



2014 - 2015 NOII Inquiry Case Study

School: Bayview Elementary **District:** #68 Nanaimo Ladysmith

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Our focus for this year: How will the direct teaching of and consistent use of the Zones of Regulation language by all adults attached to the class impact the students' ability to understand the connection between their emotions, their sensory systems, and how they relate to others and the world – in essence, to develop their self-regulation skills?

Scanning: Our school community consists of 148 learners, 93 of those learners are of Aboriginal heritage. Our school has a high vulnerability index with many of our students living in poverty. Many of our learners are coming to school emotionally dysregulated for a variety of reasons. The adults interacting with students need to know how to approach students to avoid unexpected behaviours, such as shutting down or acting out. When students are able to connect with adults who take the time to validate their emotions, students are more likely to try to identify feelings in themselves and in others. Everyone is more comfortable in the learning environment when they feel understood and heard. One classroom teacher in particular wanted to explore different ways of helping her students increase their emotional literacy.

Focus: The foci of our inquiry were “1. Learners at the Center” and “3. Emotions are Central to Learning”. Many of our students come to school with big emotions as a result of tumultuous life experiences. Emotions can be confusing and over-whelming for children. It is important for us as educators to help students understand the connection between their emotions, their sensory systems, and how they relate to others and the world – in essence, to develop their self-regulation skills. When they learn about and understand their emotions and the emotions of others, they can think about how their behaviour affects relationships and learning. Students who relate well in the school and classroom will help build a productive and prosocial learning environment.

Hunch: As adults, when we perceive ‘misbehaviour’, we often assume that children should *know* better and have the ability to *do* better. The hunch is that we can do more to help students recognize and understand their emotions, as well as the impact of their behaviours on

others. This should, in turn, lead to more self-control and self-understanding. It is important for us to go forward using a common language to discuss emotional literacy with students and staff members. It is also important for adults to directly teach these emotional literacy skills to our students.

New professional learning: We became familiar with and piloted the Zones of Regulation program in a Grade 2/3 classroom to begin building a common language around emotional literacy and self-regulation (the program was also used in three other classrooms to a lesser or different degree so 4/7 divisions in the school were introduced to the Zones language). A key component of this inquiry with the Grade 2/3 class was for the team to debrief and plan next steps on a weekly basis following the lesson from the school psychologist.

Taking action: The School Psychologist modeled teaching from the Zones of Regulation program with the counsellor and the Child and Youth Family support worker along with the classroom teacher and Education Assistants present. Immediately following the lesson, this group (except for the EAs) was able to meet to debrief and plan next steps. The classroom teacher and educational assistants followed up using the language of Zones of Regulation for check-ins and connecting with students daily. The school counsellor, child and youth family support worker and other support teachers used the Zones language with consistency in one-on-one and small group settings to help promote emotional literacy and self-regulation in the school. The principal used the Zones language when interacting with students in the office and new 'think sheets' were devised that matched the Zones language.

Checking: We used the performance standards for Social Responsibility for comparison at the beginning and end of the school year. We planned to count office referrals and "think sheets" to see if the numbers reduced, but we did not have any baseline data to make a comparison with. We now have baseline data on individual students to use for the future. Also, we used anecdotal observations from teachers and support staff to assess students' emotional literacy and program success.

Social Responsibility Data for Grade 2/3 class

	Not yet meeting (1)	Minimally meeting (2)	Fully meeting (3)	Exceeding (4)
Fall 2014	2/21 10%	10/21 48%	9/21 43%	0/21 0%
Spring 2015	0/21 0%	7/21 33%	12/21 57%	2/21 10%

- All students made progress in being able to identify which zone they are in.
- All students made progress in identifying learning tools/strategies that help them self-regulate and move into or closer to the 'green' zone of optimal learning.
- The students were willing and interested in trying out a variety of self-regulation learning tools/strategies. The novelty of the different learning tools/strategies played itself out and the students discovered which tools/strategies actually helped their learning. Furthermore, students learned that while the use of their preferred learning

tools might be okay to use in one setting (e.g. classroom), it might not be helpful across all settings (e.g. gym) and students would then be encouraged to explore other options for self-regulation, thus further expanding their self-awareness.

- Some students made progress but not enough progress to move them from one category to another. It's difficult to think of students and put a single number for social responsibility as some students have great strengths in contributing to the classroom and school community (many students liked doing class and school jobs and often volunteered to do them) or exercising democratic rights and responsibilities (talking circle, constructive ideas to improve the classroom), but have difficulty in solving problems with friends or expressing challenges in the classroom with assigned tasks or demonstrating consistent respectful behaviour in class, while others are very cooperative and respectful and have many strategies for solving problems but are not interested in helping in class or community. While these things did improve, it did not necessarily move the student along on the scoring guide.
- Some students had really big emotional experiences to deal with (e.g. going into foster care) and were able to use strategies that they learned worked for them

Reflections/Advice: This inquiry reinforced the following for us:

- There is power in all adults in the classroom/school setting using the same language when interacting with the students about emotional literacy. We need to remember to include itinerant staff as well (e.g. music teacher).
- There is power in adults with different skill sets working together to support the students. This project enabled all students to work with staff with specialized skill sets and helped students understand that there are other staff who are there to help them all and available for them to talk to if needed. It helped the students make connections with more adults in the school.
- Students need to be taught emotional literacy.
- Students need to be taught a variety of tools/strategies to help with self-regulation.
- Students need to be taught how to monitor on-going self-reflection to determine which tools work best in given situations.
- Students need to be able to use the self-regulation tools/strategies that work for them.
- Teachers are important role models in the application of self-regulation strategies that work for them. This includes teachers modeling expressing their feelings that are the result of expected and unexpected behaviours and demonstrating that it is okay to have these feelings.

Future directions: We plan to incorporate Zones language into our existing PBIS school-wide plan of respect, ownership, cooperation, kindness and safety across all environments in our school. In addition, we are focusing on indigenizing various systems within our school that promote self-regulation and expected behaviours in our school setting. We want to encourage common language with our staff, students, and families. These systems include our PBIS matrix: zones from Zones of Regulation; late slips (welcome slips); Learner Traits posters; and 'think sheets'. This is important for our learners and their families as we want visible evidence that cultural backgrounds are respected, valued, and utilized in our school. In addition, many of our

students learn well from visual cues. We hope that having First Nations images of animals and their 'stories' related to the various systems in our school will help the students to remember and apply their emotional literacy and self-regulation strategies. We are using the analogy of a canoe and everyone in the school pulling together to reach a common goal. By learning how emotional zones can affect readiness to 'paddle in the canoe', we hope that students will consider which 'tools' (strategies) they can use to help them get ready to pull together.