

Self-Reg People

Melissa Raine | Self-Reg Consultant and Foundations Graduate

Why is an expert in medieval English literature studying Self-Reg? Melissa Raine, a Self-Reg consultant and Foundations graduate in Melbourne, Australia, is an independent humanities researcher who happens to be one of the world's leading experts on children's voice in medieval English literature.

Melissa came to Stuart Shanker and Self-Reg by way of Stanley Greenspan. "I discovered Dr. Greenspan's parenting books when my eldest son was a baby," she explains. "He was very hard to soothe and Greenspan's books exhibited the best understanding of how to parent a child who was not easy to soothe. Without judging, he provided a way forward. And he took seriously the entire child, body as well as brain, in ways that helped me to understand my son's challenges. It seemed clear that I should learn more about the work of a man whose parenting books were already speaking to me more coherently than anything else out there."

Eventually the path led to Melissa reading *The First Idea*, where she first encountered the name Stuart Shanker (who co-authored that book with Greenspan). She was astonished to find how much their ideas intersected with her research interests. "*The First Idea* addressed many questions that I was interested in and also demonstrated the urgent need to improve our understanding of how children develop," she says.

Although her family's needs are the primary focus of Melissa's Self-Reg learning, she finds it relevant to her academic research. Several years ago, Melissa received a grant to research children's voice in medieval English literature. She began with some basic questions: When do children get to use their voices in medieval fiction? Under what circumstances could they express themselves? Is the main mode of communication linguistic, or are other factors significant, such as singing, laughing or crying? Does the sound of a voice often also imply complementary facial expressions, gestures and postures? "Although literature is fictional, stories where children get to 'speak for themselves' tell us something about how "real" children were expected to behave, as well as how and why they were (or weren't) valued," she says. "I became aware that these questions are just as important for contemporary childhood, especially so since not all children have the same ability to communicate their own experiences, due to age and different kinds of processing, amongst other factors."

FIVE QUESTIONS

How did your study of Self-Reg change or influence your pre-existing ideas?

Directing awareness towards effective listening needs as much work as focusing on the child. Everything a child says or does involves a relationship; we need to understand the relationship to understand what the child is telling us. Our most important contribution to helping children express themselves is to make them feel safe.

Is there a Self-Reg community in Australia?

I would say it is under construction. I'm looking forward to its growth, and doing my part by giving presentations to interested groups.

What are you doing differently in your personal life as a result of Self-Reg?

Responding more supportively when my kids are struggling.

Has Self-Reg helped you identify personal stressors that you were not aware of?

Rather than ignoring "little things" I try now to catch them and reflect on them, as they build up and drain energy. I've become better at recognizing when to take a break and come back when my regulation is better.

What aspects of Self-Reg would you still like to understand better?

Pattern recognition, changes throughout the life cycle, and deeper knowledge of how to recognize specific processing differences in order to respond more effectively.



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