



Matt Grundler: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura, welcome to the Creatively Connected Classroom. We are having yet another amazing STEAM with yet another amazing host and-

Laura Grundler: Yeah, so Jeanne Bjork has been a K-12 Art Chat founding member, I think, she was there since the beginning. And she has been doing a lot of work, I've actually seen her present it [inaudible 00:00:56] and she's our guest today and she hosted for us recently, we're real excited to have her. And, personally, I was very attracted to her topic. So, Jeanne, welcome to the program, we're super excited-

Jeanne Bjork: Hi.

Laura Grundler: How are you today?

Jeanne Bjork: I'm doing good, I just got back from getting my hair done and treating myself to a little TLC, so I'm doing good.

Laura Grundler: Oh, that's awesome. And that connects to your topic, yes. So we wanna first just have the audience know a little bit about you, so who are you? What do you teach? What do you do?

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, I'm an art teacher at Pewaukee High School in Wisconsin, Pewaukee is a suburb of Milwaukee. So I've been teaching there, this is my nineteenth year at that school and prior to that I lived in California and I did web design for a little while and I taught first grade as a classroom teacher and I've kind of traveled around a little bit, my husband is a California guy and so I lived out there for 12 years but I am from Wisconsin and kind of came back home when we came back here to raise our kids. So that's who I am.

Laura Grundler: Wow, have you been staying warm this winter? It looks like it's been frightfully cold up there.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, it's been a little nuts even for Wisconsin people.

Matt Grundler: Wow, that's a lot.



Laura Grundler: Yeah, in Texas it was 80 degrees yesterday and we don't ... it's just been really strange here.

Matt Grundler: Yeah, it hasn't been good though, it hasn't been a good 80.

Laura Grundler: No, it's a humid ... it's been a very strange year. Which kind of makes me think a little bit about your topic, balance, and the principle, it's not just a principle of design but balancing your life. Why choose that as a topic for K-12 Art Chat?

Jeanne Bjork: Well it's something that is a struggle that I've been going through personally for a while and back when I had kids living at home, my two kids are grown up and moved out of the house, so we're empty nesters, but I just remember back in those days when they were running and we were going to soccer and to this and to that and it just constantly felt like I had no control of my life. And so I wanted to find a way to enjoy it all but also be able to do things that I wanted to do and in 2016 when I met you guys in person at NAEA it was kind of like the top of the world professionally but afterwards I came home and I was just really sad and not happy with where I was at in my life. I didn't feel healthy, I didn't feel good, and so I decided to start trying in little baby steps to feel better and I knew that exercise and eating right were part of that.

Jeanne Bjork: I love cooking and I love food but I also use food as comfort and just don't always have the best choices that I had been making in my life and I'm kind of a spontaneous person and I tend to ... if the party's good then I'm joining in, kind of thing. And I was at that point in my life where I was like, "I need to get a grip on this and I need to get better balance between all of the things that I know will help. And the other big factor is my parents are getting up there, they're in their 80s, and I saw how much their health declined because they had not chosen to exercise and eat right and they really were starting to become debilitated because of some of their health choices, not because of disease or anything but because they had not chosen a balanced lifestyle as far as food and exercise and I thought, "I don't wanna end up like that, I want to be able to, in my 60s, 70s and 80s even, I wanna still be riding a bike and be able to go out for a walk around the block or travel where I wanna go."



- Jeanne Bjork: And so that's what led me to my little journey with wellness, and it's still a journey, I'm still going.
- Laura Grundler: It's always a journey. I feel like I'm kind of intersecting with you a little bit, I've gone through some health things these past few months and I just came home from physical therapy in fact, and it's one of those things, I think it's really a commitment to a different lifestyle and it's hard and I think the hard part about it ... and I watch you on social media and we've met in person and I know how busy you are, you're doing art club and AP and you're blogging and don't you travel with your kids, I think, to Italy or somewhere?
- Jeanne Bjork: I do, yeah. We've gone to Italy twice, plus I travel a lot with my husband and my kids, like I said, my own children live far away, so I try to visit them sometimes. And yeah, I'm busy a lot.
- Laura Grundler: So I guess all of that ... how do you manage all that stuff and then make it a priority to eat well or to go for that afternoon walk?
- Jeanne Bjork: Well, it really comes down to what is the long term goal. And noticing that long term commitment versus the little progress of, "Oh, this week I weigh this much and this week I'm this and I'm so many inches," and I mean I've been there and I've done that. I'm an expert on dieting. But it's not just ... and that's what I think is different this time for me and it's the longest I've ever stuck with anything, is that I'm not doing it to lose weight, I'm not doing it for any of those kinds of reasons, I'm doing it for the long run of wanting to feel happy and healthy and to have longevity.
- Jeanne Bjork: And so every day I just make choices and take control of my time and if I plan it's really not that hard and it's easy and eventually I've sort of reset my habits to where the things that I do are these wellness things of 30 minutes of exercise every day and trying to do that outside if at all possible and eating right because I plan my meals on Sunday. Just all those kinds of planning things, kind of like how do you plan a balanced lesson in your classroom, it's the same principles that all teachers are really good at, we just forget to do them for ourselves.
- Matt Grundler: I mean I think that kind of wraps around to a the question you asked about being mindful and I know that's something that Laura and I are really advocates for as well. And you said, "How are you mindful at



home, at school, in your own art creating practice, in your life? What if you took three minutes, what would that look like? And what if you did that in your classroom?" So kind of, I guess, throwing that question to you, what does that look like, how do you do that? Where and when do you take that time to be mindful of yourself?

Jeanne Bjork: And I think part of what I've learned more recently, this last year in fact, is that mindfulness isn't this touchy feely like you're meditating and you're levitating, it's not that. It's not that at all. I mean meditation can be part of a mindful practice but mindfulness is just the idea of tuning into what you are doing right now and tuning out all the rest of the stuff that might get in the way. And one of the easiest ways to do that is to slow yourself down and focus on your breath. And so when you start feeling really stressed out, that is a great time to close your eyes, even if it's for two minutes, one minute even, and just ... and if you can't close your eyes because the kids in your classroom might go crazy, another great thing ... and this, actually one of my students taught me this and she was suffering from PTSD and I was kind of stressed and she recognized the signs and she's like, "Mrs Bjork, you have" ... she's like, "Here's something you could do," and she said, "What you do is you just start naming the things that are on your desk. So, stapler, pencil, pen, and by doing that slowly it slows your breathing, it makes you mindful of where you are and what's there and it works, it really works.

Jeanne Bjork: So it's just that idea of tuning into that moment, focus on your breath, and it calms you. And you can be mindful while you're eating, while you're talking to friends. I mean we're so torn by social media and phones and computers and we're constantly trying to do 50 million things; if we just focus on that one thing that we're trying to do it really makes a difference and you do it better and you get it done quicker.

Laura Grundler: Yeah. Yeah-

Jeanne Bjork: As far as food, you end up enjoying it more because you realize what you're actually eating. I mean so many times I realized I was just wolfing it down.

Laura Grundler: I think that's a habit that teachers have in general, I don't know. I've been out of the classroom for quite some time as an administrator but I still eat



like I have a 30 minute lunch or less, the five minutes that you're eating because kids are coming in during your lunch. I think that there's a lot of bad habits that teachers get into like wolfing down their lunch and not taking a minute to breathe and trying to jam all those minutes into the day that you just don't ever feel like you have enough time. How do you feel like you can break some of those bad habits?

Jeanne Bjork: Well I know for me I actually am lucky, I have an office that I can close the door and nobody can see me in there.

Matt Grundler: That's helpful.

Jeanne Bjork: So I go and hide in my office for lunch, I have lunch in my office and I go in there and I listen to a book on Audible and I take my time and I eat my lunch slowly and quietly and that is my little break in the day. Because the rest of the day I'm Mrs Bjorg and ... you know, but that is my little mini half hour of mindful, quiet. Sometimes the guy I teach with, Ben Lamb, sometimes he joins me and we'll just have a nice conversation together and just slow down and take that time. I mean it doesn't always happen but claiming it and making it part of your habit, a huge part is just resetting your habits. So the bell rings, that's your trigger, you go to your office and you maybe start your Audible book or whatever it may be, you're listening to music, but you take yourself away from the crazy and just shut it out for a little while and focus on that fantastic lunch that you made yourself.

Jeanne Bjork: And then, when you're done and the bell rings, you transition back out to, "Okay, now I belong to the kids again."

Matt Grundler: "I'll come back and be crazy," and then there you have it.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah.

Matt Grundler: I love the fact that one of the other options you were giving someone is just having a conversation. Your last question was about connecting and the human connection and I think that is something that, as teachers, sometimes, especially art teachers, a lot of them, I was one, you kind of feel like you're on an island and you're all by yourself and so when you can have that human connection I think that's really important, so.



Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, it definitely is and I think that's one of the reasons I love the K-12 Art Chat and the PLN that's on Twitter especially, Instagram, is that when you do feel isolated like that and your school may be ... I don't actually have a lot of friends who are teachers at my school, most of them have retired, because I'm old now, but I just don't get out of my little room that often so I think it's neat to have that virtual PLN that you can talk to and you can just go back and forth with and then, when you go to the conference, you meet them and you start to become friends and start to follow each other on Facebook and suddenly they're not just colleagues, they are becoming your friends.

Matt Grundler: Real friends, absolutely.

Speaker 6: Hi there, this is Susan Riley, founder of EducationCloset. If you love these conversations with Team Grundler and friends please be sure to check out K-12 Art Chat on Twitter. The chat is held every Thursday at 8:30 PM Central and it's a great way to continue the conversation. Just go to [twitter.com](https://twitter.com) and search #K12ArtChat. We look forward to chatting with you over there soon. Now let's head back to the show.

Jeanne Bjork: I love that, I think that's fantastic but I agree, the connection part of it actually came because my husband and I became empty nesters; my kids moved out and they were gone and we both were just kind of like, "Uh, okay. Now we have to talk to each other and you're here all the time and [inaudible 00:15:36]." We actually did just weird crazy things for a year or like for six months we took ballroom dance lessons, just to really get to know each other.

Laura Grundler: That's super fun.

Jeanne Bjork: You know, and we do ... I don't know, we just do weird, random stuff. We hike together every Sunday so we go outside.

Matt Grundler: Yeah, we were gonna try to set up a podcast with you and you were like, "Oh yeah, I'm going on a hike."

Laura Grundler: I was really jealous, yeah.

Jeanne Bjork: And I mean it was pretty miserable out but we did it anyway.



- Laura Grundler: Yeah, how cold? I mean hiking in the snow, hiking in the snow?
- Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, we were hiking in the snow and trudging through some pretty deep snow and it was kind of foggy, so it was a little eerie but fun. I just love nature, I love being outside and that's another part of balance for me, and everyone's different, but I found that one thing I needed is I have to get outside every day. And my classroom has no windows, I don't have any natural light all day, and then add to it the Wisconsin winter where it can be pretty gray. So I knew that it was important for me to get outside and I'm pretty hardy, I don't mind winter, I actually enjoy it and I cross country ski and I like to do things like that, so everyone finds their place of what works for you, what's your way of being in balance. But for me being outside has to be a huge part of what I do, the physical part of what I do, and it also has become part of what my husband and I do to connect with each other.
- Laura Grundler: That's awesome. Well I was just sitting here thinking about just connections in general, as parents of younger kids I think Matt and I can attest to, sometimes you forget to put yourself and your relationship, even your relationship with each other, as a priority because you are so invested in getting the kids to whatever practice they have or whatever recital or rehearsal or sporting event. It's almost like you're living on this rollercoaster calendar, like, "Okay, what's next, what's next?" And-
- Matt Grundler: Oh, and you almost feel guilty for ... feeling like, "Oh, well if I take this time for myself then I'm feeling guilty for not giving that for my kids."
- Laura Grundler: Yeah, absolutely, I mean I can attest to that guilt, I think that there is a, "If I take care of me then how's that gonna reflect on my kids?" And things like that, but it's exactly the opposite I think, that if I take care of me then I'm a better caretaker. Does that make any sense?
- Jeanne Bjork: Exactly, it does.
- Matt Grundler: That and I think being able to even talk with your kids about it and say, "Hey, you know what? I'm taking this time for me and that's okay."
- Laura Grundler: It's good [inaudible 00:18:33], yeah.
- Matt Grundler: Yeah, frankly, so.



- Jeanne Bjork: I know a few years back I was debating whether or not I should go back to school and get my Master's degree and I remember one of my colleagues, Dr Christopher Owen, he's a doctor now but back then he was just Christopher, and he was the choir teacher at my school for a while, he now teaches at a university. But I just remember him saying to me, "Well, you know, I think your kids would admire you more if they saw you work through school and saw you pursuing something that's really important to you that you love and that you're passionate about. Don't you think that that would make you a better parent because you're showing them what inspires you and what you aspire to be." And fast forward to now and my daughter is a teacher.
- Matt Grundler: There you go.
- Laura Grundler: Oh, that's awesome.
- Jeanne Bjork: Not an art teacher, she's an ESL teacher, but I know one of the things that she said to me when she graduated with her Master's degree was, "Thank you, mom, you really inspired me," and that means a lot and that brings it full circle. I'm still waiting for my son to say that, but I'm not sure that's ever happening. But I agree with you, being on the other side of children being at home, I can tell you, treasure every moment but don't let go of yourself, you still have to love yourself and you still have to carve out time for you because you need to show them that you are this person that some day they will realize, "Wow, I was really lucky to have that person as my parent."
- Matt Grundler: I agree.
- Laura Grundler: That's such a ... I mean I'm like, "Wow."
- Matt Grundler: Feel at peace now.
- Laura Grundler: I do. I feel more balanced having this conversation.
- Jeanne Bjork: Some day you will have an empty nest.
- Matt Grundler: Oh yeah.





Laura Grundler: I'm not wishing them away right now but there are moments where ... and especially when they're arguing about something or I look at the house and it's an absolutely mess or we have a gazillion loads of laundry to do. But yeah.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah. And I think that's something that I've been learning myself, I think, and I don't know if it's an art thing or a teacher thing but we are pretty hard on ourselves. So I'm very ... I judge myself really harshly, I hold myself to such a high standard and I was raised Catholic so I have all this guilt all the time.

Matt Grundler: I understand that one.

Jeanne Bjork: I'm a recovering Catholic. But anyway, that idea of feeling guilty, feeling bad, you have to let all of that judgment go. And I mean I still have a voice in my head that can be very negative and judgmental but learning a new story, what story are you telling yourself in your head? And learning a new one and making it the one you want to tell. I mean I think that's really important to being balanced, is to not judge ourselves so harshly and to be like, "Okay, today was really hard, I just worked 12 hours and now I'm with these kids and now it's 10 and I'm just realizing I never actually went to the bathroom back at two in the afternoon when I needed to go.

Laura Grundler: And I haven't had a glass of water all day long.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, and you just have to be like, "Okay, today was that day and tomorrow's a new day and what my body needs right now is sleep and rest and I'm gonna go do that for myself." And I remember being sleep deprived and sometimes I would get up at 4:30 in the morning and I am not a morning person but I would do it just so I could have time for myself. So you have to find what works for you but yeah, you can't judge yourself, you can't be so hard on yourself, you have to be kind to you and that balance will come.

Matt Grundler: I was gonna say that you could share any parting words but I think that was such a key thing to end on.

Laura Grundler: I know, it's wonderful, being kind to yourself and-



Matt Grundler: Finding out what works best for you.

Laura Grundler: For you, yeah.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, and just ask yourself, "Is it kind for me right now to do whatever it is you're about to do?" And maybe sometimes having a dish of ice cream might be what you need to do.

Matt Grundler: Hey, that's okay once in a while, I agree.

Jeanne Bjork: Exactly, once in a while.

Matt Grundler: Once in a while.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, exactly.

Matt Grundler: Wow.

Laura Grundler: Jean, you're just so polite, really warm and fuzzy.

Jeanne Bjork: Aww.

Laura Grundler: I'm like, "I can't wait to hug you at NEA."

Matt Grundler: I know, I'm excited.

Jeanne Bjork: Me too, I can't wait, Boston is so cool, I can't wait to get there, it's gonna be a blast.

Laura Grundler: I think our whole PLN's gonna be there.

Matt Grundler: I know, and that's gonna be intense.

Laura Grundler: Yeah.

Jeanne Bjork: Yeah, it'll be-

Laura Grundler: And we will be tweeting and sharing and Periscoping.

Matt Grundler: We're probably not gonna do a chat that night but we will definitely be all over the media, yeah.



Jeanne Bjork: That's great, yeah, this year I'm not presenting, I'm just taking the year off and just enjoying.

Matt Grundler: All right,

Laura Grundler: Good, it's all about finding that balance.

Matt Grundler: Finding the balance.

Jeanne Bjork: Exactly, and this year it was kind to just experience and enjoy. Maybe next year I'll present but not this year.

Laura Grundler: Good for you.

Matt Grundler: Yeah.

Laura Grundler: Good for you.

Matt Grundler: All right, Jean, well we appreciate it so much and we're just so glad we got a chance to talk with you and that our listeners got a chance to find out more about who you are.

Jeanne Bjork: Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity, I really-

Matt Grundler: Absolutely.

Jeanne Bjork: And I love what you guys do, thank you for giving us this way of connecting every week.

Matt Grundler: Awesome.

Laura Grundler: Well we love it too, that's why we do it, so.

Matt Grundler: We'll keep doing what we do. But thank you again.

Laura Grundler: Thank you, talk to you soon.

Jeanne Bjork: Okay, take care, bye bye.

Matt Grundler: Bye.



Laura Grundler:

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