

Staff INSET resource: Teacher Wellbeing

# Whatever The Weather: Creative Wellbeing Activities for Teachers

dreams  
made  
mine

# Introduction

This staff INSET resource from Dreamachine Schools is designed for education staff to deliver a short professional development session with teachers in their own settings, to promote health and wellbeing in practical ways.

## Wellbeing and Teachers' Professional Development

We all know we should look after ourselves – eat healthily, exercise, make time for ourselves and catch some light. But for teachers and educators in particular, it can be difficult to put this into practice and ensure a healthy work life balance given the varied demands of the job mentally, emotionally and physically. We may know that looking after ourselves and taking proper breaks helps us alleviate feeling sluggish or anxious and keeps us more focused and productive. We even teach our students this. However, doing this for ourselves is easier said than done.

It can be difficult to even remember to practise self-care when we are continually exhausted and rushed off our feet, and the temptation to power on through can be high when there is so much to do (and it's hard to think of a time when teachers' workload has been so overwhelming). Another barrier to developing healthy wellbeing habits, is the pernicious belief held by some that self-care is self-indulgent; that all the focus should be on those we are caring for, our students.

Nevertheless, it is essential we make time for ourselves. When we don't, we can fail to recognise our personal stress triggers and acknowledge when we feel overwhelmed and need support. If we sustain endless patterns of unhealthy repeated behaviours and avoid dealing with stress from particular incidents, it can affect us both professionally and personally. Stress can remain buzzing in our system for a long time if we don't address it and can affect our interactions with others, including our students, and our ability to focus on the job.

Therefore, this INSET session aims to help teachers discuss the value of self-care, challenge the belief that it is self-indulgent, try out a range of creative wellbeing activities and plan how to develop these as habits in their day-to-day lives.

## The Weather

Written by Shermaine Slocombe, creative practitioner, the activities in this resource are inspired by American artist [Roni Horn's \*You are the Weather\*](#) – where the viewer can see one hundred portraits of a young woman and appreciate how the weather is reflected in subtle changes to her facial expressions. Horn records small shifts in changing weather and like a mirror, believes the weather can reflect how we are feeling.

# Introduction

*“In my own creative practice, I am concerned with combining the real with the imaginary, by capturing, movement and spirit that is fleeting. I represent sensations beyond the surface of the body such as feelings, emotions and passions as landscapes of thoughts. You may not consider yourself creative, but if you allow yourself to try, its process can activate your creative flow and regulate your nervous system.”*

– Shermaine Slocombe, resource writer and creative practitioner

## Please note

Not everyone will feel comfortable sharing how they feel about stress, self-care and wellbeing. The main aim here is to establish the importance of self-care and acknowledge that while not easy, it is possible to practise and find value in developing habits to maintain healthy wellbeing.

This session does not address issues of burnout but there is potential for this to be raised so you might find it helpful in advance of delivering this session to watch this clip about the difference between burnout and acute stress from Lisa Lea-Weston from Talking Heads, on Dreamachine’s YouTube channel.

– [‘Burnout’ clip from the Teacher Wellness Discussion CPD Recording](#)

If someone does appear to be or describes themselves as ‘burnt out’ you might want to refer them to Education Support’s help for individuals: [www.educationsupport.org.uk/get-help](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk/get-help)

## About Dreamachine

Dreamachine Schools is a major programme in partnership with the British Science Association and UNICEF UK, commissioned as part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK - a once-in-a-lifetime celebration of creativity taking place across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and online from March to October 2022. Find out more at: [www.unboxed2022.uk](http://www.unboxed2022.uk)

The learning programme fuses science with arts for pupils and teachers to explore the power of the human mind and brain and the big questions of perception and consciousness - our sense of self, how we see the world and how we connect with others.

Visit [www.schools.dreamachine.world](http://www.schools.dreamachine.world) to view 30 accredited and quality assured classroom resources to use with your students across Global Citizenship, The World Around Us, Me and My Wellbeing, What Does It Mean To Be Me, The Power of the Brain, and Perception and Illusion.

A special thanks to all the teachers who supported A New Direction with the development of the Dreamachine learning resources. A New Direction is an award-winning not-for-profit organisation generating opportunities for children and young people to develop their creativity:

[www.anewdirection.org.uk/dreamachine](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/dreamachine)

*This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg*

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With thanks to the speakers at the [Dreamachine Schools Teacher Wellbeing CPD](#) for their contributions to the resource and CPD series:

Vikki Kidd, primary school teacher

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Alison Peacock, Chartered College of Teaching

Shermaine Slocombe, creative practitioner

Andria Zafirakou, Artists in Residence



# INSET session: Whatever the Weather

**Duration** Suggested time of 45 minutes

**Resources**

- Screen at the front to play video clips, or devices for individuals to watch them
- Clips listed in the resource from the [Dreamachine YouTube channel](#)
- The Appendix of mindful activities printed for each pair / group (page 9 of this resource)
- Pens, crayons, coloured pens, any drawing materials
- Scissors
- Empty drinking glasses
- Lots of plain paper

**Objectives and outcomes**

- Understand the value of self-care, both personally and professionally
- Practise a range of creative habits
- Consider how to establish new habits for self-care

## Warm-up (5 minutes)

Read the below breathing exercise and guided visualisation to the group.

Alternatively, you can play this video clip from Dreamachine's YouTube channel: 'Visualising my breath' from the [Creative Wellbeing Classroom Activities CPD recording](#)

People can close their eyes if that helps. Ideally, there is nothing in front of them to distract them.

*Take a moment on your own. Surrender to the thoughts that fill your head.*

*Stop. Allow your breath to flow uninterrupted.*

*Notice what is going on in your body, physically and emotionally.*

*Notice. Breathe deeply calmly and slowly.*

*Observe what is going on in the body. Don't make judgements, just observe.*

*Relax your shoulders and face.*

*Visualise and imagine walking through a rainbow and allowing that energy to rise up in you.*

*Breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts and breathe out for eight counts.*

*Repeat again four times.*

*Now breathe naturally.*

*Sometimes we find it hard to be in the here and now.*

*Take a moment to consider:*

*If you could taste the rainbow you are visualising, what flavours would you revel in?*

*Take a moment to think of the last time you were really happy. What motivates you? What gives you a sense of purpose and builds confidence in you? What are you grateful for? e.g. warm water, when a student opens a door for you, the current view out of your window - remember, just looking at the sky or out of the window can make us feel calmer. Think of one thing you enjoyed and/or*



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*appreciated about the day? Where do you feel you belong? What makes you happy, no matter how small? How are you going to be kinder to yourself?*

## Introduction (10 minutes)

Explain the aims of the session:

*We are here to talk about wellbeing and self-care. This can be difficult for all of us and so it's important to take the time to develop habits of self-care to help us both personally and professionally.*

*We'll discuss stress and teachers, and the value of self-care as well as some of the barriers before trying out some creative wellbeing activities and thinking about how to incorporate them into our lives.*

Read out Alison Peacock's quotation from the webinar about School Leadership and Teacher Wellness:

*"...staff wellbeing is an extension of the wellbeing of children and young people and parents and every single person who enters through the door of the school which means it's a sense of community, a sense of wellbeing, a sense of collective endeavour..."*

Give teachers 2 minutes to discuss the quotation and their own experience and understanding of wellbeing as a teacher.

*Now we are going to talk about stress in our bodies and proven ways to manage stress.*

Play the video clip: ['Stress and our bodies' from the School Leadership and Teacher Wellness CPD recording](#)

Ask the teachers if anything about this surprised them and if anyone feels comfortable sharing what they currently do to manage their own stress, before playing either or both of the following two clips:

['Managing stress' from the School Leadership and Teacher Wellness CPD recording](#)

['Creativity and joy' from the Teacher Wellness Discussion CPD recording](#)

- *What do you think about the impact of stress described in the videos?*
- *Do you find it easy/difficult to factor in self-care?*

Take any final questions or comments from the teachers before explaining the first activity.

*Now we're going to test out some 'mindful moment' activities – all of varying lengths and based on finding our joy through creativity.*



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## Activity 1: Testing out mindful moments (15 minutes)

Ask people to tell the person next to them how they are feeling that day by using a weather metaphor. You could share a couple of examples with everyone.

Ask for a show of hands:

- *Who has spoken to someone else about the weather today?*
- *Who thinks the weather affects your mood?*
- *Whose journey to work was affected by the weather this week?*
- *Who has noticed the weather can affect their pupils' behaviour?*



*Like the weather, our emotions can feel out of our control. When we realise that the rain is rain, we can't change it, but we can change how we react to it.*

*The following exercises can be done on your own or with family members, in the car park, at home or outside.*

*They should help you **be in the moment, listen and notice, offer a space to breathe and reflect to see a new perspective.***

*They are not about perfect outcomes but experimenting to see what works best for you at different times.*

In partners, small groups, or individually, teachers try out 1 or 2 of the short activities from the Appendix of this resource (printed for groups or pairs to look through). You could choose to do one all together first, assign groups to test out different ones, or just let teachers pick which ones they fancy. The activities are themed around the weather, so some may feel more appropriate to try out depending on the current weather and mood of your staff.

## Activity 2: Planning in Self-care (10 minutes)

Bring the group back together and ask for people's thoughts on the activities – what worked for them? Why / why not?

*Remember breathing and visualisation techniques take practice – the more you do them, the more your body will become programmed to relax when you do it!*

Give staff a couple of minutes to discuss in small groups if they know of any other tips or have strategies already in their toolboxes e.g. does listening to music help? What about sport? Stretching? Creative hobbies? etc.

Next staff should make themselves an action plan for their self-care. They should plan in when they will do one (or more) of the activities they tried out today. Some may have diaries or work planners they would like to use, others could use pieces of paper.

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They should consider:

- What resources would be needed? Will you need a quiet space alone? Where will you be able to feel comfortable?
- How will you remember the activity e.g. print it off / make a bank of cards of all of them / save a picture on your phone?
- Will you schedule it in to do regularly e.g. every afternoon? Or will you look at particular lessons / times during the week you know are stress points for you e.g. Tuesday afternoon after xxx lesson which always sees you having to manage tricky behaviour? Friday afternoon before you go home to help you switch off from work?
- Do some activities suit different scenarios e.g. when it's raining, when you're feeling xxx, start of the afternoon, end of school day?
- Are there any other tips or actions you will add to your self-care plan?



Ask groups to share their **self-care plans** with each other, and then if anyone is comfortable share some examples with everyone. Remember – everyone will have different things that work for them.

You could suggest the teachers find a **wellbeing buddy** either in school or outside so they can share on a regular basis what they have tried during the week to be kind to themselves and practise self-care. It can be a helpful way to keep ourselves accountable, share what is proving helpful and consider new activities if someone's initial plan isn't working.

## Plenary (5 minutes)

Discuss in groups: *Which of these activities could you use with your students? How can you model self-care and being mindful with students?*

## Further resources and reading

- Watch the full Dreamachine webinars on teacher wellness: [www.schools.dreamachine.world/teacher-cpd/](http://www.schools.dreamachine.world/teacher-cpd/)
- Dreamachine Schools classroom resources on health and wellbeing to use with students: [www.schools.dreamachine.world/resources/pshe-health-wellbeing/](http://www.schools.dreamachine.world/resources/pshe-health-wellbeing/)
- The Science of Wellbeing, a free online course from Yale professor Laurie Santos: [www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being](http://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being)
- Education Support resources for individuals on a range of topics from handling stress to preventing burnout and self-care tips: [www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/)
- Education Support resources for organisations to help you check how your teams are coping, and boost everyone's wellbeing: [www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/](http://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/)

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- If you feel you need individual support, contact the counsellors and grant teams at Education Support:  
<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/get-help/>
- Explore the Dreamachine Schools programme:  
[www.schools.dreamachine.world](http://www.schools.dreamachine.world)



# Appendix

## Feeling under the weather (5 mins, pen and paper)

Draw a map or an island and highlight the areas on your island that are important to you, such as your family, your job, your passions etc. and give them a weather symbol or weather warning (like a weather forecast map).

For example:

- a cold front symbol (blue line with triangles) might represent the unpredictable and the seemingly impossible
- dark clouds could represent a heavy heart
- lightning could represent oppressive tensions in your life
- a sun could represent where the happiness in your life is - who are the sunshine and positive sunbeams in your life and where/how do you celebrate success with others?
- Identify those people around you who you wish to protect with an umbrella.
- What groups or communities are you part of? Where do you feel appreciated, have a purpose and make a difference?
- Where's your serene spot, where can you be the real you?



Remember, you are the sky and the weather and clouds are changeable and temporary.

**Go Further:** Repeat the activity a few weeks later and notice if your weather map changes.

## Weather patterns (5 mins, pen and paper)

The weather has been a source of inspiration for artists for centuries. It is said that JMW Turner used to strap himself to a ship's mast in order to observe a storm at sea. This activity is designed for you to look and listen, **be in the moment**, share your feelings through mark making and **make your thinking visible**. There is no right or wrong.

- Place a piece of paper in front of you, take a pen, crayon or pencil in hand, sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Focus on your breath and become aware of your breathing and enter a contemplative state. Slow down your breathing.
- Now, keeping your eyes closed, draw your breath. Connect the movement of your breath with your hand.
- Next, draw what you see when you close your eyes. Tune into the wind. What does the sound of the wind or rain look like, or the joy of the sun on your face?
- Draw how you feel. Connect the movement of the hand with your emotions and how your surroundings make you feel.



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When you are ready, look at the drawings, can you make sense of the patterns? Like our emotions, the rhythm of our self is not fixed and is constantly changing. You are not trying to recreate it but listen to it and perceive the world through your senses.



**Go Further:** Try keeping a diary of your drawings, make a series and see the patterns that emerge when linked to outside demands.

## Somewhere over the rainbow (5 mins, pen and paper optional)

There may be an image in a film, an advert, a landscape painting or a memory of a place you have been – these images dwell in us, live in our imagination and can give us hope.

Close your eyes and visualise yourself walking along a path and go to that place using your imagination. Draw it if that helps. It's not about drawing an accurate version of it but taking you to that place and reflecting. What is the weather like? Is it summer, with a warm shining sun on your skin?



Rainbows are universally considered a symbol of hope, renewal and positivity. What is your place or pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? Is there **something you really want to have, or you really want to achieve?** Think about this in your visualisation.



In the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy's pot of gold and the unattainable was actually about what she had all along - something we can all relate to. Feeling content comes from within and is not always linked to external things or success. Maybe happiness or whatever we think we are looking for is not about what we deserve or need to get but something that is already inside us.

**Go Further:** Ensure you always have something beautiful to hand whether that is something you enjoy looking at like a photo or a postcard on your desk, an object in your handbag or your favourite hand cream to smell. Using our senses can make us feel calmer, settle us and they force us to pause.

## On cloud nine (5 mins, a view of the sky, pencil/pen and paper)

*...my English breath in foreign clouds* is the title of Tacita Dean's exhibition and response to beautiful clouds in Los Angeles. It is also a quotation from Shakespeare's *Richard II*. She felt compelled to draw the clouds as their colour and shape were so different to her clouds back at home.

Grab a piece of paper and a pencil (or your camera phone), find a comfortable spot outside or near a window and go cloud spotting. Try drawing clouds for continuous movement. Clouds can be beautiful. They are restless, changeable, interchangeable, they merge, rarely keeping their shape and are difficult to draw. Looking at clouds **empowers us to slow down and consider** our place in the world. Looking at the vastness of the sky helps us to realise how insignificant and small we are and regain perspective.

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**Go further:** Try drawing clouds on different days and in different moods and keep an image diary. Does your drawing style change? How does the look of the clouds make you feel or affect your mood?

## It's raining cats and dogs visualisation (5 mins)

Breathing deeply dissolves tension in the body that left unaddressed can lead to feeling stressed or anxious. When we feel tense, our body can tighten, like a stretched and taut elastic band and we cannot think as clearly.

**Take a moment on your own.** Stand with both feet firmly on the ground. Ensure your feet are hip width apart, with both feet carrying equal weight, so you feel grounded and anchored to the floor. Make sure your shoulders are down, but head feels lifted as if being pulled by a string towards the ceiling. Bring attention to your breath to clear your mind. **Imagine your feet are like the roots of a tree and feel the energy rising up through the body.**

Breathing in through your nose for 4 counts and out through your mouth for 4 counts. Breathe in as much air as possible quickly and expel it quickly. Breathe in as much air as possible and expel it slowly. Breathe in slowly, breathe out vocalising a sound.

Repeat breathing and close your eyes, but this time, imagine your breath as water, like an overflowing river from all the rain and is flowing up and down your body. Watch the shape of the water move, change. Allow the water to move to every part of your body. Imagine the tide rising and overflowing. Let it wash all over you. You are in constant motion and changing with hidden depths. Empty your mind and don't let the pressure build up behind the dam. You are part of something bigger!

Think about what you noticed and what images emerged. You may feel relaxed or energised. The in-breath energises the body, and the out-breath relaxes. If feeling tired, focus on the in-breath and if feeling nervous, focus on the out-breath.

**Go further:** if you practice this regularly when you are relaxed, at moments of stress your body will automatically start to relax when you start this breathing exercise.

## Shadow play (5 – 10 minutes, sunshine, paper, pen/pencil, glass object)

Most of us enjoy sitting in the sunshine and feeling the warmth on our face, it makes us happy. Artist Olafur Eliasson successfully represented the sun and its effect in his work [The Weather Project](#) shown at the Tate Modern in 2003. He created a giant indoor sun using hundreds of lamps.

The next time it's sunny, grab a piece of white paper and place on it a wine glass, crystal or glass object and play with the light and shadows; make patterns and paint with light. The appearance will change depending on the angle.

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**Go further:** Have your camera phone ready to capture some lovely abstract photographs to create artwork like [Cornelia Parker](#). Can you build up a sun diary? You could try recording what you are feeling with each sketch.

## Clear moon, frost soon (5 mins)

There are lots of weather sayings that try to predict the weather, but more reliably, birds can. If you have ever been out walking before a storm, birds are very quiet, but then start to sing when the weather is going to improve. If birds start singing in the rain, you know the weather is going to improve. Apparently, frogs croak loudly when it's about to rain.

Weather forecasters predict the future – what are you looking forward to? Be open to the future and accept there will be different versions of the future.

When was the last time you did something for the first time? What are you going to do differently? What is your goal is for today?

**Go further:** Have you ever smelt the rain? Sometimes we notice a pleasant earthy smell before a storm. The next time you are out and about, notice and listen to the birds.



## Thunder and lightning very, very frightening (10 minutes or more, outside space)

We all agree when there is a thunder and lightning storm it feels like it clears the air (with a drop in temperature and as the rain washes away the debris and grey skies). Likewise, our bodies need to alleviate stress and unclog the chemical build up.

This exercise is about feeling grounded and letting go and is called 'earthing'. We are full of electrical charges, static and toxins. The toxins must go somewhere, even after a stressful event remain in your body and can lead to burnout if left unchecked. Go outside and take off your shoes and socks and walk on the grass. If you are feeling brave, dance with your arms open wide. It's a brilliant way to destress, reset and release those stress toxins and your inner playful child spirit. Appreciate that life and nature are beautiful, constantly growing and alive and you are alive too.

**Go further:** Can you plan in time to spend outdoors and enjoying nature? Even if this is only spending 10 minutes of your lunch break, or a short walk after classes finish, or walking part of your commute home? Even in a city there are often green spaces, trees, birds and the sky to notice when we take the time.



# Appendix

## Singing in the rain (5 minutes, pen and paper)

Music is an artform that unifies us all. It is easy to connect to, is accessible to all of us and can help us boost our mood. Tapping into the power of music and how we can use it to assist our wellbeing is an important skill to explore.

Make some playlists for different types of weather. You could start by trying to list songs about the weather (e.g. for a sunny day: *I'm Walking on Sunshine* by Katrina and the Waves or for a rainy day: *November Rain* by Guns 'n' Roses) and then add in songs you associate with that weather.

**Go further:** Prescribe yourself some music for your different moods – do you have songs that make you feel uplifted when you need a pick-me-up? Or songs that help you reflect when you want to feel relaxed? Send it to someone else as a gift. It will make you feel good.



## Whatever the weather (5 minutes, pen and paper)

We all have a story to tell about the weather. Like the weather, our emotions can feel out of our control. But do we reflect it? Can our internal dynamics of the body and external surroundings mimic each other? The weather can dictate our plans and it is something we all have in common, but does the weather influence our mood? When we realise that the rain is rain, we can't change it, but we can change how we react to it.



It can be hard to put our emotions into words sometimes, but the weather can be a great way to describe how we are feeling. Using the list of words below that could apply to our mood, our emotions and the weather, try to reflect on when you might use each of these words. Using these words, how you feeling right now?



bad	clammy	fierce	hot	serene
balmy	clear	fine	icy	stormy
beautiful	cold	foggy	mild	sunny
bitter	crazy	frosty	moderate	threatening
breezy	crisp	gloomy	nasty	tranquil
bright	dreary	good	nice	unpredictable
brisk	dry	gorgeous	ominous	violent
calm	dull	gray	oppressive	warm
changeable	extreme	hazy	quiet	wet
chilly	fair	heavy	rough	wild

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**Go further:** Sometimes it feels better to just record how we are feeling, but we don't always wish to share that with others. You could try reflecting for a couple of minutes each day (or throughout the day) on your mood by drawing the weather you feel or picking out some of these words above. You don't need to look back on it, you could always write it on a sticky note or scrap of paper then throw it in the recycling straight after!

## Let it snow (5 minutes or more, pen/pencil, paper, scissors)

Make paper snowflakes. You can make them as simple or as complex as you like. Simply fold up the paper at least twice and cut out various shapes. Open the paper to reveal your creation. Snowflakes are unique like us, fragile and strong.

Inspired by a snowflake, create a kaleidoscope symmetrical pattern. Draw four boxes, in one of the boxes, draw a pattern. Next, draw its reflection in the box adjacent to it. Repeat the section four times in the four boxes and so on to achieve the desired effect. You can try mirrors to help and/or use apps to create a kaleidoscopic effect.

**Go further:** Are there any other paper craft or doodling exercises you find help you relax and take your mind off things? Lots of people find colouring in is mindful, or you could try out some simple origami.

