

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

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Project Description

This capstone project was guided by the research question: *What impact does cultivating emotional resilience in teachers' professional development have on teacher retention for both new and tenured teachers?* This capstone project contains twelve sessions of a professional development sequence. This sequence of sessions will help teachers grow in their teaching practice by increasing their resilience. The ultimate goal is to help increase teacher retention by building and sustaining resilience.

This year-long professional development series is centered around two guiding texts: *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* by Elena Aguilar (2018) and the *Onward Workbook: Daily Activities to Cultivate Your Emotional Resilience and Thrive* (2018). These two partner texts are complementary and were chosen because they address habits and dispositions that are not typically included in traditional teacher pedagogy and learning.

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. Pre-work is a mandatory aspect of the professional development which must be completed in advance - as it will be referenced and used during the in-person sessions. Instructions and content for individual pre-work will be provided via email from facilitators, and participants can ask facilitators questions and dialogue regarding the pre-work in advance of the in-person session. The group cohort meetings are face

to face and will be approximately two hours long and will explore the topics individuals touched on in the pre-work.

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 Teach for America (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. In the future, this project could be used by school buildings as part of a new teacher mentorship program, or by other education non-profits working on teacher retention. However, while the possibilities are endless, the size and structure of the pilot group is appropriate for the current iteration of the project and allows room for adjustment and scalability for future endeavors.

The first primary 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 an 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 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. Facilitators will be asked to complete an application process outlining their education experience and personal connection to this body of work. Top candidates exhibiting compelling education experience and passion for this topic and its potential impact will be selected as facilitators. Once selected they will receive a small stipend for their work. In the first pilot of this project; I anticipate being one of the primary facilitators.

The project is organized in a way where the format and process each month is consistent and predictable. The sessions are organized chronologically, starting in June and continuing throughout the entire 12-month calendar year. For each month, there is a habit and disposition to focus on as well as a rationale for why that is the focus of the session. There is pre-work identified as well as in-person experiences outlined in the tables below. Each month also has

slides and a detailed facilitator guide which includes a script, implications for space, materials needed for activities, and detailed session outcomes.

The project should function as being able to be taken and translated into different groups, schools, content areas, grade level teams - and because of that, there are important points of customization left blank for the facilitator to decide. One in particular is the location of each session as well as the timing. There are recommendations given for space needs and timing estimations - but it will be up to the facilitator to make these final judgment calls.

Overall, the project will be assessed with participant provided feedback - what is most critical at this pilot stage, is that feedback will be solicited and incorporated in future versions. While this is a finalized project; it should and will be reflected upon, edited and changed given the needs of the audience and facilitators.

## 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:
<b>Session #1</b>  <b>June</b>	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>				
<b>Session #2</b>  <b>July</b>	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</p> <p>594-595: Gratitude journals</p> <p>608-609: What sets your soul on fire?</p> <p>614: Awe boosts your immune system</p> <p>618: Live as if you liked yourself</p>	<p>606: The heartbreak of teaching</p> <p>610: Enlisting an accountability buddy</p> <p>628: Chapter reflection</p> <p>630: Reflecting on a year of cultivating resilience</p> <p>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>				

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