

Art Education and Self Care

Suggested Reading

By Jessica Scott-Dunda

As a K-5 elementary Art Teacher, I commute two hours daily round trip for work, so I listen to audiobooks. I offer these books I found helpful as an art educator interested in the topic of self-care.

Art As a Reflection Tool

Heart, Breath, Mind by Dr. Leah Lagos

As a glass artist, I use my time in the studio to create personal and commissioned pieces help me release thoughts, emotions, and feelings into functional work. I've worked through this pandemic with authors, colleagues, and friends to contribute to educational writing. I practiced writing poetry again finding it to be cathartic for my hectic mind and heavy heart. As an elementary art teacher I'm using our classroom as a consistent space for kids to relax, feel safe, and be their authentic selves. I recommend Dr. Leah Lago's new book, *Heart, Breath, Mind* (2020) to remind us to deeply listen with intent to our own unique voice. Through the practice of structured breathing techniques we reduce stress and connect deeper with each other. I have listened to her book twice and each time I gain new insight to activate my compassion for my own self determination and growth.

Setting Emotional Boundaries

The Energy Bus, by Jon Gordon

Although we are all doing our best to stay positive, care for one another, and emphatically listen there are times when we must set boundaries with people who may be energy draining. Jon Gordon expresses in his book *The Energy Bus* (2007) that 'Energy Vampires' are a very real, everyday phenomenon that must be managed. Here are some suggested verbal boundary cues to cultivate positive energy and bring out the best in your team: "Let me explain it in a different way." "Let's circle back to this when we have both taken some time to think." "I hear what you're saying, but I'm going to need some time to talk it out with a couple other people first." I have found although it may be difficult to "set boundaries" especially with colleagues, these strategies help me address unproductive or unprofessional scenarios with grace and consistency.

Outdoor Time

The Nature Fix by Florence Williams

This book was recommended reading in *Fresh Paint* recently and I have listened to it twice since. Walking, hiking, and sitting outdoors helps us reconnect with an instinctual belonging to our carbon-based connection with the earth. Japanese scientists use the phrase '*forest-bathing*' to indicate a need to envelop oneself in green spaces to activate and reset normal operating levels inside us emotionally and chemically. I have two dogs I walk everyday and walking in our State Parks has added another dimension of adventure for us during COVID-19. I use apps like

the *Picture Bird Identifier* to take photos of birds and try to match them with their name and details; also flora and fauna apps that work similarly.

Clarity in Communication

Verbal Judo: The Gentle Art of Persuasion (1993) by Dr. George Thompson

This book introduced me to reacting with a dialed down tone of compassion and understanding when set against heightened emotions. Before I was a teacher I worked in advertising at a tech company owned by a local newspaper and I spent the day with Dr. Thompson where he focused on teaching us to cue and prompt clients for more information, use assertive coaxing, echo their statements to increase clarity, and verbalize their needs with diligent regard for empathy and listening. He worked in de-escalation techniques in customer service and I have recently re-visited his audiobook to remind myself to listen with intent, and purposefully build a foundation for clear communication.

Breathing

Into the Magic Shop (2016) by James Doty, MD

Cultivating Mindfulness in the Classroom (2017) by Jeanie M. Iberlin

Although I have practiced hatha yoga's breathing techniques for over 23 years I recently listened to the Audible book, *Into the Magic Shop* (2016) by James Doty, MD who speaks to the use of deep, meditative breathing techniques to steady his hands and mind as a brain surgeon. Dr. Doty's book details techniques and health implications when you harness the power of the breath. As an elementary art teacher, my fine arts team has actively been teaching students box and bubble breathing this year. We started reading *Cultivating Mindfulness in the Classroom* (2017) by Jeanie M. Iberlin as a book study in the summer and are using it as a point of reference in our professional development plan this year. We are actively integrating box breathing into electronic meetings, student curriculum, and individual practice for self-care. To begin practicing box breathing, inhale through the nose while expanding the stomach to a count of four, hold the breath gently for a count of four, then on the exhalation pull the belly button to the spine and count to four. Hold and wait a final count of four before starting over. I recommend the *Bubble Breathing App* for grades 3-5 students and the *Sesame Street Breathing App* for younger children K-2.

Final Thoughts

I've been fortunate to work with a proactive principal through this pandemic – every day in the summer we both showed up and planned and then scraped those plans and continued to try to think through all the worst case scenarios we could muster. We put ourselves in the mindset of families and kids who were scared and looking to leadership in an upside down reality. Everything we've done this year has been for student success and safety and I am grateful for the network that is FAEA and our District. With that said, I leave you with these books I am currently listening to- at random and in tandem on that long commute to and from work every day.

Lead Like a Pirate by Shelly Burgess and Beth Houf

Recommended reading by my District HR personal, on how to engage your staff and teachers in celebrating success, partying like there's no tomorrow, and acknowledging challenge through resilience.

No Hero: The Evolution of a Navy Seal (2014) by Mark Owen.

Recommended reading by the Tampa Bay Rays Mental Performance Coach, Justin Su'a, on perseverance and maintaining your three foot control on reality- on what you can affect while ignoring the distractions.

Dare to Lead (2018) by Brene Brown.

Recommended reading for my book study on leadership risk and taking a stand through unlearning what is unnecessary or ineffective while choosing to focus on the crucial flexibility necessary to grow into your potential.

Author Bio

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Ms. Scott-Dunda earned a Master in Arts degree in Special Education: Specific Learning Disabilities from the University of South Florida Tampa and has taught both ESE and Elementary Art since 2005. Ms. Scott-Dunda's graduate research took place in both Yokosuka, Japan and in Abu Dhabi, UAE where she developed assessment strategies for students with exceptionalities in dual-language programs. As a teaching glass artist, she works in warm fusing and coldworking techniques with her art being represented in galleries and commissions by request. Her current research for academic journal submission and grant writing involves student engagement and motivation as it pertains to empathy-driven outcomes. Ms. Scott-Dunda is licensed by the FLDOE in: ESE, ESOL, Elementary Education, Gifted, Reading, Art, and Leadership: All Levels.