed a kindergarten class "makeover," initiated with a local teacher. This particular class was comprised of several students with behavioural issues, language barriers and other potential limitations to interaction, social development, and learning. The makeover resulted in several changes. Instead of individual desks, students were encouraged to sit at a community table where they could interact and explore social opportunities. The classroom saw less visual stimulation such as primary colours, posters, mobiles and other distractions. The school also ensured snacks were on hand to fulfill basic biological needs. The kindergarten class



was afforded the opportunity to express their needs and other impediments to focusing. "[We're] helping children and adults think about their thinking, about how they interact with each other," Shortall said. Teachers are trained to ask questions such as: Did the child get enough sleep? Does the child need to move around? Does the child need a snack? Removing these barriers to learning results in a more focused and happy child.

After changes were made to the classroom, teachers noticed children interacting with one another, engaging in play, honing their leadership skills and developing an ability to focus on learning. "For most students, it [learning] happens as they engage in social interactions. It happens as they have opportunities to delve into their curiosities through inquiry and other different personalized options for them to learn and think."

The effect of self-regulation is that children are happier in the classroom and parents are noticing benefits at home. Shortall notes that "students who are happy and engaged in activities will get their brains ready for peak performance." Furthermore, in older grades where self-regulation techniques have been implemented, bullying has decreased significantly as students develop an ownership of their own behaviour.

Shortall insists that self-regulation is a lifelong process. She feels confident that this new technique has widened the boundaries of education and created further potential for students and adults to learn, focus and accept one another and their needs. Shortall says that in her educational district, self-regulation is "empowering students and adults in the system to be able to articulate their needs and for those needs to be accepted as norms." In a world where each child's needs are as individual as the person, self-regulation is a turn towards embracing our differences and eliminating barriers to our own learning and productivity. ●

For more information, go to www.self-regulation.ca

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educating the Heart

Inspiring Social and Emotional Learning

Phanie MacDonald and Natalia Angheli-Zaicenco

Ve all want our children to flourish. We want them to have friends, enjoy school, and embrace new experiences with confidence and curiosity. There is a growing body of research that shows that children are more successful in school and in life when they have strong social competencies and emotional maturity. What we now know is that there are specific strategies we can all use to support the positive social and emotional development of children - in families, schools and communities. The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, a non-profit organization created to promote kindness, compassion, and interconnectedness, calls it "educating the heart" - creating a balance between educating the mind, and educating the heart.

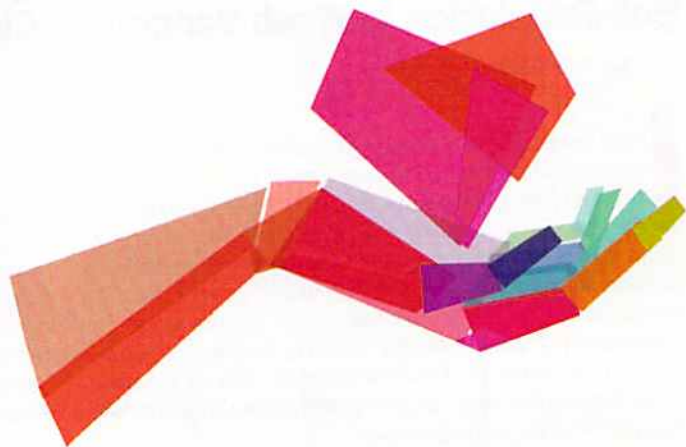
Centuries ago, Aristotle said "educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all". The idea of educating the heart has been around for centuries. However, over the past 10 years a growing body of scientific research has shown that educating the heart - promoting the development of skills such as empathy, compassion, self awareness, social awareness - not only helps children be successful in school but also successful in life.

How do you know you can teach these skills by creating conditions in homes, schools and community where children are surrounded by positive relationships with adults and other children, where they see positive role models, and where they have opportunities to learn and practice important skills that promote the development of these positive human qualities. The Centre uses the most up-to-date scientific research in social and emotional learning to inform, inspire and engage parents, teachers and others who care for and about children - to educate the hearts of children.

Our educators at the The Centre are inspired by the Dalai Lama's belief in the importance of heart-mind education, and all of their programs aim to create supports and environments to enable positive human qualities in children and youth.

The Centre's Heart-Mind Index is the first of its kind - a tool to shine a light on the social and emotional development of young children throughout BC. Through it, it is a catalyst for change - a powerful means to inform strategies, services, programs and policies that address areas of strength and concern in the Heart-Mind development of children. A Heart-Mind resource hub is currently being developed as an online tool for teachers, parents and all those who care for and about children.

Over the years, the Center has organized scores of events for everyone who cares for and about children. They've hosted internationally acclaimed speakers in science and education - Sir Ken Robinson, Daniel Siegel, Mary Gordon, Adele Diamond, Kim Schonert Reichl - to name but a few.



Speaker presentations are available for free on-demand viewing at www.dalailamacenter.org, with over 200,000 views to date.

This year's speakers' program gets a kick-start with "Heart Matters: Cultivating Caring Children", featuring Gabor Mate and Gordon Neufeld, two leaders in childhood development. This event, held in Vancouver in partnership with Hollyhock on February 26-27, includes an evening public talk and two workshops. Participants will be able to explore the challenging topic of emotion, in both their children and themselves.

On May 8-10, the DLC is hosting its annual "Heart-Mind Conference," which brings together educators, parents, thought leaders, and community-based practitioners, who care for and about children. Heart-Mind 2014 will explore the science of kindness, including empathy, compassion, altruism, and generosity. ●



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- Maddy, Grade 6

