OVERVIEW

Self-regulated learners are metacognitive, motivated for learning, and strategic (Winne & Perry, 2000; Zimmerman, 1990; 2008). Specifically, they exercise metacognition by reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses relative to the demands of tasks they are assigned and, where gaps exist, considering strategies that can be used to ensure their ultimate success. Their motivation for learning is revealed in the value they place on personal progress and deep understanding, their willingness to try challenging tasks that prompt self-regulation, and their constructive view that failure is an opportunity for learning. Strategic describes how these learners approach challenging tasks and deal with problems. They choose from a developing repertoire of strategies those best suited to a situation and then apply them effectively.

Historically, theories of motivation and SRL presumed young children were not capable of the complex cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in SRL and not vulnerable to motivational beliefs and values that undermine it. Consequently, much of the research about SRL in educational psychology focused on students in the intermediate grades and beyond. Now research is accumulating that proves young children can and do regulate their learning and are vulnerable to the same academically maladaptive motivations as older students. This research signals the general significance of self-regulation and SRL to children’s success in and beyond school.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

My research has two main goals: (a) understanding how features of classroom contexts create opportunities for children to develop and engage in SRL; and (b) helping teachers, including preservice teachers, to design tasks and interact with learners in ways that support SRL. Most of my research has focused on children in elementary schools (kindergarten through grade 5) because this group has been understudied in the past and promoting SRL early in children’s school careers seems promising for preventing academic, social, and emotional problems in the future. Recently, my research has expanded to include youth in alternative education programs. My research takes place in classrooms, providing opportunities to observe SRL in naturally occurring activities unfolding in real time. Finally, I rely on social views of learning (e.g., examining how children’s SRL is supported through transactions with teachers and peers) to interpret my research results.
FINDINGS

Students have opportunities to regulate learning in classrooms where they are engaged in complex meaningful tasks, making choices, controlling challenge, and self-evaluating learning, and where they receive support from teachers and peers that is instrumental to SRL. Importantly, tasks are not static entities with inherent properties, such as degree of difficulty. Students experience tasks differently, depending on dynamic relationships among task features, personal characteristics, and social and instructional supports. Therefore, researchers and teachers should pay close attention to how students interpret/understand tasks and how they engage with them.

Teaching toward SRL is not easy. Therefore, making the implementation of SRL promoting practices as widespread as research indicates they should be requires creating professional development contexts for teachers like the learning contexts we want them to create for their students—contexts that provide teachers with guided and sustained support to hone their self and co-regulation skills.


IMPORTANCE

Currently, I have three funded research projects:

(a) Seeding success: A longitudinal investigation of children’s development of SRL and factors associated with it;
(b) Promoting positive life outcomes for children and youth who have struggled in school; and
(c) Developing early career teacher motivation.

The longitudinal investigation of children’s development of SRL will reveal individual differences in students’ SRL trajectories over time (kindergarten through grade 3) and how these can be mediated by classroom experiences. Ideally, these findings can inform the design of interventions for children whose SRL trajectories are academically maladaptive, and prevent subsequent problems in and beyond school. Similarly, findings from my study of early career teacher motivation indicate teachers with knowledge of SRL promoting practices have higher efficacy for carrying out difficult teaching tasks (e.g., managing challenging behaviour), experience higher levels of engagement and lower levels of stress than peers without an SRL focus. These findings are leading to hypotheses about factors that can help teachers thrive, especially in challenging alternative education settings like those represented in my research about struggling youth. Together, these projects will advance theory and research on SRL, and provide the basis for developing powerful, adaptive frameworks for promoting effective teaching and learning in schools.