

PAUSE, PONDER, AND PERSIST IN THE CLASSROOM

The Workbook



JULIE SCHMIDT HASSON

So glad you're here



There's never been a more challenging time to be an educator. Many challenges are outside of our control. We can advocate for our needs (and the needs of our profession), but we can't directly impact pay, policies, and the politics of our communities.

We can control much of what happens inside our classrooms, and certainly, what happens inside of us. I've spent the past decade researching what the most impactful teachers say and do, especially when navigating challenges. The teachers I interviewed and observed show us how to turn challenges into opportunities. These opportunities may lead to growth for our students, and they certainly bring about growth for ourselves.

Thank you for the impact you make every day. Thank you for helping young people move toward their potential, and for constantly striving to learn and grow. I hope this workbook helps, and know that I am cheering you on.

♥, Julie

Introduction

Teaching is full of challenges, and the way educators respond to those challenges can light us up or burn us out. As a researcher, I began to study the ways educators navigate challenges during the pandemic, when our professional lives became more uncertain and demanding than ever. Like everyone in the education space, I hoped educators would fare better once the pandemic became less of a threat.



But educators are still leaving the profession at an alarming rate. And those who choose to stay are often sacrificing their own physical and mental health. Are those the only options, quitting our calling or sacrificing ourselves? I became determined to find an alternative. I wanted to help educators continue to make an impact, but do so in a way that is sustainable and satisfying.

I set out to explore the mindsets, practices, and habits of educators who were thriving during this difficult time, hoping to uncover something helpful I could share. After spending hundreds of hours interviewing and observing these educators, a three-step framework emerged. When an unexpected challenge arose, they paused to understand and regulate their own emotions first. Educators who are thriving are self-aware and adept at regulating their emotions. Therefore, the first step in this framework is the pause.

Introduction (continued)

The next thing these educators do is reframe the challenge as an opportunity. This opportunity may lead to their students' academic, social, or emotional growth or even their own professional growth. Effective reframing requires pushing aside initial narratives and assumptions and getting curious. Thriving educators ask themselves a series of questions, such as: *What story am I telling myself? What are other possible explanations? What additional information would be helpful? What opportunities are hidden in this challenge?*

Pausing and pondering are practices which require time and intention. In other words, navigating challenges well requires persistence. If we are to thrive as educators, we have to develop the internal resources that keep us from being depleted by the demands of our work. What do I want for you? I want you to find peace, joy, and satisfaction as an educator. I want you to love yourself and love your work. I believe the three-step framework of pausing, pondering, and persisting can help, and I'm excited to dive a little deeper with you.

“

Teaching and leading are full of challenges, and the way we respond to those challenges can light us up or burn us out.



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- Develop confidence
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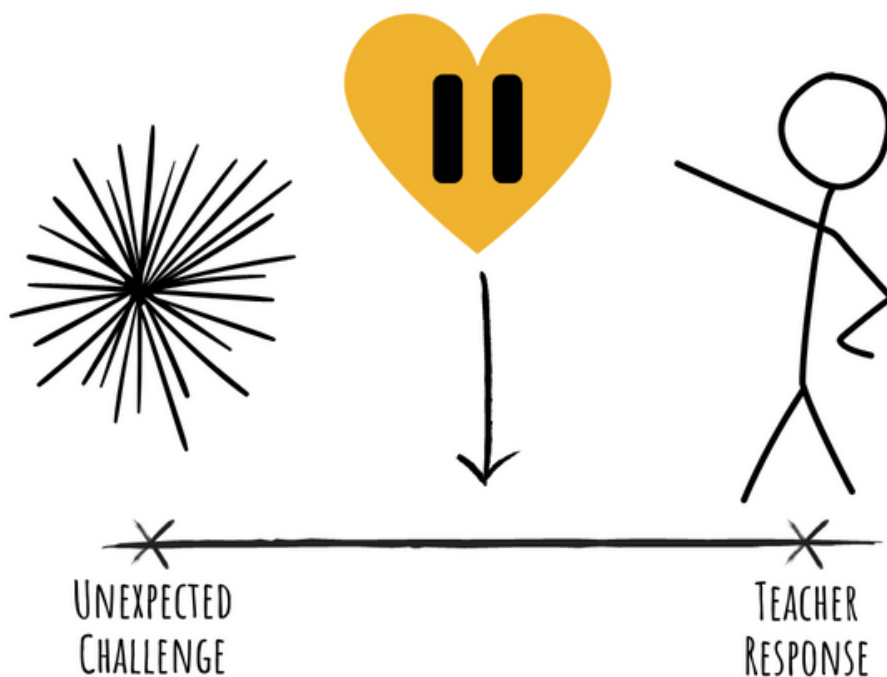
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Section 1

PAUSE

A PAUSE CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
A HELPFUL RESPONSE AND A REGRETTABLE REACTION



PAUSE

When an unexpected challenge arises, take a breath,
take a beat, and then respond.

Teaching and leading are full of challenges, and big challenges are often accompanied by big emotions. It's hard work, and it's heart work. That's why the first step in the framework is the pause. Psychologist and neuroscientist, Lisa Feldman Barrett, explains that our emotions don't happen to us. Instead, they are constructed in our brains to explain what is happening in and around us. When our hearts start racing and our palms start sweating, our brains need to figure out why. Dr. Barrett uses the example of a bad stomach ache. If we know we've eaten a big meal, we'll attribute our body's signals to that event and reach for an antacid. However, if we experience a bad stomach ache after a big argument with a spouse, we might reach for our therapist's number instead. Emotions don't dictate our actions, but the meaning we construct informs what we do next.

When an unexpected challenge occurs, a pause makes the difference between an unhelpful reaction and a helpful response. An unexpected challenge brings uncertainty, and our brains don't like uncertainty. That's why our brains search through our past experiences and patterns to devise an explanation. But with practice, we have the power to construct a different explanation. Before a big test, we are likely to attribute the butterflies in our stomach to anxiety. Could we label these sensations as determination instead? With practice, we can. But first we have to keep our emotions from escalating and practice regulating. Regulating our emotions doesn't mean ignoring them. It means navigating them by consciously choosing the most helpful response, the one most aligned with our highest values.

Pause, Ponder, Persist

Often, the first step is taking a breath. When an unexpected challenge occurs, our breathing can become faster and more shallow. Just taking a few, deep breaths can bring a sense of calm and control. Next, we can notice any spots of tension in our bodies and release it. Many people tend to hold tension in their shoulders, jaws, or fists. Once you feel a bit calmer and more centered in your body, you can begin to question the labels you've given your emotional state as well as the explanation you've constructed.

But what if there wasn't a specific event preceding unhelpful emotions? What if you just feel generally wonky. Are you frustrated? Maybe you are experiencing some barriers to a goal. Are you feeling disappointed? Maybe things just aren't going as you hoped or expected. Are you feeling irritated? Maybe there are some biological reasons. Did you get enough sleep? Are you hydrated? Are you getting sick?



One tool I share with the educators I serve is a check-in graphic (see below). I ask them to hang it where they will see it periodically throughout the day. As educators, we are running and multi-tasking all day long. Often, we don't even realize when we're not in a helpful, healthy state. When we don't check in with ourselves (and just try to power through), we are more likely to take an action or have an interaction we regret. Over time, we may also experience negative impacts to our physical or mental health. By checking in, we can become aware of how we're doing and purposefully move to a more empowering state.

Pausing is the first step because it makes the other two steps possible. We can't take a curious stance and get the information we need to make a good decision if we let our emotions take the wheel. By pausing, becoming aware of how we are feeling, and constructing meaning around those feelings for ourselves, we can move on to the second step, pondering.



PRACTICE PAUSING

When you feel unhelpful emotions rising

- Take a few slow, deep breaths
- Release any tension in your body
- Construct a new meaning around the sensations you're feeling-
Maybe that racing heart means determination rather than anxiety

Throughout the day

- Take a pause to check in with yourself
- Assess how you are feeling and what thoughts you are thinking
- Determine what you need to move to a more empowered state

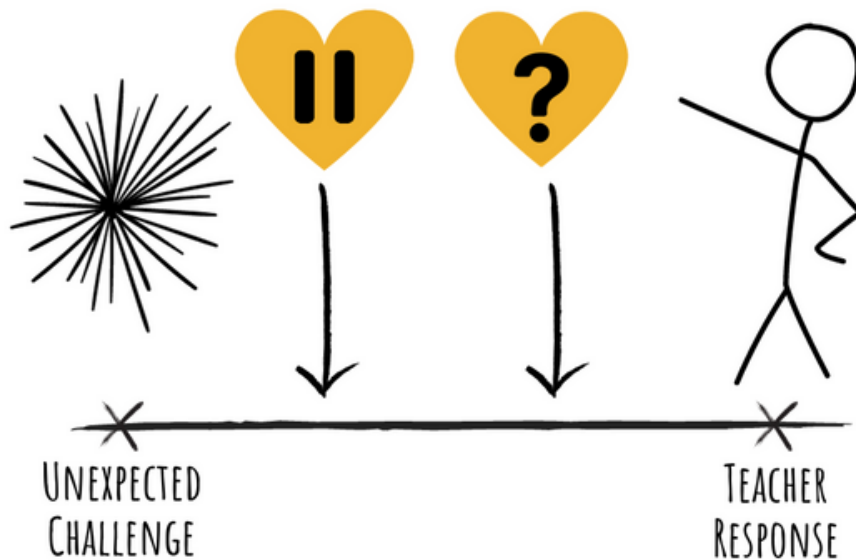
Watch the Pause Video



Section 2

PONDER

PUSH ASIDE ASSUMPTIONS,
AND GET CURIOUS,
ASK QUESTIONS



PONDER

Our decisions are only as good as the information we use to make them.

When a an unexpected challenge happens, especially when it's connected to a student's choice, we tend to construct an explanation. But assumptions can be unhelpful, and no one likes incorrect assumptions about their actions or intentions. It's easy to quickly create a narrative or fill in the blanks of someone else's story. Seeking to understand the experiences of another through genuine curiosity and care takes more time, but it pays off in deeper trust and stronger relationships. Everyone longs to feel known and understood, which only happens when we suspend judgment and listen with the purpose of finding the answer to the question, *What do I need to know to respond in a way that helps instead of making things worse?*

Questions are essential to strong relationships, and they are also a path to our own growth. They can keep us from feeling stagnant and stuck, but in some instances, asking questions can also be uncomfortable. Certainty makes us feel like we're in control, but wandering into uncertainty can feel a bit unsettling. Embracing uncertainty has its rewards though. Pausing and pondering can lead us to new ideas and insights. We can begin to see possible solutions to problems that once seemed insurmountable and begin to understand the experiences of others. Instead of rushing to answers, lingering longer and asking questions is a beneficial practice for teachers and leaders.

Pause, Ponder, Persist

Authors Edgar and Peter Shein advocate for a practice called humble inquiry, which is the art of asking questions with genuine curiosity and interest in the other person. It's a commitment to acknowledging what we don't know and our need for information from others. Telling, unlike inquiring, is built on assumptions and arrogance. When we tell instead of ask, we imply that we know more and that our knowledge is more correct or valid. When we humbly ask and deeply listen, we acknowledge the wisdom of others. Humble inquiry is a necessary practice for teachers. Making decisions based on assumptions about students' needs is unreliable. The most effective instruction and classroom management decisions are based on accurate information obtained directly from students. We need to know what our students know in order to teach them. But students will be reluctant to reveal needs, ideas, and feedback until they trust us. Students are also more likely to share information when they feel valued and believe the information they share will be used. Asking with an open mind, deeply listening, and being responsive helps us get the information we need. After all, decisions are only as good as the information on which they are based.



PRACTICE PONDERING

When an Unexpected Challenge Happens

- Push aside your initial narratives
- Question your assumptions
- Be open to other explanations or possibilities

Ask and Seek Information

- Be humble enough to know what you don't know
- Build trust so that others will share helpful information
- Ask open ended questions, like: Can you help me understand___?
What part of ___ is most difficult for you? How could I best support you in ___?

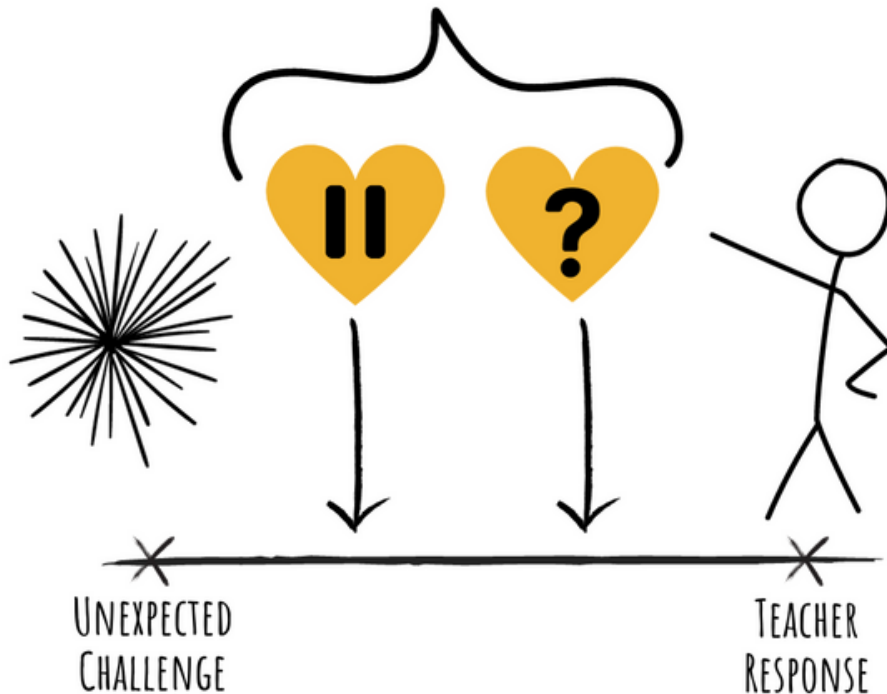
Watch the Ponder Video



Section 3

PERSIST

PAUSING AND PONDERING ARE PRACTICES
REQUIRING CONSISTENT EFFORT AND PERSISTENCE



PERSIST

Pausing and pondering are practices, and using them consistently requires persistence.

The demands of our work can be depleting, but we can build internal resources to help us navigate those demands without feeling worn out. Teacher wellbeing is a broad and complex concept, and it encompasses a range of outcomes, such as job satisfaction, engagement, and professional commitment. Building resilience is necessary for wellbeing, and resilience can help teachers bounce back from adversity more quickly. And developing internal resources can keep adversity from disrupting a teacher's sense of wellbeing.

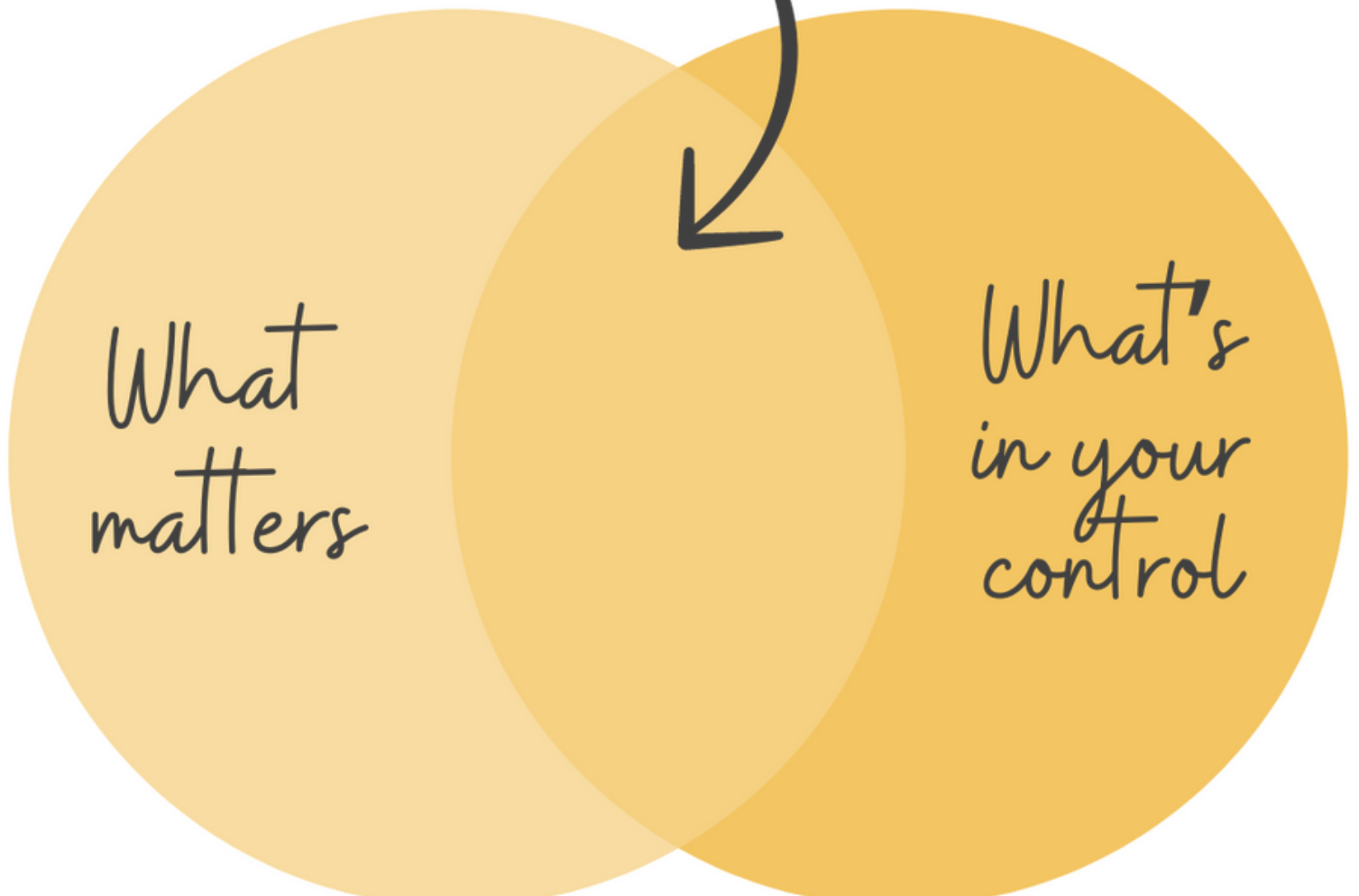
Accepting, avoiding, and advocating are three paths to building resilience. Acceptance is acknowledging and embracing a situation or circumstance that we can't change. It means letting go of resistance and allowing things to be as they are, without trying to force them to be different. Practicing acceptance saves us from wasting precious energy and helps us find more peace. In addition to practicing acceptance, we can also commit to identifying the things within our control that increase our stress. If watching the morning news starts the day in a stressful way, turn it off. Avoid or limit time with people who drain you. Even when we practice accepting and avoiding, we can still advocate for our needs. Asking for what we want, need, or value can bring a sense of empowerment.

Whenever a problem or challenge arises, remind yourself that you have the ability to navigate it. Consider the resources you have for dealing with the difficulty, especially supportive colleagues and friends. Your individual strength may be limited, but together you are exponentially stronger.

Pause, Ponder, Persist

Believing in your ability to navigate challenges impacts your wellbeing. Psychologists Albert Bandura and Charles Benight found that confidence in one's ability to cope with traumatic events aids in recovery from different types of traumatic experiences. In other words, strong belief in our ability to manage the events that affect our lives limits the negative impact of stressful events on our lives. When we believe we have some control over difficult situations, we are less likely to perceive those situations as catastrophic. If we believe our own actions have the power to produce better circumstances, we are more likely to take the steps needed to improve our lives and the lives of those we teach.

Focus here



PRACTICE PERSISTING

When You Experience Difficulty

- Focus on what you can control
- Avoid situations that increase stress when possible
- Advocate for yourself and ask for what you need

Build Internal Resources

- Build strong relationships as a source of support
- Develop confidence in your ability to navigate challenges
- Become aware of your thoughts - Ask, *What am I telling myself about this situation? What evidence do I have the other potential explanations?* Then choose thoughts to help you move forward

Watch the Persist Video



Your Turn

WORKSHEET

Think of a recent challenge you faced in your classroom or school.
Use that situation to answer the questions below.

QUESTIONS:

WRITE YOUR ANSWERS HERE...

How would you describe the challenge? What happened?



What emotions did you feel?
How could you regain a sense of calm?



What initial thoughts did you have? Did you make any assumptions?



What information did you need to respond in a helpful way?



What did you learn from that challenge?



Pause, Ponder, Persist

Your Commitments

Commit to 2 specific practices or actions that will help you turn challenges into opportunities.

COMMITMENT 1

1

COMMITMENT 2

2

Share your commitments with another educator, and ask that educator to help you stay accountable to your commitments.

Pause, Ponder, Persist



Let's stay connected.

Thank you for the impact you make on the lives of young people. Please take care of yourself, too. My wish for you is a worklife filled with joy and satisfaction. I hope pausing, pondering, and persisting help you feel engaged and encouraged as you keep making an impact.

If you enjoyed the book, please leave a rating on your favorite book seller or book review site. It will help other readers find the book.

I'd love to hear from you. You can connect with me on social media @JulieSHasson or via email julie@chalkandchances.com.