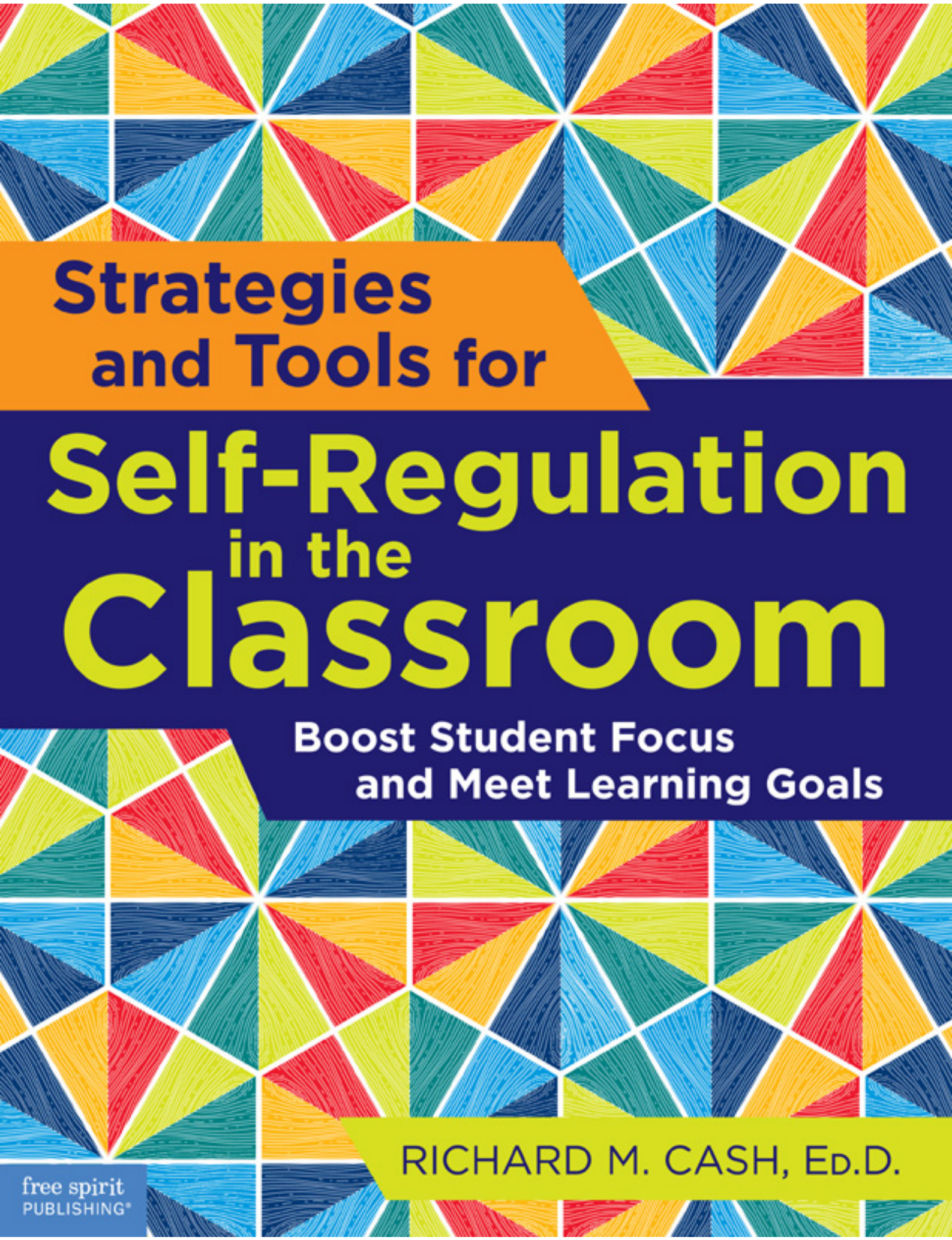

Strategies and Tools for
Self-Regulation in the Classroom
Boost Student Focus and Meet Learning Goals
RICHARD M. CASH, Ed.D.
free spirit PUBLISHING®

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PART I:

Fostering Confidence for Learning

Engagement and confidence are two fundamental psychological constructs that often intersect and influence each other. This intricate relationship can significantly impact students' performance, well-being, and overall success.

At its core, engagement is the ability to focus and resist distractions—a challenge in a world filled with distraction. Technology and media, emotional responses and physical needs, interaction and isolation—they all constantly compete for students' attention. And they all affect students' abilities to stay involved, committed, and enthusiastic about activities or tasks in the classroom.

Confidence is feeling sure of oneself and one's abilities and secure in what one can accomplish. It is not about arrogance or about feeling or being better than others. Confident learners are more likely to ask questions, seek help, acknowledge mistakes, take charge of their learning, set realistic goals, and put forth effort. In other words, confident learners are more likely to engage in learning.

Confidence is characteristic of self-regulated learners. And it is not limited to the affective dimension of SRL. Confident learners know the value of hard work and of putting effort into building their skills. They also must keep in check their internal dialogue and sense of self-belief to build self-efficacy, or trust in themselves to analyze their performance and make necessary adjustments.

The strategies in this section can assist you in developing confident, engaged, and self-regulated learners who are ready to take ownership of their learning.

Attitude Counts

Psychologically, the term *attitude* refers to "a set of emotions, beliefs, and behaviors toward a particular object, person, thing, or event. Attitude can also be described as the way we evaluate something or someone" (Cherry 2024). The three dimensions of self-regulation each have a substantial impact on a student's attitude toward learning. The cognitive dimension includes how students think about themselves—their self-beliefs—and their awareness of their abilities—their self-efficacy (cognition). Students' self-beliefs and self-efficacy are strongly related to the attitudes they have about a topic, subject, or learning environment (affect). And students' attitudes have significant impacts on what they do (behavior) and the general feelings they bear toward themselves and others.

Students' attitudes also direct their attention toward learning or away from learning. And their attitudes can be impacted by the level of confidence students feel in the classroom and in themselves as learners. You've likely seen this in action, and research backs it up: A positive attitude can have a significant influence on a child's academic learning and success (Chen et al. 2018). Therefore, it is important that students learn how to identify their attitudes and ways to shift them, when needed, to maintain confidence through learning challenges.

Strategies for Teachers

As a teacher, you are essential to the development of student attitudes and classroom culture! The strategies that follow help you build a classroom environment that promotes student confidence, intellectual risk-taking, and a positive attitude toward learning.

ENSURE THAT STUDENTS FEEL SAFE AND COMFORTABLE

One of the most effective ways to build and support positive student attitude and confidence toward learning is to ensure that students feel safe and comfortable in the learning space. This includes feeling safe from bullying, name-calling, and sarcasm; safe to take intellectual risks and be wrong without retribution; safe to work alone or with others; and safe to be themselves.

Here are a few ways to increase student comfort and safety. Also see pages 35–38 in *Self-Regulation in the Classroom: Helping Students Learn How to Learn* for more ideas.

- **Smile at your students and encourage them to smile at you!** Show a humorous clip from a movie, tell a funny story or joke, show a single-frame cartoon based on what's going on in class, and share good news.
- **Greet students as they enter the room.** When a student is late, rather than use punitive language ("Why are you late?"), welcome them in ("I'm so glad you're here.").
- **Routinely celebrate students' successes,** no matter how small.
- **Use humor, *not* sarcasm.** Since sarcasm is often used to belittle or put someone down, students may find sarcastic remarks hurtful, either to themselves or to others.
- **Allow students to choose where they sit,** within reason.
- **If you have space, provide different types of seats** (barstools, beanbags, pillows, carpet space, desks, tables).
- **Avoid harsh lighting** (natural light is best), loud sounds/noises, and strong smells/odors (this includes perfumes and colognes, scented lotions, and essential oils).

CREATE A PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT

You are a big part of the classroom environment, so be sure you are consistent in your mood. Try to stay even-keeled when you are having a bad day or are dealing with stress. Talk to your students about how you manage your stress in positive ways and how you maintain a positive attitude. Make sure to show students how you can laugh at yourself when you make a mistake. Other ways to create a predictable classroom environment include the following:

- posting timelines, schedules, and due dates

- posting lesson objectives and the "why" of the learning
- helping students adjust to changes and disruptions

CREATE POSITIVE NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS

You won't have an overall positive classroom atmosphere that supports positive attitudes toward learning if you're always telling students what they can't or shouldn't do. Start your classroom norms/expectations with "Do," keep them short and general rather than specific, and use simple language that is direct and to the point. Here are a few examples:

- Do support each other.
- Do be safe and respectful.
- Do follow directions.

Keep the number of norms/expectations to three to five. Be sure to review them with students routinely, using visuals or graphics to help students seal them into memory, and expect that students be able to recite the classroom norms when asked. You can also post your norms/expectations, along with any supporting graphics, as a visual reminder. Apply your classroom norms consistently, and offer support or guidance as needed to help students follow the norms.

USE AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations are an easy tool you can use to support an overall positive atmosphere and boost student confidence in your classroom. Here are a few ideas for how to incorporate affirmations into your daily practice:

- **Create an affirmations wall in your space and fill it with positive phrases.** Students can look at the wall and pick a positive phrase they'll say to themselves throughout the class period, day, or week.
- **Write affirmations on sticky notes and stick them around the external frame of your classroom door.** Ask students to take one as they enter the room. They can post their chosen affirmations on their desks as a reminder of the kind messages they'd like to tell themselves. Students then create their own affirmations to replace the ones they take from the doorframe. This way you never run out of positive messages.

- **Have students work in teams to create alphabet books of positive affirmations.** The more creative they get, the better. Here are a few examples. I am/we are:
  - **A:** amazing, awesome, astounding
  - **B:** beautiful, breathtaking, brilliant
  - **C:** caring, creative, cheerful
  - **D:** dynamic, determined, diligent

Also, be sure to mix up your affirmations. So often, we get stuck using a few phrases repeatedly. This repetition can start to ring hollow or feel inauthentic to students. Instead, try to use a variety of affirming messages to lighten the mood in your classroom.

USE ENCOURAGING LANGUAGE

Using encouraging language is another way to help students keep a positive attitude. As with affirmations, try to use a variety of encouraging statements to help students feel individually important. Here are twenty phrases you might incorporate into your interactions with students.

20 Affirming Statements of Encouragement

1. I believe in you!
2. You've got this.
3. We are all in this together.
4. I'm here to help you, guide you, and ensure your success.
5. I'm here to support you.
6. I'm grateful to have you in my class.
7. I'm lucky you are sharing your thoughts.
8. You are a hard worker, and it is paying off.
9. You can always count on me to be in your corner.
10. You are doing great things.
11. Your effort is what is going to make you successful.

12. I recognize your talent.
13. Keep working at it. You will get it.
14. You may have failed, but that doesn't mean you are a failure.
15. Mistakes are part of the learning process. What will you do differently next time?
16. Never be afraid to ask questions.
17. Hang in there. Tomorrow is a new day.
18. Don't give up! You've got this.
19. Trust yourself and keep going. Worrying about the outcome won't change it.
20. Breathe!

INVITE SHOUT-OUTS

Near the end of a period or day, encourage students to recognize a peer or peers who represented positivity or were helpful to others' learning. Share an example or two to get the group started:

- "I want to recognize Nico for being helpful to me during the lesson."
- "A shout-out to Mariko for always being a positive influence."
- "Here's to Bobbi, who has shown me how to work hard."
- "Thank you, Amalia, Sean, and Araby, for being great teammates."
- "Cheers to Corey and Monica for their accomplishments this week."

Acknowledging others and being acknowledged in a public way supports students' positive attitudes and individual confidence. Celebrating the help students offer one another and the effort they put forth toward learning also promotes the value of being in a learning community.

BUILD IN BRAIN BREAKS

The brain learns information best when allowed time to process and connect new ideas. To support an overall positive classroom atmosphere,

try to adhere to the 10:2/20:2 rule. This rule reflects the amount of information the brain can handle before it needs to download or use that information.

- **For students who need more support, use the 10:2 model.** For every ten minutes of instruction, allow up to two minutes for discussion, application, movement, or restating what was learned.
- **For students who are more self-regulated, use the 20:2 model.** For every twenty minutes of instruction, allow up to two minutes for discussion, application, movement, or restating what was learned.

Techniques and Tools for Students

Attitude matters! And students' attitudes have a tremendous influence on many areas of their lives. Share these tools and techniques to help students build confidence and maintain a positive attitude.

ADDRESS NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

One way students can maintain confidence and a positive attitude is to talk back to thoughts that aren't so positive. Teach students to sit quietly and listen to their self-talk before class and periodically throughout a lesson. Is it positive or negative? If a student's self-talk is negative, they can recite an affirmation silently.

Instruct students that when negative self-talk begins, they should pause and try to identify what may be causing the negative talk. Here are a number of factors to consider:

- the environment, such as room temperature, smells, harsh lighting, or sounds ("It's too noisy in here.")
- people or social interactions ("Kaeleigh bothers me when we work together.")
- content ability or interest ("I'm bad at math/math is boring.")
- past events ("Last time I failed, so I'll probably fail again.")
- future worries ("If I don't get an A, my parents will be mad.")
- the teacher ("Ms. Johnson doesn't like me.")

- distractors, such as smartphones or other external distractions ("I need my phone or else I won't know what's happening with my friends.")
- lack of reward or influence of expected/perceived punishment ("What do I need to get an A?*")*
- comparison to others ("Jibril always gets to be first.")
- behaviors of others ("My brother is so annoying!")

After students have identified negative thoughts, it's time to challenge and address them. Teach these techniques.

Challenge Negative Thoughts

One of the easiest ways to do this is to ask these three questions:

1. Is the thought true?
2. Is the thought helpful?
3. Is the thought real?

Often, the answer to these questions is no, but negative thoughts can be connected to real worries a student has. When negative thoughts are connected to worries, remind students that though their worries may be very real, worrying cannot change the eventual outcome.

The Power of Yet

This is an easy tool to teach, and even easier for students to use. All students have to do is add the word *yet* to the end of their negative thoughts. The Power of Yet can help students understand that many of the obstacles in their lives are temporary. And approaching hurdles with a positive attitude shows that they are willing to try.

- I can't do this … yet.
- I don't like this … yet.
- I'm not good at this … yet.



50 Affirmations to Try

1. I can do this.
2. I am confident in myself.
3. I am proud of who I've become.
4. I have the right to be happy.
5. I am powerful.
6. I am strong.
7. I get better each time I try.
8. I am an unstoppable force.
9. I inspire others to do better.
10. I may fail, but I learn each time.
11. I haven't done X/Y/Z yet, but eventually I will.
12. My attitude is contagious. I hope others catch my good vibes.
13. My joy/happiness is worth passing along to others.
14. I work hard to achieve success.
15. I will stay focused on my success.
16. I've overcome obstacles in the past. I can do it this time too.
17. My hard work will show in my achievements.
18. Each day, I get better and better.
19. I believe in myself.
20. I can do almost anything I put my mind to.
21. I am freeing myself from negative thoughts.
22. I accept who I am, and I will continue to do great things.
23. I deserve to be happy/successful.
24. I have made mistakes, but they don't define me.
25. I like myself the way I am.
26. I choose happiness.
27. Struggles make me stronger.
28. I am a strong and capable person.
29. It may be hard, but it's worth the challenge.
30. I am allowed to be sad, mad, or unhappy. It's part of being human.
31. I am allowed to be happy.
32. I can set boundaries without feeling bad about it.
33. I am worthy of praise and support.
34. The past is the past. Today is a new beginning.
35. I matter.
36. Growth can be difficult, but I'm getting better every day.
37. When I get stressed, I can remember to breathe.
38. I'm not bored. I'm waiting for inspiration.
39. I will avoid distractions during X/Y/Z.
40. I work hard to be my best self.
41. Even though I may not win, I will do my best.
42. My feelings are mine. I will remain positive through difficult feelings.
43. Each breath gives me peace/strength/power.
44. I live in the moment.
45. I am grateful for all the things I have.
46. I am filled with joy.
47. I greet challenges with gratitude.
48. Today, I choose to be happy.
49. I embrace my uniqueness, because there is no one like me!
50. I can do hard things.

USE AFFIRMATIONS

Teach students how to build their own positive and affirming self-talk. Share the list of positive affirmations on page 119 and ask students to choose three to five affirmations that they'll say to themselves every day. They can also create their own affirmations to add to the list. Discuss times when they will use their affirmations. Will they say them every morning? Before bed? Write them on an index card or sticky note that they carry with them? Talk about the importance of returning to affirmations in moments of struggle and self-doubt, when experiencing negative self-talk, or when confidence slips.

MORE ATTITUDE BOOSTERS

Share these attitude-boosting tips with students and incorporate them into your teaching practice.

- Make sure to laugh every day.
- Focus on goals.
- Surround yourself with positive people.
- Listen to music that makes you happy.
- Practice yoga or mindfulness.

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