

THE WORLDING OF TEACHING: HEIDEGGERIAN BEING, CURRERE, AND ONTOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

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HEIDEGGER AND CURRERE: BEING-WITH BEING

Issues about what is real, what we know, and what is right provide the basis for our ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics. What postmodernism suggests, and reconceptualist theory offers, is that these are not the right questions. Questions about power, domination, stewardship, sustainable futures, creativity, equity, care, and hope dominate postmodernist philosophic debates, including those about teaching and learning in education.

The reconceptualization of curriculum theory proposes experiential, phenomenological relationships between teacher, student, and curriculum, not a “technical-scientific objectification of [their] subjectivity” (Heidegger,¹ 1993a, p. 172). The latter is an “illusion [that] everything man encounters exists [as] his construct” (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 332) and reduces what is taught to scientific treatments with predictable outcomes and what is learned to predetermined quantifiable fragments, not as ongoing, subjective experiences unique to each teacher and learner.

Pinar (1975) brought forth experiential and phenomenological dimensions of curriculum, describing *currere* as autobiographical “investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public” (p. 400). This description does not diminish the essential experience of schooling to subjectivity of the curriculum and suggests a Heideggerian being-in-the-world. Further, Pinar calls for “a self-hermeneutical, phenomenological method [questioning one’s lived-experiences] to help an investigator gain access to the *lebenswelt* (‘lifeworld’), or that realm of *lebenswelt* associated with *currere*” (p. 403). In this way, curricular inquiry becomes a purposeful “seeking...guided... by what is sought” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 25). Hodge (2015) proposed that “currere is to education what...being-in-the-world is to the understanding of consciousness: a redrawing of the phenomenological scope of the question that shows up the distorting limitations of [modernist’s] ways of questioning” (pp. 97-98).

Pinar (2011) offers *currere* as a process outliving classroom experience, a “complicated conversation,” enabling each learner, each teacher, and society to engage in ongoing “subjective and social reconstruction” (p. 2). Curriculum, conceived of as *currere*, “privileges the concept of the *individual* in curriculum studies” (p. 2). It relates to (in)forming each individual through classical and practical *Bildung* or self-cultivation, which includes qualities such as tact, “self-determination, freedom, emancipation, autonomy, responsibility, reason, and independence” (p. 66). (In)forming their character,

each teacher and student forms “a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge of general principles does not suffice” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 14).

In this paper, we use Heidegger’s Being to extend *currere*, incorporating each teacher’s perspective and developing what we understand as ontological citizenship. In this understanding, “everything is an experience” to be interpreted by the person who experiences it (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 204). After his “turn,” Heidegger explored Being as a being-in-relation Being, focusing on the “becoming” of Being (Carman, 2008, p. xx). This shift to ontological Being-in-relation orients teachers towards a sustainable, hopeful, creative, and engaged education and citizenry.

Heidegger (1962) introduced *Dasein*, the “there is” of Being, to emphasize ontological existence as experience-with-other and being-in-the-world (p. 26). *Dasein* and Being-in-the-world do not separate “I” from “they.” Rather, Heidegger’s ontology places Being-in-the-world-with-other in, not above or separate from, the social fabric. Personal and collective meaning-making emerge from cultural and historical embeddedness in past, present, and future (p. 63). Being-with allows *Dasein* to realize the paradox of existence with others while being alone with one’s self, emphasizing experiential and phenomenological aspects of *Dasein*.

A focus of being-with-Being entails being open to care for Other. In Heidegger (1962) “Da”² of Da-sein is not precisely the “there” of Being, but a presence in “thereness” and “openness” to reflect on the world (p. 344). This ontological treatment suggests that to be human is to experience sense-making within social contexts.

Each human can critically self-reflect on the meaning of their particular existence, which is shared with others. Purposeful self-reflection is grounded in one’s experience and phenomena encountered as opposed to being a “vacuous...free-floating thesis,” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 61). Rigid dichotomies, such as subject-object, human-non-human, school-society, thinking-feeling, and myth-logic dissolve, as humans interpret, understand, and direct being-with-other experiences, ways of being, and return “to the things [and phenomena] themselves” (p. 72).

VIGNETTE ONE: BEING-AS-TEACHING RECONCEPTUALIZED – KERI

Students hurriedly type their answers to questions awaiting them on the board the first day of class. After five minutes, one student asks, “Where is the teacher? Should we just leave?” A few students look up, exchanging uncertain, awkward glances while the rest continue typing their answers. In the back, a person in sandals, shorts, a Dr. Seuss “Teacher of All Things” t-shirt, and a baseball cap removes noise-cancelling headphones and walks forward asking, “Can we move on or do we need more time?”

Surprised, the students look up, some with furrowed brows of confusion. Others stare at the person walking towards the front of the room. They seem to wonder, “Who is this person taking control of the class?”

This person is me—their teacher. In the first five minutes of class, I challenged their preconceived understanding, that had been reinforced over eighteen years of their Being-in-the-world, of the appearance of a typical teacher and who should be a teacher. Teaching is far greater than an action—it is an act of being. We teach who we are (Palmer, 2007, p. 4). As I become more comfortable in my own skin, I realize that my students, especially those with disabilities, often become accepting of their perceived societal shortcomings. Over the semester, they learn socioeconomic

status, gender, religion, ethnicity, and disability do not define a person as less capable of teaching. Some find that traditional markers of marginalization can become assets in the classroom and catalysts for change in their future teaching.

A person is conscious of worlds disclosed to them, existing contingencies that shape the world they are “thrown” into, and “authentically Being-their-Selves [and] authentically [being] with one another” (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 344-345). In this sense, Dasein’s Being-in-the-World is a relational ontology of authentic-Dasein as conscious of and open to being in the world in ethical and caring ways—the for-the-sake-of-which ethical Being (Sheehan, 2010).

VIGNETTE TWO: AN ONTOLOGICAL ETHIC OF CARE – JAYNE

I always loved the history and philosophy of mathematics. The foundations of mathematics were being disrupted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in ways that fundamentally changed our expectations about the nature of what we can know in and through mathematics. My high school students always knew they could get me off topic by asking innocent-sounding questions like “What is infinity?,” “Why can’t we divide by zero?,” “What is a fractal?,” or “What is a paradox?” I happily conspired with them to tell stories about the history and philosophy of mathematics. But, what they didn’t realize was that these were the moments when I felt like I was really teaching. I hoped to instill in them an awe for mathematics, allowing them to live in their worlds in mathematical ways and to question the mathematics handed to them in textbooks. I wanted them to see mathematics not as something static or “pure,” but living, breathing, and changing. I wanted them to develop their own relationships with mathematics and experience mathematics as a way we make our world. Plato’s ideal forms and abstraction of mathematics give way to human creation and meaning making. I wanted students to understand mathematics as meaning making and connecting with nature, not as answers in a textbook or memorized procedures.

Student relationship-with-content unfolds through relationship-with-others. Heidegger (1993c) explores how humans “dwell” and belong, and Being’s situatedness is a “place” of sense-making, culture, and relationship, proposing Being as a relational, “event” ontology to “cherish and protect, preserve and care” for the essence of what is shared with others (pp. 348-350). Being exists in relationship, disclosing political, social, and educational “worlds” through language (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 170). Heidegger’s relevance to education combines hermeneutic, phenomenological, and relational aspects, making contextual being essential to furthering what it means to be-in-relationship.

VIGNETTE THREE: BEING IN THE CLASSROOM TEACHING LONG DIVISION – IVON

After graduating, I taught a Grade 4 class for four months. The principal suggested I not worry about the academic side of learning, but I worried—this was the year they learned long division.

I expressed frustration to my wife, Kathy, about my struggles in teaching long division. I followed colleagues suggestions to use the curriculum, resource guide, and text, but the same students still weren’t getting it. When Kathy asked how I learned to divide, as “new math” was gaining ground, I recalled tears during my struggle to learn “new division” and fears my teacher would not accept homework

solved with “old division.” My teacher did accept that the method was as important as the mastery.

Kathy suggested I teach students how I understood long division. I announced to the students we would learn more than one way to divide and see which worked best for each of us. Each student learned division by year end. This approach was consistent with what called me to teach: “making a difference for students” without understanding in advance what that meant.

Several months later, four students from that class tracked me down, calling each Prefontaine in the phone book until they found me, wanting to know how I was and if I was coming back. I learned that Being-in-relation with one’s students is not exclusive to their learning and my teaching. I experienced them as intertwined and interdependent elements of my teaching.

Heidegger goes beyond earlier understandings of Being-in-time to develop “worlding,” transforming Being through relationships with others and “Earth” (Heidegger, 1993a, pp. 170-171). Where things and works go “unrecognized [in] usefulness and serviceability,” ever unfolding possibilities are aesthetically “rediscovered by new inquiry” to be “brought forth [and] set forth” through the complexity of autopoiesis and self-creating within natural and cultural contexts (pp. 170-171).

VIGNETTE FOUR: OVERCOMING AMBIGUITY FOR BECOMING SCHOLARS – KELLY

As an academic editor, I often help doctoral students complete dissertations. I find it exciting when scholars transition from being student researchers to “owning” their research. One client was working on a project based in her home school district, where she attended school as a student and later taught and served in administration. Her topic was “home-grown teachers,” examining the phenomenon of why teachers often return to their home school districts to teach and whether it is a practice to be encouraged. This client had been in her doctoral program as ABD (All But Dissertation) for years and was in danger of hitting the deadline at which the university would refuse to allow her to graduate. When we began, she had the first two chapters of her dissertation completed and had collected data but had not written the analysis or conclusion. We reviewed the material and discussed the writing left to complete, and she began working on the final sections.

When she sent me a draft of her “analysis” chapter, it was no more than a very narrow paraphrase of the entire data set. I explained that it was her job to interpret the data, to provide the reader with a clear understanding of what the data said, and, as an expert on her topic, to judge what data was most important, what trends were significant, and what the data meant to future research and action. She felt she was not knowledgeable enough to make these calls and feared allowing her feelings and experiences to color her interpretation.

We discussed how she designed the study, how it took place in a familiar setting, and how she chose a phenomenon to examine because it aligned with her personal experience. She lived a similar story to her participants, and the entire dissertation was about wanting to understand why many colleagues followed a similar path. I asked, “Who is better suited than you to share with the world what this data means?” She stared in stunned silence. “Nobody,” she responded. A few days later, I received a second draft of the analysis chapter that was analysis, and good analysis at that. She was capable of the work all along. She simply had not

given herself permission to be the person she had become, an expert on her own data. As in my experience is often the case, once she embraced the idea that her dissertation was an exploration of her story and her currere journey, the work flowed, and she completed and successfully defended her dissertation.

Pinar (2012) used allegory to describe curriculum (understood as *currere*), reactivate the past, reconstruct the present, and discover the future as autobiographical and phenomenological reflection (p. xv). In Heidegger (1968), Being-in-the-world creates potential spaces for “thought-provoking” reflection (p. 31). Being-in-relation, dwelling, opens up spaces to reflect on and participate in the “mysterious” realms of Being (p. 31).

VIGNETTE FIVE: CREATING POTENTIAL SPACES FOR CHANGE – JAYNE

At the beginning of my graduate Organizational Theory classes, students typically have two areas of resistance, “theory” and organizational perspective. They find discussions about ontology, epistemology, and ethics abstract and confusing. What is the difference between interpretivism and critical theory? Is modernism “bad”? Why do we make things complex and look at organizations from many perspectives? These are some questions students ask at the beginning of a semester.

As we explore their current and former organizations from these various perspectives, new ways of looking at the complexity of social systems and organizations emerge for them. They understand the problem of Larry Nasser at Michigan State or the challenges of a business remaining relevant, multi-layered, interdependent, contextual, isomorphic, with its ethical implications and mandates. What appeared abstract and irrelevant in the study of organization theory suddenly provides multiple lenses through which to look at some difficult problems in social systems. They then can analyze and go one step further in enacting and creating change in their organizational contexts.

How people choose to-be-in-the-world and dwell there and define society has ethical implications, creating openings for new awareness of the world and existence. When “dwelling in tranquilized familiarity,” we de-contextualize lived-experience and the life-world, placing calculative thinking and instrumental uses of Being above meditative thinking (Heidegger, 1962, p. 234). We order, count, measure, and compare, obscuring Being’s unfolding, and “enframe” people, earth, and things, reducing them and relationships with them to “mere resources” for personal advancement (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 332). We come to understand people and resources as “standing-reserve” only, through technical and instrumental purposes, waiting to be summoned as if a machine and limiting authentic Being and relationships (p. 332). We plug into and unplug from relationships as is convenient.

Heidegger (1962) describes a relational ontology, connecting authentic Being through unconcealment with Being-in-the-World, “observing entities and marveling at them” (p. 216). Through “circumspection [giving] us a route to proceed,” rather than saving the world, authentic being honors nature’s essence and dignity, its capacity for self-creation, and human capacity to relate to what is possible (p. 216). Authentic Being honors natural rhythms, seasons passing, ebb and flow of time, and human mortality, avoiding instrumentalist attempts to control time and space, earth, and others. In

recognizing one's mortality, authentic and ontological being avoids existential angst and acknowledges divinity of spirit existing and persisting beyond death. An event ontology and understanding of authentic Being as an ethical Being-in-relation has implications for education. *Currere* supports authentic Being and avoids enframing that limits educational outcomes to what can be known, predicted, and controlled in advance, rather than ever unfolding.

CURRERE AND ONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION

VIGNETTE SIX: CONNECTING STUDENTS TO THE WORLD – JAYNE

I envy writing and social studies teachers for assignments that provide students' opportunities to place themselves in world contexts. As a dean, I experienced opportunities to visit schools and witness great teaching, even in an age of accountability. While visiting a school applying for special designation as a global school, I observed fourth-grade students learning about how plastics impact the environment. In the foyer, students displayed posters of various ways plastic refuse affects the environment and societies, with statistics, drawings, photos of animals suffocated by plastic bags, and pictures of children eking out a meagre living for their families by abstracting materials from mountains of plastic trash. What brought this alive was how students approached me to passionately describe the project, the data, unsustainable uses of plastic, how the environment was being poisoned, and their care for others who made a living going through our garbage. For me, this resonated as currere in action.

An event and relational ontology disrupts dominant discourses that focus on certain, predictable knowledge and a desire for human mastery and negate authentic Being. This ontology provides hope and promise for sustainable ways of being, essential in overcoming political, social, ecological, and economic division without guaranteeing success. For example, Warren (1997) and Griffin (2016) offer cogent, comprehensive critiques of modernism's alienation of women and their bodies in order to parallel raping the environment and to counter continued exploitation of people and the environment.

VIGNETTE SEVEN: TEACHING HUMAN BEINGS – KERI

My students begin their first course in the professional education sequence eager to master teaching skills. On the first day, they share what they hope to learn that semester. Classroom management and lesson planning are at the top of the list.

I ask them, "What will you teach?" One after another, they reply, "Art," "History," and "Biology." The list goes on as every content area is represented in my classroom. I answer "No" to each student, and they grow perplexed. Someone tentatively asks, "Students?" I reply that they are getting warmer. Finally, someone gives the answer I seek, "Human beings." I almost see light bulbs appearing above their heads and facial expressions reveal them pondering this new "truth."

I acknowledge asking them a trick question I as continue, "We do not teach subjects. We teach human beings." Human beings—with lived experiences, with hopes and fears, each wanting to be valued and appreciated, and hoping to succeed in the real world—inhabit classroom spaces. Our role is not to stand at the front of the class and pontificate about our favorite subjects. Rather, it is to listen with our eyes, with our ears and, most importantly, with our hearts as we model for them authentic ways of Being-with others.

As an educative event, the Being of being-in-relationships and *currere* engage the past, present, and future in non-linear ways, embracing impermanence, meditative thought, what exists, mystery, and a sense of wonder for what could be. In relational ontology, teaching and learning are understood as authentic, reflective, thoughtful, self-aware, and being-in-relation, seeking and supporting becoming in self, other, and the world.

VIGNETTE EIGHT: I AM – IVON

For 10 years, I began each year with an activity called “I Am” to inform my relationships with new and returning students in our multi-grade classroom. I distributed the poem and read it aloud. Student volunteers read it aloud several more times, allowing different voices to be heard.

In small groups, students discussed the poem and its meaning to each of them. Each shared something about themselves, describing what Stony Creek meant to them and what brought them there. I circulated, listening about and learning how returning students changed over the summer and about new students.

For 30 minutes, students engaged with the poem, themselves, and Stony Creek. I then asked each student to write two poems, an acrostic using their names and a free verse about their interests, feelings, dreams, etc. With the poems, they prepared a collage, finding and labelling pictures to reflect who they were (e.g., moto-crosser, dancer, horse person) and their relationships (e.g., son, daughter, student).

They tacked their poems and collages on bulletin boards, helping and learning about each other. They shared what the collages and poems said about them as people. I listened and learned.

Throughout the year, the collages and poems remained on the bulletin boards as touchstones for students, parents, visitors, and me. For me, they demonstrated what students cared about, dreamed about, and were interested in. If they struggled with learning, I referred back to interests they shared in their poems and collages. I feel this activity had an authentic effect on forming relationships between each of us in our classroom.

The authentic Being of education is a Heideggerian unconcealment, a becoming of Being. History connects the authentic Being with natural, social, and cultural pasts, propelling Being to shape the future. Mathematics, experienced in authentic ways, opens up new worlds for Being to interact and engage in the world, not for domination or control, but to understand and appreciate the beauty of patterns and connectedness of relationships. Learning new languages extends opportunities for Being to relate with others from distinct traditions. We derive deeper understandings and appreciations for cultural variance, to shape potential futures through discernment and ethical action, forming openings for Being. While learning can be instrumental, it is not its dominant purpose.

VIGNETTE NINE: STANDARDS DRIVEN CURRICULUM AND THE HUMANITY OF STUDENTS – JAYNE

I was fortunate as a mathematics teacher in the 1980s that I could develop my own curriculum to meet my students’ needs with my ultimate goal being to help them each form caring and personal relationships with mathematics. Rather than following a geometry textbook, we spent the first semester exploring various

deductive systems, including creating our own “taxi-cab” geometry with theorems and axioms associated with how a taxi in New York City might navigate Manhattan’s avenues and streets.

As a mathematics teacher educator after No Child Left Behind, I sadly realized I had to teach pre-service teachers how to “demonstrate effectiveness” and “teach content” for students to do well on exams. Beginning-teachers were asked to ignore their students’ humanity to the point of “giving up” on some students so averages met predetermined outcomes. Policies and my students asked me to “technologize” mathematics in ways that decontextualized them and their future students. In the end, I think this approach to education contributed to anti-education and a pervasive sense of schooling’s meaninglessness. I feel we lost our sense of what it means to be educated.

The authentic teacher is a Being who recognizes and supports the Being of others, including students, and their connectedness to their learning through creative openings. Non-authentic teaching enframes and reduces ideas and knowledge to instrumental purposes. It technologizes students, conflates learning with numbers in order to measure learning and time for learning. Authentic teaching supports Being’s attempts to uncover and transcend knowledge of a certain time, with openings to reflect and make meaning, and opportunities for connections, insights, and ethics through four moments of what is, what could be, what is impermanent, and what was and persists through time. The fourfold of Being is reflective, self-aware, thoughtful, an authentic being-in-relation, continually seeking and supporting autopoietic becomings of Being in self, other, and the world.

Poiesis (reflective self-creation) of Being undergirds educative experiences to support the knowing-spaces as meaning-making and relational at all levels of being. Education is a coming-to-presence and unconcealment of truth as Being (as a relationship), connecting past, present, future, with impermanence and wonder. It reveals worlds, opening spaces for meaning “over and above the thingly element” (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 145). Being-in-the-world is not about Being in a place but creating potential spaces of being-in-relation.

Transformational learning as a goal for 21st century schooling is driven by an understanding about what it means to know and do. It requires a shift from emphasizing static knowledge to embracing processes and multiple perspectives and from learning as consumption of discrete facts to learning embraced as connected, dynamic, and relational being. As a goal for the realities of 21st century curriculum, it challenges the essentialism of instrumental approaches to curriculum and teaching, providing adaptive opportunities for the 21st century’s realities.

Curriculum’s reconceptualist movement provides a way to “disentangle” education by challenging the link between education and curriculum as “the [fixed] content of what is taught,” the “track of the race course” (Pinar points out, the etymology of “curriculum”), and the “external” of what is taught, the “running of the race,” and experiencing curriculum as “*currere*.” Reconceptualizing curriculum as *currere* supports an ontological perspective of education to rethink “the key curriculum question—‘what knowledge is of most worth?’—... animated by ethics, history, and politics” (Pinar, 2012, p. xv).

CURRERE AS CITIZENSHIP

Currere, as method, provokes thinking about how the teacher and curriculum, supporting the learner as connected being, creates these worlds of Being that transform

the learner in the process. Using Heidegger's aesthetic to rethink transformational learning as unconcealment of ontological being evokes insights to develop opportunities for students to engage with learning in ways that support their "being-with" understandings as transformational learning. The setting up and setting forth of curriculum clearings provides spaces for students to create and engage in learning spaces of world-ing. The art-being of transformational learning can be supported by a being-with curriculum. The moments of *currere* (Baszile, 2017) integrate with a Heideggerian sense of ontological being to engage an educative experience for Being-in-relationship that engages the past, present, and future through the four-fold of Being.

Theorizing complex relationships between democratic preparation, freedom, and openings of educational spaces for authentic Being, we move beyond a narrative of citizenship as civic participation and respecting, or tolerating, the rights of others. We begin to appreciate our ontological Being as a complex web of relationships between authenticity, emergence, freedom, and dynamic interplay among individuals and their futures, through the context of their pasts and potentials. We envision an educational lifeworld embracing this ontological turn that supports

agency, transformation, materiality and relations...[and] the importance of being clear about how educators and educational researchers conceptualize ontology and engage with debates on the ontological turn in related disciplines...[creating] potential spaces for future action in a web of relationship. (Zembylas, 2017, p. 1401)

This is paramount as we seek to prepare our students to meaningfully navigate challenges of civic involvement to support multiple and overlapping perspectives of difference. As such, educating for ontological citizenship is supportive of authentic Being-in-the-world-with-others to celebrate as well as bridge difference across race, class, gender, sexuality, exceptionality, and disability, and overcome tribalism and isolationism as operating principles of the politics of difference.

VIGNETTE TEN: ONTOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP AND CURRERE

We began our conversations about being-with curriculum sitting around a table at the 2018 Currere Exchange. Over the past year, we engaged in ongoing and meandering through the moments of currere to arrive at ways of thinking about our roles in nurturing the forming of Bildung—reflective, expansive, lifelong learning as a means for freedom, autonomy, and personal responsibility—as a way-of-Being that supports an “ethic of care” and democratic embrace for authentic freedom, connecting an individual with others and society as a whole (Noddings, 1992). Through these personal and collective reflections, we have revisited our own teaching practices over our collective many years that intuitively supported a Being-centered approach to education. Emerging out of these conversations was a new way of thinking about authentic citizenship that is now especially important as we attempt to over-come and heal our many divisions and tribalisms that threaten to dissolve our democratic way of life.

Currere supports authentic Being through individual educative engagement. Both exist as ongoing processes, outliving each passing moment as one reflects on the past, imagines future worlds, and lives each present moment.

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Endnotes

¹The authors acknowledge that Heidegger is a controversial character. He collaborated with the Nazis and, even after ending his public support, maintained a membership in the National Socialist Party. Equally as damning was his silence and lack of contrition throughout his life. As noted by Krell (2008) in the General Introduction to *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, “Even those...who affirm the greatness of [Heidegger’s] thought [acknowledge] his engagement...was a monstrous error [and] his silence disturbing” (p. 30).

²Heidegger used a hyphen to emphasize his understanding of Da-sein as there is of Being and the ability to reflect on one’s existence in the time and place in which one is situated.