

Book Club Report

SIDES 2021-2022

Submitted by Holly Mair

Our staff wanted me to begin this report by thanking the School Board Office and the Saanich Teacher's Association for partnering on this initiative. This was a much-needed opportunity for CUPE, STA members and our Admin to get together to have some meaningful conversations about how these books will change both our personal practices and our professional practices.

Below is a brief summary of the three books we studied.

Ensouling Our Schools by Katz and Lamoureux. Book Club members described this book with the following statement: "It reads like a textbook". As such, many did not find it an enjoyable read and overall, we thought the joint authorship of the book was not a successful collaboration. While the topics have significant cross-over, we felt that Lamoureux's tone was much more inclusive and engaging than Katz. Despite these struggles, we did feel that the book had a lot of "good nuggets" if you were willing to dig for them. Some of these included:

- The importance of building community for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students is something that is paramount to student success. We discussed how this can be challenging in an online environment and we made some commitments to delving further into this next year. One staff member has even offered to run a lunch-time sharing session so we can start by compiling all of the best practices that are currently happening at our school and then build upon those.
- We loved page 175 and how it reminds teachers that reconciliation is also "reconcili-action".
- We liked the lesson on how there is more than one way to be smart as well as the staff well-being section on page 201.

Atomic Habits by James Clear. This was by far the most popular book and the one that got the most positive response. Book Club members felt that there were many concrete actions that students could take to build positive habits for the future. One of our CUPE members has two boys who attend secondary schools in SD63 and she is making them read the book and discussing it with them! Here are some examples of things we can do personally and professionally.

- Show up for 1 minute per day. Small changes add up to big changes. We thought this was useful to us personally but also in our work with students. Can we encourage them to read for 1 minute a day and then build it to 5, 10 etc?
- Move away from focussing on goals to the systems needed to get you there. Two quotes that resonated with this statement:
 - "The purpose of setting goals is to win the game. The purpose of building systems is to continue playing the game. True long-term thinking is goal-less thinking. It's not about any single accomplishment. It is about the cycle of endless refinement and continuous improvement."
 - "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems."

- We spent quite a bit of time discussing how we can help students build those systems and how this should become part of goal setting lessons.

The Body Keeps Score by Bessel van der Kolk. This book was an emotionally difficult book to read. Many of the staff members who selected this book had recently experienced some personal trauma. While they found the book difficult, they also found it very enlightening and several wanted to keep it for their own healing journey. Some of the lessons from this book that we felt we could use in our professional practice included:

- We need to be able to give extra grace and compassion/empathy toward our students and parents. Rather than recognizing them as difficult or not engaged, we can more deeply recognize these traits as possibly stemming from personal or inherited trauma
- How can we support our students if their parents aren't feeling supported in their own trauma?
- The importance of relationships –if a student does not feel emotionally supported, they can't fully engage in learning. As online educators are students may feel deeper safety in sharing with us because of the distance
- Understanding poverty as a traumatic experience
- Having to assign a grade to someone's narrative of personal trauma – Creative Writing course – when it took so much courage for the student to share their experience, there's a sense of a) guilt to assign a grade and b) responsibility to make sure that the student is supported in their trauma when we don't have the tools to support them. Maybe some things shouldn't be graded the same way as other things.

For the rest of May and June, our plan is to circulate books amongst each other. We had three groups (one for each book title) and the richness of the conversation has sparked interest in reading more! We are in the process of doing that and will meet informally to continue conversations. As mentioned previously we have one staff member who has committed continuing the discussion around the importance of building community in our online courses for next year. There are a couple of other staff members, who are contemplating the same: one around goal setting and another who is thinking of the importance of relationships as described in The Body Keeps Score and how it might connect with the book Ensouling our Schools.