Supporting All Learners to Develop Their Personal Potential Through the Social-Emotional Competences of Self-Determination and Self-Regulation

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

We accept the Major Project as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

As the education system in British Columbia is shifting to embrace the research and understanding of how students learn most effectively, educators have been tasked with providing opportunities for students to work through academic understandings and for students to develop the social-emotional competencies that will impact their future success. In this current educational context, I saw that there is a place for me to explore the teaching of social-emotional skills and competence through the redesigned BC curriculum’s Core Competencies. The research suggests that if a student has the social-emotional competence of self-determination, they are focused on reaching a goal through having a growth mindset, grit and autonomy. Learners thrive when they are able to self-regulate their emotions and actions in order to reach a specific learning goal. In this thesis project, I have developed a unit plan accompanied by a detailed rationale about the necessary elements needed to create a safe learning environment in which students are able to learn deeply through self-determination and self-regulation. To fully understand the impact to students of directly teaching the Core Competencies, further research and action is required to discern how to ask students to authentically reflect on their learning.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, self-determination, self-regulation, growth mindset, Core Competencies
Acknowledgements

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge.
“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

_A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens_
(1843, p. 11)

“The main concern of wholehearted men and women is living a life defined by courage, engagement, and a clear sense of purpose”

_Rising Strong by Brene Brown_
(2015, p. 273)

My children inspire me every day. As they show their developing social competence, I feel pride and I learn from their examples. Graeme and Adelle show grit and a growth mindset as they complete tasks in their daily activities. Thank you to Adelle for showing me that you cannot do things - yet. Graeme, thank you for your demonstration of how to get a job done. You put your head down, focus and complete any task you set your mind to. Thank you, Adelle and Graeme, for supporting your Muma Neto. You teach me about self-determination and self-regulation, and I am so deeply proud. For Mike, who believes that I can do absolutely anything. Thank you for supporting our family in order for me to continue my own learning, and for supplying me with tea, salad, and dark salt chocolate. Mum and Dad, you have always been my most motivating role models for how to live life well: integrity, care for all, self-determination. Always, thank you. Matthew and Teresa, so much gratitude for all that you have done to enable me to reach my goals – including childcare and technical support. My tribe, Heidi, Amelia, Madison, and Steph, what an incredible source of encouragement and grounding you have been. Thank you for giving me a place to be vulnerable and to be truly seen. To all of my family, friends and colleagues who have provided support, thank you. Judy, Linda and Paige, thank you for the mentorship you provided as you demonstrate moral purpose, leadership and professionalism. I have been honored to learn from you. As I meandered through the roads of this journey, I was not lost, but intuitively listening to my moral purpose, and this allowed for authentic, autonomous, deep learning.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

As we move into these exciting and demanding times for schools, educators are challenged with the task of not only teaching academic processes, but also the social and emotional competencies that are central to our students’ future success (Zins & Elias, 2007). The purpose of my thesis is to explore the teaching of social and emotional skills and competence through the redesigned BC curriculum’s Core Competencies. The development of students’ social-emotional proficiency is part of each subject and learning situation. Will this deliberate practice make a difference to my students’ self-regulation and self-determination?

As a young student, I came from a place of privilege - it was never a question of whether or not I would go to post secondary and earn qualifications to do something meaningful as generations before me have done. Proudly, I am a third generation educator. During my childhood, school experiences allowed me to develop my sense of self and to know my strengths. Teachers provided me with opportunities to lead and plan classroom and school activities, they challenged me to learn more and to think deeply, to set goals to better my skills and knowledge. Because of these opportunities, and mentoring by adults, I learned incredible social competencies that continue to serve me. How lucky I was. Self-determination and self-regulation skills have assisted me as a student and an educator. Without these social-emotional competencies, I would not be able to successfully plan and execute lessons in my classroom, I would not have the grit to meet all of the obligations in my life, nor have the determination to complete this thesis. In my life, I have been granted opportunities to develop the social-emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation, and this has helped me to be successful in a variety of situations.
As an educator, I am an adaptive expert. Adaptive expertise is the ability to “use knowledge to understand and work effectively to problem solve in novel situations” (La Fevre, Timperley & Ell, 2015, p.6) and is focused on student needs. To be professional adaptive experts, teachers must take responsibility for their own learning and create a pedagogical culture that adapts daily practices to the requirements of their students (La Fevre et al., 2015). Simply stated, I am passionate about helping my students to achieve their best at all they set their minds to, to develop their personal strengths, and to best discover their talents and abilities in any given area. The essence of why I teach is to enable students to reach their personal potential and to develop their sense of purpose.

I have been fortunate to work with Faye Brownlie for a number of years, and with her wisdom and teaching she has guided me in my growth as an educator. I have learned to support diverse learners through Assessment for Learning practices, the gradual release of responsibility (Brownlie & Schnellert, 2009) and backward planning. Most notably, I learned about the use of a variety of open-ended strategies that provide opportunities for students to enter a learning situation and to “stretch as far as they can go in using language and pushing the edges of their current knowledge” (p. 48). These strategies have helped numerous students to reach their personal potential.

In my context at Smithers Secondary School, my purpose as an educator was to better support all of our learners to reach their personal potential. For example, I asked myself questions like: How can I support the girls in the gym so that they feel comfortable, behave with confidence, and feel like they belong? In regards to my classes, I wondered if theme based units that were focused on a big idea could make a difference to the way my students viewed themselves and the world. Now that I am moving to work with primary students at Walnut Park Elementary School,
my passion for supporting all students will continue. This holistic focus of my teaching will always be a part of my practice. As I enter a very different role, I wonder how I can support all of the learners in my class to develop skills of self-determination and self-regulation?

Within the first days of school, I begin the scanning process in my class. What do I notice about my students socially, emotionally, and academically? I observe my students. I talk to my students. I also ask them for written reflections in the form of a questionnaire, and hope to discover how they feel about school and about their successes/failures. It is always my challenge to help students to see that they can improve their skills, and to know that everyone is working on their own personal goals. One way to increase our support of all our learners is to encourage them to learn and grow through “setting goals, having tenacity and perseverance to pursue them, and believing in their own abilities” (Brown, 2012, p. 240), and through the scanning process, I see how I can best support students to reach their personal potential through courage to learn and grow.

At Walnut Park Elementary School, how we can better enable our students to achieve a deeper awareness of how their actions impact their successes and challenges? Will the learning of specific social/emotional skills support this understanding? These skills are important to all students. What are some of the particular mindsets and strategies schools can incorporate into their teaching practices that support self-regulation? How can I best intentionally focus on giving my students opportunities that build social-emotional competencies?

The topic of social-emotional skills speaks to my inherent values; I live my life with self-determination and in order to be successful, I must self-regulate. Luckily, this Masters program has provided me with a great deal of autonomy – choice in the topic and how I demonstrate my learning. Throughout my career as an educator, I have taught social-emotional skills to my
students. In my first teaching position at CM Finch Elementary School in Fort St. John, the school-wide focus was on respect and responsibility, and this fit my teaching style perfectly because I fundamentally believed that the development of social-emotional skills would enable students to be successful. My experience at CM Finch had a profound impact on my practice. As a class, we worked on the development of social-emotional skills daily. We talked about how to show respect to peers and to adults, and there was an emphasis on responsible actions. Each month, the principal took the entire school into the gym for a lesson and activities about social responsibility. Because of this amazing experience with the integration of social-emotional competence in our school, I have continued to directly teach these proficiencies.

Through theme-based units at Smithers Secondary School, I continued to teach these skills. For example, perseverance is a social-emotional skill we focused on. Students read texts about how people were determined to be successful throughout challenging situations. They were then asked to show their understanding of the text by choosing a method of response (essay or speech), and then I requested that they apply these thoughts to their own personal context. Another way that I supported students’ social-emotional growth was through assessment practices, specifically through providing detailed and clear feedback for each student. What are they doing well? What can they improve? From there, students were able to set a goal to improve their next assignments. Feedback from students told me that they appreciated how they clearly understood what their next steps where, and that the goals were personal to their own learning. Also, students told me that they admired and appreciated how hard I worked to support them, and that because I persevered through a great deal of work, I was a role model to them.

My personal skills of self-determination and self-regulation support my students’ growth and learning in the context of our classroom and in their lives outside of school. The teaching of
social-emotional skills has been an element of my teaching practice for many years, and through
the use of specific strategies and by modeling these skills, my students have known how to show
care and respect to others, and been engaged in their own learning.

Now, I wonder how the teaching of social-emotional skills can be deliberate at Walnut Park
Elementary School. Because the instruction of social-emotional skills is an integral part of my
teaching practice, I would like to continue to teach these skills in the context of a primary
classroom. What skills are more necessary to teach to enable each student to reach his or her
personal potential? When I look closely at the curriculum, I see that the Core Competencies are
a driving force behind all of the learning that students will do in each subject. Therefore, I
wonder if the direct teaching of specific social and emotional skills in my classes will help
students to develop the Core Competencies of self-determination and self-regulation?

One of the recommendations from the global OECD work that looked specifically into social-
emotional learning, as published in 2015, encourages policy makers and school administrators to
endorse the system-wide teaching of social-emotional skills as part of the curriculum (OECD
Skills Studies, 2015, p. 134). This is exactly what the education leaders in British Columbia
have done. At a time that the structure of British Columbia educational practices is changing, it
is vital to explore one of the central components to the redesigned curriculum. Though many
teachers have taught social-emotional skills for years, this practice is now an essential part of all
subject areas. Furthermore, students will be asked to assess their development through the Core
Competencies. Now is the time to explore the use of the competencies through deliberate
practice based on supporting literature.
Definition of Terms

1) Social-emotional competence/skills: When students show the skills of social-emotional competence, they demonstrate the “competencies needed to successfully navigate social and emotional aspects of activities and environments” (Butler, Perry & Schnellert, 2017, p.28). As Butler, et. al explain, some of the specific skills are “self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management of one’s emotions, thoughts and behaviours, and responsible decision making” (p.28), and the skills provide the “capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 234).

2) Self-determination: For the purposes of this project, the definition of self-determination relies upon Butler et al’s (2017) interpretation, which refers to a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated behavior. These include capacities to make decisions and solve problems; knowledge skills, and strategies needed to manage one’s own performance; self-awareness and self-advocacy; and beliefs in one’s capacities to succeed. (Butler, et. al, 2017 p. 44)

3) Self-regulation: Self-regulation is an aspect of social-emotional competence, and according to Butler et al. (2017) “refers to the ability to control thoughts and actions to achieve personal goals and respond to environmental demands” ( p.2). According to Shanker (2013) self-regulation is also “the ability to: attain, maintain, and change one’s level of energy to match the demands of a task or situation; monitor evaluate, and modify one’s emotions; sustain and shift one’s attention when necessary and ignore distractions” (Shanker, 2013, p. x).
4) **Core Competencies:** The Core Competencies are an aspect of the redesigned curriculum for the British Columbia education system (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). The Core Competencies are rooted in the intention to foster “deep learning and life-long learning” for the students in our province, and are “sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies” (BC Ministry of Education, 2017).

My thesis will focus on the *Personal Awareness and Responsibility Competency* because it enables students to consider and to develop skills “need[ed] to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purpose in the world” (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). Specifically, I will look at the social-emotional competencies of self-determination and self-regulation. How will the direct teaching of these skills help students to reach their individual potential?

**Thesis Project Focus & Overview**

In this thesis project, I have developed a unit plan accompanied by a detailed rationale about the necessary elements needed to create a safe learning environment in which students are able to learn deeply through self-determination and self-regulation. As the unit is written, it is intended to be used at the start of the school year as an introduction to the ideas that will drive our learning community and the Core Competencies of self-determination and self-regulation. I will be deliberate in my professional practice by using the plans I have created to explore the direct teaching of social-emotional competencies in my own classroom. As well, I aim to support colleagues with the implementation and direct teaching of these skills in their practice.

I see the potential to create a resource that will incorporate the direct teaching of social-emotional skills, and create learning situations that will focus on a growth mindset, ensure that
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assignments offer autonomous learning situations, where feedback and goal setting are explicit within my class structures. With these intentional practices, I will support students to better develop the social competencies of self-determination and self-regulation and help them to reach their personal potential.

The issue I would like to explore through this project is how does the teaching of social and emotional skills/competencies through the Personal and Social Core Competency make a difference to how students at Walnut Park Elementary School develop themselves within the self-determination and self-regulation competencies? How will this help students to reach their personal potential?

Through previous experience, I have begun the journey to teach social-emotional skills. Now is the time to delve more deeply and discover more specific methods of incorporating social-emotional skill and the Core Competencies into a classroom learning community – a classroom learning community that will be new to me as I move from senior secondary to primary. This provides me with the opportunity to really delve into the creation of an effective learning group based on literature and best practice.

The instructional plan that I have developed first explores how I will create a classroom learning community as well as the most important elements of culture that I would like to cultivate. I ask myself how I should focus the lessons on the social emotional competencies of self-determination and self-regulation. How should I begin the process of building the learning community based on a trusting and safe learning space, growth mindset, goal setting, while also providing opportunities for students’ autonomous decision making?

I see the potential to support students. It is my hope that the unit design will clearly lay out simple strategies to help teachers begin the process of creating a classroom based on the
principles of a student-centered learning community where students embody the Core Competencies of self-regulation and self-determination. I am curious to see how my students will receive this project and in what ways it will be necessary to change aspects of the unit. Within this plan, I am optimistic that there will be interest from teachers in my school to extend their practice to include some or all of the principles developed in the unit.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this literature review is to investigate the teaching of social-emotional skills. In order to obtain background knowledge of the themes, my research will focus on the impact and value of teaching social and emotional skills. Because the redesigned BC Curriculum includes the social-emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation, I will look closely at these in the context of a classroom. What helps to build these competencies in students, what skills do they need and how can teachers best support this in learning environments? Furthermore, I plan to look into the teaching of social and emotional skills within the Core Competencies from the BC redesigned curriculum. How do these social and emotional competencies aid students to reach their personal potential?

I will examine the literature using the lens of my own project inquiry, and focus on how a carefully planned unit will enable students to develop the social-emotional skills to develop themselves in order to be their most successful selves. When situating my previous work within the larger academic literature, I see that my instinct to teach the whole child and not simply a subject is backed by research. One understands that this is the appropriate method to teach children about themselves and how they can reach their personal potential. The classroom practices can have a direct impact on who the learners may become. Within this literature review, I will explore the themes of social-emotional skills/social competence, self-determination, self-regulation, and Core Competencies.
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Social-Emotional Skills/Social Competence

A main purpose of education is to support students to become successful in a variety of life situations. What are the skills that drive students to succeed? How can schools best support students? It is imperative that we help students to meet the rising expectations of the 21st century; social and emotional skills such as “perseverance, sociability and self-esteem” (Ikesako & Miyamoto, 2015, p. 3) which will help our youth to be more successful in their futures and to reach their personal potential.

There is an emerging body of research that explores the rationale for the explicit teaching of social emotional skills, as well as some of the challenges. Many Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) studies illustrate that both cognitive and social/emotional “capabilities [are] needed for achieving prosperous, healthy and happy lives” (OECD Skills Studies, 2015, p.31). Beginning in 2005, the OECD began to evaluate how education impacts students’ social situation, such as completion of education, employment and health. These longitudinal OECD studies are wide reaching and include nine countries such as Australia, Luxembourg, Chile, Turkey, Sweden, Korea, UK, USA, and Canada. As mentioned previously, one of the recommendations from this work, as published in 2015, encourages policy makers and school administrators to endorse the system-wide teaching of social-emotional skills as part of the curriculum, and we see a reflection of this recommendation in the redesigned BC curriculum.

Because of the OECD studies, those in the field of education know that to effectively ready youth for a successful future, schools must “prepare students not only to pass tests at school but also pass the tests of life” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 250) and develop students’ social competence. In order to connect with students and to engage them in learning, students’ social and emotional needs must be at the center of school culture (Ikesako & Miyamanoto, 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007).
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The direct teaching of social-emotional skills such as perseverance at a whole school and classroom level will empower students. Zins and Elias remind us that “social-emotional competence and academic achievement are interwoven” in order to “maximize students’ potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives” (2007, p. 233). This is reflected in the work of Merrell et al. (2008) who also argue that appropriate social and emotional conduct will enable students as they face challenges in their futures. Our world is changing, and so are the needs of our students, and one way to best support them in our schools is through the direct teaching of social and emotional competencies.

Figure 1. “The relationship between incentives, effort and skills in task performance” (OECD Skills Studies, p.38). The study shows that in order to successfully complete a task, effort and cognitive skills are as important as social emotional skills.

In order to directly teach social-emotional skills, a multitude of social and emotional teaching programs are available, and some focus on particular skills, while others are more general. Elias, Hamend, Moceri, Morana, and Reyes (2011) outlined a specific program, Girls Leading Outward (GLO), that can be used to build students’ confidence, communication, teamwork and self-regulation skills, and leadership roles in the school. Through explicit lessons, GLO teaches students “mind (the ability to think through problems and come up with solutions); voice (the ability to speak out confidently); heart (passion as well and the ability to recognize and cope with
emotions); and skills in functioning with a team” (p.71) and this builds a sense of community amongst the team and the school community. Likewise, in his article “Classes in courage” Ron Berger (2013), asked us to consider how, and why, schools can teach explicit character traits such as courage. He argues that students should reflect on their learning, recognize opportunities to improve, and “understand how their character affects their academic learning” (p.15). To find their greatest success in the 21st century, Berger argues that students must be taught how to take chances with their learning and taught how to overcome challenges, and courage is needed in order to attempt new tasks and to take risks (p.16). This again demonstrates how important social competence is for students and illustrates how schools and classrooms might embrace the direct teaching of these skills.

Much of the research shows that the purposeful teaching of such social-emotional programs “are effective in terms of fostering social and emotional development” (Sklad et al., 2012, p. 892) and social competence. Studies of a wide variety of skills-based programs have consistently shown that teaching students social and emotional competencies enables youth to more successfully manage their emotions and behaviors, and have the knowledge and skills available in order to successfully interact with others (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2008; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007). The globally focused work of Sancassiani, et al. (2015) in particular supports the findings of the OECD and others. The purpose of their research was to discover some of the elements of an effective school-based social-emotional learning program and they looked at a number of life skills training programs in such countries as Germany, USA, Ireland, Taiwan, South Afrtica, Thailand, Mexico, Australia, Canada and Hong Kong. From this varied cross-section of representation came the caution that no study site involved all of the students’ influences: parents, teachers, whole school, and larger
community (p. 29). The researchers suggest that future studies should include all of the above because students are socially and emotionally influenced and taught by more than their classroom teacher. The findings of Sancassiani, et al. tell us that “the programs addressed to enhance the emotional and social skills of the young and promote their wellbeing are effective at all educational levels” (p. 37). If we are to best support our students to reach their full potential, in our schools we must teach youth how to behave and respond to situations and this will enhance their social competence. To support this, it is clearly noted that social and emotional skills aid children to achieve “goals, work with others and manage emotions” (OECD Skills Studies, 2015, p. 31), and others tell us that the teaching of the competencies are necessary if we are to best support our students (Butler et al., 2017; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Despite a multitude of examples that show successful implementation of social and emotional programming, there are a number of challenges to consider when teaching social and emotional skills. Merrell et al. (2008) bring attention to the fact that brief programming is effective, but the long-term teaching of social and emotional skills would be more meaningful. Likewise, there are things that teachers must consider when applying the programing. For example, the social and emotional competencies “are taught most effectively within caring, supportive, and well-managed learning environments” (Zin & Elias, 2007, p. 238), so it is necessary to develop a safe atmosphere for students before teaching social and emotional skills. Durlak et al. (2011) also point out that their studies show that programs must be safe for students and be “well designed and well conducted” (p. 418). Importantly, teachers should carefully consider how they could include social and emotional learning activities into their classrooms (Zin & Elias, 2007, p. 247).

From my review of the literature regarding social-emotional learning, I have concluded that the teaching of social emotional skills should be an imperative aspect of schools and classrooms.
The integration of the social emotional skills into units and lessons, coupled with a safe atmosphere and detailed planning, will support more successful learning for students. Students will develop social competence and an ability to face challenges, problem solve, interact with others, and manage their emotions. As we move into a truly globally based world, we must empower our learners with the skills to be able to be social with a variety of people, in multiple situations, to be able to manage their own responses to situations and to reach their individual potential. Our schools and classrooms are places where this crucial learning can take place.

**Self-Determination**

When we refer to social-emotional learning (SEL) it “encompasses the process associated with building social-emotional competence” (Butler, et. al, 2017, p.28) and the social-emotional skill of self-determination is an aspect of SEL.

**Examples of the Social-Emotional Skill of Self-Determination: Growth Mindset & Grit.** The importance of the social-emotional skill of self-determination for student success is well represented in the literature (Blackwell et al., 2007; Butler et al., 2017; Dweck, 1999; Duckworth et al., 2007) and clearly shows educators how vital it is for students to believe that they are capable of learning and improving their work. Teachers are encouraged to build social emotional learning into their class structures and to ask students to practice a growth mindset in order to improve their learning and their individual progress.

To have the social-emotional skill of self-determination, students demonstrate the ability to set goals and self-regulate their actions based on a skill-set, understanding and experience (Butler et. al., 2017), and in recent years, educators have connected to these ideas through the work of Carol Dweck who researches the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset. Students
who display a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence is a fixed entity; on the other hand, youth who display a growth mindset have the “belief that intelligence is malleable” (Dweck, 1999, p. 11) and know that “skills and achievement come through commitment and effort” (Dweck, 2006, p. 179) to stretch themselves to reach their goals. Through the teaching of growth mindset, students come to see that their ability to learn is flexible; they can learn. Importantly, teachers can help students to reach their personal potential through setting “high standards for all their students, not just the ones who are already achieving” (p. 196). Teachers can, therefore, see that each individual student has the potential to learn new information and to learn something new. Angela Duckworth (2007) has researched a similar social-emotional skill: grit. Like growth mindset, grit enables students to reach goals and their personal potential. Grit is defined by Duckworth as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (p.1087/1088). Through having a growth mindset, students demonstrate grit and self-determination.

Within their research, both Dweck and Duckworth have concluded that effort and self-determination help students to be most successful. For example, in 2004 Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly studied 1, 218 freshman cadets at West Point United States Military Academy. These students are high achieving athletes and academics, who are chosen through a rigorous and competitive process; of the 14,000 applicants, only 1,200 are chosen, and in the first year of cadet training, one in five will drop out of the incredibly strenuous program (Duckworth, 2016, p. 3). Duckworth and her colleagues wondered what social-emotional skill stopped some cadets from dropping out. After following the students’ progress for a year through participant reports, official records, and the completion of the Grit Scale, the researchers conclude that grit
was the main reason students at West Point were successful (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1096). Another conclusion is “that gritty children work harder and longer than their less gritty peers and, as a consequence, perform better” (p.1098). Dedication to their learning predicted which students would complete the program successfully; they were able to mentally and emotionally keep going through academic and strenuous physical undertakings because they show grit and determination. Likewise, through a multitude of studies, Dweck concluded that “effort is what makes you smart or talented” (p. 16) and, an important point to highlight from the research of Duckworth, et. al is that “grittiness [effort] – rather than IQ or standardized test scores – is the most accurate predictor of college grades” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 123). Duckworth also reminds us that achievement of goals is the combination of both talent and effort (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1098). This detailed research helps to validate the understanding that effort and self-determination are important to support students to make personal progress in their learning.

Notably, we must not assume that all students can reach the same potential. As shown previously, an OECD study showed that in order to successfully complete a task, effort and cognitive skills are as important as social emotional skills (OECD Skills Studies, p.38). This is reflected in the work of Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck (2007) who studied the mindset of math students, some with a growth mindset, others with a fixed mindset, and found that with a growth mindset, students will learn mathematical skills more readily (p. 259). They caution educators that “[i]t is important to recognize that believing intelligence to be malleable does not imply that everyone has exactly the same potential in every domain, or will learn everything with equal ease” (Blackwell et al., 2007, p. 247). Though grit and a growth mindset can help students to “grow [their] potential” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 269) it is essential to remember that potential is individual.
Motivation: Autonomy, Feedback & Goal Setting

As we have considered previously, the teaching of social and emotional skills will support students as they thrive in the classroom and in their futures within our social world (Elias et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2008; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007). As educators, if we are to build students’ social-emotional skills, specifically self-determination, it is important that we “focus on the potential of students to develop their intellectual capacity” and the development of their personal intellectual capacity “provides a host of motivational benefits” (Blackwell et al., 2007, p. 260) to the students as they can see a larger purpose to their learning.
Autonomy. Autonomy is an integral part of self-determined behavior and refers to “be[ing] self-directed” (Pink, 2009, p. 222) and able to control aspects of situations. In his work, *Drive*, Daniel Pink (2009) reminds us that we “have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined” (p. 71). Numerous studies in a variety of contexts all point to the fact that autonomy is a psychological need (Chirkov et al., 2003; Lepper et al., 1973; Benabou et al., 2003; Deci et al., 2008) and that “autonomous motivation predicts persistence and adherence” (Deci et al., 2008, p. 14). Autonomy is an imperative factor in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and specifically self-determination because behavior and choices are self-directed towards getting better at a task and this leads to engagement in the learning. Confidence in their ability to learn is shown by providing students with control over a task that, as studies by Benabou and Tirole show “makes it more likely that the agent [student] exerts effort” (2003, p. 506). Further studies demonstrate that “the importance of autonomy-supportive teachers and classrooms cannot be overstated” (Deci et al., 2008, p. 19) because in the context of education, this leads students to a larger sense of purpose for each learning circumstance and “[o]ne of the hallmarks of student motivation is a sense of purpose. Motivated students know how the task at hand fits into the larger scheme of things” (Berger, 2014, p. 23); students require autonomy and self-direction if they are to be self-determined individuals.
Feedback & Goal Setting. Giving students extrinsic rewards, for example gold stars or gumballs, can interfere with their self-determination, because students require autonomy and a vested interest if they are to be motivated to pursue their learning (Lepper et al., 1973; Benabou et al., 2003). A 1973 study of extrinsic rewards by Lepper, Greene and Nisbett found that children show less interest in an activity if they receive a reward (Lepper et al., 1973, p. 136), and this was supported by the more recent study by Benabou and Tirole who found that rewards are a short term reinforcer that decreases future motivation (Benabou et al., 2003, p. 503). Though classrooms are often a place where rewards are given, this strategy is not the best way to support students as they develop self-determination.

A SEL method to support students’ belief in their growth mindset and self-determination regards assessment through providing feedback and helping students to set clear goals (Benabou et al., 2003; Berger, 2014; Dweck, 2006; Pink, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). A strong theme emerges from the literature around assessment; the importance of how teachers assess student work and provide praise cannot be overstated because it directly impacts a student’s mindset and determination to reach their goals. In his crucial work regarding evaluation of student work, Wiliam (2011) clearly conveys that the significance of assessment cannot be exaggerated because of “the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of students, both of which are crucial influences on learning” (p. 39). When a teacher assesses students’ work, simply putting a grade on a paper does not facilitate deep learning because it only shows a percentage or letter grade (Benabou et al., 2003; Berger, 2014; Dweck, 2006; Pink, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). What did the student do well? What might the student improve upon? As a form of assessment, feedback is necessary if students are going to be motivated to reach their personal potential through self-determination and the “more feedback focuses on specifics… -
and the more the praise is about effort and strategy rather than about achieving a particular outcome – the more effective it can be” (Pink, 2009, p. 66). The literature around feedback also states that students will see that they have the potential to learn and a growth mindset will be supported if teachers praise children’s’ “process [that] they used – their strategies, effort, or choices” (Dweck, 2006, p. 211) rather than their intelligence or ability (Dweck, 2006; Pink, 2009; Wiliam, 2011).

By making feedback specific to the students’ learning process and needs, students can set goals to improve their learning and this supports a growth mindset and the self-determination to succeed. The literature shows that if students know what they are learning, and what they need to do to advance, they will set their sights on improvement (Benabou et al., 2003; Berger, 2014; Dweck, 2006; Duckworth, 2016; Pink, 2009; Wiliam, 2011). Duckworth brings attention to the following steps that will motivate students to develop their personal intellectual potential.

“Deliberate practice consists of

- A clearly defined stretch goal
- Full concentration and effort
- Immediate and informative feedback
- Repetition with reflection and refinement” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 137)

This means that students are provided with feedback that gives a specific goal that they can work to improve upon. Students then focus their energy on improvement. Teachers give specific feedback as the students are working or soon after an assignment is finished, and following this is the opportunity for students to repeat the assignment or learning process. The feedback that students receive has the power to tell them a great deal about their personal learning. For educators, it is important to recognize that “constructive, precise comments that make up
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Descriptive feedback specifically address a particular piece of work by a single student and are articulated in a way to raise the quality of the work toward the personal best for each individual” (Berger, 2014, p. 135). Wiliam’s (2011) work supports both Berger and Duckworth’s research, as he suggests that feedback is given as “Two Stars and a Wish” in which the peer or the teacher “provide two things he thinks were good about the work (the two stars) and a suggestion for improvement (the wish)” (p. 138). Goals can be established based on the wish for improvement. As Berger (2014) notes, goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) (p. 116) and clear to students so that they are able to take action (p. 128). Brownlie and Schnellert (2009) also illustrate that “when teachers use information from formative assessments to set goals, make plans, and involve students in developing specific strategies and practices, students and teachers get better at what they are doing” (p. 14). Descriptive feedback and a personal and achievable goal that students will improve upon, help learners to improve their self-determination because they will “understand that all work, learning, and performance can be improved” (Berger, 2014, p. 136).

From examining the research about self-determination, my interpretation is that for students to demonstrate the social-emotional skill of self-determination, they must be taught and encouraged to have a growth mindset and grit in order to reach their personal potential. Students are most likely to have a growth mindset and grit if they are able to make their own decisions regarding how to get better at a task. Goal setting and the feedback that students receive support students in their autonomous decisions. The life-long social-emotional skill of self-determination can help people to be “happier if they try something hard, struggle through and reach their goal” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 270) and through SEL in our classrooms, we can teach “children to love
challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning” (Dweck, 2006, p. 177) and to be self-determined.

**Self-Regulation**

The teaching of social-emotional skills such as self-determination are paramount to how students reach their personal potential and thrive in their future (Elias et al., 2011; Merrell et al., 2008; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins & Elias, 2007). Self-regulation is an integral aspect of how students control their behavior (Chirkov et al., 2003, p. 98), and in discussions of social emotional learning, self-regulation is often examined. Research suggests that students who intentionally and reflectively self-regulate their learning experiences, are more likely to be successful in school (Butler et al., 2017, p. 74; Burman et al., 2015, p. 1519). British Columbia researchers Butler, Schnellert and Perry are proponents of self-regulation in schools, and their work stresses the importance of how students can learn to regulate and be in control of their actions and choices. They bring attention to how self-regulation in a classroom is more than the regulation of emotions. It is also about regulating the learning through building social-emotional competence in students. Social emotional competence is the ability to move through a variety of social and emotional situations and to use skills such as self-determination and self-regulation (Butler et al., 2017, p. 28). Burman, Green, and Shanker support this; they assert that to acquire the skills of “self-regulation involves learning how to monitor and manage one’s internal status and predispositions, so that behavior can be appropriately controlled” (Burman et al., 2016, p. 1518) therefore, more meaningful learning can occur.

Stewart Shanker has dedicated much of his career to the study of self-regulation. His work focuses on self-regulation specifically through the management of emotions. He brings our attention to the fact that if people “can develop the ‘muscle’ (grit, determination, self-
discipline)… you are basically learning how to deal with a feeling of discomfort without giving into it” (Shanker, 2016, p. 22). In addition, he clearly notes that self-regulation helps people to recognize the feelings of discomfort and how to alleviate the struggles so that we can continue to strive and reach a goal (p. 22). His work has had a powerful impact on the teaching profession as educators recognize the need for additional supports for children and want to see changes in how youth self-regulate their emotions and develop the capacity to manage themselves to meet all challenges and live life to the fullest. If students learn how to manage their emotions, they will be able to manage their ability to have a growth mindset and be self-determined individuals.
How Can Student Learning Be Supported by Self-Regulation? How can we bring these two perspectives of self-regulation to the classroom? According to Burman, Green and Shanker, self-regulation in a learning environment concerns “encouraging the development of affiliated skills related to Self Monitoring/Self Management” (Burman et al., 2016, p. 1519). If students self-manage their emotions and their actions, they are self-determined. This is supported by the research of Butler et al. who suggest “that teachers should build… [the] use of self-regulating strategies for planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluating and adjusting approaches in the face of emotional, motivational, or reading or learning challenges” (2015, p. 98). Their research focused on high school students who where taking part in learning through reading (LTR) activities at four multicultural schools in an urban area. The goal of their research was to discover more about students’ self-regulated learning in the context of the reading program. This was assessed using two methods. First, the researchers used student questionnaires about perceptions of the LTR activities and student level of engagement. An academic measure of student performance was also used. The findings supported other research as they found that students who learned in a classroom that focused on goal setting as a part of assessment, were more likely to be engaged in the reading program and academically successful (Cartier, et. al., 2015, p. 98). A classroom with an emphasis on self-regulation would be focused on providing students with learning activities that help the students to meet their potential (Burman et al., 2016, p. 1519) through specific strategies and actions, as well as assessment practices that support self-determination through setting targets for their learning.
Goal Setting. An important aspect of self-regulation, like self-determination, is goal setting (Berger, 2014; Burman et al., 2016; Butler et al., 2017; O’Conner et al., 2017). Goal setting is a specific action that can be taken in all classrooms as it helps students to self-regulate their actions towards improvement. The research of O’Conner et al. shows that a self-regulated learning environment should be “Sequenced, Active, Focused, Explicit” (O’Conner et al., 2017, p. 415). This means that students have explicit learning goals that they are able to focus on. O’Conner et al.’s work supports what we have discussed previously. By setting explicit learning goals, students are able to stay focused on what they need to improve and show self-determination to reach their personal potential. Berger (2014) reminds us that goals should be given to students in the form of descriptive feedback that “specifically address a particular piece of work by a single student and are articulated in a way to raise the quality of the work” (p. 135) so that students know that their “work, learning, and performance can be improved”(p.136) in order to reach their personal potential.

Through my research regarding the social-emotional skill of self-regulation, it is apparent that students’ social-emotional learning must be supported through classroom practice. Butler, et al., remind us that “learning develops over time through effortful, strategic action” (2017, p. 170) and in learning situations, students would be helped to develop a growth mindset, to have grit, autonomy, to set goals. The steps that students and teachers take to self-regulate emotions and learning situations can enable students to be more self-determined and to strive to reach their personal potential.

Core Competencies

As studies have shown, the direct teaching of the social emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation can support students to reach their personal potential. Currently in our
province we are experimenting with the use of the Core Competencies as we explore the redesigned British Columbia curriculum. Our curriculum has adopted the importance of social emotional development and competence as something that lives everywhere in our teaching, and the Core Competencies are a specific way to engage students in the development of social and emotional competence. The redesigned BC Curriculum is, in part, an outcome of the emerging body of literature that supports the approach to education that highlights the teaching of social-emotional skills through the Core Competencies. As noted earlier, one of the recommendations from the global OECD work around social-emotional learning, is that policy makers and school administrators should endorse the system-wide teaching of social-emotional skills as part of the curriculum (OECD Skills Studies, 2015, p. 134). The Core Competencies are directly connected to the research I have reviewed as it embodies the goals of researchers and those in the education field that understand how vital it is to teach the whole child.

The Core Competencies are an aspect of the redesigned curriculum for the British Columbia education system (BC Ministry of Education, 2017) and demonstrate the direction that the Ministry of Education is taking. The ideas are rooted in the intention to foster “deep learning and life-long learning” (2017) for the students in our province. The Competencies are “sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies” (2017).

Through the Personal Awareness and Responsibility Competency students are enabled to consider and to develop “abilities students need to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purpose in the world” (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). Specifically, the skills of self-determination and self-regulation are imperative parts of the Competency. According to the Ministry of Education Website, students show self-determination when “[t]hey value themselves, their ideas, and their accomplishments. They are
able to express their needs and seek help when they need it, to find purpose and motivation and act on it, and to advocate for themselves” (2017). Students who show the attributes of the self-regulation Competency demonstrate that “[t]hey are able to persevere in difficult situations” and “set goals, monitor progress, and understand and regulate their emotions” (2017). The Core Competencies can be used to guide student learning, and as a tool for assessment.

Conclusion

As we have explored through research, social competence will allow students to be more successful in their classroom learning situations and in their futures and to reach their personal potential. Two specific aspects of social competence are self-determination and self-regulation. If a student is self-determined they are focused on reaching a goal through having a growth mindset, grit and autonomy. Students thrive when they are able to self-regulate their emotions and actions in order to reach a specific learning goal. The BC Ministry of Education has designed the curriculum to reflect this research and now incorporates the social-emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation into the Core Competencies which can be used as a tool to guide classroom practice and student assessment.

This work has led me to focus on how I can incorporate the development of social competence with the primary students at Walnut Park. How can I support the students in their development of self-determination through a growth mindset, having grit, autonomy and to being able to set goals? The research tells me that students will be able to self-regulate more readily if they have self-regulation skills to manage their emotions and their actions. Again goal setting is paramount, as it will help students to control their actions and reach their personal potential. Within this thesis project, I will explore the ways in which self-regulation and self-determination can be included into the classroom learning community.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Considerations in Unit Design

Within the journey that I have taken to write this thesis, I have had to demonstrate self-determination and self-regulation. Thankfully, my schooling and life experience have prepared me with the strength and skills to complete my own learning and growth and to reach my personal potential as the current circumstances of my life have allowed. As I began the first steps of this work two years ago, my instinctual pull was to a student-centered classroom where social-emotional learning was a focus. This is how I have taught for all the years of my career, and I believed it to be one of the most effective ways to connect students to their learning.

As my graduate learning continued, I wanted to support the acquisition of social-emotional skills for the senior students in my high school classes, and it was my goal to work with and explore the Core Competencies. I knew that it is imperative to teach students social and emotional skills, and within the redesigned BC Curriculum, the Core Competencies to focus on these skills. Also, I judged that when students are connected to the school, they feel that they have a greater purpose to attend and to complete assignments. I wondered if deliberately teaching social and emotional skills will make a difference to how students connect to the school, and whether or not they will feel that they have a deeper purpose at school. It was my goal, through action research, to discover if my students would feel more connected to the school community through the direct teaching of the Core Competencies.

Change arose. I was not able to complete action research, so it was necessary to reevaluate my thesis and to include a project. This decision was made in March, and I wrestled with the idea of whether I should produce a unit or a handbook. My final decision to create a unit hinged on the idea that I will best support my students and colleagues through a usable and directly applicable unit, and put theory into practice. The unit was going to be for grade 12 students and
would, without the focus on connection to the school community, directly teach the social-emotional skills in the Core Competencies. Again, a modification to my plan was necessary, as I chose to make the career change to teach grade three. In June, I decided that the unit would be for grade three students, so my thesis focus changed as necessary and to suit my situation and learning needs.

As the literature demonstrates, social competence can be taught, and this will allow students to be successful, not only in their classroom, but for life. The first lessons in the thesis project unit will ask students to help design the classroom norms and to be respectful communicators. Butler et al., tell us that in effective learning communities there is “respect [for] all individuals as valued members, recognize and accept their various strengths and challenges” (2017, p. 60) and this supports social forms of regulation “when individuals’ engagement in activities or environments is socially influenced or interactive” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 68). Classroom and the learning that occurs is social, so my unit will begin by building a community in which students feel safe to learn together, to take risks and to grow. It is effective to “create a shared vision of everyone’s respective roles and responsibilities” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 68). This literature reminds me to spend meaningful time in the unit design creating a learning community in which students know the expectations of behavior and communication.

In order for students to develop social competence and to show the social-emotional skill of self-determination, they have the skills of growth mindset, grit, autonomy and goal setting (Berger, 2014; Butler et al., 2017; Dweck, 1999; Duckworth, 2016; Pink, 2009; Wiliam, 2011).
autonomy and goal setting. At Smithers Secondary School, students were given autonomy in terms of how they showed their learning, and in the goals they set for the learning. In *Drive*, Daniel Pink shows the reader that autonomy creates a vested interest for students. They are learning what and how they choose and “when choosing a topic for a research project, students have opportunities to steer their learning in ways that match their strengths and interests” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 83). In my new classroom, students will have autonomy in some of their choices. As well, through assessment practices, I have supported student’s growth through providing specific feedback. What are they doing well? What can they improve? From there, students were able to set a goal to improve their next assignments. Feedback from students told me that they appreciated how clear goals helped them to learn more deeply. My instinctual teaching practice was effective according to the journals and books that I read. Through her research, Duckworth reminds readers that if people try “hard, struggle through and reach their goal” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 270) they will have a higher quality of life as they feel a greater purpose and will be happier. Social Emotional Learning in our classrooms needs to be part of all subject areas each day, and through SEL we can teach “children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning” (Dweck, 2006, p. 177) so I will use the language of growth mindset and will encourage my students to take risks, make mistakes and grow. Therefore, I learned that it would be effective to build a unit that introduces the social emotional skill of self-determination.

My literature review also focused the other social competence of self-regulation, which directly ties to the skill of self-determination. According to Burman, Green and Shanker, self-regulation in a learning environment concerns “encouraging the development of affiliated skills related to Self Monitoring/Self Management” (Burman et al., 2016, p. 1519). If students self-
manage their emotions and their actions, they are self-determined. This is supported by the research of Butler, Cartier, Schnellert, Gagnon, and Gianmario who suggest “that teachers should build… [the] use of self-regulating strategies for planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluating and adjusting approaches in the face of emotional, motivational, or reading or learning challenges” (2015, p. 98). The thesis project unit will, therefore, give students the learning opportunities in which they will set goals and reflect upon their journey to achieve these challenges. The literature also reminds me to support students in the ability to self regulate. Shanker notes that Self-Reg helps people to recognize the feelings of discomfort and how to alleviate the struggles so that we can continue to strive and reach a goal (Shanker, 2016, p. 22). One way to help students to ease their discomfort is to help them to manage the physical classroom environment to suit them, so a lesson in the unit focuses on the various workspace options available to students. Perhaps they would like to sit on an exercise ball or stand up at the window ledge.

The learning in my literature review confirmed that a unit for my new grade three class would be effective if it incorporates the social competence of self-regulation.

Because the redesigned British Columbia curriculum is based on research, the Core Competencies ask that students be taught the social-emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation. The unit, therefore, is built to include space for students to reflect on how they show self-determination and self-regulation. The reflections are written simply in language that most grade three students will understand and will connect to. Also, the reflection pages include a place for students’ artifacts. This may be a photograph (perhaps a selfie), a drawing or a physical example. This ensures that their reflections are even more personalized. No two students will demonstrate the same growth in their development, nor will they have the same artifact to show their growth. The Core Competencies play an important part in the redesigned
curriculum and “[t]he ultimate goal is for learners to employ the core competencies every day in school and in life, and for the core competencies to be an integral part of the learning in all curriculum areas” (BC Ministry of Education, 2017), so during the first weeks of school, the introductory unit will begin to introduce the thinking and the doing behind the Core Competency skills. It would be remiss if I did not include the teaching of these skills, and it is imperative that I also model the reflection of my own growth of skills within the Core Competencies. Therefore, I will show my own growth mindset. Dweck reminds teachers to have “high standards for all their students, not just the ones who are already achieving” (Dweck, 2006, p. 196). Each student can achieve. Students can reach their personal potential and through a carefully designed unit that includes personalized student reflection, I will do my best to support each student to achieve their best in our learning community.

Through my teaching experience and understanding of the literature, I wondered how in this thesis project I could help my students to see their larger purpose and to include the social competencies of self-determination and self-regulation. How can I best help to support students as part of a cohesive and safe learning community? To be motivated and self-determined, feedback and goal setting will be part of each lesson and part of the final open-ended Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) project. Students will also be able to make autonomous, self-directed choices in the topic and/or how they show their learning. Importantly, the unit is simply an introduction to these skills and concepts, so there will be repetitive practice and the language and actions will be a fundamental part of our classroom learning community and culture. This thesis project is an introductory unit to our learning community. The concepts will be introduced during the first weeks of school and will include the big ideas that will be the basis
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of our learning community where all students feel safe to learn and to develop their personal potential.

The ultimate goal of this thesis project is derived from a desire to better understand how to support students’ learning within a classroom community of learners. How can I best support my students to be self-regulated and self-determined? It is my hope that developing a classroom learning environment in which students learn the specific ways to communicate with each other, to have a growth mindset, to set learning goals and to be aware of the physical space of their classroom will help the students in my classroom to reach their personal learning potential. Explicitly defining and providing opportunities for practicing these skills and competencies has the potential to best support the students in my classroom.
Chapter 4: Unit Design and Rationale

Classroom Culture & Environment

The unit I have planned is designed for a primary class, with the aim to develop a stronger understanding of who the students are as learners, particularly regarding their use of social/emotional skills. Education systems around the world, and British Columbia in particular, are turning their attention to the role of 'non-cognitive' skills such as social/emotional skills and their role in learner success. In British Columbia, the focus on social and emotional skills is within the Core Competencies.

In order to support all students to reach their personal potential, it is imperative that we directly teach specific social emotional skills that will lead to student success in our classrooms and in their futures. As discussed in the Literature Review, multiple studies have shown that the explicit teaching of social-emotional competencies is needed for students to be successful self-regulated learners.

With this in mind, the first days of a new school year are a perfect time to lay the groundwork for this important work. It is my aim to share this unit with my grade three class at the start of our new school year. Importantly, we will regularly return to the social emotional skills of respect, collaboration, growth mindset, self-determination, goal setting and their needs in the physical environment each day. These skills will support each learner to demonstrate work habits that will help them to learn best. As is my personal philosophy, Butler et al. stresses the importance of creating a safe classroom community where all students see themselves as learners. I have deeply connected with the work of Butler, Schnellert and Perry (2017), so will base many of the classroom structures and expectations on their teachings, and on Ritchhart (2015) and Shanker (2013).
As we begin our school year, it will be my goal to create a community where students feel that they belong and that they are all learners. It is important that I produce a clear vision of what I would like to achieve for the learners in my classroom. How will I be deliberate in creating a safe learning environment where students know that they can take risks, make mistakes and to learn? This lays the groundwork for how I hope to support all learners to achieve their personal potential and to create an environment where students are able to be determined self-regulated learners.

A main element of the classroom environment that I hope to create is one in which we begin to build relationships from the first day of school, and where students feel that they belong. Each student is an individual who brings their own experiences and perceptions into our classroom, so I know from my years of teaching that it is important for the teacher to know that each student carries unique ways of thinking and behaving. The teacher must respect who each individual is, and demonstrate that they are valued for who they are and what they bring to the classroom (excitement, hopes, fears, anxieties). This is a model for students in terms of how to show respect to each other and this leads to a sense of belonging and a supportive learning environment where students feel safe to take chances with their learning, to make mistakes and “when students perceive environments to be non-threatening, they are more relaxed and willing to engage with others” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 64). Butler, et al. stress that when students feel acknowledged for who they are, respected, safe, and they are not concerned about self-protection (p. 65). Students feel safe to learn. In order to get to know about each student’s life outside of school, I will begin the year with a whole class activity where they will ask each other about, for example, favourite activities, food, colours. This will enable students to know each other better and begin the journey to create a classroom of belonging. Whole class activities in which all
students are involved and are learning about how to be part of a group will be part of the first week of school, and will continue through the year. As I have done for many years, I will continue to greet students at the classroom door each morning. For example, I will say good morning, welcome to school and I will ask them about their evening or weekend activities (dance, soccer, video game level, etc.). Through this simple action of greeting students, I acknowledge the importance of each person who enters our classroom. Who they are and their activities outside of school are a valuable part of our community. Shanker supports this ritual because “it affords you a wonderful opportunity to assess a child’s arousal state” (2013, p. 16) and the teacher is able to then provide opportunities to help students to regulate their emotions through suitable activities. Another important aspect of creating a classroom of trust and belonging is allowing the students to get to know me. I will share little stories about what I do outside of school, and about my family. By sharing my life with the class, I am able to model that our classroom is built upon being an emotionally safe community. From the first day of school to each subsequent day, I will focus my energy on building a safe place for students to learn, and where, as unique individuals, they feel belonging.

I have experienced and observed that when students know what they can expect in their class, whether it is at a primary or a high school level, they will feel comfortable and will be able to be self-determined and self-regulated learners. Comfort and belonging are built alongside clear classroom expectations. Butler, et al., (2017) refer to these expectations as participation structures: “define expectations and norms of engagement for different kinds of activities; for example, how students should interact and learn with one another, direct their attention, organize their work, ask permission to use the washroom, or ask for help” (p. 65). If students know the norms and expectations in the classroom, they will be able to learn and to engage with their
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classmates, and this will help them to self-regulate. During the first days of school, we will co-create the Classroom Expectations, with a focus on safety and respect. By being explicit in terms of how students should behave and the routines in the classroom, and by creating a plan together, students will have “common understandings and shared language” (p. 67). It is important to remember that students have had a variety of life experiences and school experiences, and we can never assume that what they know of how to behave will meet your own expectations. The first days of school are also a time to make the classroom routines well defined. We will follow some norms in our classroom. There will be a bell that I will consistently use to gain students’ attention and that they will put their supplies away when they are finished a task. Each morning I will greet students at the door after they have hung their backpacks on the hooks outside the room, they will return permission slips and lunch orders to the tub beside my desk, then we will all meet at the carpet where attendance will be taken, and using magnetic organisers talk about the schedule for the day. These simple routines will not change from day to day. If the needs of a student require that they come into the class later than others, I will adapt the routines to suit their personal schedule, but more importantly, the focus will be on a consistent schedule for all students.

Students and teachers spend hours each day, days each month, and months each year in their class spaces, so it is imperative that the physical environment of the classroom is carefully considered “to work for the activities we conduct in them, and to be comfortable and inviting to those we welcome in” (Ritchhart, 2015, p. 256). In Creating cultures of thinking, Ritchhart expresses the need for classroom spaces to be inviting, a place where there is student ownership and where their learning is celebrated. This supports my personal mindset and has driven the design and organization of my previous class spaces. My new classroom at Walnut Park will be
no different as it will be orderly, welcoming, clean, and will display student work and ideas on all walls. The classroom will be organised so that the tables are arranged in the center of the room. This is where the students will sit with their table group, collaborate and work independently. The groups will change every two weeks, or month, or at another time that suits the needs of the class. Each table group will have their supplies in colour-coded baskets. Each student will have a personal tub that will be stored along one wall. This is where they will keep their books and papers. There will be a book-nook with comfy beanbag chairs, a colourful rug, individual carpets and floor pillows, and of course, a large assortment of books. Along the wall with the whiteboard and bulletin board, the calendar, day plan, reminders, and learning themes will be displayed. Hanging chart paper and books will be on display in this area, and this is where we will meet at the start of each day and during lessons. The classroom colour scheme will be teal, grey, and purple, so the bean bags, rug, shelves, etc. will be in these colours. Positive words and images will be up on the walls - messages about growth mindset, learning, individualism, and the world. Some flowers and plants will line the long wall of windows and shelves, and this is where students can stand and work if they would prefer. The opposite wall is where the classroom computers are set. Students will use these for their work or for reading. Beside the computers, there will be exercise balls. The organization of the physical space is an element of classroom environment that Shanker stresses as important to student self-regulation (2013). For students to self-regulate their emotions and learning situations, they will have options as to how and where they work. Some students might like to, as I have mentioned, stand at the shelves under the window, others could sit on an exercise ball, while one or two might sit in the carol where they cannot see others and be distracted by activities. Shanker reminds educators that they should support students’ ability to self-regulate through avoiding the use of
additional background noise (fans, computers) and by allowing natural light to enter the classroom (2013, p. 21). Another facet of the organization is a quiet space where students can be calm if needed. A carrel and the area under the computer counter will be established as student learning areas. One of my goals is to help students to recognize what the best work situation is for them, so it is my task to create a physical environment where students feel welcomed, that they belong and are able to self-regulate their learning.

The learning culture in my classroom will also be developed from the first days in school. Through discussion and learning about the social emotional skills of respect, collaboration, growth mindset self-determination, and goal setting, we will begin the steps towards a community of students in which everyone feels that they are a learner. By teaching of growth mindset, students come to see that their ability to learn is flexible; they can learn (Dweck, 1999, 2006). Before school begins, I will prepare a bulletin board that, through words and images, will show the difference between a growth and fixed mindset, as well as some vocabulary used with a growth mindset. The students in our learning community will see and hear about growth mindset each day. We will begin the school year with a lesson that will introduce the ideas of growth mindset and determination, and this will support students in the first stages of learning about growth mindset. During the remainder of the year, we will return to growth mindset and determination, because to truly embody with understandings, students require daily reminders and opportunities to practice. After learning about the difference between a growth and a fixed mindset, and looking at how they can have a growth mindset, students will have opportunities to practice through the language they use (“I can try. I don’t understand yet.”), and through specific teaching throughout the year. I will stress to students that each student can learn, and that “every person has the potential to develop, grow, and achieve in any given area” (Brock and
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Hundley, 2016, p. 4). In our classroom, I will encourage students to see that taking risks and making mistakes is a good thing and will help them to learn more. Effort, perseverance and positive behavior will be complimented.

Through growth mindset teaching, I will also do my best to encourage each student’s individual potential through helping them to reach their personal outcomes. Students will create their own goals for their next steps in learning tasks, or I will provide feedback that will help them to reach their personal potential. We will talk about how everyone in the class will have personalized learning goals, and they will be given autonomy as they choose topics for assignments or choose how they show their learning. Their success will be supported with positive wording that is “specific, action-oriented feedback that focuses on guiding efforts and actions” (Ritchhart, 2015, p. 323). The creation of our classroom learning culture will begin in September, and will be a focus for the entire year.

Each student brings their personal experiences to our classroom, it is my hope that I am able to create a learning environment where they feel safe to learn and grow, but I understand that my intentions may not suit each student, so I must continue my path as an adaptive expert and change my practice and the physical environment to suit my students needs and who they are. I will observe their behaviour, actions and communication, and adapt lessons and the classroom itself to better suit their needs.

The unit will support the journey to create a classroom community where students feel that they belong, where there are clearly defined participation structures such as classroom expectations, peer collaboration, growth mindset, and a culture of respectful learning. As we look to the Core Competencies and how to teach them into our classrooms in a meaningful way, I begin my own journey with the integration of Core Competencies into units and lessons. The
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ideas of the Core Competencies live everywhere and ideally, educators will help students to embody the Core Competencies through the development of self-determination and self-regulation in a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable, where the participation structures are clear and where there is an authentic culture of learning. During the first days of school, students will work through the unit included in this chapter, and they will be helped to develop a growth mindset, have grit, autonomy in their learning and to set achievable, personal learning goals. I will work to create a culture of learning in which students practice the Core Competencies of self-determination and self-regulation, and in the beginning of the journey, students will be asked to self-assess the Core Competencies in the first unit. For example, in the context of the Core Competency of self-determination, students will be asked to respond to the following: “I can stick with it, or be determined, when I am doing something that I feel I’m not good at yet.” How do they show determination? Throughout the year, students will reflect upon their growth in relation to the Core Competencies, and we will use Fresh Grade as an online method of communicating this to parents. I believe that it is important that I show and talk about how I personally demonstrate aspects of the Core Competencies and show what I am working to improve. It is my responsibility to be a role model about my own learning and to encourage students to reflect and demonstrate their learning growth. During the year, we will return to the Core Competencies and the elements that support the student development of the proficiencies associated with intellectual, personal and social-emotional growth and success.

This thesis project will focus on creation of a classroom where students are supported to become self-regulated learners who are able to collaborate with and respect their peers, who show a growth mindset and are determined learners, who set goals for the next steps in the learning and who are aware of how the physical environment of the classroom helps them to
focus (Butler et al., 2017; Ritchhart, 2015; Shanker, 2013). Through this work, it is my hope that we will create a meaningful and personalized learning culture.
Lesson One: We Can Co-create Our Classroom Expectations!

Rationale:

As I have learned from experience, and as Butler et al. confirm, it is imperative that we lay the groundwork for student success at the beginning of the school year (Butler, et al., 2017). This can be achieved through creating classrooms as a safe social space for learning (Butler, et al., 2017, p. 106), where students are able to feel courage to learn and grow through “setting goals, having tenacity and perseverance to pursue them, and believing in [their] own abilities” (Brown, 2012, p. 240).

The first step in this development is to co-create a participation structure through a lesson to create a safe place where students are able to confidently work together, and independently (Butler, et al., 2017, p. 106). From my own experience, I know how vital this is as I have been a part of a classroom community where the expectations were not made clear. At the beginning of my career, I shared a grade one class with an experienced teacher, and it was my first official teaching position. She taught three days a week and I taught the other two. When I came into the class on the first Thursday, the students did not have clear expectations about how to behave while a different teacher was in the classroom. I assumed that they would simply follow the rules set-out by the other teacher, but my goodness, I was mistaken and over the years, I look back on my learning with this class as some of the most rich. After a few weeks of teaching the class, I realized that it was necessary to go back to the beginning and create classroom expectations for the time that I was teaching. Although the intention was to help the students to regulate their behavior and their learning through the classroom norms, it did not work as well as I had hoped. The misbehavior continued for some students because I had waited too long to create the norms that lead to a safe learning environment. Lesson learned - begin the year with co-created classroom expectations.

Therefore, Lesson One is grounded in the understanding that we will create a classroom where the roles and responsibilities are co-created and are clearly setup during the first days of the new school year. It is recommended that teachers co-create the expectations with the class because this helps the students to feel a sense of belonging and will be more likely to have an emotional connection to the classroom (Butler, et al., 2017, p. 66).

Essential Question:
How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn?

Learning Intentions:
We can work together to decide some of the routines in our classroom.
I can set learning goals for myself.

Timeframe: (Part One) 30 minutes; (Part Two) 20 minutes

Materials:
Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Rathmann
chart paper, markers
Student Goal Booklet

Activity:

Part One
As a whole class at the carpet, teacher will introduce the concept of rules and expectations...

- Read *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. Talk about the events in the story. Why do we need rules in our classroom and in our school? Using chart paper, make a poster together with pictures and words about classroom behaviour. Guide the discussion to talk about how rules are needed for safety and for respect.

- Stretch Break! (Introduce this as a norm where I lead them in yoga poses, and then they return to their seats calmly.)

- Using the chart paper, collaboratively make a list of the Classroom Expectations. There will be two categories: Safety and Respect (examples: walk in the classroom, put supplies away, kind words, listen to the speaker).

- The chart paper will go up in the classroom and will be referred to regularly. During the first few days as we settle into the class routines, we will add to the list or take away ideas if necessary. I will then type out the Classroom Expectations.

Part Two (a few days later)

- Give each student a typed copy of the Classroom Expectations. They will sign a copy and keep it in their tub as a reminder if necessary.

Assessment:

- Observation of student engagement in the collaborative class activity.

GOAL SETTING:
In their Learning Goals Booklet, students will set a goal for how they will follow the guidelines of the Classroom Expectations.
Lesson Two: I Learn With My Classmates!

Rationale:
The learning and practice of “social and emotional skills [support children] to achieve lifetime success” (OECD Skills Studies, 2015, p.130) means that it is vital that students learn social-emotional competence through engaging in collaborative learning tasks.

At the beginning of our school year, we will lay the groundwork for communication and social norms in our classroom through a focus on respectful group work and collaboration skills. While teaching at Smithers Secondary School, we spent much of the first two classes creating and practicing norms for group work. During the remainder of the semester, group collaboration was a regular part of the learning activities. This not only assisted in the teaching of oral communication skills, but also respect for others and that every group member had valuable ideas to share. As Brownlie and Schnellert remind us, “[c]ooperation plays a key role in learning and in one’s ability to contribute to and participate in society” (Brownlie, et al., 2009, p. 50) through the importance of capacities found in job descriptions that relate to communication skills and to interpersonal skills. If we do not directly teach and model respectful collaboration, we will not fully prepare our learners for their future endeavors.

With this previous experience and knowledge, the following lesson is designed to foster a collaborative learning community in our class at Walnut Park, and to support the students to reach their personal potential in their futures.

Essential Question:
How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn?

Learning Intentions:
I can work respectfully with my classmates.
I can show amazing group work and collaboration skills.
I can share ideas and information with my classmates.
I can set learning goals for myself.

Timeframe: 60 minutes

Materials:
Group Work Bulletin Board 😊
Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes
chart paper, markers
Student Goal Booklet

Activity:
As a whole class at the carpet, teacher will introduce the concepts of group collaboration…
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- Read Lilly's Plastic Purse. Talk about the characters' behavior and attitudes. What does Lilly's behavior tell you about appropriate classroom behaviour? Can you make a connection to the story from your own life? Using chart paper, make a poster together with pictures and words about classroom behaviour.
- Stretch Break!
- Using the mini-posters on the Group Work Bulletin Board, define collaboration (working together to create something and the importance of sharing their own ideas).
- As a whole class, collaboratively make a list of what collaborative group work should look like (listening to each other, speaking softly, taking turns, listening to each other, doing our jobs, etc.)
- Stretch Break!

Table Group Activity…
- As a whole group at the carpet, teacher will explain the mini-challenge activity that each table group will complete (choose: card tower, marshmallow/straw challenge, etc. depending on the class needs).
- Students will be reminded to show amazing group work and collaboration skills!
- Students will return to their table groups and complete the activity

Group Evaluation…
- As a whole group at the carpet, teacher will demonstrate how to complete the Group Evaluation sheet by filling it out about herself.
- When students have returned to their table groups, they will complete the sheet.

Assessment:

- Observation of student work as they complete the challenge activity. Did they show amazing group work and collaboration skills?
- On the Group Evaluation sheet and through discussions as students are working, look for evidence that students understand how they can show amazing group work and collaboration skills.

GOAL SETTING:
Students will set a goal for their amazing group work and collaboration skills.
Lesson Three: I Can Have a Growth Mindset and Show Determination!

Rationale:
After we have begun the process of building a classroom learning community that is based on norms and respectful collaboration, our class will be introduced to the concepts of a growth mindset and determination, and it is important to recognize that “[i]ndividuals can only be fully self-determining to the extent that these three basic psychological needs [competence, belonging, and autonomy] are fulfilled” (Butler et al., 2017, p. 202). This lesson will introduce the idea of growth mindset, but for students to truly embrace the actions and embodiment of a growth mindset, it will take months of the practice of making mistakes and having the growth mindset to learn and embody a growth mindset. Also, students must feel that their learning is their own personal exploration and at this early point in the year, students may not feel or have experienced autonomous learning situations. With this in mind, the third lesson in this unit will support students in the first stages of learning about growth mindset and determination.

Essential Question:
How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn?

Learning Intentions:
I understand the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.
Using examples, understand how to change a fixed mindset into a growth mindset.
I understand how I can show a growth mindset and determination!
I can set learning goals for myself.

Timeframe: 60 minutes

Materials:
Growth Mindset bulletin board 😊
Books: The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein
Class Dojo videos: https://ideas.classdojo.com/b/growth-mindset
Sesame Street video: The Power of Yet! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLeUvZuvvAs
Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset Sorting Activity sheets (one copy for each table group)
Growth Mindset sheet
Student Goal Booklet

Activity:
As a whole class at the carpet, teacher will introduce the concepts of a growth mindset and a fixed mindset…

- Read The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes. Talk about the characters’ behavior and attitudes.
- Stretch Break!
- Define growth mindset/determination/fixed mindset
- Watch Class Dojo videos that introduce a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.
- Watch the Sesame Street video: The Power of Yet!
- Using chart paper, list how the characters in the book showed a growth or a fixed mindset.
Talk about the growth mindset/determination examples on the bulletin board.

Stretch Break!

Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset Sorting Activity...

As a whole group at the carpet, teacher will demonstrate (with student input) how to sort the mindset phrases into the fixed or growth boxes.

Students will transition into table groups.

As table groups, students will sort the mindset phrases.

Share as a whole class.

Stretch Break!

Growth Mindset Sheet

As a whole group at the carpet, teacher will demonstrate how to complete the assignment sheet by filling it out about herself.

When students have returned to their table groups, they will complete the sheet.

Assessment:

Observation of student work as they complete the sorting activity. Are they able to differentiate between a growth and a fixed mindset?

On the growth mindset sheet and through discussions as students are working, look for evidence that students understand how they can show a growth mindset and determination.

GOAL SETTING:

In their Learning Goals Booklet, students will set a goal for how they will show growth mindset and determination.
Lesson Four: Where Should I Work so That I can Focus on My Learning Tasks?

Rationale:
In our classroom space at Walnut Park, there will be multiple options for student workspaces. There will be tables, a carol, floor area under the computer desks, exercise balls and a stand-up station on the shelves under the window. In his list of classroom environment considerations, Shanker suggests that teachers “[p]lan seating arrangements that will encourage your students to remain calm and focused” (2013, p. 20) and it will help students to self-regulate their learning if they have autonomous choice regarding where they work during focused learning time. As the year progresses, it will be important for me to remind students to reassess their work station and to consider what is working for them and what could be better. Are they able to focus? Would a fidget, perhaps, aid their learning?

This lesson is designed to introduce the students in my classroom to the concept of utilizing a variety of work-stations for their focused learning tasks.

Essential Question:
How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn?

Learning Intentions:
I understand that there are different areas in the classroom where I can work.
Exploring the examples, I would like to try to focus on my work best when I am: sitting, standing, lying down or sitting on an exercise ball.
I can set learning goals for myself.

Timeframe: 60 minutes

Materials:
chart paper/markers
Student Learning Goal Booklet

Activity:
As a whole class at the carpet, teacher will introduce the concepts of completing their work in a variety of areas in the classroom.
- We will visit two classrooms where there are a variety of student workstations and we will talk to other students about how this can help them to focus on their learning tasks.
- Back in our classroom, we will tour the different options for student workspaces.

Returning to the carpet, we will make a list of types of workspaces on the chart paper.
- Students will discuss the workstation that they would like to try with their carpet partner. Also, they will talk about why they think that workstation will suit their learning needs. How will it help them to focus?
- Return to their table groups and record their thinking in the Learning Goals Booklet.
Assessment:
- Observation of students as they discuss the workstation they would like to try. Are they able to tell their partner why they made that choice?
- In the Learning Goals Booklet look for evidence that students understand how they can make a choice about their workstation that will help them to focus on their learning tasks.

GOAL SETTING:
In their Learning Goals Booklet, students will set a goal for where they would like to sit/stand/lay in the classroom so that they can focus best.
Lesson Five: Culminating STEM Projects!

The final task will be a STEM Project! When I have met my class, I will decide on the subject and focus of the project. A STEM Project gives students opportunity to practice effective collaborative group work and to show growth mindset and determination.

There are three areas of assessment: STEM Project reflections, student interviews reflecting on collaborative group work, growth mindset/determination, and Core Competencies reflections. This will help students to see how they can embody the social-emotional skills of group work and self-determination. Despite this task being a final assessment for the unit, the students will continue to practice the skills they have developed, so the Core Competency assessment will be ongoing throughout the year and will be integrated with other learning tasks.

Essential Question:
How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn?

Learning Intentions:
I can work respectfully with my classmates.
I can show amazing group work and collaboration skills.
I can share ideas and information with my classmates.
I understand the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.
Using examples, understand how to change a fixed mindset into a growth mindset.
I understand how I can show a growth mindset and determination!
I can set learning goals for myself.

Timeframe: 120 minutes

Materials:
This will be dependent on the STEM project chosen
To provide autonomy, I would like student groups to have a choice of four different STEM projects to complete. This will depend on the needs of the class.

Activity:
*When I have met my class, I will choose which STEM project we will complete.
Assessment:

STEM PROJECT ASSESSMENT

*My STEM Journal response:*

**SOLVE IT:**

How can we solve the problem?
The BEST solution is… because…

**TEST IT:**

What worked well?
What didn’t work well?
Ideas for next time?

*Teacher Observation:*

Through a final STEM Project, student will demonstrate evidence of them reaching the goals they set for group work, and showing a growth mindset.

**UNIT FINAL ASSESSMENT:**

The final assessment will be completed through teacher interview. Over the course of a week while students are silent reading, the teacher will individually ask the students the following questions and will record their responses.

*Student Reflections and Goal Setting:*

1. How do you work respectfully with a group? How do you collaborate with a group?
2. How are you doing with showing respect to your classmates? How are you doing collaborating with your classmates? Did you share your own ideas?
3. What is one goal for how you will show respect and collaborate effectively?
4. How do you show a growth mindset in your learning?
5. How are you doing with showing a growth mindset right now?
6. What is one goal for how you will show a growth mindset this year? How are you going to stick with something that is challenging?

Students will complete the Core Competency reflections independently. *CORE COMPETENCIES: SELF-DETERMINATION & SELF-REGULATION STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION* (see attached reflection sheets)

**Appendices:**

Unit Plan
Goal Booklet
Core Competencies Reflections
Chapter 5: Discussion & Implications

Through this learning process, I have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to deeply reflect upon my moral purpose as an educator and how I hope to create a safe learning community where all students know that they will be supported to reach their personal potential. This work has been a complex process in which I have embodied much of what I hope my students experience in their own learning journeys. I have shown a growth mindset, self-determination, self-regulation, have set goals and have been fortunate to be autonomous in my learning journey. This work truly matters to me and is an integral part of who I previously was as a young student, and presently, who I am as an educator and a graduate student.

To complete this work, I have had to self-regulate my behaviors and focus my time carefully. It began as I applied to Vancouver Island University to be part of this Masters program. Along with my grade 12 students, I sent in my application and since then have been reminded about what it means to be a student. Coursework and writing my thesis has been amazing learning for me, and I have talked about my learning journey with my students. In this way, I have modeled grit and determination. Summer 2017 has been spent writing. I have composed madly for a great deal of time, followed by periods of time waiting for feedback. Then, my family has enjoyed time together while we kayaked and hiked; I have been able to balance my time well. This takes a great deal of self-regulation and self-determination, and I have focused my writing based on a goal for the day and my advisor’s suggestions.

Why have I been able to demonstrate these social competencies? In large part, it is because as graduate students we have been given autonomy - choice in our topic, how we show our learning through research methods or project type, and some options in the way we create our thesis. This has fueled me in my journey.
As I began the Literature Review, I knew that to suit my learning style the notes about each journal or book needed to be colour-coded to subject area and that my notes needed to be large. Therefore on a wall in our basement, I created personalized learning notes and this action reminded me that it is important to guide students in how they, in this case, take notes and that their learning will be deeper when they have autonomy in how they learn. This is powerful learning for me as I have experienced so much of what I have read in the literature. Autonomy, self-determination, self-regulation creates deep learning in which students are able to reach their personal potential.

My learning notes – messy rough draft of ideas, color-coded, full of questions, autonomous, personalized for my learning needs!
As I move from the deep, meaningful and autonomous learning within my thesis, I am enthusiastic about my collaboration with a teacher leader from another school district. Our goal to create meaningful personalized learning portfolios that include reading and writing assessments; specific opportunities will be provided for students to know what their learning goals are, and there will be a culminating project in which students embody the actions and attitudes of the Core Competencies while showing to their school community that they have reached their learning goals and their personal potential.

I am looking forward to deeper practice with the Core Competencies because I do not feel that I was able to develop a truly meaningful way to assess the students’ perceptions of their social-emotional skills through the Core Competencies. How I support students to embody the actions and attitudes of the Core Competencies will continue to evolve. I believe in continuous improvement and I am “never satisfied, always expecting more of [myself] and more of their students” (Ritchhard, 2015, p. x). The main question that I now wonder is how I can create authentic opportunities for students to be aware of and to reflect upon their social-emotional growth through the Core Competencies. I am not satisfied with how the Core Competencies student reflections were part of the unit. My next steps are to consider deeply how to assess the Competencies more authentically as part of students’ learning tasks and how to encourage learners to truly embody the social-emotional elements of the competency.

I will only know if this unit is effective when I have worked with it in September. The wording and format will change as my lessons evolve to meet the needs of the unique students in my class. Will the unit help students to embody the actions and attitudes of self-determination and self-regulation? I will scan the class for answers to this question, and perhaps this will be a focus for my NOII Inquiry. Some results that may transpire are shifts in how students perceive
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themselves as learners, and it will be interesting to scan for evidence of this. Because students in grade three are at the beginning stages of their school careers, it is my hope that they have an enthusiasm for learning. As a high school teacher, it was disheartening to meet students for the first time as they entered grade 12 and see that some students have a lack of interest in school. Another question I may want to consider is how all stages of schooling can better support students to reach their personal potential and support their enthusiastic learning. This school year, I will begin with a careful focus on my grade three class at Walnut Park, and on building a safe classroom community where students are respectful of others, feel that they can make mistakes, show a growth mindset and determination, set goals for their next steps of learning, and know how their physical working space can best meet their needs.

As we move forward in the year, I will practice a Gradual Release of Responsibility (Brownlie et al., 2009; Butler et al., 2017). The unit supports our first steps in developing a classroom community where students feel they belong and that they are all learners. Through the focus on social-emotional skills, it is my hope that during the school year we will develop our classroom into a learning community where all students are able to develop to meet their personal potential.

If students are to truly embody the Core Competencies of self-determination and self-regulation, I know that it will be necessary for our classroom community to use the unit vocabulary and to consistently revisit our classroom expectations, look at how we are respectful collaborators, show a growth mindset, show self-determination, practice goal setting, and the Core Competencies. Repetition will allow students to integrate the experiences into their daily attitudes and actions as learner.
Recommendations

Throughout my learning journey, I have absorbed a great deal of information about the research behind the teaching of social-emotional skills and how they can support students to reach their personal potential for today and in their future. I look forward to sharing this learning with the staff at Walnut Park as we collaborate and plan together.

The Core Competencies are part of our redesigned curriculum, so it is necessary for educators to teach the social-emotional skills of self-determination and self-regulation, and I would recommend to those who would like to begin the year building a learning community to first consider their own moral purpose and philosophy as an educator. This will enable them to ground in their own reasons for supporting students in growth to reach their potential.

As well, I would suggest that teachers and teacher leaders take steps to understand the concept of growth mindset and how that translates into the development of self-determination, and in turn, self-regulation. Perhaps a teacher leader could lead a book study around Dweck’s *Growth Mindset*. As previously shown, Shanker’s concerning self-regulation would be a place to begin the understanding of how to apply self-regulation theory and strategies in the classroom. Another helpful resource is *Leaders of their own learning: Transforming schools through student-engaged assessment* (Berger, 2014) as it supports goal-setting and autonomy in the classroom. It is important to keep in mind that there is overlap between all of these concepts, and Butler et al., competently combine these ideas in such a way that the reader understands the steps needed to support students in their growth to embody the Core Competencies of self-determination and self-regulation. Their incredible resource is built upon research. *Developing Self-Regulating Learners* is written by Deborah L. Butler, Leyton Schnellert and Nancy E. Perry (2017) and I would recommend that every educator read and utilize their suggestions about how
to build a learning community and how to support students to show self-determination and self-regulation. This was the final book that I read while reading and preparing my literature review, and it showed incredible synchronicity with everything that I had connected and learned. I thank them for this well-constructed resource and as I continue to learn and improve my teaching practice, hope to read more by these researchers.

I wonder if Butler et al. or other researchers are studying how to authentically ask students to reflect upon their learning. As I stated previously, this is something that I do not feel is well constructed in the Core Competency reflections and I would like to improve upon this. It will be something that I will focus on and will look for other research to support my learning.

For those who would like to build a classroom learning community based on safety, growth mindset, goal setting, autonomy, therefore the social-emotional competencies of self-determination/self-regulation, I would suggest that educators keep in mind that their students’ learning and their own learning can change from day to day. It is necessary to be adaptive experts as we shift our practice to meet the needs of our students. We benefit as educators through having the background knowledge of the research and literature, and as we put it into practice, we must remember that if we are to support our learners to reach their personal potential, we must change our approaches and truly individualize our plans.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that students will be more able to reach their individual learning potential through the direct teaching of the social-emotional skills of a growth mindset, goal setting, and autonomy. Research also indicates that self-determination and self-regulation are vital elements of social competence and the research based Core Competencies provide teachers with the opportunity to teach these skills to their students. With this learning, I hope to support
my students in the development and embodiment of self-determination and self-regulation. My carefully considered and developed unit will keep me grounded in my instincts and rooted in the literature, and I have come to realize that as I entered into this thesis work, I intrinsically know that social-emotional skills are at the center of student learning. The literature has confirmed that it is imperative to teach social-emotional skills, specifically self-determination and self-regulation. The provincial focus on the Core Competencies verifies that the importance of supporting students to reach their personal potential through the development of social-emotional skills. I look forward to meeting my new students, creating a classroom learning community and continuing to learn and change my practice to best help students to meet their individual potential.
References


https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies


[http://dx.doi.org/10.1787.5js07529lwf0-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787.5js07529lwf0-en)


## Respectful Collaboration & A Growth Mindset: Helping Students Achieve Their Best

### Rationale:

This mini-unit is designed for a primary class, with the aim to develop a stronger understanding of who the students are as learners, particularly regarding their use of social/emotional skills. Education systems around the world, and British Columbia in particular, are turning their attention to the role of 'non-cognitive' skills such as social/emotional skills and their role in learner success. In British Columbia, the focus on social and emotional skills is within the Core Competencies.

In order to support all students to reach their personal potential, it is imperative that we directly teach specific social emotional skills that will lead to student success in our classrooms and in their futures.

With this in mind, the first days of a new school year are a perfect time to lay the groundwork for this important work. It is my aim to share these three lessons with my grade three class at the start of our new school year. Importantly, we will regularly return to the social emotional skills of respect, collaboration and growth mindset each day. These skills will support each learner to demonstrate work habits that will help them to learn best.
## Culminating Task

### STEM Projects!

### STAGE 1: Desired Results (what will students be able to understand? know? do? (write, say, do)

**Core Competencies:**

- **Communication**
  - Connect and engage with others (to share and develop ideas)
  - Acquire, interpret, and present information (includes inquiries)
  - Collaborate to plan, carry out, and review constructions and activities
  - Explain/recap and reflect on experiences and accomplishments

- **Thinking**
  - Creative
  - Novelty and value
  - Generating ideas
  - Developing ideas
  - Critical
  - Analyze and critique
  - Question and investigate
  - Develop and design

- **Personal & Social**
  - Positive Personal & Social identity
  - Relationships and cultural contexts
  - Personal values and choices
  - Personal strengths and abilities
  - Personal Awareness & Responsibility
    - Self-determination
    - Self-regulation

### Big Ideas:

- Confidence develops through the process of self-discovery.
- Effective collaboration relies on clear, respectful communication.
- Everything we learn helps us to develop skills.
- Learning is a lifelong enterprise.

### Essential Question:

How can we create a learning community where our classmates respect everyone, and where we can all learn? We are all learners who work together!

### Curricular Competencies:

- Identify and appreciate their personal attributes, skills, interests, and accomplishments
- Recognize the importance of positive relationships in their lives
- Share ideas, information, personal feelings, and knowledge with others
- Work respectfully and constructively with others to achieve common goals
- Recognize the importance of learning in their lives
- Set and achieve realistic learning goals for themselves
- Demonstrate effective work habits and organizational skills appropriate to their level of development

### Content:

*Students are expected to know the following:*

**Personal Development**
- goal-setting strategies
- risk taking and its role in self-exploration

**Connections to Community**
- social awareness
- roles and responsibilities at school
STAGE 2: Assessment Plan

Formative Assessment (for learning):
Observation of students during activities; student reflection and goal sheets at the end of each lesson; observation of student actions and their communication in relation to the goals they set.

Summative Assessment (of learning):
Teacher Observation: Through a final STEM Project, student will demonstrate evidence of them reaching the goals they set for group work, and showing a growth mindset.

Student final self-assessment in response to the following questions:

Essential Question: How can I show work habits that will help me to learn best?

1. How do you work respectfully with a group? How do you collaborate with a group?
2. How are you doing with showing respect to your classmates? How are you doing collaborating with your classmates? Did you share your own ideas?
3. What is one goal for how you will show respect and collaborate effectively?

1. How do you show a growth mindset in your learning?
2. How are you doing with showing a growth mindset right now?
3. What is one goal for how you will show a growth mindset this year? How are you going to stick with something that is challenging?

Core Competencies: Self-Determination & Self-Regulation Student Self-Reflection (see attached reflection sheets)

Stage 3: Learning Plan -

Learning Intention | Instructional Activities | Assessment
See attached plans for lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
Appendix B

Goal Booklet

*My Learning Goals*

**Name:**

*A Self-Portrait!*
Lesson One

What am I learning?
I am an important part of our classroom community and I can follow our Classroom Expectations.

Where to next? What is my goal?
I will be a good member of our classroom community by following our Classroom Expectations.

For example, I will...
Lesson Two

What am I learning?
I can show amazing group work and collaborate with my classmates.

Where to next? What is my goal?
How will you show respect to your classmates?
How will you collaborate with them?
Lesson Three

What am I learning?
I can show a growth mindset and determination.

Where to next? What is my goal?
Three ways that I will show a growth mindset and determination are...
Lesson Four
Where should I work?

What am I learning?
I’m learning that best physical space for me will help me to learn and focus my best is...

I would like to (example) stand sometimes because moving helps me to learn and that I like to work by myself because it helps me to focus.

Where to next? What is my goal?
When I need (example)a stretch break, I need to ask to (example) go to a quiet spot to work.
Lesson Five

My goals 😊

What is one goal for how you will show respect and collaborate effectively?

What is one goal for how you will show a growth mindset this year? How are you going to stick with something that is challenging?
Appendix C

Core Competencies Reflections

Core Competencies: Self-Determination & Self-Regulation

Student Self-Reflection

The following reflections are designed to be completed at the end of the unit (*Respectful Collaboration & A Growth Mindset: Helping Students Achieve Their Best*), or after a few more weeks of returning to the social emotional skills of respect, collaboration and growth mindset each day.

Self-Determination

I can share my ideas.

Here is my example or artefact:

My learning goal is:
Self-Regulation

I can sometimes recognize my emotions and I can communicate that with my classmates.

Here is my example or artefact:

My learning goal is:
Self-Regulation

I can stick with it, or be determined, when I am doing something that I feel I’m not good at yet.

Here is my example or artefact:

My learning goal is:
Self-Regulation

I can set goals that I feel I am able to meet.

Here is my example or artefact:

My learning goal is: