



Announcer 1: You are listening to the Creatively Connected Classroom podcast episode number 34.

Announcer 2: Welcome to the Creatively Connected podcast from EducationCloset, connecting teachers and ideas one glue stick at a time. Here's your hosts and K12 Art Chat founders, Matt and Laura Grundler.

Matt Grundler: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura and welcome to another episode of the Creatively Connected classroom. We are interviewing ourselves today because of our chat that we did last time was all about surviving until the end of the school year.

Laura Grundler: How are we interviewing ourselves? Clearly surviving.

Matt Grundler: We're at our wits' end. As we, I mean, here in Texas, we're coming to the end. We're about 15 days, I think. Something like that.

Laura Grundler: I don't keep count.

Matt Grundler: I try not to, just because that helps my own sanity. And what?

Laura Grundler: I would like to see our questions from the chat.

Matt Grundler: Oh, okay. And we talk about tips and tricks for your own wellbeing, because that's the biggest part is to keep yourself going and at a good level.

Laura Grundler: Yeah. It's hard. I am not on the teacher cycle anymore, but I feel the teacher cycle because I work with about 100 art teachers.

Matt Grundler: And you married one.

Laura Grundler: And I'm married to one. And even the kids, I think people forget that kids also feel this end of the year thing going on. I mean, we've had these discussions lately about our three children, having hard time getting them up in the morning and being there. I think that the whole push and the end of the year stuff is, it's like being on a treadmill and you're just going, going, going, going, going, going. And then, for teachers it's like boom. You fall off the back of the treadmill.

Laura Grundler: There's no like, slowing down, right?

Matt Grundler: No, there's not.



- Laura Grundler: Like I feel like that that's how it is. I feel like if you were doing a run, an actual run, you would build up your momentum and then you would slow down-
- Matt Grundler: You'd be able to gradually slow down.
- Laura Grundler: And you gradually get off. But I think, in my mind, I visualize what it feels like for teachers is that it's that YouTube video where they're on the treadmill and they're running and then boom, and they're falling off the back. You know? I think that that's really what it feels like.
- Laura Grundler: And when you start the year, you do feel refreshed, hopefully. Hopefully, you didn't work all summer. That's a misnomer. I think that people think, oh teachers get the whole summer off and we all know that-
- Matt Grundler: That's not always the case.
- Laura Grundler: You're doing professional learning, that you're teaching summer school, that you're managing your own children because we don't have daycare.
- Matt Grundler: If you have kids.
- Laura Grundler: You're doing all kinds of things. And then in the summertime, the other thing that we're doing is planning for the next school year. You know, you're sitting down, you're mapping out your curriculum. You're looking at-
- Matt Grundler: See the successes were and reflecting.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah, hopefully reflecting on what worked and what didn't work. And so I think that there's a lot to this last three to four weeks for teachers that are really challenging. I know for you next week, and for the kids especially, in our state, we've gone to this very late testing schedule, which has its pluses and minuses.
- Matt Grundler: It does. The minus is the kids that are struggling who have been struggling all year and they're testing, they're getting pulled out of different classes and usually it's the arts that kind of takes that, but then you on the positives where they're getting that help that they need.
- Laura Grundler: Well, and for all kids, it gives them the teachers a little bit longer to to make sure that standards are met, that they've hopefully been able to master the standards and the material before actually taking the test. You know, when you take the test early in April you're like, well, I still have six weeks to get all these things taught that we didn't get taught. So I mean, that's the bonus.



- Laura Grundler: I think the negative is that kids are tired, teachers are tired.
- Matt Grundler: I mean, one of our questions was how do you evaluate that? The goals that you have set for your kids, how do you make sure that you've met them? I mean, what are ways to do that?
- Laura Grundler: I think that's where collaboration is key. I mean if you really have good planning protocols and you have a team. This is always a little different for the creatives because a lot of times to creative teachers are the singleton teachers, the teachers that don't have a team. And that's where you have to find your team on other campuses. It's where you have to make time to sit down with other teachers, which is a little bit more challenging.
- Laura Grundler: But you know, if I were on an ELA team, an English team, I would probably hopefully be sitting down all through the school year with that team and talking about those goals and talking about what our students' needs are and then a value weighting them as you move forward. And this would be the time that I would start reflecting on did we meet those goals, in a different way maybe than I've been reflecting all year, in a meaningful way to say, okay, so this year this item analysis was not working. How might I tackle it differently for next year? Those kinds of conversations.
- Laura Grundler: And I think also within that, giving yourself grace, I think we're so hard on ourselves as teachers and every year is different. Every kid is different. Every interaction you have is different. Every family's different. You know, it's not like we're working with a static product, right?
- Matt Grundler: Oh, yeah. Kids and families are totally different, from each kid. They're totally different from each day. I mean, that's something I'm learning with the middle schoolers day to day. Yeah, it's the same kid, but it's not the same kid, as far as things that may have happened to them or whatever or goings on in their family.
- Laura Grundler: I think just allowing yourself that grace and understanding that and that you go into everyday doing the best job you can do.
- Matt Grundler: Well, and I think that goes to that next question that we had, which was, you know, priorities or goals for the end of the year. And it sounds like that should be one of your goals is give yourself a little bit of a break. Like as far as grace, not saying, oh my gosh, I'm a terrible teacher because I didn't accomplish this one thing, or oh, I have these papers I have to grade and I didn't get to them today so I'm a terrible teacher or whatever.



- Laura Grundler: Yeah, I definitely think that your priority needs to be self love and care at the end of the year. And then also I think the priority is to make every moment count. I think one of the falls, and you say this a lot is you get really frustrated when people are counting down the days because you just want to teach until the end and you want to make every class period count. And I feel like maybe that comes a little bit from your experience being an elementary teacher where you didn't get to see the kids every day.
- Matt Grundler: True.
- Laura Grundler: Because 50 minutes with them once a week, you had to make every minute count.
- Matt Grundler: Every second, yeah.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. Which is always something that I think you tend to focus on.
- Matt Grundler: I think that's also a mentality that I grew up with doing sports was you push, you keep pushing until it's finished. So you know, I'm waiting for the bell to ring, yes. But I'm pushing constantly until the bell rang.
- Laura Grundler: I think that there's a lot of different things you can look at as your own personal priorities, but I think in the end, it boils down to reflecting on that and then giving yourself a little bit of grace. What was our next question?
- Matt Grundler: Let's see. Our next question was, as a veteran teacher, I mean I guess we've kind of already talked about this, but as a veteran teacher reaching out and checking in on some of the newer teachers, some of the first year teachers, even the second year teachers giving them advice, not necessarily on like, oh, you have to do this, but just checking in with them and make sure they're doing all right.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. I think we forget that the end of the year also includes a lot of crazy things oftentimes, like packing up your whole storage room.
- Matt Grundler: The campus has checklists and things like, oh, you've got to make sure to have this done. You've got to have this signed off by this person or whatever, your team leader or wherever, and that can get stressful.
- Laura Grundler: Well, yeah. Especially when you don't know the campus as well or you don't know who to go for for what piece. Or you've inherited a classroom that was owned by somebody that taught for 20 years and has like all these things and you're like, I don't even know what this is used for and who gives me permission to throw this away.



- Matt Grundler: Can I throw it away? Am I supposed to keep it?
- Laura Grundler: All of those things. I think that it's really important for the veteran teachers to not necessarily handhold, but just check in. And remember when it was those difficult end of the year. Almost sometimes, I don't know what the priority is because as a new teacher, because I'm being given directives from my administrators; I'm being given directors from my curriculum coordinator, I'm being given directors from parents. All of these things that they're kind of piling up and it becomes overwhelming, I guess, is what I'm trying to say.
- Matt Grundler: And I think also then the shoe falls onto the beginning teacher too as far as it's okay to ask those questions because I think sometimes they're like, oh my gosh, I'm new teacher. I'm supposed to know all these answers and know everything. If you don't, you don't, but ask. That's what we say. That's what we expect from our students. If they don't know or are stuck somewhere, ask. And that'll help save a new teacher from being hyperly stressed out because then they will have an answer.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. I mean, we see it all the time. New teachers getting sick constantly because they're just overwhelmed and stressed out. And so whatever we can do to help them through that process is really important. So I think surviving the end of the year means also leaning into to each other and asking questions and saying, it's okay if you don't know, but you have to ask.
- Matt Grundler: I think one of the things that helps save our mental stressors is reflecting on all the good stuff, too. See what those kids have made. See what they have accomplished. See what strides you've as a teacher. Where have you made improvements?
- Matt Grundler: And you know, even at the middle school level, you still get those little notes or you still get those messages from kids that they don't want to give it to you in the middle of class but they'll give them to you or they'll leave them at your desk or whatever. All folded up and wadded up in a certain way.
- Matt Grundler: Hold on to those, because as things do get stressful, you look back on those and just be like, okay, I did make an impact.
- Laura Grundler: My first year teaching, there was a teacher in our building that gave me a little book and she said, it's your blue sky folder. And your blue sky folder was where you kept all those little notes from kids and parents and you put all those little notes in that book and then on the really hard days you would open up that book and remember why you do what you do.



Laura Grundler: I had a great example of that about a week, two weeks ago. I went into a high school to visit some teachers and a kiddo that I had met when she was in middle school ran up to me and gave me a hug. Remember, I'm not even a teacher at this point. I am a coordinator so I don't get to have these wonderful interactions with students anymore. And that's one of the hardest things about what I do.

Laura Grundler: But she was a really interesting kid with really interesting sketchbooks and I just had to say, you know, you need to stay in art. And she at the time was telling me I'm not able to stay in art. And I made the effort to talk to her mom and she's been in art two years in high school and is going to be in AP art next year. And you know, she ran up to me and she was doing this most beautiful portrait. It was in acrylic paint and it was gorgeous and I just was so ... Just as she was thankful for me, I was eternally grateful to see her. To see her being happy and joyful in the process of being an artist and learning. And so those are the moments that you have to hang onto. Like, that is why we do what we do. It's about the students.

Matt Grundler: There's one, I was sad I wasn't able to see the student but a student had left a note and a little flyer that was talking about this show that they were doing. They were getting ready to graduate and they have to do a senior show and their piece made the cover of this senior show flyer and I don't even remember how many years I taught this student as an elementary kid, but they wrote me this little sticky note and said, thank you Mr. Grundler for keeping me in art and interested in art and here's what my work is. And her piece was this figure on the front of an IB show.

Laura Grundler: Beautiful.

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Laura Grundler: I mean, that's really what it's really-

Matt Grundler: I have it up on my desk still.

Laura Grundler: Yeah. I mean, we do it because we want to see kids grow. And we have to remember that even though we don't get to see that every single day, that



that's what it's all about. And I think that those are what keeps you going in the hard times.

Matt Grundler: Oh, for sure.

Laura Grundler: So what else? What else helps you survive the end of the school year, Matt?

Matt Grundler: I mean, I find that when I've had ... our Friday night involves us journaling and I think just making some times, just making for the sake of making sometimes. It helps you to kind of just detach your brain from all the week and just kind of create and there's quite a bit of joy in just creating,

Laura Grundler: You know, it's funny, Owen said the same thing to me today. He said, "Mom, you know why I like video games so much and like Minecraft?" And I said no. He's like, "It's because my brain can just be there. It's not everywhere else." And I said, I get that. And I said almost exactly what you just said to him is that, that's why I love to create because when I'm in the mode of painting or in my journal and just working, that's when I can tune out all the other-

Matt Grundler: Stuff.

Laura Grundler: Stuff. So whatever it is that you find for yourself that's the way to tune that out, I think that's helpful. As much as we are in social media and on Twitter and Instagram and everywhere else, I have also taken up turning my phone off for a while.

Matt Grundler: You took a break for a whole weekend.

Laura Grundler: Yeah, Easter weekend, I took the whole weekend off. I just turned it off.

Matt Grundler: It was a long weekend and you just were like, "Hey, I'm done."

Laura Grundler: Yeah. I know people will text me over the weekend. I'm not as good about this during the work week and I need to get better as like, you know, if it's 6:00 at night I need to just put it away. But on the weekends, I'm not real quick to respond to texts or anything because I don't wear my watch. I don't wear my Apple Watch, and I try to kind of disconnect from the tech over the weekends, which is helpful to me. I'm not diagnosed with ADHD or anything like that, but I do have a brain that's really a ping pong kind of, there's ideas sparking all the time and I'm always thinking about the next thing and I'm always thinking about teachers and students and how to help and what needs to be done and next steps, those kinds of things. And so I need to zoom out some way and disconnect. And one of the



things I've found for me that helps is putting my phone away-away for a little while.

Matt Grundler: We did a chat awhile back where it was your social/emotional health like as a teacher because we do sometimes forget about that at any time, not just the end of the year. But one of the things that was somebody had mentioned that they do is that they set aside a certain time that as soon as they get home they go and take their dog on a walk or they just sit outside and just enjoy the silence for a little bit.

Laura Grundler: And you're good at like, you know, you've taught our three children the breathing techniques. And I think that just remembering that piece of it is helpful is like, just take a deep breath. You know? Like, it's okay.

Laura Grundler: I think as you grow and you get older for whatever that is, you do, you realize that things would tend to work out, but I think you just have to again zoom out a little bit and take a deep breath and I love that you teach our kids how to do that. Because that's something that is really helpful for them and something that you can use your entire life.

Matt Grundler: I mean, it's funny you bring that up because I was thinking of your mom, who used to always tell you and us as we were newly-started parents, stressing about our son was: where does it rate? You know, between one and 10? Where is the priority? If that requires you writing it down and saying, "Okay, these are my priorities right now."

Laura Grundler: Yeah. She at the time when we were having Owen and we were excited and scared and all of those things.

Matt Grundler: New parent things.

Laura Grundler: New parent things. 12 years ago, my mom was also going through some serious chemo for ovarian cancer and so she was a very reflective person and she had this one to 10 scale and I think we both use that regularly now.

Matt Grundler: Whether we use it in that sense or not, but then we kind of go, "Okay, priority is."

Laura Grundler: She used to say like, on on the one to 10 what is cancer? And for her cancer was maybe like a four or five. And you would think because she was dying of cancer that it would be-

Matt Grundler: That it would be higher.



- Laura Grundler: That it would be the 10, right? But her 10 because she was such an academic, her 10 was not being able to communicate or not being able to read. There's a short story from the '70s called, "Johnny Got Your Gun," I think is what it's called. And it's a man basically that is trapped in his body. He's able to see or communicate or hear and he's also lost feeling. I think he's paralyzed completely.
- Laura Grundler: And so, that's her 10, or was her 10. Not being able to experience the world around you and communicate with the world around you would be a 10. Having cancer was a four or five, you know? And so I try to think in terms of that often. Thank you for bringing that up because I do, I even I say that to people a lot. Where where does this fall on a one to 10, because just putting things in perspective helps
- Matt Grundler: Well, and as we mentioned during this podcast, being okay with what you choose to do and not beating yourself up over it and know that everybody's one to 10 is not going to be the same one to 10.
- Laura Grundler: I'm going to say like, for me this time of year is really, even though I'm not into the year teaching, what I'm doing right now is-
- Matt Grundler: You're getting things ready for next year.
- Laura Grundler: I'm trying to get things ready for next year. I'm trying to help close out things. We have something like eight or nine different renovations on track for the summer. So, that means helping teachers get their rooms ready so that the very last day of school when kids leave the room-
- Matt Grundler: The renovation can start.
- Laura Grundler: The construction can start. That means packing things, getting rid of things. In addition to that, it's trying to get some are school ready because summer school starts.
- Matt Grundler: And meetings with builders and contractors and constructions.
- Laura Grundler: There's all those things. You know, my job is such a strange job and a great job. I love my job, but it's just a lot of varied things.
- Laura Grundler: And then on top of it right now, I'm looking to hire art teachers, help principals hire art teachers. I don't actually do the hiring, but what I do is I evaluate their-
- Matt Grundler: Personality, more or less.



- Laura Grundler: Well, no.
- Matt Grundler: Sorry.
- Laura Grundler: Not personality.
- Matt Grundler: Not personality.
- Laura Grundler: No. Their content understanding, their understanding of content, definitely how they would fit on the campus is up to the principals, but I'm trying to be the liaison to help them find the teachers that know the content and really what our philosophy in our school district is. And then, as soon as another resignation comes in, it's looking-
- Matt Grundler: All over again.
- Laura Grundler: You start over again. Because then you're like, I need to find more candidates and different things. So you know, it's all of that and you're really hoping to work with all of these different personalities and you're being stretched.
- Laura Grundler: So I fully understand the teachers' frustrations, but in a different way. And so I'm really having to remember what my why is. And so ultimately I think that that's what keeps you going during the hard times of the school year and survival mode is what is your why. My why is to help facilitate the very best visual art program in the state of Texas, or in the country. And that why means getting what students need, helping principals find what they need, helping teachers with having resources that they need. Those are my whys. And so knowing your why I think is really helpful.
- Matt Grundler: As we wind up, I think basically the biggest thing is just to know your priorities, know what they are going to be, be easy on yourself and know that if you don't get something done, don't beat yourself up over it.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. I mean, I think if you look at those priorities, you look at what's being demanded of you or expected of you from your administration and you make sure to meet those goals and just do the very best you can everyday.
- Matt Grundler: And if you have a question or if you have a concern or are not sure how to go about something, ask somebody.
- Laura Grundler: Yeah. As your mom says.
- Matt Grundler: Don't be a pumpkin head.



Laura Grundler: Don't be a pumpkin head.

Matt Grundler: So, we certainly appreciate you guys listening to this podcast. Hopefully it helps and we wish you guys all the best of luck in surviving your school year. The end of your school year, I should say.

Laura Grundler: Deep breaths. You've got this.

Matt Grundler: All right.

Laura Grundler: Thank you.

Matt Grundler: Thanks, guys.

Laura Grundler: Bye.

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