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## Entering and Continuing the Journey in the Classroom: Personal Explorations, Professional Learning and Cultivating Emotional Resilience

Jillian Stockmo

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ENTERING AND CONTINUING THE JOURNEY IN THE CLASSROOM:  
PERSONAL EXPLORATIONS, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND CULTIVATING  
EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

by

Jillian Stockmo

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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Imagine what would be possible if you felt connected to others whom you trusted, who listened to you, who believed in you and encouraged you, as well as to those from whom you could learn and with whom you could do great things. Imagine if you experienced this inside school halls and on your street. Can you see how significant this would be when things get tough?

-Elena Aguilar, *Onward*

There is no possible way that I would have been able to complete this work without my community - my people whom I have trusted, asked to listen to me, believed in and have received so much encouragement from. I am able to do great things because of you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

I hold a deep personal belief that every child deserves effective, diverse, high-quality, responsive and professional teachers. Holding these instructional figureheads to such standards is essential for maximizing our collective youth's educational growth and obtaining their full knowledge potential. However, these standards also put a high demand on teachers' energy, time, capacity, and ability to successfully cope with stress, leading to perpetual and accelerated turnover as the passion in new teachers quickly burns out and the patience of tenured teachers slowly erodes.

This study aims to answer a question that may help alleviate this systemic problem: *what impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers' professional development have on teacher retention for both new and tenured teachers?* Though this question is deeply rooted in my own subjective journey as I reflect on the aforementioned belief and my path to and from the classroom, I have also observed more objectively that it is a common theme in our industry and a topic with a growing body of academic literature worthy of further research. This chapter relays my experience in the classroom, applies my current career in cultivating teachers through highly structured and programmatic support, and provides a deeper dive into why this topic and project are core to the long-term success of both individual teachers and the overall field of education.

## **Entering the Classroom**

I have had many difficult education- and teacher-related conversations thus far in my life. At fifteen, I discussed with my teacher that yes, my last name was Stockmo and that I could be both African American and Norwegian. At eighteen, I informed my parents that I – as their only child – was leaving Minnesota solely for the opportunity to pursue an academically rigorous college education in Massachusetts. At, twenty-two I debated with my thesis advisor the benefits and costs associated with being a professor or a K-12 classroom teacher. Yet the hardest such conversation by far was telling my parents that I was going to become a teacher upon graduating college.

It is certainly not that my parents dislike teachers – my dad has been one his entire life and understands the impact first hand that this position has on our society. Rather, I had made all the choices in my young adult life that would have prepared me to do exactly the opposite of teaching. I attended Amherst College as an undergraduate student, a small liberal arts institution not known for cultivation of K-12 teachers or technically capable of doing so – it did not have an education program or degree. My parents and I – and generally most others – were instead under the impression that young people who went to Amherst College did not teach; they became doctors, bankers, professors, lawyers, scientists, and members of many other professional fields, but definitely not teachers. That is what we heard in admission sessions, from many conversations with different alumni and from looking at the programs and majors offered.

I followed suit (literally) at first and was on such a track: double majoring in Religion and Anthropology to prepare for a career in academia or perhaps foreign study.

However, I found myself slowly deviating from that narrative and was actively going against the grain by my senior year, realizing that I loved my academic disciplines but that it was not what I wanted for my professional career. Teaching was instead calling my name, and, somewhat ironically, always right in front of me in the form of family and excellent instructors. During my senior year, I realized that without the talented, dedicated and intentional teachers and coaches I had growing up, my path to and through Amherst College would not have been possible. In those last few months of my collegiate career, while my peers were applying to law clerk roles and master's programs, I researched every teaching pathway I could and finally found an entry into the field – through Teach for America (TFA).

In 2009 when I was admitted into the program, TFA had over 50 “regions” and applicants were given a limited choice in determining in what part of the country they could serve. My preferences narrowed onto two disparate directions: the first was to further ground my footing on the east coast through regions such as Boston, Connecticut and Washington D.C., while the second focused on high need parts of the country like Las Vegas Valley and Arkansas. Both directions would enable a new adventure and new community through which I could collaborate and learn a more pragmatic skill set to supplement my academic side. I then received TFA’s announcement of a different plan for my future: I would be returning to Minnesota to work in the then four-year-old Twin Cities region to teach in the community that taught me for most of my life.

TFA is well-known in the industry and across the nation for putting its teachers through an alternative model of preparation with no formal student teaching, some



established support and coaching systems, modified coursework and night classes but equally high expectations for students' results. This alternative model is centered around alleviating education inequity as much as it is creating teacher leaders (Teach For America, 2018). Yet when I returned home to join the Twin Cities region, the pathway in front of me seemed not only surprisingly quite traditional, but even bordering on a universal model based on what I observed in fellow teachers and master's students.

I was enrolled in the Masters of Arts in Teaching program at Hamline University with the expectation that I would take multiple nights of coursework each week to complete the program in two years with tuition costs upwards of \$18,000. This would also require me to obtain a license, which was also only possible from taking courses during the summer. I taught in my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom for two years at a struggling yet vibrant charter school in an equally struggling and vibrant neighborhood in North Minneapolis – both given fewer resources than deserved but nevertheless making the most of those resources on behalf of their youth. It was an uphill battle with us teachers on the front lines.

As a first year teacher, this entry into the classroom was a bit shocking. My own graduate education was to be balanced with the unique academic and personal needs of all of my students and often their families, creating lesson plans and implementing curriculum, and discovering and applying general classroom management strategies. All teachers at the school were also maneuvering greater school dynamics with other teachers and administrators. They were being asked to consider budgeting and allocating very limited resources while still providing the classroom environment and students with what

they needed. Above all, the teachers that I worked with were striving to exceed all requirements demanded of us from all of our school's various stakeholders.

We found that with all of these stakeholders' demands, there was little time and energy to devote to our own health and stability. Often we were exhausted emotionally, physically and financially. Yet we still showed up every day to exceed these high standards and kept personal concerns contained not for ourselves, but for our students. Our students needed a stable and positive environment to learn – and therein lies the risk and problem of teacher burnout and erosion when emotional resilience is lacking against such environments and demands.

### **Leaving the Classroom**

This study is not about beginnings in the classroom, but rather about a sustained presence in teaching and prolonging possible departures. I left teaching after my second year in the classroom, and it is something that I greatly struggled with at the time and still think about often. Many questions frequented my mind while mulling over the decision at the time: could I be more resilient and just try harder? Should I try working at a different school? Where can I go for more help or development? What impact will this have on my students? Where can I find more financial support or aid to finance my degree and even basic needs for my classroom? As people often do with large life decisions, I began to ask these questions aloud to family, friends, mentors and coworkers who were in or familiar with the education field. What I found was not necessarily direct answers to these questions, but instead a greater revelation arose in that I was a part of a large majority for simply having them. In January 2019, it was reported that “some 70,000

licensed Minnesota teachers are not working in classrooms. That's 52.5 percent of licensed teachers in the 2017-2018 school year" (Olson, 2019) and it continues to be evident that across the state of Minnesota licensed teachers are struggling and exiting the classroom. I was clearly experiencing a symptom of a greater epidemic in the teaching profession, and the cure for myself would be to devote time to refine the illness and treat it in others.

Before I left my classroom and school, turnover was already a blatant and highly damaging issue. When I left, five of my closest colleagues had also chosen to leave the school as well. While three of us decided to continue in the classroom elsewhere and I joined a role supporting the industry, the remaining two people chose to leave the field entirely. Brilliant teachers like them, who are profoundly committed to their students and families and have years of potential growth as teachers, still end up leaving the profession in great numbers. Even as I reflect on some of the strongest teachers I met while I was in the classroom (as both a teacher and student), few made it fully to retirement in the same role; this is of immense concern both to me personally and to the profession. Many people say they *have* a lot of respect for teachers and what they do, yet we as a society are falling short in showing that respect in our actions by not providing teachers with the resources they need.

### **Personal Connection**

After leaving the classroom, I transitioned to working for a local non-profit. Currently, I work on teacher development and support; specifically, my group works with new teachers but also experienced teachers to help them cultivate their leadership and

teaching skills at multiple points in their careers. My organization centers itself around the thought that leadership, teacher leadership, educational leadership and systems-level leadership are integral for change to occur in education. Daily, I have the opportunity to think about what experiences and development opportunities retain teachers, grow their leadership and change outcomes for all students to achieve academic and social success.

In this capstone, I am studying the experiences of both new and tenured teachers cultivating their emotional resilience. I want to find out how to support a diverse audience of teachers in skills that emphasize their personal development. The information provided in this capstone is expected to help retain more teachers in the profession and not perpetuate the experience that I and my colleagues have had.

### **Summary**

To preview the remainder of this study – Chapter Two will include a thorough review of literature specifically around the impacts and costs of teacher attrition, teacher retention and strategies used to improve retention. Chapter Three will outline my project description and model for a professional development experience for new and tenured teachers that centers emotional resilience. Lastly, Chapter Four will conclude the study with recommendations and thoughts to consider.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

As discussed in Chapter One, the primary purpose of this project is to answer the following important question: *what impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers' professional development have on retention for both new and tenured teachers?*

Chapter One described how this question originally stemmed from my experience as a new teacher through the TFA teacher preparation program, how I initially thought this experience (and end result) was an anomaly within the education system and the realization that the problem is instead a deep and systemic concern that must be addressed. One such method of addressing teacher retention is through increasing teacher emotional resilience.

This chapter outlines many of the reasons behind this study and empirical context and historical literature that supports it. I begin by exploring the definition of teacher attrition and retention, specifically by discussing both national and local conversations surrounding the importance of retention to the profession. Then I outline two specific strategies – mentorship and professional learning communities – that have been explored as a means to increase retention and that are relevant to the project design explained in Chapter Three. I then define and elaborate on the adult learning principles and theories that inform the project design for highest impact and introduce the central text that the project will utilize to develop a framework for its sessions. Finally, a summary of key research is provided to situate the need for this specific work in the broader conversation of teacher retention and how it can change the field.

## **Teacher Attrition and Retention**

In this section of the literature review, I define teacher attrition and retention, explore the national and local conversations around the topic and finally discuss the importance of retaining teachers and the potential trends that may affect and influence the profession in the future.

According to Hughes (2012), turnover, migration to another school and leaving the teaching profession are all characteristics of teacher attrition. Darling-Hammond (2003) discussed two groups of people: *leavers*, as individuals who leave the profession within five years and *movers*, teachers who switch from one school district to another. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), both *leavers* and *movers* have a huge impact on the education profession. These definitions of attrition share a common thread in that they may seem broad at first glance, but both involve leaving. It is true that any movement has potential impact on the teacher's current school. Yet the scope of these definitions diminishes the greater industry impact of having a teacher leave the field altogether. Further bifurcation is needed for the purposes of the current project.

Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) reported that teaching has less attrition than some occupations such as secretarial and paralegal fields. However, the teaching profession also has much higher attrition rates than other fields that frequently require licensure and master's or doctorate degrees, such as nursing, law, engineering, architecture and academia. In this case, teacher attrition is defined essentially as teacher turnover, or the rate in which teachers are leaving the profession. Hughes (2012),

Darling-Hammond (2003) and Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) provided various definitions to discuss teacher attrition. In this capstone, I will assume the following definition that describes teacher attrition as the rate at which teachers are exiting the profession. Teacher retention studies look at all types of factors to answer the question of how to keep teachers with schools. Studies have focused on school size and type (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009), teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond 2002; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000), teacher salaries (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003), teacher characteristics such as age and gender (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004) and more. It is worth noting that these factors include both external variables that are entirely beyond a teacher's control and internal variables over which a teacher can enact greater influence. Emotional resilience falls firmly into this latter category.

Nationally, much is known about teacher retention from a historical perspective as well as through recent trends, some of which have continued through today. Between 1988-2008, annual attrition in the teaching workforce increased by about 41% as identified by Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey (2014). These authors posited that this dramatic and concerning increase in attrition is due to seven trends that face the teacher workforce. According to Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey (2014) these trends are that the workforce is larger (size), grayer (age), greener (tenure), more female (gender), more diverse by race-ethnicity, consistent in academic ability (intellect) and less stable (volatile). This trend analysis and historical view is in alignment with more current reports on attrition at a national scale. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2014)

reported that “annually, 13% of the United States teacher workforce leaves the profession... whether moving or exiting the classroom, it accounts to almost half a million public school teachers leaving schools and classrooms” (p. 2).

While this attrition rate is present and a legitimate concern in all teacher types regardless of background, personal characteristics and other variables, it is especially true for new and beginning teachers. Ingersoll (2003) specifically reported that “beginners, regardless of their race, have the highest rates of turnover of any group of teachers. Over a decade ago, we estimated that between 40 to 50 percent of those who enter teaching leave teaching within 5 years” (p. 2).

Our current level of attrition is important to consider and alarming for many reasons, but in particular, because the effect it has on school resources and budgets cannot be understated and is severely damaging. It is estimated that states spend between \$1 billion and \$2.2 billion a year on average for teacher attrition and turnover (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014), and much of this spending is extracted from taxing the states’ citizens. Every year, schools with limited resources – sometimes including limited state funding – are being asked to retrain and catch up new staff members, which leads to less productivity at the school site level and to reallocate resources that could otherwise be used towards expanding programs and opportunities to assist student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Primarily teacher retention studies have been completed on a national scale. This body of research is immense and directly relates to the attrition and retention trends in Minnesota.



In the 2017 Report of Supply and Demand by the Minnesota Department of Education (2017), the state found that “the number of teachers leaving their positions has increased by 46% since 2008-2009” (p. 8). This same report found that “the average percentage of teachers leaving the profession after 1 year is 15.1% and over a quarter of teachers (25.9%) leave the profession after 3 years” (2017 Report of Teacher Supply and Demand in Minnesota's Public Schools, 2017, p. 8). This local attrition, which dovetails with the national trend, has similar cost implications that the state, schools, communities and citizens must absorb. Ingersoll (2007 & 2009) found that annually, the State of Minnesota was spending anywhere from \$18 million to \$40 million on teacher attrition (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Again, these resources could be shifted to other purposes that benefit children if attrition could be reduced.

Given that attrition is costly, has negative impacts on teacher effectiveness, and reduces stability of the profession overall – all of which directly detract from the students’ education – there has been ample research focusing on refining strategies to increase teacher retention. Pursuing and strengthening these strategies will benefit society as a whole by increasing the value in our collective investment in the education industry. These strategies are explored in the following section.

### **Strategies to Increase Retention**

To fully review the literature of all strategies that focus on increasing teacher retention would be a study within itself, as the wealth of literature is robust and profound. It is, instead, more productive to extract the core relevant concepts that can be implemented within the context of this project. As the basis of this specific exploration, I

focus on two specific strategies to increase teacher retention: mentorship and professional learning communities. The key applications of both strategies will also be explored in more detail within the project design discussed in Chapter Three.

**Mentorship.** It has been well documented that if beginning teachers are left to “sink or swim” on their own, they may become overwhelmed and leave the field, and that stories of first year teaching often include themes of loneliness, the struggle to survive, a loss or change in idealism and ideology, and significant culture and reality shock (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). In doing so, the field loses out on teachers who, if given proper oversight and guidance, may have been highly influential and effective for their students and future generations of teachers.

The incorporation of thoughtful mentoring programs into early teaching careers has been reviewed and shown statistical significance in combating initial negative feelings and the shocking transition associated with entry into the profession (Ingersoll, 2003; Wynn, 2007). The literature makes a clear distinction between well-designed mentoring programs versus simply matching or placing teachers into groups (Darling-Hammond, 2003), the latter of which is unsurprisingly less effective. Well-designed programs can improve attitudes, feelings of effectiveness, instructional skills and connectivity between peers and colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 2003). These are all logical qualities we would expect to see in teachers who have little interest in departing the industry.

To be considered “well-designed,” mentorship components and programs should be implemented with consistency, provide support for both participants and mentors, be

multifaceted in design and hold high standards for rigor and development (Wynn, 2007). They should meet frequently, include high-leverage activities and planning time and integrate opportunities to build community with an external network of teachers to actively combat attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Most importantly, for mentorship opportunities to be truly effective according to Wynn (2007), they must “reflect two key components of professional learning communities, collective learning and application of learning and shared personal practices” (p. 225).

Effective design and implementation of mentorship will directly increase retention, and while this has been documented heavily with supporting evidence in the aforementioned literature, it must also be understood that strong mentoring design and programs cannot solve all the ills that plague our educational system. For example, it would be hard for a mentorship program to effectively solve such problems as unhealthy school climate, teacher competition or inappropriate and mismatched teaching assignments (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Mentorship holds benefits for both new and veteran teachers, as mentorship opportunities can provide essential psychological and instructional support networks (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). It can provide a growing network and community in which new teachers can ask for help, and try to problem solve and find solutions to what they are facing in their classrooms rather than seeking less productive or more exhausting approaches (Feiman-Nemset, 2003). Similarly, Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) stated “at this emotionally challenging time, more experienced colleagues can play an important

role for new teachers, serving as a sounding board and assuring beginners that their experience is normal, offering sympathy and perspective, and providing advice to help reduce the inevitable stress” (p. 4). For new teachers, mentorship can benefit them in a variety of ways as they embark on their individual journey as an educator and build their own successful set of abilities to handle the difficulties and stressors that frequent this profession.

While the benefits of mentorship for new teachers have been well documented, the literature typically alludes to the benefits that exist for veteran teachers rather than directly quantifying or assessing it. Darling-Hammond (2003) reported that “veteran teachers need ongoing challenges to remain stimulated and excited about the profession. Many say that mentoring and coaching other teachers creates an incentive for them to remain in teaching as they learn from and share with their colleagues” (p. 10). By setting up veteran teachers as mentors and models, they can serve as integral partners in the communal goal to improve teacher practice. This also puts them in a position of leadership and can lead to avoidance of letting their mentees down by departing the field. Through the experience, they can also grow in their practice by learning and engaging with new teachers. Further, Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) documented that new teachers can be important resources for schools as they bring in new learning, relevant pedagogy and fresh perspectives, as long as these new teachers are not simply hired as an unfortunate byproduct of high turnover. Such context may instead leave veteran teachers feeling resentful, stressed or dissatisfied with their working environment and more resistant to enter into a mentor relationship that they believe will not last.

Overall, it has been researched that all teachers benefit from the access to a well-designed, resourced and thoughtfully executed mentorship experience. Teachers will often embrace learning from each other and contributing to each other's development if given the opportunity. They will grow personally, psychologically and instructionally as described by Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000). The practice and importance of self-reflection was one specific practice highlighted in the literature as being extremely impactful for new and veteran teachers participating in mentorship (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). This transformational skill is both an opportunity for veterans to model but also an area for new teachers to more rigorously develop interpersonal skills as well as to internalize and experiment with key instructional practices. The importance of self-reflection under a system of mentorship will be considered not only in the context of professional learning communities in the next section but also in the overall design of the project in Chapter Three.

**Professional Learning Communities.** As acknowledged in the previous section, the profession can be isolating and lonely for new and veteran teachers alike. One way to combat this is through intentional professional learning communities. DuFour and Eaker (1998) have written extensively on learning communities, which they believe is the most promising strategy for school improvement. They suggested that the ability to have school personnel function as professional learning communities is transformational in how the individuals and system operates.

The literature surrounding professional learning communities is extensive, and details are too numerous to review in the context of the current project. So, in what

follows, two of the most relevant topics for this project are discussed: how these groupings are organized to maximize efficacy and what opportunities for support these communities provide. These two topics will then be incorporated into the project design in Chapter Three.

Learning communities are conceptualized and defined in many ways in the literature. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) wrote that study groups and mini courses are effective and sufficient learning communities, as they focus around one central topic or strategy. Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009) wrote that professional learning must be a balance between externally provided support and directly applicable to the job through embedded activities that support growth in teacher knowledge. Hicks (1997) further elaborated on learning communities by stating that they must be a group of educators that hold shared interests and are employed in an atmosphere where they hold shared work.

Hicks (1997) took this conversation a step further to say that in this community, cognitive and affective aspects must be considered and planned for to ensure success of the learning experience. Wei et al. (2009) discussed extensively that professional learning communities must be sustained, intense and applicable to lead to transformational teaching practices. When taking key aspects of these definitions together, we find that the research speaks directly to not only defining the grouping and atmosphere, but that there are important considerations regarding timing. In the conscious combination of these three components, learning communities can be effective in preventing attrition by allowing support networks to be sustainable beyond initial programming and individual

tools. We have evolved into social beings who – especially when learning to survive and thrive in stressful environments – take comfort in working together with others who may have different strengths, weaknesses, problems and solutions than us. Our best results come from a sum of our parts, and sharing knowledge and emotional support is no exception.

A case in point of gaining strength from developing learning communities comes from Wei et al. (2009), who developed an international report on the status of professional development in the United States and abroad. From their findings, they concluded that there is a likely connection between opportunities for teacher development in communal atmospheres and improved quality in both teaching and learning. Through their qualitative and quantitative analysis of over 30 countries, they found that these spaces can find augmented success if they also operate beyond the confines of the school setting and are organized around networks that connect teachers beyond subject matter and other educational concerns. This study on seemingly universal connectivity is one of the strongest pieces of evidence in supporting professional learning communities, especially those that are carefully constructed to go beyond the school walls to connect people with similar but not identical experiences.

***Considerations.*** While the literature is quite clear that mentorship and professional learning communities can improve teacher retention, it is also important to acknowledge that other relevant factors could improve or disrupt efficacy of the proposed program design and implementation.

First, by narrowing the methods to only mentorship and professional learning communities, the project may miss out on other strategies that may have been equally effective, or the combination of which may offer correlations and synergies beyond what the selected methods will do. For example, Wynn (2007) and Darling-Hammond (2003), both discussed the importance of principal leadership and teaching environment as substantial factors in teacher development and retention. However, a project must focus and find significant effect on a small selection of items to more clearly attribute that effect. It should also be noted that some factors are not feasible to influence within this project – for example, altering teacher pay is not within scope.

Similarly, we do not yet know if there is negative correlation between any included components, meaning they have an adverse effect on each other that may cancel out results. Though I do not believe that is likely for the selected components, nor do I think it is economical to proceed with a project that is too narrow, this will be taken into consideration when reviewing results from the project.

### **Adult Learning Principles**

Having teachers engage with a modern text with no discussion or exploration of adult learning principles would be highly irresponsible and likely result in diminishing the impact and results of the project. If we want teachers to grow and learn about themselves and their resilience, many different learning theories for adults must be explored and considered. The sections below serves as a brief introduction to relevant concepts that will be included in the project.



**Knowles.** Malcolm Knowles is one of the cornerstones of modern adult learning and theory. One of his greatest contributions to the field is the theory and term ‘Andragogy,’ which is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1970). Andragogy differs from pedagogy and asks designers and facilitators of adult learning experiences to consider the following concepts.

Adults are independent and must be treated as unique individuals (Knowles, 1970). Adults are also voluntary learners and will leave learning experiences that do not satisfy for them, and they bring with them their unique individual experiences that can often contribute to group learning contexts in ways that young students often cannot. Knowles (1970) stated,

But to an adult, his experience *is* him. He defines who he is, establishes his self-identity, in terms of his accumulation of a unique set of experiences. So if you ask an adult who he is, he is likely to identify himself in terms of what his occupation is, where he has worked, where he has travelled, what his training and experience have equipped him to do and what his achievements have been. An adult *is* what he has *done*. (p. 62)

With this in mind, adults must be given a level of autonomy, respect and decision making power within learning experiences. Pushing them in any particular direction with too much force will most likely push them out the door.

Knowles (1970) also stated that adults crave the opportunity to self-direct and self-diagnose their learning. A balance between pre-planning and asking participants to contribute must be considered. Knowles (1970) asked facilitators to consider participant

ego and involvement when planning and to understand that “learning is an internal process and that methods and techniques that will involve the individual most deeply in self directed inquiry will produce the greatest adult learning” (p. 68). To achieve the best adult learning experiences, facilitators should serve as procedural guides and as a content resource while sharing responsibility with participants for learning and development rather than placing the burden on any one party.

Knowles (1970) acknowledged that adults need to learn experimentally, learn things that hold immediate value as well as engaging in problem solving with others, as their ability to contribute is high. The knowledge acquisition process is often much more focused on applicability than simply learning to learn or, worse yet, learning because one is told to do so.

Lastly, Knowles (1970) elaborated on the position of the adult psyche as having positive and negative implications for adult learning. Since people are unique individuals, their positive or negative experiences with education or schooling will follow them into adult learning experiences. While this means that they will have a rich foundation from which they can relate and pull knowledge, it also means that facilitators can experience more fixed habits and mindsets that are harder to break if negative. This can lead to tensions that may not be experienced with young learners.

**Kolb.** David Kolb contributed to the field of adult learning by stating that there is benefit and evidence for having adults engage in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). He argued that our learning styles and points of view are not only influenced by our personality type, career choice educational specialization, current role or tasks, but also

that adults can be influenced and changed through direct and pointed experience. For example, Kolb (1984) wrote:

The stability and endurance of these states in individuals comes not solely from fixed genetic qualities or characteristics of human beings: nor, for that matter, does it come from the stable fixed demands of environmental circumstances. Rather, stable and enduring patterns of human individuality arise from consistent patterns of transaction between the individual and his or her environment. . . . The way we process the possibilities of each new emerging event determines the range of choices and decisions we see. The choices and decisions we make to some extent determine the events we live through, and these events influence our future choices. Thus, people create themselves through the choice of actual occasions they live through. (pp. 63-64)

Kolb (1984) presented a learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting that can push adults to grow and learn. This cycle should be applied to and repeated within concrete experiences such as hands-on tasks, role-plays, and scenarios, which may lead to greater change in the individual.

**Mezirow.** Jack Mezirow contributed to the field of adult learning with the idea of transformational learning and critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000). He argued that adults can engage in transformational learning by examining their own unchallenged assumptions, biases and perspectives in both personal reflection and group engagement. In doing so, they gain further perspective into how they think rather than simply what

they think, which can help them slow the process down and possibly reach new conclusions.

Mezirow (2000) pushed facilitators and designers of adult learning experiences to create environments of acceptance, vulnerability, empathy and trust so that adults feel able to reflect and grow alongside others. One point of contention in Mezirow's (2000) analysis is that it does not account for race, gender, class, bias or historical context and how these demographic indicators can shape participant experience and engagement.

### **Main Text for Session Framework**

Due to its relevant and straightforward framework that can be effectively applied to adult learning contexts, the work of Elena Aguilar (2018) will be the key text around which this project is centered. While she is not a theorist like the three established and well known authors above, Aguilar is an educator and trainer who draws her experience from her experience as a classroom teacher, instructional coach and leadership coach (BrightMorning, 2018). She has published multiple works which have been utilized by school districts across the country (BrightMorning, 2018) and that focus on the idea of helping teachers learn and change, most notably: *The Art of Coaching* (2013) and *The Art of Coaching Teams* (2016).

The series of sessions in this project will use emotional resilience concepts and learning approaches derived from her most recent text, *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* (2018). Specifically, the project incorporates a four-pronged approach to each activity and session development to cultivate emotional resilience “intentionally, strategically, methodically and systematically” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 9).

Her newest text also holds an accompanying workbook that, in partnership with additional resources, will help to build a cohesive, effective and easily understood program that educators not only follow but in which they are invested.

## **Resilience**

The main topic of this study is cultivating emotional resilience in educators, and there has been significant scholarship surrounding resilience. However, the bulk of this scholarship has focused on students (Masten et al., 1990) or specific programs (Jennings et al., 2013) instead of teachers or adult learners.

Resilience has been defined by Aguilar (2018) as “how we weather the storms in our lives and rebound after something difficult” (p. 2). Masten et al. (1990) described resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcomes of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 425). Both definitions mesh well and help to illustrate the importance of resilience, especially in the teaching profession when the failure of some teachers to be resilient is seen as a personal deficiency rather than an institutional weakness or systemic problem (Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Kyricaou (2001) highlighted that teachers attempt to cope with stress and build resilience in two ways: palliative and direct action. Palliative attempts to reduce the impact of the stressor instead of dealing with the source of the stressor itself; this concept can be seen in behaviors such as smoking, excessive drinking, and avoidance behaviors (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Conversely, direct action behaviors attempt to both cope and eliminate the source of stress; examples of this approach are seeking support, organizing time, and prioritizing tasks (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Resilience is better built by

diverting time, energy, consistency and persistence via direct action behaviors rather than palliative attempts.

While the research on resilience is still in its nascent stage, there is very promising evidence that when teachers engage in direct action behaviors, the ill effects of stress and burnout can be reduced (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Cultivating resilience for resilience sake is not the goal of this project or an adequate contribution to the research. Rather, directly applying resilience to pragmatic situations for results that address this project's core research question will be considered a success.

### **Synthesis**

This literature review suggests that there is further need to specifically study the experience of new and tenured teachers in cultivating their emotional resilience. There are systemic benefits to supporting a diverse group of teachers in mentorship and resilience as well as in overall psychological development as a means to increase teacher retention. Cultivating emotional resilience while incorporating adult learning principles, mentorship and the development of a strong professional learning community could lead to increased teacher retention and provide solutions to large issues facing the education profession overall. This project seeks to combine these elements into a single program described in the next Chapter.

### **Summary**

In summary, this Chapter outlined the definitions of teacher attrition and retention, national and local conversations surrounding the importance of retention to the profession as well as specific strategies and adult learning principles that can increase

retention. Then it introduced the text that will be used as the central resource in this project. Finally, a detailed account of the key notion of resilience was provided to situate the need for this work in the broader conversation of teacher retention. In the next Chapter, I will discuss the specifics of the proposed project by exploring the audience, setting, timing and other aspects of design to be considered.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

Chapter Three outlines and highlights a sequence of professional development sessions that aim to build and sustain educators' emotional resilience. Building upon the research question stated in Chapter One: *what impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers' professional development have on teacher retention for both new and tenured teachers?* This sequence of sessions will help teachers grow in their practice by increasing their resilience. The ultimate goal is to help increase teacher retention by building (and sustaining) this resilience.

This Chapter begins with a description of the project and the rationale for how this body of work serves as a logical extension of the literature described in Chapter Two. I then explore key components of the project by describing the main research framework, topic, setting, audience and measures of effectiveness. These components function as the foundation of this project to ensure its scope, direction and content are appropriate as a potential solution to the problem. This Chapter then concludes by discussing a timeline for implementation and other important considerations for facilitators of this sequence.

### Project Overview and Rationale

I developed and refined a comprehensive action plan as well as individual session plans for a year-long professional development series centered around *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* by Elena Aguilar (2018). Overall there will be twelve sessions, one for each month of the calendar year (Appendix A). Sessions will run for two hours, and while the content will change, there are routines that will stay



the same throughout the whole sequence to build uniformity and consistency. The ultimate goal of this action plan and subsequent sessions will be to design specific experiences in which educators explore ways that emotional resilience can be “intentionally, strategically, methodically and systematically cultivated” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 9) in a diverse professional learning community. All four of these components will be incorporated into every session throughout the year. By investing time into developing emotional resilience under these four components, educators will be better equipped to cope with the high stress and demands of their role in the community, leading to greater individual workplace satisfaction, classrooms that are more effective and a more stable industry retention.

Educators will *intentionally* cultivate emotional resilience by engaging in rigorous pre-work before every monthly session that is also defined as a part of the sequence. Throughout the year, this pre-work will ask educators to reflect on their personal history, identity and current practices as well as track their behavior and emotion by engaging in specific activities and individual exploration. These reflections build self-awareness and pointed motivation that in turn ground the teacher in themselves rather than an otherwise stressful external environment. This self-reflection component of the action plan directly correlates to Knowles (1970) body of work which was further explored in Chapter Two – adult individual learners work best when they engage in self-direction and diagnosis.

Educators will *strategically* cultivate emotional resilience by engaging in a variety of activities that target their mind, body, relationships, behaviors and more. The sequence will be designed to build and engrain thoughtful habits within each educator and within

the cohort in a holistic and strategic manner. Through consistent use, these habits will help teachers feel empowered to bend through difficult life situations rather than break by applying these sound strategic tools correctly. This strategy also draws upon Knowles (1970) as it acknowledges that individual adult learners bring their histories, habits and context with them into learning experiences and an aspect of this project aims to acknowledge but to push these foundations into changed behaviors that increase resilience.

Educators will *methodically* learn specific strategies that they can add to their daily practice. Elements of the sequence will be immediately applicable and incorporated within the cohort. This will allow educators to structure their practice in an orderly and organized manner. By incorporating order and structure to daily routines, educators will find that difficult situations arise less often due to newfound predictability and are thus more manageable. The order and structure created by this strategy calls upon Mezirow's (2000) work. By ensuring that the learning environment is consistent and predictable, educators will have the time and space to challenge their assumptions and grow alongside the cohort.

Lastly, educators will *systematically* cultivate emotional resilience through examining the school sites, staff and communities of which they are a part and discover how these factors influence their identity and responsibilities. By better understanding their environment, how it functions and how it trickles down to what they and their students experience and feel on a daily basis, educators will gain a more objective perspective on the system itself. This reflection will draw upon the principles suggested

by Kolb (1984), and push teachers to gain perspective and other points of view that are not a direct product of their current environments.

Though monthly sessions will vary in actual content, discussion and takeaways, each will always incorporate these aforementioned four components to increase emotional resilience. Each session will also include two other consistent elements: a self-assessment that is individually completed and not shared with facilitators or fellow participants at the beginning and a chapter reflection as a closing group activity. These two anchor points – one of individual exploration and discovery and the other of commonality and grounding – effectively bookend each session into something that is familiar yet still facilitates personal change and development.

Similarly, this sequence focuses primarily on individual reflection and engagement but also dovetails the personal journey with group learning. Though much of the pre-work for each session's activities will be completed alone, the sessions themselves will be overwhelmingly based on discussion and sharing thoughts from this pre-work. By having both individuals and the larger group engage in conversations about systems, identities, emotions, and issues they face in their buildings, the sessions will allow educators to learn second-hand from the experiences of others about what tools were successful (and unsuccessful) in increasing resiliency. Educators will find new and creative ways to cultivate and empower resilience within themselves while also strengthening a support network of understanding and empathetic peers.

Focusing the professional development series with consistent text components in a cohort format of the same participants and facilitators will allow a deeper dive into the

complex topics above while in a safe space. Consistency in relationships will allow this to happen both quickly and purposefully, and it inherently develops emotional resilience as well. Lastly, it will allow educators to answer some deeply personal change management questions: what does cultivating emotional resilience look like to me? What are the habits that I want to grow and cultivate? And how will doing this help me to become a better educator for students?

The main purpose of this project is to draw upon the support models shared in Chapter Two and design an experience that will take these best practices to create a cohort experience that facilitates cultivating emotional resilience and in turn increases teacher retention. For the project to be effective, it will require structure through a research framework, setting, audience and measures of effectiveness.

### **Research Framework**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the sequence of sessions should adequately incorporate components of mentorship and professional learning communities, adult learning principles, and our understanding of resilience – all under the four-pronged framework as crafted by Elena Aguilar and discussed in the previous section.

Mentorship and professional learning communities were both presented as highly impactful methods through which teacher retention could be increased, but only if executed thoughtfully and with specific features. This project is careful to incorporate these features; for mentorship, the sequence of sessions will be consistent and meet frequently, include high-leverage activities, allow for opportunities to build community with an external teacher network, be multifaceted in design and hold high standards for

rigor and development. Similarly for professional learning communities, the sequence of sessions will include mini courses and study groups focusing on one central topic, have a balance between externally provided support and be directly applicable to the job.

What we understand about adult learning principles and resilience will also be factored into the project design. Adults will be treated as unique individuals with greater autonomy, respect and decision making within sessions and primarily self-diagnosed on their progress (Knowles, 1970). While recognizing that habits can be harder to break in adults, change management approaches and self-reflection will help lead to perspectives and experiences that combat ingrained behavior. The space will be accepting, vulnerable and trustworthy. All of this will be used to help train direct action behaviors to increase emotional resilience rather than palliative behaviors, and these will be actively applied and discussed to successfully adapt to challenging or threatening circumstances.

### **Setting**

The professional development sessions will occur over the course of a full year with monthly sessions beginning in June. Each of the twelve, monthly sessions include individual reflection pre-work and a group cohort meeting. The setting of individual reflection pre-work will be determined by each participant at a place with which they are comfortable, and it may change from session to session depending on their preferences. Facilitators for this setting will demand little structure, but the end result of completed and thoughtful work will be expected nonetheless. Instructions and content for individual reflection will be provided via email from facilitators, and participants can ask facilitators

questions through any medium that is convenient for them. Results from this setting are then brought to the next group meeting.

The group meetings, however, will have a more formal structure. These will take place on the first week of each month for two hours in the Teach For America - Twin Cities regional office in downtown Minneapolis to provide a consistent, familiar and central space. During this monthly cohort time, the group will reflect on their pre-work, bring what they are experiencing in their classrooms into the shared professional development space and, perhaps most importantly, construct a community and toolset that will support them in the classroom and beyond.

### **Audience and Participants**

This project will work directly with two primary audiences, but will also influence several secondary audiences. The two primary audiences for whom this project will build emotional resilience will be new and experienced teachers in a 15-educator pilot group. Five of these educators will be brand new TFA corps members, and the remaining ten will be TFA alumni who continue to teach in Twin Cities classrooms past their two-year commitment. These teachers will vary in age, experience, race, gender, religion, place of origin, school settings, and most other facets that could collectively make them a diverse subject group. These educators do effectively serve a dual role in this project as both the audience and subjects – at least until the scope of this project is expanded in future years. The size and structure of the group is appropriate for the current pilot and allows room for adjustment and scalability in future projects.

The first audience of five new TFA teachers will be entering the profession for the first time, though they may have had previous work experience outside of being an educator. Since TFA offers annual rolling application process in which the participants will be identified, these participants will be selected long before the June launch of the series. The rationale for choosing these new educators to participate in this project is to see if building their emotional resilience helps them in the early stages of their teaching careers.

The second primary audience will be tenured teachers where the professional experience will range from three to ten years of direct and solo classroom teaching experience. These teachers will be selected as volunteers who have previously expressed interest in receiving additional professional development from resources outside of their schools, but also to serve as mentors to new educators in the Twin Cities. To build continuity and a shared foundation for the cohort's experience, this group of ten teachers will be TFA alumni, though their two-year TFA experiences need not to have taken place in the Twin Cities.

One secondary participatory group will be two facilitators to guide the pilot cohort through this experience. These individuals will also be diverse and have ample experience helping participants explore difficult topics to extract useful content while also ensuring they stay comfortable in vulnerable discussions. They will also have experience specifically working with teachers in typical classroom settings and providing professional development.

There are two other secondary audiences that this project will influence: administrators and students. Though they will not directly participate in the professional development, they will be made aware of the project to a limited extent. There will also be moments within the year sequence where teachers will be asked to engage with both of these audiences around building their own emotional resilience as well as emotional resilience in these two groups. Finally, as secondary audiences, they will indirectly benefit from the improved emotional resilience of their teachers in that retention will be increased and stabilize the educational environment.

### **Project Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of this project will be assessed in two tangible and measurable ways: reflections and retention. Before beginning the year sequence, teachers will be asked to complete an initial reflection consisting of qualitative and quantitative questions where they score and describe their confidence, effectiveness and experiences. Though this will not be mandatory for participants, it will be highly encouraged by facilitators who can then use this data to inform and lead future sessions. Throughout each module, teachers will also pre-test (through self-reflection) and post-test (through chapter reflection) for each subject and write their thoughts on each. Lastly, teachers will submit their portfolio project at the culmination of the series, which will include one of their most meaningful experiences from each month of the series. When compared to the initial reflection from before the sequence, the difference will serve as a qualitative measure of effectiveness by observing the growth of their mindset. Pointed questions will



extract the long-term likelihood of retention by asking about specific skills they will use in difficult situations and their overall satisfaction with teaching and community support.

Effectiveness of this project can also be measured over time through a retention survey. TFA, as a non-profit organization administers a yearly survey for its alumni with questions that revolve around teacher satisfaction with their classrooms, schools and the education field. It will be necessary to work in partnership with the organization to gain access to the relevant data as well as build a supplemental questionnaire into this survey to measure retention over a period of five years. As the project grows beyond the pilot group in future iterations, this survey will also provide a helpful and statistically significant control group against which the success of this program could be determined.

### **Timeline**

The research for this project began in summer of 2018 and will continue throughout 2018 and into 2019. Project development, design and consultation will be completed during winter and spring 2019, with a final presentation that will take place in late spring 2019. That will allow for a short window of both new and tenured teacher recruitment to launch in summer 2019 or in summer 2020 based on budget considerations. Early sampling with current TFA alumni and corps members have revealed considerable interest in such a program, so a pilot cohort will be easy to fill and even allow room for applications and active screening. The sessions will take place starting in June to provide teachers an introduction, several helpful tools and an early support network before the school year commences. It will then follow through the year with monthly pre-work and meetings as described in the setting section above.

## **Considerations**

Given the audiences and timeline, there are several considerations that facilitators of the experience should keep in mind for this project. For new teachers, this experience could be unintentionally interpreted as a mandatory commitment given the demands of their licensure program, whereas the remaining participants would be aware of the program being entirely voluntary. This possible interpretation would need to be addressed with new teachers in the recruitment and application process as well as explicitly discussed during the first cohort gathering.

Both texts that are used in this sequence would require participants to incur additional costs and expense, and considerable time each month through the year must be devoted to the sequence in order to experience results in increased emotional resilience. These commitments should be disclosed to participants as well as facilitators so that expectations are clear and audiences can plan accordingly, especially when these audiences are already stretched thin on these fronts. The project will keep in mind the financial impact and will keep cost constraints limited in purchased texts and materials, meeting space, and less direct expenses.

## **Summary**

The aim of this Chapter was to comprehensively outline the entirety of the professional development sequence I plan to design and implement with a pilot group of TFA corps members and alumni. This project aims to answer my important research question introduced in Chapter One: what impact does teaching emotional resilience in teacher professional development have on teacher retention for new and tenured

teachers? The Chapter outlined an overview and scope of the project, discussed the foundational resources and texts that contribute to the idea as an extension of Chapter Two, and expanded details on the setting, audience, timeline and other key considerations.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on the final product of this project, the capstone experience and what I have learned in the process. I will also discuss the opportunities and limitations of the scope of my work and how this could impact the groups of teachers that I work with on a daily basis, which will also influence future iterations of this project. Lastly, I will reflect on how this experience could have impacted my personal experience in the classroom and my current daily work as someone who helps develop educators.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions

When I began teaching, I believed that all my intellectual capacity needed to be focused on learning high-leverage instructional practices, practicing delivery of content and - perhaps most importantly - building relationships with students and families. While this made me a “successful” teacher in the near term - I achieved significant academic growth with my students, cultivated trusting relationships with my families and earned respect of my colleagues - it also left me burnt out and winded as I crossed the finish line of what felt like a multi-year sprint in the classroom. And as I noted previously, it was a finish line I had originally planned to see years later. After spending the last several years of my career in the subfield of teacher development and support and wrestling with the research question: *what impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers’ professional development have on teacher retention for both new and tenured teachers?* I believe I understand how one can prepare, train and empower teachers to take on the ultra-marathon that is teaching. At its foundation, one must do so “intentionally, strategically, methodically and systematically” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 9).

I began this capstone in Chapter One by articulating my personal story: a journey into the field of education and the deep connection that I have to this project. In Chapter Two, I tackled a thorough review of the literature surrounding my research question: focusing intentionally on teacher attrition, teacher retention and strategies to improve retention. Chapter Three outlined my project in detail, from considerations of cohort size, setting, audiences, demographics and more. And now in Chapter Four, I will conclude the

study with lessons learned, recommendations and thoughts to consider for future research.

### **Insights**

Perhaps the most important learning I have gained from this experience is that there is an incredible amount of content available to educators; however, what is important to cultivate emotional resilience is how educators organize, relate, empathize and develop habits and dispositions in relation to that content. Within my sequence, there is ample content provided for those who do not have time to dive as deeply as myself through the countless resources and materials. But there is also opportunity for customization and variability with video clips, images, articles, etc. - as long as teacher skills remain unequivocally central and paramount to the final amalgamation, and that the facilitator realizes that there may be diminishing returns to the amount of effort they put into finding extra materials.

I personally experienced this while trying to pull images or videos or activities - there was much to choose from, and while that choice at times was paralyzing, it helped me realize that the content itself pales in importance to the end result for teachers relative to the habits and dispositions that the teachers actively develop. This was incredibly difficult for me, as I prefer finding the perfect video clip or activity to illustrate a concept or standard; instead of focusing on the *what*, this capstone project pushed me to consider the greater *how* more intentionally than I had previously. Getting into the weeds is great, but you cannot forget why you are growing the garden. This is an insight that I will bring into my everyday practices as a teacher, educator and learner.

## **Revisiting the Literature**

Within my literature review, the adult learning theories are what I found to be most impactful in the development of my project content. Referring back to Knowles (1970), Kolb (1984), and Mezirow (2000) and trying to interweave their concepts with Elena Aguilar's (2018) unique and powerful content was difficult but beneficial. Within the literature of all four writers, I saw a strong focus on the adult individual - specifically how they learn, develop and (ideally) flourish.

One area in which I believe this project expands that literature is to intentionally focus on how a cohort develops alongside strong individual reflection and self-work. This capstone project directly builds individual self-development along lines of race, gender, class, bias and historical context but additionally asks the cohort to do this; not only for the group itself but for individual school buildings, school systems and for the education system in our country as well. I believe that this is a departure from the literature and a gap I intended to fill. Teachers certainly need to think, plan, practice and work on their individual environments but also have incredible insights to contribute to the larger educational realm given their unique lived experiences and dynamic perspectives.

## **Implications**

Throughout this project, I reflected on the policy implications it could inspire and believe they are two-fold. First, this work could impact continuing education requirements and teacher preparation. In the Renewal Requirements for Tiered Licensure (2019) published by the Minnesota Professional Educator Standards and Licensing Board, requirements for continuing education/relicensure credits (CERs) are 75 hours for

a Tier 3 license and 125 hours for a Tier 4 license. If I worked collaboratively with an institution of higher education or even tried to submit this program for approval, it could be used by educators to fulfill this requirement. Overall, the professional development series I developed has 24 hours of direct session time with perhaps an additional 12 hours of pre-work; those 36 hours could account for almost half of the requirements for a Tier 3 and over a fourth of the requirements of continuing education credits for a Tier 4 license.

This could have policy implications because it could shift the requirements of CERs from “cultural competency, positive behavior intervention strategies and reading preparation” (Renewal Requirements for Tiered Licensure, 2019) to being inclusive of teacher behaviors as well. Legislators and policy advocates would be interested in thinking holistically about how teachers learn to develop their students directly *and* how they work to focus on and listen to themselves to better serve their students.

The second policy implication this work could inspire would be dialogue and discourse in institutions of higher education and teacher preparation providers. These stakeholders are a bit behind when reflecting critically on holistic teacher development - my employer (Teach For America) included. This work can build and inspire collaboration between schools who are interested in this work along with institutions who could align themselves to provide credit for this type of professional development. It would have to be debated if this could be a part of initial licensure; but given that “the average percentage of teachers leaving the profession after 1 year is 15.1% and over a quarter leave the profession after 3 years” (2017 Report of Teacher Supply and Demand in Minnesota’s Public Schools, 2017), this focus on cultivating emotional resilience most

certainly has a place in initial licensure programs for the longevity and overall health of the industry.

### **Limitations**

This project was overall soundly developed; however, one limitation that emerged was one of translatability. About halfway through the development of the project, I shared two of the facilitator guides with one of my colleagues. While she was engaged in the content, she shared her perspective - "Jillian, this is awesome, it sounds completely like you - but if I were presenting this, I would rewrite aspects of this to fit my style and your slides differently." While I tried to write unbiased and easily generalized facilitator guides, doing so was incredibly difficult. I had been intentional to not incorporate my biases - of race, class, gender and the many other faces and facets that make me who I am - they had nevertheless emerged throughout the professional development sequence in the photos I chose, the pre-work I surfaced and the guides I created.

I do not find this to be a failure of the project; it is rather an inherent reality of when project and professional material development is localized to a primary author. However, what this limitation led me to do was shift the scope of deliverables produced within my project. I created full facilitator guides and slides for months 1-6 with the rationale that facilitators would need an entry point to the material. I then created slides for months 7-12 as well - however, I omitted the detailed session guides and created a general template instead. I believe that at this point, month 7 of content, facilitators will be confident in building their own notes that fit their styles and reflect their strengths and biases rather than my own. Perhaps I will discover after several samples of facilitators



have used the materials I developed that a different number of months is optimal to both provide a strong foundation for them while also not fully locking them into my own structure and voice.

### **Contributions and Future Ideas**

The biggest contribution my capstone project adds to the field of education is a welcomed focus on the holistic professional development and training of teachers. As I have communicated about my project with colleagues and peers consistently, I have heard responses of how helpful, important, and different it feels to how they were personally prepared as teachers. This project pushes past the concepts of mindfulness or community building as isolated concepts and instead requires teachers and schools to think about the intersection of the many habits and practices that are considered “extra” or fully within the teacher’s locus of control. I hope my work will push teachers and schools to advocate for holistic curriculum in teacher development, driving teachers in real time to work through stressors and build better habits that lead to greater retention.

My next steps with my project are to fully pilot it with a group of teachers. Before making it readily available to share with school teams or audiences, I want to ensure that what I developed is relevant and impactful. I want to solicit and receive feedback from the main audience - teachers. They can answer many questions that I cannot on my own: does this feel relevant? Are the activities we’re doing together actually going to become part of your practice? What do you see missing that would be integral to explore within yourself or with your peers? Their additional perspective is essential to answering these questions and many others I fretted over while developing and organizing the content.

I also want to send the entire project to Elena Aguilar and her team; not necessarily for feedback or review but just to share an example of how one educator is putting her work into practice and action. It is important to share learnings, insights and struggles whenever possible, and this would be a phenomenal opportunity to do so.

Lastly, I want to take the feedback, edits and data from the pilot and incorporate that into a version that can be in the hands of teachers and educators for continuous use and improvement. It is important to me that before the resource is shared or adopted by other audiences that I as a designer practice the habits and dispositions encouraged in the text - self-reflection and feedback.

### **Summary**

The ultimate goal of this capstone was to answer the research question: *what impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers' professional development have on teacher retention for both new and tenured teachers?* Through personal reflection, rigorous literature review and project design I built a sequence of content and opportunities that can impact teachers so they can be better for themselves, for their communities and their students. And as these teachers learn more about themselves, so too will the educational system then be able to learn and adapt to better support them.

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## APPENDIX A

### Overview of Development Sequence

Session # & Month:	Habit: & Disposition: <i>Onward</i> (pgs 15-16)	Why this Month? Timing Rationale: <i>Onward</i> (pp. 17-18)	<i>Onward</i> Workbook Pages:	
			Individual Pre-Work:	In-person Group Session:
Session #1  June	Know Yourself  Purposefulness	This habit is foundational for all others. In June you can reflect on last year, transition into summer, and contemplate next year while gaining deeper self-understanding.	8-9: Self-Assessment 15: I am 25-27: Core values 67-68: Aligning values to actions	17-22: Myers Briggs part 1 & 2 50-51: Socio political identities 53: Make a values jar 72: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>● <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
Session #2  July	Understand Emotions  Acceptance	Summer is an ideal time to reflect on your emotions because hopefully you can sleep a little more, enjoy warm evenings, and find a few minutes for contemplation.	76-77: Self-Assessment 79-80: Beliefs about Feelings 81: Examining Coping Mechanisms 105-106: Lessons about strong emotions	84-85: Cultural Construction of Emotions 120: Quick Calm: Grounding 127: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>● <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				



<b>Session #3</b>  <b>August</b>	Tell Empowering Stories  Optimism	Your thoughts are the keys to unlocking reserves of resilience. Start the year with this key habit.	130-131: Self-Assessment 132-135: Three good things 158: Affirmations	150-153: Exploring the impact of cognitive distortions 160-163: Take apart that thought 182-183: River and Rut Stories 203: Chapter Reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #4</b>  <b>September</b>	Build Community  Empathy	During the month when we're surrounded by new people, building strong relationships must be our primary goal. The community we build is foundational for our resilience.	206-207: Self – Assessment 208: Community Mapping 235-238: Sixty ways to build community at school	220-223: How to build trust 245-246: Building your social network 265: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #5</b>  <b>October</b>	Be Here Now  Humor	As we move into the fall, our energy wanes, and we are triggered more easily. Learning to be in the present moment enables us to cultivate awareness of our emotions and make choices that foster our resilience.	268-269: Self – Assessment 273: Right here, right now 275: Morning messages	284: Project silliness 302: Kale is not required 306: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				

<b>Session #6</b>  <b>November</b>	Take Care of Yourself  Positive Self-Perception	Self-care is the root of resilience when you're dragging yourself toward winter break and your emotions are raw.	310-311: Self - Assessment 318: Tracking Exhaustion 319-320: Keep a food diary 333-336: Planning for better sleep 355: Who needs to yell at you?	343: The best cup of chai 361-363: 65 ways to care for yourself 367: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #7</b>  <b>December</b>	Focus on the Bright Spots  Empowerment	When the days are short and you haven't recovered from the exhaustion of late fall, look for the light.	370-371: Self – Assessment 374-377: Savor the little moments 393-394: The joy of making lists	386: The words of others 410: Destination postcard 411: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #8</b>  <b>January</b>	Cultivate Compassion  Perspective	Start the new year by strengthening your compassion for yourself and others, and unlock another resource for resilience.	414-415: Self – Assessment 421: Acknowledging your teachers 454: The people who support me	431: The Self-Compassion Break 445: The Self-Compassion Journal 459: Eat together 465: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				

<b>Session #9</b>  <b>February</b>	Be a Learner  Curiosity	Around midyear, you may have the bandwidth to reflect on how you learn and to return to your beginner's mind because learning is a path to growth and resilience.	468-469: Self – Assessment 479: Get rid of some things 492: Expanding your learning community	472: Super-you 488-490: Indicators of a learning organization 505: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #10</b>  <b>March</b>	Play and Create  Courage	Spring break brings an opportunity to explore play and creativity so that you can integrate these activities into daily life. Resilience arises from creation.	508-509: Self- Assessment 510: Your play personality 531: A play list 539: A collage of student voices	523: Play hide and seek 547: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				
<b>Session #11</b>  <b>April</b>	Ride the Waves of Change  Perseverance	Although change is constant, spring brings especially high levels of change to schools. Learn to ride those waves of change with focus, patience, persistence, and courage.	550-551: Self – Assessment 555: Reflecting on hope and change 570: Scream and yell 577-579: Tackle your complaints	552: Make a vision board 560: The monster in the closet 576: Inspiration to fight the good fight 588: Chapter reflection
<b>Facilitator Resources:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Slides</a></li> </ul>				

<p><b>Session #12</b></p> <p><b>May</b></p>	<p>Celebrate and Appreciate</p> <p>Trust</p>	<p>Endings are times for celebration and appreciation, which lay the foundation for resilience in the days ahead.</p>	<p>592-593: Self – Assessment 594-595: Gratitude journals 608-609: What sets your soul on fire? 614: Awe boosts your immune system 618: Live as if you liked yourself</p>	<p>606: The heartbreak of teaching 610: Enlisting an accountability buddy 628: Chapter reflection 630: Reflecting on a year of cultivating resilience 639: Now What?</p>
<p><b>Facilitator Resources:</b></p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <a href="#">Session Guide Template (Facilitator creates independently)</a></li><li>● <a href="#">Slides</a></li></ul>				
<p></p>				