Social and Emotional Learning: Teaching Self-Regulation and Emotional Control

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 **Abstract**

*Social & Emotional Learning: Teaching Self-Regulation and Emotional Control* is for teachers, support services staff, occupational staff, parents, and others interested in acquiring knowledge about students with emotional regulation needs, different sensory requirements, and unique social learning necessities. The focus is on how to develop within students the ability to perform an appropriate action while also thinking, monitoring, and controlling their behavior in all areas within the school setting. In order to be successful, educators will look at strategies and skills for:

1. Sensory integration and regulation.
2. Emotional self-understanding and self-regulation.
3. Executive functioning and cognitive control of behaviors.
4. Visual scaffolds and visual teachings.
5. Using appropriate social and emotional vocabulary.
6. Development of self-awareness.

**Introduction**

Understanding the needs, behavior, and emotion of the students are important in order to provide them the appropriate teaching methods. The educators cannot simply share information without knowing their students. This is more necessary for special education where the educators need to have a specific understanding of the case of each special education student to properly address their needs, understand their moods, and regulate their emotions. By considering these things, the educators can succeed in teaching their students. Therefore, more than anything, it is necessary to identify the emotions and behavior of the students and regulate them in order for them to positively respond to the teaching process, activities, and requirements. Self-regulation skills are developed through consistent regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Self-regulation is important because it enables the students or individuals to control their behavior, thoughts, and emotions that may affect their social relationship, as well as their condition, situation, and future. According to the Raising Children Network (2017), “Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage your behavior and your reactions to feelings and the things happening around you” (para. 3). This definition shows that self-regulation is developed in order to manage the personality and feelings of an individual. The purpose of this paper is to present an educational strategy that will identify the feelings, thoughts, behavior, and attitude of special education students in order to provide them self-regulation processes that will help them control their mind, body, and emotions. This strategy is called Zones of Regulation, which defines and describes the different levels of alertness of students.

**Statement of Problem**

Special education students often show extreme behaviors, attitudes, and emotions that are hard to control. These kinds of students change their behavior and emotions even without any strong provocation. With simple inconsistencies or inability to accomplish a task, they tend to express exasperation, frustration, fear, and sadness that can affect their mood—and these emotions can happen in a single period of time. They show exhaustion, happiness, excitement, desperation, and sadness in one period because of their inability to express proper emotions and behavior (Goudie et al., 2013; Sahoo, Biswas, & Padhy, 2015). This problem is common in the special education class where students have a variety of emotional and learning issues that keep them away from understanding and learning concepts. The tasks and responsibility are greater among teachers who need to educate these students despite their incapability, mental issues, and behavioral lapses. The more pressing problem is that not all teachers can address or control the behavior of the special education student. Without strong and proper training about the strategies of special education, these teachers fail to educate their students. These problems need to be resolved and this can be done by understanding the levels of behavior, attitude, and emotions of the special education student. The educators need to respond to the students’ level of alertness or zones of emotions in order to regulate them. In order to understand the self-regulation process, the educators need to consider the sensory processing, executive functioning, and emotional regulations. These procedures require observation and activities that will determine how, when, and where do students become happy, excited, calm, sad, exhausted, frustrated, and afraid. These identifications can be done through the Zones of Regulation.

**Review of Literature**

The concept of self-regulation is widely discussed, acknowledged, recognized, and studied because of its impact on the learners. It is important to note that self-regulation is not done by the student alone but with the help of their educators. This means that the teachers play a vital role in motivating the students to regulate their behavior, mood, and levels of alertness. Through early student-teacher relationships, the students are able to function normally and are able to easily cope with their distress (Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2007). This is an important point to consider because the students depend on what their teachers tell them—and students with special needs tend to become dependent on their educators (Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2007). By establishing a strong bond and connection between the student and teacher, the students with special needs can perform self-regulation. According to Kang (2010), self-regulatory training is helpful in teaching the special education student in learning mathematics. Through self-regulation, the students can increase their academic performance (Kang, 2010). Self-regulation is important for students with special needs because it helps them control their behavior, emotions, and thoughts that can negatively affect their mood (Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2013). In the study conducted by Gomez-Vela et al. (2012), it is shown that self-regulation empowers the students with special needs because it helps them manage their behavior and control their negative emotions. Through self-regulation, the students can focus on the positive behavior, mood, and alertness (Gomez-Vela et al., 2012). These significant points clearly reveal that self-regulation is helpful and has a positive impact on the students with special needs.

Some studies also explore the different self-regulation strategies used in addressing the behavior of students with special needs. According to Lienemann and Reid (2006), the self-regulated strategy development is a significant instructional model that provides educators the proper ways of guiding and educating the students with special needs. In order to increase the special education students’ knowledge in math, Fuchs et al. (2008) stated that intensive intervention is required, which includes self-regulation. Self-regulation is difficult to utilize among students with special needs because they cannot easily control their behavior. However, focusing on how they would be able to regulate their mood, behavior, attitude, and thoughts can help them achieve proper disposition (Fuchs et al., 2008). It is also said that self-regulation has a significant impact on the literacy of students because it individualizes them and encourages them to learn more about themselves (Connor et al., 2010). This means that self-regulation is an important strategy that encourages the students to become emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally independent. In Norris’ (2016) study, it is shown that self-regulation strategies can positively affect the students with disruptive behavior disorders, which include the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder. These disruptive behaviors can be addressed through self-regulation strategies like self-monitoring, self-monitoring plus reinforcement, self-reinforcement, and self-management (Norris, 2016). These studies show that self-regulation is not a plain process of regulating a person’s own self but a way to acknowledge problems and address them using proper methodologies, strategies, and procedures. This is an important case in special education because students with special needs are required to regulate their emotions and behavior. They have to practice their body, emotional, and mental control in order to properly socialize with people. Through this practice, they will be able to connect with others.

**Methods**

The goal of this presentation is to describe the Zones of Regulation as a way of understanding and categorizing the complex mood and feelings of the students. The first point is the identifying of complex emotions. The second point is defining these feelings or moods based on the zone colors. The third point is regulating the behavior, moods, or feelings of the students from negative to positive emotions in order for them to become attentive. These are all considered in this paper where the process of identifying negative and positive zones, addressing the negative zones, and rebuilding the emotions in order to become positive zone is defined.

Self-regulation is important for students with special needs because it encourages them to defy their negative and inappropriate behavior—and deal with their senses in order to become more alert and positive in their social environment. To resolve the issues revolving around the practice of self-regulation, the Zones of Regulation can be used. The Zones of Regulation refers to the personality, behavior, and feelings of an individual. In order to understand the level of alertness of the students, this zone of regulation is used because "creating this type of system to categorize the complex feelings and states students experience improves their ability to recognize and communicate how they are feeling in a safe, non-judgmental way" (Kuypers, 2011, p. 4043). This means that the Zones of Regulation is beneficial to the students because they can express their emotions and behavior, which will also help the educators in understanding their level of alertness. The zones are identified through various colors: blue, green, yellow, and red (Kuypers, 2011, p. 4043). These zones refer to the feelings, experiences, or behavior of an individual within a given time. Through these Zones of Regulations, the educator can determine what strategy, medium, or methods to use in order to attract, encourage, and help a student. The level of alertness is defined through these zones, which is important to the teachers, particularly in special education.

The Zones of Regulation provides specific color zones that define the personality, behavior, mood, and levels of alertness of the students. The blue zone occurs when the person is in the “low states of alertness, such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored” (Kuypers, 2011, p. 6656). When the person is in the blue zone, he or she is more likely feeling and moving slow and sluggish. There is no sufficient energy within the mind, body, and soul of an individual in the blue zone. A person in this zone cannot move forward or think positive because his or her mind cannot think properly due to negative feelings surrounding him or her. A person in the green zone is in the period of alertness. This individual feels “calm, happy, focused, or contented” (Kuypers, 2011, p. 6656). This is the period wherein an individual is in control; therefore, the students must be asked to do a schoolwork or to perform in the class because this is the time when they can perform and manage their personality well. When they are in the green zone, the students can do everything while in control. They can manage any form of the situation surrounding them and perform their best in class. The yellow zone is used to "describe a heightened state of alertness" (Kuypers, 2011, p. 6656). When in this zone, the person is somehow in control but there are feelings of frustration, stress, anxiety, silliness, excitement, nervousness, confusion, and other elevated emotions that tend to cause loss of some of the person’s control (Kuypers, 2011, p. 6656). This means that a person in yellow zone experiences different emotions that can cause loss of his or her control but still able to manage the behavior. The red zone is used when the individual demonstrates “extremely heightened states of alertness or very intense feelings” (Kuypers, 2011, p. 6656). In this zone, the person demonstrates or experiences, rage, anger, explosive behavior, terror, panic, or elation. When a person is in the red zone, he or she cannot control his or her own body. This means that a person experiences deep, heightened, and extreme emotions that he or she cannot contain.

These zones are used to identify the kind of mood a student has within a particular period. The blue, yellow, and red zones are all negative zones. The green zone is the only positive zone where the educators need to take advantage in order to teach the students new ideas and concepts in the classroom. There are also some positive moods or feelings in the yellow zone but the teachers need to pay attention to this zone because the students having these feelings have low control. This means that they can be happy and excited but they may not be able to control their excitement which can lead to nervousness, anxiety, and confusion. Therefore, proper and clear identification of the zones is important because it will determine the teacher’s strategy in addressing the students’ behavior. After defining the Zones of Regulation, the teacher will be able to create a self-regulation strategy that can help the students in controlling their behavior, mood, attitude, and feelings. This method signifies the importance of understanding the situation, feelings, and condition of the students even without saying a word. Through observation, the educator will be able to determine if the student is willing to cooperate and learn within a specific period. By determining their behavior using the color zones, the teacher will be able to manage the situation. Through this, proper regulation strategies can be given to the students—depending on their emotional and behavioral case.

Furthermore, the Zones of Regulation have specific terms and ideas that require attention and understanding. These terms include the toolbox, tools of strategies, trigger, stop, opt, and go, expected behaviors, unexpected behaviors, the size of the problem, big problems, medium problems, little problems, inner critic, inner coach, superflex training, and rock brain thinking. The toolbox refers to the collection of alerting and calming strategies used based on the need for the educators and the situation of the students (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The tools or strategies are the techniques used to aid the students in regulation (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The trigger is the irritant that leads to the deregulation of the student’s mood and soon leads them to either yellow or red zone (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The stop, opt, and go are concepts used in controlling the impulses of the students, as well as encouraging them to perform problem-solving (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). It also serves as a cue for the students. The expected behaviors are the behaviors that are given by people around each other—the good or comfortable thoughts about an individual (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The unexpected behaviors are the uncomfortable thoughts about an individual (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The question, “what is the size of the problem?” is a question asked to measure the scope or magnitude of the problem the student's experience, which can be big, medium, or little (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). The inner critic is used to illustrate the negative thoughts, while the inner coach identifies the positive thoughts. The superflex thinking is a form or flexible thinking pattern that enable an individual to identify the different points of view when doing something. The rock brain thinking is a rigid thinking pattern that isolates the thoughts of an individual and experience difficulty of considering various options or ways to resolve a problem (Kuypers, 2011, p. 1174). These terms are used when conducting the Zones of Regulation—to understand the specific situations occurring within the classroom based on the mood, behavior, and levels of alertness of the students.

**Recommendations of Practical Implementation**

Identifying the zones can be done through practical implementation—wherein the students are divided into groups, collaborate with other students, and learn their own behavior, mood, and attitude. Therefore, the process of using the curriculum must be considered. This regulation has specific procedures that adhere to the identification of the special education students’ level of alertness or zones. These procedures include forming groups, collaborating, organizing materials, structure of group sessions, linking the zones to academic standards, checking for learning, and lesson sequence (Kuypers, 2011). Forming groups is necessary in order to determine the capabilities, behavior, and emotions of every student. A group of three to four students is best in identifying their zones (Kuypers, 2011). After grouping them, the students will be encouraged to collaborate with one another—presenting their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. In this collaboration, they will be encouraged to become more expressive. The teachers must also provide the students the organizing materials in order to practice their self-regulation. The students must be given specific tasks where they are required to organize their movements, behavior, mood, or feelings. From this, the teacher can structure a group session where each group will present their idea of positive and negative behavior, mood, or feeling. From this, the students will be able to identify the positive and negative aspects of their behavior. The identification of these zones must be linked to the academic standards to ensure that the students are doing these activities to gain more knowledge rather than to simply understand the concept of good and bad behavior. This means that the educator must check the learning of the students through proper assessment and evaluation. The collaboration, recitation, and discussion among the students must adhere to the academic standard. Through this, the teacher will be able to define the lesson sequence and use them when the students are showing negative behavior that put them in either blue, yellow, or red zone. This process shows that the Zones of Regulation is recommended for educators who teach students with special needs. It is important to note that the zones are used to define the mood and emotions of the students. By the students expressing their zone, the teacher will be able to address their emotions—encouraging them to move from blue, yellow, or red zone to green zone. In using this, the teachers are encouraged to introduce the students to the different zones by providing them various activities like wall poster making, writing, reading, and role-playing (Kuypers, 2011). Through these introductions and procedures, the students will be able to identify their zones and inform their teacher whenever they experience a good or bad emotion. From this, the students and educator will establish a strong relationship that will help the students in performing self-regulation.

**Conclusion**

Self-regulation is a complex process for students with special needs. It requires special attention and continuous motivation and reminders. Since students with special needs have compulsive behavior, they fail to understand the significance of self-regulation. Using the Zones of Regulation provides a significant advantage to special education teachers because it provides them a proper understanding of the emotional and behavioral condition of the students. Through these zones, the teachers can provide strategies to students so they can regulate their feelings and behavior. With the use of the zones, the students can identify and discuss their feelings and moods with their teachers. Students can convey to teacher which zone they are in currently. Through this, the teacher will be able to provide strategies that will help them address their negative feeling or mood. These zones are important because it helps both the students and teachers in understanding one another. It encourages the students to express their feelings and helps the teachers in defining the situation of their students. It also gives the teachers the patterns of self-regulation procedures that will help students move from a negative to a positive disposition.

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