A reflection on teaching

It seems to me
That I use my voice too much
Leave my classroom
Parched
        (Which means I've failed again)
Because I've poured my
Words out and over them
Flooded their own thoughts with
Wave
        After wave
After wave
                        Of my own

Giving no respite for onehourandthirtyminutesand (20 minutes) plusseventymoremin-
utes

Except for
        Those few in the middle

And shouldn't I be
Asking questions
        Or collecting them?

Helping us to wake up from the anesthetic (of CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE)
More like a compress
        Than a fire hose

Or maybe everything above is
all wrong
And I should be
         stirring embers
To light
        our next moment together

        And then the next

Sarrah J. Grubb
Jan. 2022

Grubb, S. J. (2022). A reflection on teaching. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 1.

Confronting Normative Autobiography Conventions at the Intersection of Queer Literary Theory and *Currere*: A Fluid High School Homecoming

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Homosexuals are sick, perverted. We won't talk about them in health class.

The teacher said something that I heard for the first—and possibly the last—time in high school in Seattle in the early 1970s: the word "homosexual" coupled to a discourse of hate. Yes—his words were shocking, but their meaning wasn't surprising. "Am I a sick pervert?" I asked myself. Sitting in the back of the class, I sought invisibility. Just as the official curriculum of my high school in Seattle erased the identity of homosexual[1] students, I attempted the same. I now realize, so many years later, that my reaction to the hatred of the teacher's words was not about the bigotry, but rather my fear of breaking the norm.

Schools as institutions represent both the artifact of historic discourses and a passageway for those discourses into the future (Baszile, 2017b; Foucault, 1972, 1990). When I go back and attempt to remember my high school days (daze?) from almost half a century ago, the dated fashions and interactions from that period make it easy to identify bigotry and ideologies of the past. Although my high school experiences happened in the past, the same discourses of hate continue in the present. For example, according to the Trevor Project's (2020) National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, "48% of LGBTQ youth reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, including over 60% of transgender and nonbinary youth, 29% of LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or run away," and one in three LGBTQ youth reported that they had been physically threatened or harmed in their lifetime due to their LGBTQ identity (p. 1).

As we know from curriculum theory, American education was founded and fueled by discourses intended to maintain the power of the status quo (Tozer et al., 2013). Hegemonic historical discourses do not go away; they move forward by appropriating and nullifying cultural threats to their continuance (Sawyer & Benozzo, 2019). Official stories come to absorb narratives of resistance and lived liberation from the past (Edleman, 2007; Greene, 2021). For this reason, those who have lived stories of resistance, including those who identify as LGBTQ, need (if possible) to tell their stories in their own words to avoid the risk of being absorbed into the hegemony of more dominant narratives.

As I considered how to tell the stories of my high school experience as a queer man, I encountered a number of problems. First, the identity of LGBTQ students at the time I went to school—far from being acknowledged—were foreclosed and repressed on the institutional, the pedagogical (e.g., the lived curriculum by teachers, students, and others), and personal (e.g., self-views and socialization) levels. For me, this lack of physical occurrence and its official documentation doesn't imply a corresponding lack of lived experience in relation to erasure, schooling, and bigotry (examples of which I explore in this paper). Rather, these missing physical experiences foreground a null curriculum of schooling—the present absent—as a site for study (Sawyer & Norris, 2015). However, the construction of a binary between the official and the null curriculum is itself problematic. A goal in *currere* is to disrupt the trap of binary thinking as a

Sawyer, R. D. (2022). Confronting normative autobiography conventions at the intersection of queer literary theory and *currere*: A fluid high school homecoming. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 2–14.

context for the inquirer to progress to a greater understanding of possibilities leading to liberation (Pinar, 2012). As I explore in this paper, *currere* provided an inquiry language for third-space analysis (Pinar, 2012), for spaces of cultural translation (Bhabha 1994), which transcended binary (and normative) constructions in its analytic, synthetic, regressive, and progressive movements.

Another problem was about narrative and autobiography—that many of the patriarchal, racial, sexist, and abelist ideologies present in the past—those that have intended to define and marginalize people from non-dominant cultures—continue to inhabit traditional forms of storytelling and narrative (Bradway, 2021).Warhol and Lanser (2015) offer insight into "the many ways in which narrative represents, structures, and constitutes gender and sexuality, as well as the ways these concepts inflect narrative itself" (p. 3). "Dominant stories keeping the binaries in place" (Warhol & Lanser, 2015, p. 7–8) emphasize forward-moving logic (even with flashbacks), causality, future (positive) resolutions, and individual development (Matz, 2015). Such direction and logic often run counter to queer experience, which is more relational, episodic, unpredictable, and haphazard. Queer narrative emphasizes relational, not causal development (Cvetkovich, 2007). Traditional narrative conventions frame not only how stories are told, but also how the writer considers and imagines them: that is, the conventions, grounded in normative narratives, become hegemonic. Thus, given my history and socialization within public education, I was challenged in accessing non-biased memories of the past (Brown & Au, 2014).

These conventions also pose risks for biography and autobiography. Discussing gay biography, de Villiers (2012) stated,

> Biographical description becomes painfully acute, and the need to resist it becomes pressingly urgent, when the biographical subject is gay. The struggle for interpretive authority … intrinsic as it may be to the biographical situation in general, acquires an absolutely irreducible political specificity when it is waged over a gay life. (p. 11)

Sometimes, in fact, I think, who am I to tell my story? As soon as I develop a plot, name people and events—simply put words on the page—the story has been altered, reduced, and directed by the same conventions of remembering, interpreting, and writing that I would seek to deconstruct and disrupt. How do you tell a queer story? How do I tell my story without using recognizable storytelling conventions? If I tell my story with a Western, linear, future directed form of storytelling, I am binding my story with forms that reinforce bias and hate.

As I tentatively offer vignettes and examples from my school experiences I try to engage a subjective, personal, and queer sensibility, moving, at times, into an interior space—a null curriculum of my experience. Thinking about the past, we often highlight activity and behavior, thus, negating the value and meaning of inner experience—the site where a counter-narrative of resistance may have thrived. Telling counter-stories rooted in oppressive situations allows those spaces to re-emerge as counterspaces, "spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (Soja, 1996, p. 68, as cited in Taylor & Helfenbein, 2009, p. 322).

A Brief Description of the Historical Context

My high school was situated in and responded to broader societal changes, including legal movements, which impacted students. There was tension, for example, between

the school's traditional curriculum and the Civil Rights Movements, as well as between the traditional curriculum and the criminal investigations of politicians (e.g., Richard Nixon's tottering demise). It seemed to me then, and more so now, that the school was attempting to exert a conservative habitus, a coded symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1977), to defend against societal pressures and to present a template for student identity (Pinar et al., 2008). Conducting this study, I had a small epiphany when I realized that there was a balance between schools and laws in relation to the agency of identity and behavioral regulation (Au et al., 2016). Schools can play a de facto regulatory role (i.e., existing in fact or reality but not law) or a de jure role (i.e., existing in law), where legal regulation existed. For example, since Brown versus the Board of Education in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had made segregation illegal in public schools, the school shifted to a form of de facto segregation. At my school, social segregation occurred as a normal course of action (which I explore in this paper). The school took a different stance, however, where laws provided the regulation, exempting it from a more explicit mediating role. Thus, in relation to homosexuality, which was still illegal within the sodomy laws (not changing in Washington state until 1975), schools were under no pressure to enforce de facto social regulation of homosexuality. Freed of this function, my school could simply dismiss the regulation of homosexuality (and gay identity) as an explicit or even implicit focus.

But even with this dismissal, the times, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, they were a-changin'. Tension started building around the growing awareness of homosexuality. In Seattle, a rising gay presence led to different forms of social and legal regulation. For example, in the mid-1960s, the leading daily paper, *The Seattle Times*, ran the headline, "Seattle Homosexual Problem Reported to be 'Out of Hand'" (Wilson, 1966). In 1972, two men were arrested for holding hands at a roller skating rink in North Seattle (where I used to do the "Hokey Pokey"). Even following the state-by-state repealing of sodomy laws, public high schools were slow to consider the educational or social-emotional welfare of their gay students. It wasn't until 1985 that Virginia Uribe established Project 10—the first school-based program for gay and lesbian youth—in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Ocamb, 2019).

Currere's Evocative Polyvocal Spaces

Currere has provided a relational curricular language since its inception. Initially established as part of the first curriculum reconceptualization movement in the 1970s, from its start, *currere* emphasized the critique and disruption of normative discourses within schools and curriculum. As a form of lived curriculum, this critique was manifested by students and other practitioners of *currere* as they enacted their specific, situated narratives in relation to curriculum and each other in dialogic and generative ways (Pinar et al., 2008). Bill Pinar has mentioned how *currere* breaks from the logic of binary thinking (a hallmark of normative thinking) to create inbetween third spaces: "The analysis of *currere* is akin to phenomenological bracketing; one's distantiation from the past and extrication from the future functions to create a subjective—third (Wang, 2004)—space of freedom in the present" (Pinar, 2012, p. 46). In this third space, the four movements of *currere* (i.e., analysis/synthesis and regression/progression) can be overlaid to generate "cultural translations" (Bhabha, 1994) in the middle.

To re-enter the past in this space, Pinar highlights the process of free-association. In the regressive moment, to stimulate and transform memory, one free associates: "In doing so, one regresses, that is, re-experiences, to the extent that is possible, the past. The emphasis here, however, is the past, not (yet) its reconstruction in the present" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45).

As I engaged in my *currere*, I structured it as an evocative space (Ellis, 1997), one that requested responses from me. To structure this space, I worked with an arts-based approach involving old photographs. While often discourses are invisible as we live through them, by examining photographs from a different (slightly incongruous) time period, discourses may become painfully obvious. Some of these photos came from my senior yearbook, which I considered proxies of the discourses governing behavior as we walked through the hallways, sat in classes, ate in the cafeteria, and hung out by the back portables (including the one with a large yellow submarine painted on its side). And some of these photos came from the collection of pictures I took in high school, which I examined as examples of a null curriculum. At times I juxtaposed the yearbook photos and my own informal photos.

Rah Rah Rah Be True to Your School[2]: Regression and Analysis

You say you want a revolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the world
You tell me that it's evolution
Well, you know
We all want to change the world

-Lennon & McCartney, 1968

To trigger my free-association and re-entry into a null curriculum, I started by accessing the official curriculum (and my responses to it). I opened my box of high school artifacts that I've inexplicably carried around from apartment to apartment, house to house. I found an old report card with a grading rubric on the back. All in caps, the rubric told parents and students how to interpret the grades. The rubric shows five levels of grading in the categories of "initiative," "response," and "accomplishment." Under "A SUPERIOR" for Initiative, for example, it states, "Pupil works independently and has sufficient interest and initiative to undertake original projects beyond assignment work." However, the definition for unsatisfactory for the same category shows that student initiative is regulated and categorized: It sates, "Pupil is indifferent toward suggestions or daily work." Under "B ABOVE AVERAGE" for Response (with response meaning how well and quickly you respond to the teacher's orders), it says, "Responds promptly and in a workmanlike manner to all assignments." Under "A SUPERIOR" for Accomplishment, it says, "Makes splendid progress in mastering the subject and in the cultivation of highly desirable habits of work." And finally, under "F UNSATISFACTORY" for the same category, it states, "Fails to work reasonably near the level of his ability and does not meet class requirements." What I found so surprising were clear discourses in the rubric that emphasized teacher control, work and work habits, and independent knowledge that matched the classroom knowledge. The ambiguity in the authoritative language of the rubric gave teachers abundant room to exercise implicit (and passive aggressive) bias.

As I dug more deeply in the box, I found my old high school year book. A high school yearbook is the official documentation of a particular year at the school. As schools operate as both the channel and artifact of discursive meaning (normative ideologies), yearbooks provide a time capsule of those meanings, both collecting and projecting them.

The first noteworthy thing about the yearbook is its cover. Under the name of the school (that of a 17th century British queen), there is a skillful drawing of William Shakespeare, feather quill in hand, sitting on the steps of the school, getting ready to

write. In case the connection between the departed queen, William Shakespeare, and the school itself isn't clear, there is a plaque on the wall behind Shakespeare that presents the name of the school.

Opening the yearbook, I flipped through 150 primarily black and white pages. I started with the class portraits. It is important to note that there is a long list of names of students who chose not to appear in the student gallery. My gaze was then arrested by the story of the candid photos and their captions. It's interesting to note that the Shakespearian captions operate as narration. Here, I first present descriptions of a few photos followed by an interpretation of emergent patterns and themes. I intentionally block these descriptions to isolate the photos and create an alienation effect (Brecht, 1957).[3]

<table>
<tr>
<td>A hand holds an open pair of scissors to the face of a young male student with a flat top. The next photo shows what appears to be a face mask on a pole. The caption reads: “Sans eyes, sans taste, sans / teeth sans everything [sic]. –As You Like It.”</td>
<td>A female student with bangs in a long sleeveless cardigan is carrying a thick notebook. She appears startled and has a surprised look on her face. The caption reads: “The naked truth of it is / I have no shirt. –King Henry VI.”</td>
<td>Four male students, two of whom are standing, circle around a female student who is apparently saying something with (mock?) annoyance. The caption reads: “The lady doth protest too much, me thinks. –Hamlet.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A girl in a sweater vest writes on a piece of paper in the library, with an open book in front of her. The caption reads: “The rest is silence. –Hamlet.”</td>
<td>A male student, puckering his lips, is camping it up, holding out a limp (disabled? gay?) hand and opening his long trench coat to the waist. No caption.</td>
<td>A male student with a long, crooked smile and gleaming eyes is holding a small rope noose. He is looking right into the camera. No caption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the first of two facing pages, the “Men's Club Officers” are pictured. In the lower photo the four male teenage officers, all smiling, are dressed in evening attire (black slacks and jackets, white shirts, black bowties) standing in front of an expensive, LA style restaurant. In the top photo the same four students, again smiling with debonair assurance, are standing around what appears to be a bar; drinks and straws are in front of them. No caption.</td>
<td colspan="2">The opposite page shows four photos of the “Girls [sic] Club Officers.” A faculty advisor and the female officers engage in public functions, probably in an auditorium. Five of the female officers are at a well-known viewpoint near the school, standing in front of a sculpture with a well-known city landmark behind them. They are dressed similarly in long (stewardess like?) sleeveless argyle sweaters, white knee-high socks, black skirts, and white shirts. No caption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two male students, one of whom appears slightly overweight, sit at a cafeteria table strewn with food wrappers. The caption reads: “Sweets are uses of adversity. –As You Like It.”</td>
<td>A heavy male student with a bald or shaven head smiles disarmingly at the camera. The caption reads: “There's no time for a man to recover his hair/ that's grows bald by nature. Comedy of Errors.”</td>
<td>A female student is reading a book, possibly in the library. The caption reads: “There is nothing either good or bad, / But thinking makes it so. Hamlet.”</td>
</tr>
</table>

All the above students appear to be white. Except for the class portraits, a small number of male black students were pictured in the formal clubs and on the sports teams (maybe a total of 10). A total of three black male students were shown in the candid photos. Shockingly, not a single black female student was pictured in any of the candid or even club photos (they are in the class galleries). In a close inspection of students packing a wooden bleacher at a football game, no black faces—male of female—were evident. Aside from the photos of the athletic clubs, there were 69 photos of (white) male athletes in action and none of female athletes, white or of color.

I didn't tally the number of students who were pictured multiple times in the candid photos in the yearbook, but there were approximately 100 students who repeatedly pop up. There were also, based on my own photographs of students around the school, large numbers of students who were not pictured at all.

The yearbook communicates and rewards an idealized image of white male strength, masculinity, beauty, and territoriality. The young men leap, run, toss, carry, tackle, block, huddle, kick, shoot, bounce, dribble, pitch, catch, bat, flex, swing, put, score, and win. This idealized image is seen in explicit representations of power, for example in the name, "The Men's Club," and in the warrior-like images on the playing field. It's also communicated by implicit messages, for example, in the male gaze projected onto the images of females who were sexualized, trivialized, cornered, and silenced in their photos or captions. It's seen in the mocking descriptions of overweight males. And it's seen in the tantalizing glimpses of future pleasure as these young men swing a club on the fairway and then rest an elbow on the clubhouse bar.

Striking is not so much the hegemony of power in the hands of straight white males embedded in a lush field of Shakespearean prose. Rather, it's the reified and closed nature of this power. The images and captions taken together signify a totalitarian stance: the avenues of power are one-way and open only to a few.

These examples of the official curriculum starkly force me back to my past resistance as a student. On a piece of paper I brainstorm and cluster. Classes appear at random, and I can again hear the voices of my teachers:

> In Spanish class: "Grammar doesn't lie. Conjugate correctly."
> In Sociology: "The medium is the message."
> In English: "The pearl is symbolic."
> In gym: "Take a lap around the Space Needle and then run back up the hill."

To this day, as I remember the sound of their voices, I experience anxiety and dread. With the exception of the sociology teacher (who I liked), the above teachers projected a hidden curriculum of authoritative, static knowledge and passivity within rote learning. Some of my friends were more outwardly rebellious than I was. Instead of taking a lap around the Space Needle, they would run three blocks down the hill and stop for a smoke. Light headed, they would then, fifteen minutes later, join their classmates on their uphill climb.

I realize now that I rebelled by taking photos. In the analytic phase, I laid the photos out on the desk and let them talk to me. I arranged them one way and then another way, with different stories emerging from the changing juxtapositions. With random juxtapositions, the photos broke their narrative contexts and told new stories in the spaces that lay between them. I need to be clear here that the intention of creating random arrangements was not to promote a sense of anarchy, but rather to begin to untether meaning from its narrative associations and open channels of consciousness toward new future possibilities.

To deepen associations and re-enter the moment, as I moved the photos around I listened to music "from the day," whose lyrics I occasionally add to the mix. The following are my descriptions of some of my photos.

About forty people, most walking individually, take different paths across the courtyard: jeans with acid wash, long hair parted in the middle on males and females, dark clothing, long shadows cutting the light on the ground. The bodies are frozen in time, as if in a ballet.

The courtyard is ringed by the castle-like fortress of the school and then the newer mid-century optimism of the cafeteria. Geometric blue paneling on the walls of the one-story cafeteria alternate with large windows, creating a Mondrian field, but a seemingly flimsy one, almost built of twigs compared to the main school building.

Two young men in flannel fight in the street with sticks, their long hair flying, faces distorted (and blurry). To the side, a young man leaps in the air to catch a Frisbee. Two young women dressed in black lean against a wall and look at me.

It's a family affair…
One child grows up to be someone that just loves to learn
And another child grows up to be someone that you'd just love to burn
Mom loves the both of them
You see, it's in the blood
Both kids are good to mom
Blood's thicker than the mud
It's a family affair. (Stone, 1970)

Two young women stand next to each other. One wears a fuzzy dark coat and holds a notebook; the other wears a pea coat and has her hand in her pocket. They look directly into the camera, revealing a private moment of friendship. A good-looking young man—only half in the photo—stands to their right, sporting blond bangs (Andy Warhol style), a dark shirt, jeans.

An attractive male student sits on the steps of a loading dock off the courtyard. He's dressed in wide-vertically striped white and grey slacks, a herringbone coat, a white shirt, and suede boots with buckles. His long blond, slightly curly hair parted in the middle, falls to his shoulders and to his cheeks, nearly touching a Fu Manchu mustache. He's surrounded by his friends, all with long hair (front and sides), with the young women in black tights and the young men in Left Bank dark dress jackets. He's trying to balance a skull on his knee. A pack of Tarryton cigarettes leans against the skull, which is capped with a homburg hat.

In a staged photo, a pack of cigarettes lean against a skull, which leans against a book. The title of the book is *Atlas of Human Anatomy for the Artist*, by Peck. The props are placed on a textured concrete walkway, lined by a low, stained cement wall.

Bobby! Should I take 'em to the bridge?
(Go Ahead!)
Take 'em to the bridge:
(Take em to the bridge!)
Should I take 'em to the bridge?
Yeah.
Take 'em to the bridge?
Go ahead!
Hit me now.
Go ahead.
Stay on the scene… (Brown, 1970)

Following this random juxtaposition, I moved my photos next to the yearbook photos. Intentionally, I sought evocative combinations. I extended the gaze of the young woman in the yearbook surrounded by males—looking into the camera—by placing it next to the two women in my photo, looking ambiguously at me, another male. I ask myself about my complicity with male privilege that the photos suggest. Next to the photo of the students in the yearbook who've been body shamed for their appearance I placed my photos of perfect bodies—of male and female beauty: what are my own implicit biases of beauty (Shelton & McDermott, 2012). I sought to deconstruct them with my pictures, but they deconstruct mine, and my authorial authority fails me as I tried to assign identities to others. As I broke my images from their narrative logic, I lost a comforting sense of complicity with the past and a secure sense of privilege.

These particular images I now see have played a profoundly pedagogical role in my life. The women in my photos (and in the candid yearbook photos) were asking me to step outside the small frame of the yearbook and take responsibility for my choices in life (and teaching). Had they read Maxine Greene? Probably not. But to me, they were existential beacons, shining a light for me forward. And the artist, arranging the skull, book, and package of cigarettes in a mid-twentieth century tableau of art and evil, showed—yes—the medium was the message. Without explicitly knowing it (before doing this *currere*), I now see these photos represented root metaphors for my life, grounding me not in an official curriculum of hate (as found in my classes), but rather in a null and unofficial curriculum of engagement, public action, and self-authorship.

Thinking back to the grading rubric, I understand my opposition to standardized, culturally-biased grading and prescriptive rubrics that sort students into winners and losers. I repeatedly ask myself, as a person who works in higher education: "If I don't believe in standardization (conflated with standards), what are my principles in education?"

I return to my high school. Later, in the afternoon, I cut through the basement hall lined by wrapped water pipes on the ceiling and wires on the walls. I go into the darkroom of the photography class (It's lunch, so class isn't in session) and leave with a

couple of crisp contact sheets of new images. Then, I run into my teacher, who I always avoided. He was a middle-aged white male with a flattop haircut, thick slightly pink skin, and a heavy presence; he always seemed ready to pounce on me whenever I entered his private reserve (the classroom). He asks to see my contact sheets. It's important to note that this may have been the first time I even talked to him or, rather, that he talked to me. He immediately dismissed my photos. But he isn't looking at the pictures. His mind goes blank as he judges me.

One of the images on the contact sheet, taken from an upper window of the main building, shows a gray street, a limp American flag on a tall flagpole, a blank retaining wall, and long shadows everywhere. The shadow of the flag looks like a smudge made with a thumb. One image of a person, partly obscured behind the flagpole, walks across the foreground. Wooden telephone poles, including a thick one in the immediate foreground and electric wires cut the photo into jagged segments. Silence and alienation permeate the image.

Moving Toward New Possibilities: The Progressive and Synthetic Movements

In this *currere*, I've explored some of the broken contextual pieces of my high school experience. These pieces have included regulatory grading rubrics, erasures, images of desirable masculinity, sexism, homophobia, racism, an official curriculum promoting mainstream knowledge and power, people fighting in the street, art critical of corporate greed, war, protest, happiness, music, and sex. Although I've described my experiences from nearly fifty years ago, similar broken contextual pieces exist today—an indication of the power of discourses to mark and pass through different time pieces.

And it is these historical continuities that I find so alarming as I ask myself, how have I as a faculty member in higher education remained complicit in the bigotry at play when I was in high school. I mentioned earlier that I had ah-hah moments about similarities between my views at the time and those found in the yearbook related to beauty and male power. But for me, my bigger epiphanies were about similarities of erasure. While the regulation at my high school may have been de jure and legal, in these days of marriage equity, it has become de facto. With the rise of consumerist neoliberalism, LGBTQ identity is more visible but also co-opted and nullified by the media and the marketplace as sites of domesticity and consumerism (Duggan, 2002; Sawyer & Benozzo, 2019). In higher education, complex LGBTQ identity and culture (at least in my experience) are still erased. Hiring processes, for example, continue to raise questions of "fit," often in direct opposition to diversity statements. The tenure and promotion process rewards the production of mainstream knowledge (as seen in journal impact factors and anti-intellectualism). The societal critique and rejection of normative gender and sexual binaries found in queer theory are marginalized in higher education as identity issues and not acknowledged as epistemological and ontological concerns.

Examining these background dynamics, I now begin to grasp the capacity of high school (and university life) to exhaust and deplete those who are out of step. I think back on my 17 year-old self, an awkward, self-conscious teenager, who, prone to optimism, sought to grow into healthy adulthood. For me, this is where the null curriculum becomes especially important as a projection of my experience. On the one hand, vulnerable and guilty, I expressed through the null curriculum and internalized messages of sin, resulting in my hoping that I was just going through "a phase" (a popular notion at the time) from which I would exit married with children. And on the other hand, also vulnerable but

resistant, I rejected the intolerance—the hate, really—of the mix and tried to imagine and create a new life. The problem I encountered, as so many other LGBTQ people encounter, was the lack of a language for this new vision.

However, I was lucky to be able to enter at my school into an informal curriculum, a "counter-cultural" mix that contrasted with the formal curriculum. This mix existed for me in the peripheral spaces of the school—the hallways, the courtyard, and the alley bordering the cafeteria. In these spaces, a vibrant and organic counter-curriculum proliferated. For me, the counter-curriculum became the dominant curriculum, while the official curriculum became peripheral. My photos of the informal spaces show a pedagogy of resistance, of counter-narratives, of fluidity—the rhizomatic mingling of bodies on concrete—and of heteroglossia.

In this sense, the informal curriculum became dialogic, inclusive, lived, and equitable. It was a reaction to "the project of homogeneity" and homophobia. However, a sharp duality existed between the "homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the social functional citizen [in the established school curriculum]" "and the teeming world of multiplicity and hybridity…[in the] lives of youth beyond the [classroom]" (Matus & McCarthy, 2003, p. 74). This duality, intentional I would say, cordoned difference off from the classroom curriculum.

As part of the synthetic movement of *currere*, I reject the "happy ending" found in conventional autobiography and narrative. In this *currere*, in which I sought new possibilities for LGBTQ life and experience, I have experienced new possibilities in the process of the *currere*, not in its product or ending. Pinar clarifies this possibility found within curriculum:

> To understand curriculum as deconstructed (and deconstructing) text is to tell stories that never end, stories in which the listener, the "narratee," may become a character or indeed the narrator, in which all structure is provisional, momentary, a collection of twinkling stars in a firmament of flux. (Pinar et al., 2008, pp. 448–449)

The meaning for me is in dialogic engagement. While there were no visible queer people in this informal space at my school, for me, this was a queer space, layered into other discourse communities. Here, a third space of cultural translation emerged from voices of critique and multiplicity (Bhabha, 1990; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). It wasn't so much about sexuality as about ways of living, critiquing, (de/re)constructing, and transacting. It provided me with a voice to critique, reframe, and queer the traditional curriculum of the school. I now see my own attempts at photography as grounded in the resistance, irony, resilience, creativity, and open-mindedness of this space. Then—and now—I critiqued the center of the school from this amazing peripheral space. Photography gave me a language of resistance. I should note that there was no present-absence (i.e., null curriculum) for me with this informal curriculum. The deconstruction and critique—the queering stance—was present for me. And in this momentary space that I've tried to envision—dialogic, relational, nonpatriarchal, contingent, and collective yet different—the possibilities for a progressive future lie.

Continuing Reflections: The Bright Curricular Language of *Currere*

Currere matters in the struggle for equity. It has helped me to recognize historical continuities within bigotry (those discourses especially destructive). It has also helped me to surface and begin to understand patterns of resistance to such bigotry within a critical

nexus in the present, a process of relational engagement and increased consciousness. Writing a *currere*—disclosing past experiences and events—may be difficult (at least for me). But critical stories need to be told, and told without the use of narrative conventions that reinforce dominant ideologies.

Currere and queer literary theory potentially animate each other. *Currere* provides an inquiry language for queer self-study, framed by relationality rather than causality, performativity instead of essentialism, and openness rather than closure; queer literary theory pushes *currere* toward a more critical examination of heteronormative structures in both its analytical and synthetical moments.

Currere also helps with lingering anxiety from the past. When I first considered conducting this inquiry, I began to re-experience the angst and even despair from my high school days. Many of my nebulous memories centered on the projected authority of teachers and an official curriculum of exclusion. I was unsure how to place the three teachers who offered me encouragement and validation (an art teacher, a sociology teacher, and a student teacher), but I now look back at them with gratitude. I now also see that the beauty, creativity, and resistance of friends represented new possibilities of engagement within the school (and life). For me, then and now, the hope for new possibilities for future LGBTQ lives (and those of others) exists within collective engagement in the moment. *Currere* and queer narrative theory underscore this realization: calling for an understanding of temporality as pedagogy, Jesse Matz asks queer narrative theorists to shift attention "from time-schemes that shape our lives to those that are shaped by our practices and rhetorics" (Matz, 2015, p. 247). The happy ending doesn't come at the end. It comes in the middle.

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Endnotes

[1]In this paper, I use period terminology.

[2](Wilson & Love, 1963)

[3]Throughout this paper, I offer my narrative structures as illustration, not as template.

A Journey towards Discovering Novel Ways of Teaching and Learning

By Somanita Kheang
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The Regression: Multiplication and Me

Being born and raised in Cambodia, I was taught to learn everything by rote so that I would always be prepared to answer any questions related to what I had learned. My elementary teacher—in 2nd grade, to be specific—emphasized that the best way to excel in multiplication was to repeat what we learned and practice it every day. I readily admit that I did not have a real passion in mathematics, so learning by heart was a reasonable approach to use to let multiplication facts sink in. This learning technique, though, was boring sometimes, and I could not help but wish that I did not have to take mathematics. As I started taking more advanced mathematics, I increasingly felt that learning multiplication was an unpleasant obligation, and there was no way that I could say "No" to it. I found being good at mathematics increasingly onerous, especially when my mom did not let me play with other kids on weekends if I had not mastered my math lessons. My relationship with mathematics, thus, grew worse, and it seemed to reign supreme in my childhood. To put it plainly, I don't have any good memories of learning math, only frustration and dull moments. On one occasion, one of my classmates was punished and made to stand up in class for about half an hour just because she did not remember her multiplication facts, nor did she understand how multiplication works. This served only to convince me further that multiplication was not useful for anything—the only reason that I tried to be good at it was just because I wanted to get a good grade and make my parents happy. Still, I took to heart the belief that the best way to excel in any subject in my elementary school was to learn it by heart so that I wouldn't have to risk being embarrassed or even punished for drawing a blank in front of my teacher and other students while being tested in class.

In similar fashion, I took the same approach—learning by rote—to excel in my writing class in elementary school. I was taught to write an essay using only the structure that was provided by the teacher. While this linear approach allowed me to be successful, I found it uninspiring and impersonal. I wished to be given leeway to write my essay and present it to the class using whatever style I felt comfortable with and enjoyed doing. One day, we were asked to write a short essay about family members and present it to the class as our mid-term exam. I knew that I had to follow the writing script in drafting my text, but I thought that showing some creativity in terms of how I presented my essay to the class could result in higher scores. I wrote the required essay and turned it in to my teacher, but instead of reading my entire essay to the class word for word as we had been instructed, I drew a picture of my daddy reading a newspaper, my mom cooking food, my sister watching TV, and myself playing with my brother and presented that collage to the class. I colored everything nicely as I imagined being showered with compliments. My hopes were dashed when I received a poor grade because I did not follow the instructions. I felt this was very unfair, and the whole experience came out as a disorienting dilemma to me. I cried myself to sleep that night and could not get over the humiliation and feelings of unfairness for several weeks.

All of my classes in elementary school had the same format and expectations—we had to sit in a row, listen to the lectures, and do homework following the guidelines

Kheang, S. (2022). A journey towards discovering novel ways of teaching and learning. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 15–22.

provided by the teachers. I did not feel comfortable practicing these norms, especially when the entire learning process was just copying verbatim whatever I had been given. I became convinced that, in order to be successful in school, students should not even try to question that norm. Following that pattern, I achieved success in school, but I am not remotely proud of my achievements to this day.

I have always been the kind of person who resists following what people say I should do, preferring my own ways of learning and doing things. I was fortunate to be nurtured by great parents in a close-knit family. My mom and my dad are my best friends—they raised me to be an independent and strong woman so that I am not afraid to have my own opinions about things, while still being willing to discuss and compromise if needed. Plainly put, I have developed my life philosophy from their wisdom and ways of living. I still remember what my dad said to me when I asked him how to discover my passion so that I could succeed in life. He gave me the following advice:

> *Know yourself, your values and your brand, and you will be able to build a firm foundation in yourself that even a big storm cannot break apart. Considering yourself a victim of any life circumstance is not remotely attractive. You are who you choose to be. There is no upper limit to your success—you just reap what you sow. If you believe that you can do it, you definitely can do it. Dealing with rejection is not always an easy thing to do, but remember that only the strongest survive. Never take failures in life as a limit to your possible self—it is just a test of your creativity and perseverance. Accept the message from reality and keep moving forward with hope*.

His advice really touched my heart, and my self-doubts were magically brushed away as I contemplated on my life goals and how to successfully achieve them. The definition of success was no longer an ability to get everything I have set my mind on, but the fact that I have tried my best with what I believe I could do.

In my quest to integrate my educational history with the person my parents had raised me to be, I sought out education in three different countries (Cambodia, Thailand, and the U.S.), which allowed me to compare and contemplate the possible and preferable future of helping teachers and students to teach and learn mathematics in a more effective way. One of the major issues that the teachers in my home country of Cambodia have is that they all are trained only to practice specific pedagogical techniques to help students learn, and there are very few professional development opportunities for them, which means that they have no support for learning more effective instruction techniques. I first started to think about the importance of providing teachers with a variety of pedagogical approaches when I was in Bangkok, Thailand, for my master's degree in Non-Formal Education at Chulalongkorn University (CU).

The Thai education system allows students to select from different learning settings, environments, and activities. For example, their system recognizes both formal and non-formal education diplomas and certificates. In my two years in Thailand, I had a chance to visit various non-formal learning centers in different provinces, including Chheang Rai, Pattaya, and Pech Buri, to name a few—those learning centers provide opportunities for younger and older adults to learn basic mathematics and literacy, life skills, and other vocational training. The teaching and learning happen in a place that is convenient to students in the community, and the learning schedules and activities are flexible in accordance with learners' learning styles and preferences.

In the second semester of my master's degree in Thailand, I was introduced to the concept of andragogy, and I became more familiar with the theory and practices of andragogy when I came to the U.S. for a study exchange in Fall 2013. The term andragogy was first introduced by Kapp, who was a high school teacher in Germany (Henschke, 2016). According to Knowles (1980), andragogy is the "art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43). Kheang (2018) emphasizes that the application of andragogy in teaching means that teachers' beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are important in building trust and helping students learn. That said, although andragogy is an art and science of teaching adult learners, it is recommended that the approach be applied in the teaching of children as well.

Many teachers in the U.S. education system do not realize that their teaching methods are a combination of andragogical and pedagogical theories, which is not surprising—usually, this term is only introduced to and/or stumbled across by adult education scholars who have done research or who are taking classes in the field. Still, compared to the education systems I have experienced in other countries, the U.S. education system values creativity (including students' diverse learning styles), integrity, and freedom of learning for both adults and children. The characteristics of this education system encourage students to be self-directed and active (rather than passive) when it comes to learning specific subject matters—both in and outside of classroom (Kheang, 2019, 2022). The learning activities in the U.S. K–12 and higher education systems prepare students to challenge what is right and what might be a better way to look at and/or handle particular problems. The growth of various teaching and learning techniques in the U.S. education system resulted from their school principals and teachers being open to new ideas and concepts while helping diverse students learn.

The Progression: My Dream of the Future of Mathematic Teaching and Learning

As a result of my education in Cambodia, Thailand, and the U.S., I have come to the conclusion that andragogy is a very inspiring learning approach indeed, especially when the students are given leeway to be self-directed learners. I also learned that teachers should trust that every kid is unique in terms of how they learn certain things, and those kids should be encouraged to use any learning style that they believe can help them learn the subjects. In other words, teachers should not play the role of authoritarian, but rather that of facilitator in supporting students' learning processes. There should not be an absolute rule when it comes to how particular subjects can be learned. I would like to empower elementary teachers to borrow andragogical instruction techniques and apply various teaching activities and allow students to take part in choosing the learning activities that are helpful for their learning processes—this practice will help elementary students learn and excel.

I strongly believe that education is the passport to a better future, and it is a ladder to a myriad of opportunities and success. I also believe that learning mathematics, or any other subject, does not have to be wearisome, and every student should be encouraged to excel in learning in a less stressful learning environment than the one I experienced. The disorienting dilemma in my childhood has continued to resonate with me, and I have become crystal clear that I want to be a teacher so that I can develop alternative methods to teach students and utilize my knowledge, skills, and experiences to inspire others to think more, do more, learn more, and become more. As a teacher educator, I want to encourage the future generation of elementary teachers to be more sensitive

towards students' diverse learning styles and be willing to compromise when it comes to providing instructions for completing specific homework. To accommodate student success, I hope that the future generation of elementary teachers will consider applying both linear and non-linear approaches to help students learn, allowing for more flexibility and creativity. I understand that there are multiple steps and obstacles that I need to experience in order to reach the pinnacle of this career as a teacher educator—getting a higher degree, more experience in teaching and working in higher education, and, especially, interacting with more scholars in the field so that I am up to date with how mathematics is taught in elementary school. Additionally, I need to be able to teach and inspire adults (elementary teachers) in this rapidly changing world to teach mathematics in a more creative and fun way.

Analyzing the Possibility of Inspiring Elementary Mathematics Teachers

As I continue to inspire mathematics teachers to strive for changes in their instruction styles, I give myself permission to value creative ideas and academic interests as they stand alone, without needing approval. My passion is to work with future teachers as leaders to co-create learning environments in which mathematics teachers are utilizing both linear and non-linear approaches to teach and learn from students in this rapidly changing world. The power of this transformational journey unwinds through this spiral even as I write these words. I am inspired by my parents, my professors, and my entire educational journey to make such transformation possible for good.

In this process, I am currently working on my second doctoral degree in Adult, Workforce, and Continuing Professional Education at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. I consider myself both a teacher and a lifelong learner—these two identities tangle together in my work as a graduate student, teaching assistant, and researcher. My first doctoral degree is in Instructional Leadership, and I am convinced by both of my doctoral journeys that the only way that I can be a worse teacher is when I believe that there is only one way for students to learn specific content, and that one way is for them to follow everything I say.

Instead of being an authoritarian, I am inclined to allow my students to utilize their learning styles and techniques that might be helpful for them to learn specific content. I continue to provide support to students whenever they need it, and to do so, I have made myself more accessible to students—students can set up an in-person and/or an online meeting with me if they have questions or concerns regarding specific learning goals, assignments, or other learning issues. I have faith in my students, so I always provide them a second chance to submit their assignments should they have proper excuses for late submissions or problems with successfully completing the assignments on time. I believe that all of my teacher education students are unique and capable of becoming wonderful teachers after graduation. To me, learning is a process of growing and becoming a more capable person, so students should not be merely judged by whether or not they have firmly followed the guidelines or instructions provided by me as their teacher, but whether or not they are willing to learn from their mistakes and commit to better learning outcomes.

Additionally, I always encourage my students to bring their creativity to the table when it comes to classroom discussions and accomplishing specific projects or assignments. I strongly value creativity in learning, simply because I believe that creativity is not confined to special people or to particular art-based activities, nor is it undisciplined

play. Instead, "creativity is possible wherever human intelligence is actively engaged and is a vital part of an effective education: it includes all areas of understanding and all children, teachers and others working in primary education" (Cremin & Barnes, 2015, p. 359). Nurturing learner creativity, thus, should be acknowledged as a key aim for both educators and school leaders to help students learn, grow, and succeed.

Unfortunately, utilizing creativity in elementary classes might still be a real challenge for Cambodian teachers. I still keep in touch with my elementary teachers from Cambodia, and they connected me with some of their friends who had expressed interest in utilizing fun and helpful learning techniques to help their students learn. I had a chance to interact with mathematics teachers in an elementary school in Cambodia and learned about their experiences and challenges in helping students master multiplication concepts. It was an informal meeting, so all of the teachers were willing to share their challenges in helping students to stay focused and engaged in math class. I was told that most students tend to misbehave when being told to follow guidelines and review the previous mathematics lessons in class. Some students would make noise and choose to be punished by the teacher instead of submitting their mathematics homework. Some provided excuses for not doing their homework and ended up getting a bad grade in class. Teaching mathematics had become a real challenge for elementary teachers, and the problem was only going to get worse if no effective intervention was taken. This issue was reported to the school during a monthly teacher meeting, yet no resolutions were recommended to mitigate this tension.

In my meeting with these teachers, I asked if they knew what "andragogy" is, and none of them said "yes." One of the main barriers to working with teachers from Cambodia is that they are comfortable with the traditional pedagogical teaching method, and they expressed reluctance when being introduced to andragogical teaching methods—even if it was just a suggestion to combine andragogical and pedagogical teaching methods to provide a more fun and relaxed learning environment in a mathematics class. For example, teachers can help students learn mathematics by using pictures, games, or cartoons to explain the mathematical concepts rather than a whole bunch of descriptions and notes. Those teachers expressed concerns that students may not pay attention to the significance of mathematics if they are allowed to learn it in a relaxed and fun environment. They fear this could result in a lack of discipline, and students might earn even poorer grades on their final exams. After my conversation with these elementary teachers, I came to the realization that, in order to transform teaching elementary math given these barriers, it is important that teachers be encouraged to be more open-minded when it comes to applying various teaching methods to help students learn. Teachers need to also trust in the power of positivity and fun and be willing to support and encourage students to try novel ways of learning mathematics.

This change process can start with teachers having a creative state of mind that is exercised and developed through their creative practices and creative personal/professional curiosity (Cremin et al., 2009). Teachers can learn to be creative by exchanging ideas and experiences with fellow elementary teachers through a process called "peer mentoring." This process does not require any authorization or school policy changes to make it happen. All that is needed is the teachers' commitment to student success.

Friere (1998) talks about correct thinking and how a teacher who thinks correctly transmits to the students the beauty of our way of existing in the world (pp. 34–35). He encourages students to think correctly in order to reflect and act accordingly with

the surrounding environment so that they can generate new and innovative ideas to address issues they face. Smyre and Richardson (2016) also encourage students to ask appropriate questions and engage in debating and using dialogue so that students can develop innovative and transformative ideas in a rapidly changing world (p. 53). I am convinced that mathematics teachers can borrow this correct thinking technique to help facilitate the learning of their students, since this allows students and teachers to be more open when it comes to the learning style and processes that might be helpful for students.

Synthetic Stage: Exploring Novel Ways to Teach and Learn Mathematics

Creativity is the basic element in evolution. If there is anything I, as a teacher of adults, seek to do in my practice with adult learners/students, it is to guide, motivate, and support them to be more creative and think correctly so that they can succeed in any learning circumstances. According to Smyre and Richardson (2016), in order to dive beneath the surface of casual thinking, we need to unlearn our traditional educational ideas and relearn at a more complicated level so that we can deal with the nuances and subtleties of an increasingly complex world (pp. 35–36). My teaching philosophy is to teach with love, trust, and understanding. I teach because I want to affect changes in others, and the key to helping adults learn and grow is to work with them using both the head and the heart. I seek to apply both pedagogical and andragogical instruction techniques to help adults learn. I focus on learning processes rather than learning content when it comes to the facilitation of adult learning in the classroom.

I believe that every student (whose age is 18 years old or older)—regardless of gender, socioeconomic status (SES), race, ethnicity, culture or educational background—deserves to be treated as an adult—as one among equals—in the learning process. In order for the education of equals to occur, I design pedagogy and instruction according to subject matter differences, individual differences, and situational differences so that diverse students in my class can relate course content to their cultural contexts. I play the role of facilitator rather than teacher in the learning process. My facilitating techniques are in line with Knowles' (1980) eight learning processes: preparation, climate setting, mutual planning, self-diagnosis of needs, setting objectives, designing a pattern, conducting activities, and evaluation. In the doctoral classes in adult education that I taught at Lindenwood University, I used andragogical approaches to engage students in a positive learning environment, in which they could utilize their past experiences as learning tools and use both their peers and the facilitator as educational resources to enrich their understanding on particular subjects. As a facilitator, I also encouraged students to discover their inner voices and authentic selves so that they can actively participate in classroom discussion, discover their passions, and ultimately unlock their unique potential for the sake of success in the graduate program. Ten doctoral students in my EdD program reached out to me for further advice on their dissertation writing process given that they appreciated how I led the entire classes with sensitivity, trust, and love.

Additionally, I believe that students learn best when they are encouraged to become self-directed learners. Thomas and Brown (2011) mention in their book, *A New Culture of Learning*, that learning can take place outside the school context, and as long as learners stay true to their learning needs and goals, they will become self-directed and unstoppable. The authors introduce the concept of arc-of-life learning, which emphasizes that, in this 21st century, there are various learning approaches that can allow both teachers and students to learn. We can also use this concept with teaching

kids. For example, mathematics teachers should be up to date with new ways of helping students learn. They can use technology—such as the internet, email, and games, to name a few—to facilitate teaching and learning processes and enhance our own comprehensive understanding of specific subject matter so that we can help students learn mathematics in a less stressful way (Thomas & Brown, 2011, pp. 17–33). The COVID-19 pandemic is a great example of how teaching mathematics online is possible, even though it may not be a preferable way. Online teaching is still novel to the majority of Cambodian elementary teachers, so incorporating mathematics in an online learning environment would take time. The effort could still be worth it.

Equally momentous, mathematics does not have to be a scary subject for elementary students if the teacher allows students to make mistakes and learn from their experiences. Even though mathematics is a concrete science, students should be given chances to learn, practice, and improve their multiplication skills without too much pressure and punishment. Thomas and Brown (2011) acknowledge the concept of "tacit learning" as the production of three dimensions of learning: knowing, making, and playing. These three techniques should be embedded in the process of mathematics teaching and learning because it is important that educators understand that both knowledge and belief are situated as a question of "what." For example, in "knowing," "what" refers to the content of knowledge that students should learn, but it also embeds teachers' specific *beliefs* on how students can learn specific content (i.e., group discussion can be considered as one of the techniques that mathematic teachers can use to help their students learn because teachers believe that students can learn specific content through a peer-support technique).

"Making" refers to how knowledge is transferred beyond information sharing—through the process of making, students learn how to craft the context of their learning process in addition to creating the content—this helps students with decision making processes as they are dealing with problems and changes in this fast-changing world. For example, in order to use "making" in the classroom, mathematics teachers may show students the specific content that they want their students to learn (information sharing). Students then develop a context regarding how and where they want to learn—they may want to learn through memorization, role play, arts, or games, to name a few. Once they have decided which learning approach works best for them, they then decide on whether learning from home or at school will help them grasp the concept or knowledge of specific content better. As a result, they may come up with a suggestion of specific learning activities that might be helpful for them to learn similar content or content of a specific type in the future. When students are engaged in the "making" process, they tend to develop their flexibility and creativity in learning, and this helps solve many mathematics learning issues (p. 94).

Playing creates culture—it allows students to engage in complicated negotiation of meaning, interaction, and competition, not only for entertainment, but also for understanding why learning mathematics matters in life. For instance, teachers can teach mathematics through gamification. Smyre and Richardson (2016) mention in their book that gamification is a great strategy that adult educators can use to engage students' instincts for learning and socialization (p. 95).

Teaching is a challenging yet rewarding profession. Educators need more than a working knowledge of creativity and the prescribed curriculum in order to be creative educators. We must be sensitive and supportive when it comes to helping students learn and grow. Inspiring future elementary teachers requires time and effort as well as strong commitment to enabling changes in traditional instruction techniques. We should not

solely focus on standardized test scores and mere academic records, but on students' experiences and on helping them develop a strong determination to succeed in specific subjects. Mathematics can be taught in a fun and flexible learning environment so that students and teachers can work collaboratively to ensure more promising and satisfactory learning processes and outcomes.

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Finding and Loving Myself

By Sheryl Evans Davis
San Francisco Human Rights Commission

Who Am I
Am I who I should be?
Or am I still trying to be
Who people think
I am supposed to be?
Or at least who I was told
I'm supposed to be?
A good respectable
Christian girl,
One who follows
all the rules,
Is kind to others,
Humble, and hard working.

Should I let out the
scared little girl?
The one I locked up
To avoid the shame
And pain of childhood?
The one who is
Broken and afraid?
Not for herself
But the darkness
Of family secrets,
The truth that
Ruins lives,
Destroys reputations,
And makes plain
How the sins
Of our fathers
Are passed
Through the generations.

Show up
As your true self.

Who is my
True Self?

Evans Davis, S. (2022). Finding and loving myself. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 23–25.

Be Your True Self

Mad self
Sad self
Want to hurt
You back self

Shy self
Quiet self
Want to run
And hide self

Cute self
Sassy self
Go on
With yo' bad self

Silly self
Funny self
Gonna make you
laugh self

Like the many
Faces of Eve
You can't believe
All the selves
I am and can be

Black Like Me

I choose to be
Black like me
The Black don't crack me
I'm not talking about my skin
But my peace within
The peace that encourages me
There is no shade
Or color of Black
that's "Really Black"
There is no
Area code
Zip code
Neighborhood
Language
Clothing
Housing
Income level
Socio-economic Status
Music
Walk or talk
That defines
My Blackness

I Am Black Like Me

Texas born
California raised
Homeowner
Foreclosed
Renter
College failure
College graduate
Student
Teacher
Daughter
Sister
Wife
Mother
Separated
Almost single
Complicated
Hopeless
Hopeful
Tough
Sensitive
Hard
Soft
Alone
Lonely
Nosey
Anti-social
Funny
Compassionate
Painfully driven
To be the best
Me
I can be
For
My ancestors
My community
And the communities
to come

A Tool for Becoming: Intersecting *Currere* & Theatre of the Oppressed

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There are many frameworks, theories, and methodologies that fall outside of traditional ways of knowing and knowledge production. As educators and scholars who often operate on the margins, working with populations that are historically vulnerable, we continually search for frameworks and theories that bring our own experiences and the experiences of the folks we work with from the "margins to the center" (hooks, 1984). When we function within the cold confines of the Eurocentric norm (i.e., whiteness), we begin to think something must be wrong with us. Some of us have come to understand that we all know differently, and our knowing is informed by different spaces, experiences, and ways of being in the world. *Currere* and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) offer counter-narratives to traditional narratives, also known as master narratives, which are the stories that not only get the most airplay, but are the broadly accepted and inherently deep stories orienting how we understand society (Ross, 2021; Zamudio et al., 2011). In general, counter-narratives create spaces for individuals to become active participants in the struggle for justice within educational, social, economic, and political contexts, and the *type of counter-narratives* will determine the functional limits of the created spaces (Ross, 2021). Counter-narratives aid active participation rather than passivity, thus, creating space for people to fully engage in all aspects of their lives. The merging of *currere* and TO draws out and excavates those counter-narratives that have been buried beneath the heavy weight of master narratives.

Through the use of *currere* and TO, we transcend traditional notions of knowing and knowledge production by examining the reasons why we act, think, and feel in ways that often align with the oppressor. In much the same way that William Pinar (2012), the pioneer of *currere*, suggests that we use the stages of *currere* (regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical), Augusto Boal (1992), the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, uses games to introduce "de-mechanization" (p. 41) or breaking down the way that we have been trained to understand and interact with the world. The aim of both *currere* and TO is to deconstruct our personal histories and stories, allowing us to gain cultural awareness and insight into systems and structures of power and privilege. Intersecting emancipatory frameworks such as *currere* and TO aid self-reflection and create a path to examine historical trajectories to better understand past, present, and future decision making. We promise that this is a path worth taking. As Boal famously said at the beginning of his workshops, "come closer," and let us discover what is "not yet present" (Pinar, 2012, p. 46).

Intersecting Theatre of the Oppressed and *Currere*

If, as Shakespeare (1603/2018) posited, "all the world's a stage" (p. 45), then perhaps theatre is a revolutionary act that allows us to embody possibilities for a future that does not yet exist. Augusto Boal (1985) was firm in his belief that theatre cannot and should not be separated from politics and that theatre is the embodiment of struggle, "a rehearsal for the revolution" (p. 123). Boal, who was bold enough to conceptualize theatre as a revolutionary weapon, understood the importance of people moving from the position of spectator to actor. This idea connects to Freire's (1970) concept of the dualism of the oppressed:

Radina, R., Webb, M., & Ross, G. (2022). A tool for becoming: Intersecting *currere* and Theater of the Oppressed. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 26–31.

> The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being *spectators or actors.* (p. 48, emphasis added)

TO allows people to step outside of the tradition of being spectators into the role of active participants in the struggle for their own liberation. Boal (1995) writes, "Theatre or theatricality … allows man to observe himself in action, in activity. The self knowledge … allows him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives" (p. 13). TO allows us to step back and observe systemic oppression and then provides space for us to consider alternative pathways to work towards liberation. This process of engaging in various theatre techniques and games allows us to practice intervening in many different contexts, while exploring different possibilities for taking action and creating change. "In Theatre of the Oppressed, reality is shown not only as it is, but also, more importantly, as it could be. Which is what we live for—to become what we have the potential to be" (Boal, 1992, p. 6). This process must also be collective. Boal (1992) passionately describes why this is the case:

> We cannot live in isolation, under arrest inside ourselves. We can learn enormously when we recognise ourselves in alterity: the *Other* also loves and hates, fears and has courage—just like me, like you, even though she/he, you and I have cultural differences. Precisely because of that, we can learn from each other: we are different, being the same. (p. 2)

Currere is also a process of discovery and helps us connect not only to ourselves, but to other people and our collective history.

Baszile (2017) states, "*Currere* is an attempt to reclaim education as a journey toward self-understanding or an understanding of self as it is always in relation to other selves and always positioned in the world at a particular historical moment" (pp. vii–viii). Therefore, when we embody our experiences through the merging of TO and *currere* we see ourselves in the *Other,* and our cultural differences become bridges of connection. An ecosystem relies on all of the various components within—a system that makes the connections and creates order out of chaos, responding to the outstretched hands of the various connectors (human beings) that are yearning for connection, cohesion, comradery, liberation, and the protection of their humanity. This does not mean we dismiss or minimize our differences—exactly the opposite—we find strength in our differences and only then can we truly know and love the other. Freire's (1993) words capture the importance of embodiment,

> The importance of the body is indisputable; the body moves, acts, rememorizes the struggle for its liberation; the body, in sum, desires, points out, announces, protests, curves itself, rises, designs and remakes the world. … I think it's absurd to separate the rigorous acts of knowing the world from the body. (p. 87)

As scholars, we believe it is absurd to situate our work and ourselves as active participants in struggles for justice but ignore the ecosystemic and epigenetic manner in which the body informs life (i.e., what was, is, and can become). The intersection of *currere* and TO helps us to become critically conscious of our bodies, emotions, thoughts, words, and actions.

Currere and TO share important characteristics. Neither are fixed, both are in motion, and both are lived and experienced in and through the body. Freire (2005) suggests, "Whatever I know I know with my entire self: with my critical mind, but also with my feelings, with my intuitions, with my emotions" (p. 54). In order to truly know something, we must experience it in the body. We must walk in the spaces we seek to know and understand; we have to feel pain, joy, hope, and love. TO provides the mechanism to embody different ways of experiencing and knowing the world. It connects to our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. TO opens up space to imagine new possibilities, "imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use" (hooks, 2010, p. 61). Educators must work hard to foster imagination because, as bell hooks (2010) teaches us, "in dominator culture the killing off of imagination serves as a way to repress and contain everyone within the limits of the status quo" (p. 60). This is similar to the progressive stage of *currere* in which imagination is an important tool in the process of becoming (Pinar, 2012). Merging these two practices taps into emancipatory possibilities, because it allows us to imagine, shape, and embody dreams that have not yet been realized. Similar to TO, the fourth stage of *currere* (synthetical) is transformative. Other stages are used to inform, analyze, and make meaning of the present. *Currere* begs the question, "Now that I understand where I have been and where I am now, what's next?" This is the stage where one can utilize insights from the past, present, and future to move toward transformation. One of the goals of *currere* is to learn from our experience and take action. TO gives us the ability to practice acting out those experiences and intervene to create a different outcome.

While *currere* and TO are standalone methodologies that allow individuals to broaden the scope of how they understand themselves and their ability to act, *currere* and TO make a powerful combination. This intersection provides a variety of tools, aiding people to embody and tell their stories in different ways. TO creates space for people to tell their stories (examined through *currere*) by embodying their past experiences and sharing who they are and how they show up in the world, while also imagining future possibilities. TO puts *currere* into action—building a bridge to bring our stories to life and place them center stage. The ability to express our stories outside of oral and written traditions creates space to recognize how our stories connect. This also allows us to appreciate our differences and expand on what we accept as valid ways of knowing and being in the world where "the only access we have to advocating with/for others is through the self (Baszile, 2017, p. viii). *Currere* helps us to better understand the self through reflecting upon and writing about the memories that weave our story together—sometimes an eloquent and complex pattern and at other times a messy, tightly wound, and bound knot. Regardless, both patterns are part of a beautiful tapestry that we can further bring to life through the use of theatre techniques and games that help us excavate, dig deeper, search for the root. This is a necessary and painful process that can lead to liberation—but we cannot fear entering into the unknown darkness of the rabbit hole; we must engage with courage and vulnerability, entering the deep caverns of the past that inform the present and provide a trail of cherry blossoms leading to the heart of the matter in a future not so distant, but still just out of reach. As Pinar (2012) explains, the progressive stage of *currere* is the search for "what is not yet present" (p. 46).

A New Methodology: A Contextual Example of Intersecting *Currere* and Theatre of the Oppressed

The intersection of *currere* and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) creates space for individuals to do self-reflective work. The intersection of these two methodological

frameworks is best suited as a process of exploration. Although we have shared some aspects of *currere* and TO, a deeper understanding of *currere* and TO as separate methodologies will help practitioners determine the best way to intersect the two within their specific contexts. In the next section we provide an example of how we intersected *currere* and TO, not as a prescriptive "right" way of engaging in this work, but to display how we used it in our specific context. Given the time constraints of the workshop model, we focused on the regressive stage of intersecting *currere* with TO. We recommend going through each of the stages of *currere* to execute a project using the intersection of *currere* and TO. In addition, there are multiple ways in which TO can be used intersectionally that are not explored in this paper.

Complete the Currereian Image

Part One- Currere: Focus on your Regressive

This was an activity used during a conference workshop. There were 18-20 participants who attended this particular session. Prior to the start of the workshop, participants were told that they could choose not to participate or to stop engaging in an activity at any time. These techniques can create emotional triggers, and so it's important to discuss the ability to step out of an activity before the start of each workshop. After a brief overview of the main stages of *currere* and some of the techniques and theoretical underpinnings of TO, participants were led through a series of warm up games that are typical in TO workshops (see Boal, 1992). Participants were then broken up into pairs and instructed to take three minutes to think back about an important educational experience or memory from school. The memory could be positive, negative, or a combination of both. The remaining time was used to share their experiences with their partners. The return to the past in *currere* allows for working through intellectual and emotional blocks to reconstruct one's relationship with oneself and the world (Pinar, 1994). As soon as the participants started to share their stories within their pairs, an emotional intensity could be felt in the room. After participants had the chance to share their stories with one another, the TO component of the activity was introduced.

Part Two-Incorporating TO

Each pair was asked to retell one of their previously shared educational experiences with the group. However, there was one important caveat—they had to share the story through an image, without using words. We asked them to use a variation of a TO technique called *Complete the Image* that was practiced earlier in the workshop with participant-generated words. In *Complete the Image*, one person starts the image by creating a shape with their body and their partner completes the image. Once they were finished with their images, each pair was asked to come to the center of the room and share their *Currereian Image*. Audience members were prompted to walk around the pair and write down or ask questions about the *Currereian Image*. Within TO, Boal (2002) suggests:

> Dealing with images we should not try to 'understand' the meaning of each image... but to feel those images, to let our memories and imaginations wander: *the meaning of an image is the image itself.* Image is a language. (p. 175)

The audience members respond by sharing how the image makes them feel or how they make meaning of the image. By hearing multiple interpretations, the people who created the image will understand "hidden aspects" of the image, as illuminated by the audience (Boal, 2002, p. 175). Further, Boal (1992) suggests that "art does not reproduce the real; it represents it" (p. 293). It's important to note that an image should not be interpreted

in just one way; clarity of what the creators meant is not important. In the case of one interpretation, "it ceases to be Image Theatre and becomes a mere illustration of the words spoken" (p. 175). The *Currereian Images* were very powerful, and many of the participants became emotional when they shared their embodied representation of their regressive educational experience.

After the completion of this activity the group engaged in a facilitator-led dialogue. First the participants were asked what this activity was like for them. Many of the participants shared that the experience was more emotional than they had anticipated. Some participants discussed sharing positive experiences, while others talked about negative experiences of school. The fact that participants shared different kinds of schooling experiences speaks to the power and privilege dynamics in the room. It came as no surprise that some of the participants who shared negative schooling experiences were *othered* in some way because of their personal identities (i.e., race, social class, or ability). Many of the participants who shared positive schooling experiences were in privileged positions in regard to their identities (i.e., white, middle class, and heterosexual). This is a powerful approach to deconstructing different experiences of schooling based on positionality. This could also be a valuable exercise to use with pre-service and/or in-service teachers to help them better understand the power dynamics in the classroom. Facilitators then led a discussion based on the following questions:

(1) How might people use this in educational spaces?
(2) How might this encourage a consciousness about diversity?
(3) How might this process facilitate remembering past experiences in order to imagine new possibilities?

During the discussion, participants were cautioned again about the use of these techniques in their own contexts. The facilitators advised them to be aware that this exercise may trigger deep emotional feelings for their own participants, and they should be prepared to address all potential outcomes. This is particularly important to keep in mind when working with youth and other vulnerable and/or historically marginalized populations. The key is letting participants know ahead of time that they can choose not to participate in certain activities or leave an activity if it becomes too intense for them. Prior to beginning this process, ideally, practitioners should have a list of resources for participants who may have experienced some kind of trauma, so they can seek professional care if necessary. This approach to self-reflection and understanding requires vulnerability and trust from both the participants and the facilitators. Therefore, it is important that facilitators navigate this process with care and compassion, attending to the needs of the participants.

Conclusion

Collaborative work both in and outside of the academy is essential. We must spend time reflecting, but we cannot do this in isolation. This is particularly important in a society in which:

> Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community. (hooks, 2010, p. 60)

Working with other scholars, educators, and activists can help us see the world through various lenses. By providing readers a glimpse into the collaborative space we created through our exploration of the intersections of *currere* and Theatre of the Oppressed, we hope to encourage other scholars, educators, and activists to engage in this work. We plan to continue exploring the intersectional possibilities of TO and *currere* as a way to move this work forward. Disrupting the master narratives and traditions that lead to the treatment of bodies as unremembering organisms is a necessary act of resistance to create inclusive spaces for human uplift. This also allows us to create and maintain space for different ways of knowing and being in the world. Radina (2018) speaks to the notion of being who you are in the world: "What a painful, yet beautiful, process it is to become someone—the person you can recognize when you look in the mirror" (p. 53). Using TO and *currere* as an intersecting methodology and sharing what we learn through our practice adds to the body of work on becoming. This powerful approach reinforces the notion that humans are diverse, evolving beings, rather than mindless objects to be manipulated. Instead of docile spectators, we are actors, engaging in a liberatory path toward a future that is more just and equitable—a future with a multitude of possibilities.

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Circumstance and Possibility

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Broken windows and barred doors enclose the remnants of paper and steel mills once vibrant and filled with noise in this small, blue-collar, town. Hunger, homelessness, and poverty follow when employment and community resources wither. Out of the shadow of this brokenness, public schools become a refuge providing warmth, meals, and safe spaces. Schools present the possibility of a brighter future; they foster hope. Well, school is where I put my hope. It is through these conditions that I developed my love of learning particularly through reading stories of lives that were different from mine, lives filled with families playing games and visiting the beach, lives that I could only imagine, but imagine I did.

Boylorn and Orbe (2016) describe autoethnography as "cultural analysis through personal narrative" (p. 17), and they add, "by engaging the retrospective lens of autoethnography, they use their stories to engage their identities as evolving and vulnerable" (p. 21). Autoethnography, in this sense, is similar to Pinar's (1975) *currere* method in that it is biographical, reflexive, and analytical regarding my educational journey. It synthesizes the impact of the temporal, socio-cultural, and educational experiences on my life path—past, present, and future—and my current professional role in higher education as an academic coach, mentor, and researcher. *Currere* in practice might illuminate where our narratives connect with or diverge from our students', and acknowledging these stories could inform our relationships with and support for them.

The *currere* model provides a vehicle for "living with a simultaneous sense of intrasubjectivity and intersubjectivity—both an individual and shared sense of making meaning, making self, and making the world" (Gouzouasis & Wiebe, 2018, p. 4). This autoethnographic and *currereian* reflection, through critical theory and as a critical research methodology, endeavors to "understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, p. 20).

Here, I present a glimpse of my story and three students' stories; these are our lived experiences. Impoverished social conditions, particularly in economically depressed geographic locations such as what I and these students have experienced, may be difficult to transcend. However, this story illustrates how education is a beacon of promise and hope. It always has been and continues to be such for me, and it is for these students and many like us.

Circumstance can be harsh, and it can be serendipitous. This small town has a beacon that attracts the unprepared into a new and strange world—a world with tall, brick buildings, long hallways, offices, paperwork, schedules, and fees. But it is also a world with many familiar and welcomed comforts: libraries, books, classrooms—a continuation of the safe spaces where I first imagined my life could be different, better. If it were not for the circumstance of geographic location, I would not have known how to attend college, and I never would have. I suspect these are similar circumstances that now prompt students to my office, in this strange and unfamiliar world, seeking encouragement and guidance to navigate these challenging spaces. And, these are the circumstances that drive my passion to support them.

Flick, B. L. (2022). Circumstance and possibility. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 32–34.

Who Am I and Why Am I Here
An example—definitely
A role model—hopefully
Resources, support, encouragement
A harbor for physical and emotional refuge—only after trust
Only through an open heart
Who are You and Why are You Here
(all pseudonyms)
Allison
mother, friend
mourning the suicide of a loved one
mental health, depression, OCD
strong, determined
seeking,
seeking…
Maria
mother, laborer
forging a path for her children
conqueror of language barriers
proving it's never too late to finish what we start
commitment, dedication
seeking,
seeking…
Brittany
mother, provider
juggling work, school, financial aid
overcoming obstacles to achieve dreams
passionate, determined
seeking,
seeking…

Stewart (2020) explains Pinar's four component *currere* method of regressive–progressive–analytical–synthetical as a reflection of and discovery between the individual's lived experiences relative to time and place and one's conceptualization or understanding of how this situates and informs our personal and educational journeys. *Currere* inspires us to compose our autobiographic narrative, to analyze the temporality of these socially constructed experiences, to help us derive a path forward. It can encourage agency, agency for us as individuals and as educators. Gouzouasis and Wiebe (2018) expound on the method of *currere*:

> In the process of describing the connections between ones' personal experiences, the many relationships between and across professional and personal work, and various ways of knowing, we may arrive at a predominant question: what has been, what is now, and what can be(come)—regarding not only the nature of our educational experiences, but how those experiences are related to the broad, interpretive spectrum of the auto in coalescence with the lifeworld. (p. 2)

My journey is reflected in the previous student vignettes, and I hope my vignette will inform a piece of their journeys. We are intertwined culturally and personally through

our vulnerabilities and through our strength, commitment, and determination. We share a goal to transcend our impoverished circumstance through education; education steers our meaning making and our seeking. Why do working-class and first-generation students decide to attend college? Seeking, Seeking… What does it mean to them to graduate from college with a four-year degree? Hope, possibility…

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My Journey to Surrendering Power in a Writing Workshop

By Leah D. Koch
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The clock read 10:40. Time to transition to writing time. I looked out over my noisy, engaged second graders. They were busy with the independent math choices: playing math games, practicing flashcards with partners, and using manipulatives to solve word problems. I announced that it was time to clean up and switch to writing. The group collectively groaned. Writing was generally their least favorite subject, and I couldn't blame them. Silently sitting and working on a teacher-determined prompt sounded a lot less appealing than our fun, collaborative math time with choices and hands-on activities.

The class gathered at the carpet, and I led the narrative writing lesson. Today, I was encouraging kids to narrow the focus of their personal narratives to a specific beginning, middle, and end. As I modeled an example on the board, it was a struggle to get more than a few hands in the air to respond to my questions. I sent them off to try the work at their tables. A few kids stared at their papers, completely unmotivated, as I walked around encouraging them to get started and check the spelling of sight words. After ten minutes, I realized one student hadn't even gotten out his pencil yet.

The scene described above played out daily during my first year of teaching. By the end of the unit, after weeks, I would be shocked that some students had only managed to create one book with a couple sentences on each page. I didn't know how to motivate my class to write, let alone view themselves as creative and skilled authors. I led what I perceived to be interesting lessons using slideshow presentations. I read picture books from the curriculum kit and pointed out what I thought they should try. Of course, my students labeled "gifted" or "advanced" delivered, but even then, the writing didn't sound like them. They just knew enough about school to meet my expectations. They could successfully fit the mold of what I needed, but other students fell behind. Rather than valuing each student's unique identity and story, I pictured success to be every student's writing looking and sounding the same (Kissel, 2017).

Typical elementary writing classrooms look similar. The teacher is the main, if not only, audience for student writing (Ring, 2020). Students are unmotivated to write (Ruben & Moll, 2016), likely because the writing projects are not inclusive of youth or diverse cultures (Christianakis, 2011). Writing curriculum is formulaic, rather than creative (Seely Flint & Tropp Laman, 2012). The teacher holds the power, and students are passive participants in writing to meet the teacher's expectations.

In this piece, I explore the relationship between my journey as a writer and development as a teacher of writing. I've realized that I hold far too much power in my writing classroom. If I want to hear my students' voices through writing, I need to surrender some of that control. This piece aims to reflect on my lived experiences as a teacher and student to imagine a future where my students develop and grow as authors. Pinar's (1994) *currere* method aids my reflection, because I am looking within myself and my lived experiences to determine the best way to help my young writers reflect in the same way. Kissel (2017) argues that writers have an internal compass; "They look back, look forward, look inward, and look outward. … [They consider] where they've been and where they need to go next" (p. 58). I seek to define my internal compass in

Koch, L. D. (2022). My journey to surrendering power in a writing workshop. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 35–40.

this paper. I use the *currere* framework (Pinar, 1994) and my own experiences as data to analyze my past and present as an elementary writing teacher. Through this reflection of who I am and how I got here, I will determine where I want to be in the future. As I grapple with my identity as a teacher, I hope my students can reflect in the same way to develop their own identities and voices as authors.

Regression: Reflecting On My Past Teaching

I remember the first time I was proud of my own writing, when I wrote a book about holiday celebrations in the first grade. It was my own idea and represented my family and background. I didn't write it at school, so I had no requirements to follow. I was free to be an author with my own rules. Yet as I progressed through school, I learned I could write to fit the mold of the assignment and nothing more. To me, this meant avoiding extra work and creativity, aside from the rare experience that I was interested in and excited about.

As a preservice teacher, I didn't have any courses about how to teach writing—a lapse that occurs in most teacher preparation programs (Kissel, 2017). I didn't know how to listen to young writers and center their needs in a writing workshop. So, when I accepted my first teaching position, I was suddenly thrust into a new role. I shifted from the student who only worked hard enough to meet the teacher's standard to becoming the leader who sets the expectations. I found myself attempting to coax more heart and effort out of young writers, in the same way my teachers had begged me not long before. When students couldn't meet the standard, I increased the rigidity of expectations by designing organizers and outlines for students to follow and limiting the topics they could write about. Thus, my solution to engage my students and increase their achievement was to take more control, hoping I could bend my students to fit where I needed them to fit. I centered myself and my experiences as a middle-class white woman, sending a message that my students' stories were unimportant. I communicated that young writers were "incapable of doing the important thinking work that writers [do] to choose their own topics" (Kissel 2017, p. 118). I needed students to listen to me—and yet, I wasn't listening to them.

Then, the summer after my first year of teaching, I participated in a writing workshop institute with the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project from Columbia University in which attendees had to keep a writer's notebook. At first, I hated it! I was there to learn how to teach writing, not to be an author myself. The first day, I didn't take it seriously and only wrote enough to *look* like a participant. As we reflected, I realized I was performing exactly how my students did. I wasn't trying to be a writer—I was just trying to complete the assignment. Kissel (2017) asks, "Can we really teach writing effectively if we never engage in writing ourselves?" (p. 97). I learned that, if I wanted my students to become authors, then I had to develop my own identity as a writer. As I reflected on my personal journey as an author throughout the week, my thinking shifted. I was beginning to view writing as an individualized journey, rather than a standardized product. Energized, I realized I was becoming a writer! It was time to help my students develop their own identities as writers.

Beginning my second year of teaching, I was excited to apply what I had learned. I finally felt equipped and empowered to teach the art of writing. In the first weeks, I taught students the workshop cycle (Calkins & Cunningham, 2013) of planning, writing, revising, and editing. I told them writers were never finished! We celebrated the process of writing, not the product. I forced myself to keep my lessons short to limit my voice and instead focused my energy on conferring and small group sessions. I made a writing wall of fame to exhibit innovative and creative student work so that authors could learn

from their peers. And my greatest achievement: I heard my students groan at the end of writing time! They wrote, and wrote, and wrote. Their writing surprised and impressed me. I printed off three times as much writing paper, as students wrote more than they ever had before, since I was no longer asking for a single, finished product. The students who I would have previously labeled as "low-achieving" were crafting insightful and reflective stories about their lives. Everyone, regardless of their topic, experiences, or background, felt empowered to share their stories. A writing revolution had begun.

My third year brought many challenges and what felt like setbacks in this work. As I navigated virtual teaching and then in-person teaching with social distancing, our writing workshop looked different. And yet, the feeling was the same because my philosophy had shifted. The writers continued to thrive. As a result, one of my quietest students saw her persuasive letter to the community about the importance of wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic published in the local paper. This student shared her opinion and voice with an authentic audience. This energized the rest of her year and excited her peers, too! Students felt the power in their classmate's voice and saw the power in writing.

Progression: Imagining Potential Futures

My reflection of the past helps me to look forward and imagine potential futures (Pinar, 1994). As I reflect on my present teaching, two critical themes emerge from my research that guide expectations for the future.

Teachers must communicate to students that their voice matters. I define "voice" as the authentic expression of student identity, guided by their passions and interests. This means affirming student identity and providing authentic channels that center youth voice and culture. When students do not experience a teacher who values their unique identity, they are "outside looking in" (Chavez, 2021). This feeling of being an outsider is even stronger for students of color, especially when one considers that most elementary teachers are white women (Douglas et al., 2008). "Writers of color are charged with convincing white readers [and teachers] that [their] stories are believable, relatable, universal" (Chavez, 2021, p. 37). Many young writers of color are forced to assimilate to the teacher's expectations or be outcast. Teachers, especially white teachers, must demonstrate the value and importance of all student stories, particularly the voices of historically marginalized students. Dena Simmons (2015) says, "There is emotional damage done when people can't be themselves. … Every child deserves an education that guarantees the comfort to learn in one's own skin" (n.p.). One goal for my teaching future is to make my classroom a place where students feel a sense of belonging because they are empowered, through writing, to explore their own history and stories.

When I reflect on methods to liberate the unheard voices, I find a second theme: the existing power structure in elementary classrooms. Teachers must shift power away from themselves to support student voice development. Power is "the capacity or ability to influence one's own actions or the actions of others" (Kissel & Miller, 2015, p. 77). In my past classrooms, I upheld a banking system model of education (Freire, 1968/2018) in which I used my power to supply knowledge to students through a one-way channel. I believed the students knew nothing and I, the teacher, knew everything (Freire, 1968/2018). Teachers and students should instead work as partners throughout the writing process to create knowledge and meaning. The writing process should be reciprocal (Chavez, 2021). Ideally, as the teacher shares knowledge, students have the freedom to challenge and experiment with their own ideas, too. Shifting power in the writing classroom can help teachers and students develop an authentic and identity-affirming workshop environment.

When teachers work to center student voices, young writers experience freedom to share their identities. This analysis prompts me to consider the many instances in the past and present where I held power over my students and their voices. My students have not had enough freedom to write authentically. I hope my future teaching self grows to embody these findings as I discover more methods to amplify student voices over mine.

Analysis: Taking Action to Initiate my Future

Moving forward, my goal is to de-center myself to affirm my students' identities and hear their authentic voices. Although I have much work ahead of me, aspects of this work are present in my current classroom. In this moment, I outline three important features present in my classroom that I hope to carry into the future. First, I want to honor the efforts I've made to give students autonomy. Second, I hope to continue improving my writing environment so that students feel safe enough to take risks. Third, I must ensure that students experience authentic opportunities for writing. In my analytical moment, I explore fragments of these goals that exist in the present.

Providing students with autonomy is an effective method to shift power into the students' hands. Students deserve to write about what is important to them. One of my previously reluctant writers declared that poetry was his favorite unit of the year because, in his words, "We can write about anything we want!" The freedom he experienced in writing workshop helped him become an author. But autonomy in writing means much more than just topic choice. Students, like adult authors, have the power to determine their needs as writers. This means choosing the pace with which they move through the writing process. Additionally, it means choosing who they learn from. I have set the stage for these opportunities by establishing a "partner conference corner" where writers can confer and teach one another. Writers also sign up to teach small group lessons over a writing skill they have mastered, fostering confidence in the leader and autonomy in the listeners. Participating in these activities is optional and driven by student needs. Young writers deserve the autonomy to make decisions about their own writing.

Another important factor to foster an identity-affirming writing workshop is a safe space (Kissel, 2017; Ruben & Moll, 2016; Singer & Shagoury, 2005). To establish a safe classroom community where students are willing to take risks, teachers work daily to truly understand their students and form relationships. When it came time to introduce poetry, I was hesitant, because for me, poetry is challenging to read and write. Then I remembered the summer workshop where I learned about the importance of developing my own identity as an author before attempting to engage kids in this work. I knew I had to model vulnerability myself before asking students to take risks as poets. So, I crafted a poem in front of them about precious childhood memories at my grandparents' house. I told them I was trusting them with a lot of responsibility by sharing my heart and my poem. They felt power in that trust and created poems reflecting their identities and experiences. Here is one student example:

I Remember

I remember when you made crafts with me all day.
I remember when you gave my brother many, many balloons.
I remember the day you died, and that made me very, very sad.
But in August, I'm turning nine.
And I got a new puppy named Mia.
And I know that you'd be very proud of me.

The young author's voice is prominent in this piece. When I modeled risk-taking, my students realized they existed in a safe place to express themselves.

Finally, I explore methods to make writing projects more authentic and relevant (Spycher et al., 2018). Kissel (2017) argues, "Writers who write with passion do so because they have reasons other than to simply please the teacher" (p. 121). Providing students with an authentic audience is the most significant step I've taken towards this goal. At the end of writing workshop, students participate in an Author's Chair feedback session (Kissel, 2017). Rather than concluding the period with my own thoughts and observations, students take over this time by energetically conferring with peers. Leveraging all the teaching voices in the room results in more learning and engagement. I also consider audiences outside of our classroom (Ring, 2020) for whom my students could write, including pen pals, community members, and a kindergarten class. This provides students with an important purpose for sharing their voices.

No matter the genre, students need opportunities for choice, safety, and authenticity (Christianakis, 2011; Diamond, 2017; Ruben & Moll, 2016; Spycher et al., 2018). The strength of young voices should not be underestimated. Every time I have entrusted students with a challenge, they've risen to the occasion and surpassed my expectations. In this moment, I see more connections between the present and future than the present and the past.

Synthesis: Advancing My Writer's Workshop

The insights found in these experiences show how far I've come and how far I still must travel as a teacher, learner, and writer. I still have high expectations for students despite giving up so much of my own power. In fact, my expectations are now higher because I am entrusting young authors with so much responsibility. I take students—and their stories—seriously. Now, I listen, rather than assuming my students aren't capable and taking power away. I know my young learners have much to say. Listening communicates that they truly belong in our writing space.

Along with these teaching experiences, I also honor, and commit to continuing, my personal journey as a writer. In this present moment, I can choose my next steps. By continuing to learn with my students, I can provide students with the tools to liberate their voices through the platforms they choose.

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A Safe Place

By Eboni N. Malloy
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I look back, I look forward.
My past awaits my glance back.
Back to Ashley, back to Hillcrest, back to Terry Sanford.
The school buildings that formed me.
The educator, the student, Eboni
All that you see!
I was a loner in my class full of students.
In that moment, the only little black girl tested and labeled.
Academically gifted was my title I carried throughout school.
But where were the others or was one to three blacks the unspoken rule?
The school labeled me "AG" and my peers labeled me "acting white."
Being a scholar, earning good grades, doing well in school,
This is what my grandmother encouraged; this was my goal.
I didn't see the color in it; black, white, silver or gold.

I look back, I look forward.
The future awaits my doing.
I want spaces, I want safety.
I want safe spaces for the Ebonis of tomorrow.
Little black girls who grow up, know your knowledge is not borrowed.
Your voice is heard, you're valued.
You possess ways of knowing.
You're cared for; we support your unique ways of growing.
Ahead I see you being, knowing, and doing in these safe spaces.
Safe to unapologetically be you!

I look back, I look forward.
My right now is what I see in time.
Time, the past and the future stare at me.
As a child, I felt different.
As a college freshman, I felt welcomed on my white campus.
I saw shades of black and brown
In a sea of others, I had a community of us.
As a professional, I felt sad.
The black students shared their stories.
The glares and ugly stares.
I have to be that familiar face
That feeling of connection and support.
I have to be her safe place.

I look back, I look forward.
The Ebonis of tomorrow need a change.

Malloy, E. N. (2022). A safe place. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 41–5.

Access, equity, inclusion, and diversity.
Challenging the dominant voice for those black girls who look like me!
I will use my voice.
I will ask that you use yours.
I will retell your story.
I will ask that you retell yours.
Together we will break down systems of oppression,
One by one, door by door!

The *currere* process has given me the opportunity to reflect on my educational experiences in an effort to transform professionally and personally to become a better adult educator (Edwards, 2021). This method allows me to look back at how impactful my lived experiences are on the way in which I approach my professional work with students and how I envision the future of adult education. McQueen's (2017) article gave me a clearer understanding of Pinar's *currere* method and provided a path to progress through the four stages. As I traversed through the regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic stages, I muddled through the Eboni of the past, confronted the Eboni of the now, and anticipate the Eboni of the socially constructed future (Baszile, 2017).

Retelling My Story

Education was always valued in my household growing up. My grandmother played an integral role in my life, and I immediately think of her when I think of my educational journey. I can recall her buying books for me as a child about Black inventors and other related Black history topics. She instilled pride in me about who I was at a very early age. With only her high school diploma, she encouraged me to be a scholar and further my education. As I journey through my doctoral program, I often think of the seeds she planted over 30 years ago and only hope that in her absence the harvest will be reaped by other women who are in need of support, guidance, and advocacy.

I attended kindergarten through 12th grade in the same school district, which was coined the "white schools" in Fayetteville, North Carolina. This term was commonly used because the high school was in fact a white-only high school during segregation. Once the schools were desegregated during the 1970s, the attendance area included the same affluent, white neighborhoods but also the heavily Black-populated government subsidized housing areas. While my schools (elementary, junior, and high) overall had what I would consider a diverse student body, once I entered grade levels that based classroom assignments on performance, I became one of few if not the only Black, female student in my class. I can recall this starting in the fourth grade once I was tested and identified as academically gifted. Being the minority in my classes was the norm, and I did not view it as lacking diversity at that young age because it was all I knew.

During my elementary school years, my friendships included children from all backgrounds and races. There was a distinct shift to almost all Black friends once I started junior high school. I am unsure of the reason for this shift. I and my elementary school friends seemed to gravitate to other students who looked like us. There was also a shift in how I thought about my learning. I was told in the seventh grade from another Black, female student that I thought I was white because I made good grades. At the age of 12, I had never heard of "white grades," so I was confused by what she meant and questioned why grades were associated with a race.

Future Stories

As I matriculated through high school and college, I became passionate about education and the experiences of students. Upon entering the professional field of education, I found my fulfillment working in higher education and specifically with adult students. Educational access, educational experiences, and motivation to pursue post-secondary education of students who look like me, a Black, female adult learner, peaked my research interests and fueled my desire to become a change agent.

I envision a future that encompasses spaces inside and outside the classroom that are safe for all learners including Black, female, adult learners. Historically marginalized groups have been silenced; therefore, there is a dire need for the voices of Black, female, adult learners to be heard (Sheard, 1994).

As educators consider classroom environment, curriculum, and academic support services, close attention should be given to dialogue and giving a voice to those learners in marginalized groups. Dialogue is a critical concept in the Black feminist theory that seeks to challenge knowledge and how adult learners make meaning. Knowledge is a product of learners' everyday lived experiences, yet authority and hegemony affect these realities. The process of engaging with others gives learners various views and perspectives, which develops connectedness. This connectedness is necessary to assess and validate knowledge (Sheard, 1994).

Black, female, adult learners should tell future stories that demonstrate value, respect, care, connectedness, and a sense of community. Their voices should be welcomed and heard in their classrooms and across their campuses. Educators should reinforce the notion that this subgroup of learners embodies unique ways of knowing. Their futures should tell stories of their lived experiences and realities constructing knowledge, challenging those who say they do not have a voice (Bridwell, 2020; Heikkinen et al., 2012). I see a future where colleges and universities go beyond their well-written diversity and inclusion statements plastered on websites and admissions brochures and begin to truly create a campus atmosphere that lives and breathes it.

Analyzing My Story

I am a Black female who attended a predominately white institution for both of my post-secondary degrees; however, I did not face any challenges while attending my North Carolina public, four-year university. Fall semester 2018, I was employed as an Academic Advisor for first-year students at a private, liberal arts university located in eastern North Carolina. During advising sessions and informal conversations with students, I was bombarded with complaints and concerns. Those complaints came from Black, female students who expressed to me the issues and challenges they were facing on campus, which they felt were racially charged. Although I was aware these issues existed, I did not experience any of these problems during my college journey and was unaware that it was so prevalent on my former campus.

I hurt for my students. They expressed feelings of unworthiness, exclusion, and regret. My students described differential treatment in the classrooms from faculty, the lack of relatable campus programming, negative reception from students in the dining halls, buildings, and student common areas, and minimal staff/faculty members who looked like them. I was disappointed in my former university for creating this type of experience for select students. This small, private university boasted about diversity but forgot about inclusion.

My experience at this private university is why I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree. While I have over 15 years of professional work experience, I saw the need to study in-depth this unique subgroup of Black, female students. I desired to learn more about the experiences of Black, female students. My educational aspirations include filling the gap in the literature as it relates to this group of adult learners and how their educational experiences impact their motivation to pursue education beyond high school. Through this *currere* process, I hope to transform into a reflective educator and a scholar who seeks to create and support educational spaces where students who look like me can feel celebrated and heard.

Beyond My Story

I recently read *Despite the Best Intentions* by Amanda Lewis and John Diamond (2015). This book examines racial inequality at a "good" high school that consistently had a large racial academic achievement gap. This high school mirrored my high school experience in that majority of students in the honors and advance placement (AP) courses were disproportionately white. The book provides several narratives from faculty, staff, students, and parents. I found myself relating to many of the Black students' stories of being the lone Black student in higher level courses. What stood out to me were the stories of the Black students in the regular level courses. They associated their presence in those courses with being less than, slower, basic. Most of the students at the high school in the book, both white and Black, were aware of the racial differences and even referred to the honors/AP courses as "white classes" and the regular level courses as "minority classes." The accounts presented in the book were eye opening to the lived experiences of Black students and the impacts their educational experiences had on their motivation, self-worth, and academic performance (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

I also read the work of Stephen Brookfield (2005) and was introduced to critical theory. The notion of challenging the dominant narrative jarred a memory from eighth grade. During that school year, I found myself having daily arguments with my social studies teacher regarding misinformation he would present to the class. I felt compelled to speak out against his inaccurate rhetoric regarding Black history, the Black experience, and the contributions of Black people to society. As I continued to read Brookfield's work about hegemony and power structures, I connected with critical discourse and challenging dominant narratives. While I did not experience challenges during college, I began to reflect on my K-12 experiences and saw many instances of authority figures projecting this hegemonic ideology, which one can assume plays a role in reproducing and perpetuating educational inequalities (Brookfield, 2005). As with the students highlighted in Lewis and Diamond's (2015) book, what type of teacher narratives and expectations were my fellow high school classmates in regular level classes exposed to? Did my public schools have practices that negatively impacted students of color? If so, who is speaking up for these students?

Upon reviewing the literature related to the identities of Black, female students, I connected with the womanist perspective, which serves as the basis for Black feminist theory and views race, gender, and class identities as intertwined realities. The Black feminist theory subscribes to the notion of giving a voice to those who have been historically silenced based on both race and gender, not solely race or solely gender (Sheard, 1994).

This topic matters to me because the voices of Black, female, adult learners matter. Their lived experiences, their uniqueness, their stories matter. Just as the junior high

school Eboni challenged the hegemonic, problematic discourse of that time, I am still motivated to challenge the traditional, educational power structures by encouraging students who look like me to find their voice and find value and validation in creating their own knowledge.

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Not All Who Wander are Lost: Navigating Teacher Literacy Education in a Pandemic

By Mona Beth Zignego
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Introductions and Questions for the Present

Literacy education requires teacher knowledge and experience of literacy learning and can be enhanced when in-service teachers receive ongoing training by literacy experts (Honeyford & Watt, 2018). Such training has been incorporated into the practice of many schools and school districts across the U.S. and in recent years has even been mandated by education policy in some states (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020). Like with so many educational endeavors, however, the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated many and sudden changes in literacy education practice. This essay shares our story, as one teacher literacy educator and her critical friend (Schuck & Russell, 2005), as we negotiated our teaching practice during the pandemic.

Though we initiated our research collaboration through a mutual interest in self-study and intended at the start of our writing to present our experience as a journey through *currere* (Pinar, 2004), the act of writing our story took us through and beyond *currere* to auto- and ultimately duo-ethnography. As Hasebe-Ludt, et al. (2009) explain, “if curriculum is *currere*, then autobiography is the theorizing of *currere*” (p. 31). As we reviewed more than a year of notes, artifacts, and memos from our self-study work in preparation for writing and examined this data in light of our personal educational histories and experiences, we found autoethnography helped us to see ourselves “more clearly … in relation to [our] circumstances, past and present, and to understand those relationships and their implications more deeply” (Hasebe-Ludt, 2009, p. 31). Yet, once we began to write, we realized that just as we had conversed honestly throughout our collaboration together, we needed to write our story as a conversation. Gómez (2013) explains that “duoethnography is a scholarly conversation. The topic is viewed through the researcher’s eyes and communicated via a written dialogue” (p. 474). Likewise, to communicate our story accurately, we needed to write duoethnographically, attending to our respective experiences of regression, progression, and analysis in order to arrive at a collective synthesis (Pinar, 2004). Accordingly, in this essay we present our story by alternating voice between Mona and Kathleen, before ultimately joining together into one sythetical voice. Not only does this choice mirror our experience of critical friendship and *currere* during the COVID pandemic, it models the kind of reflective, caring practice that we hope all educators, and literacy educators in a particular way, might embody.

Mona

I am a teacher literacy educator and facilitate professional development learning in literacy for in-service teachers. I believe that teaching and learning should occur in a dynamic, interactive environment. Throughout my decades of teaching, I have relied heavily on human interactions, with verbal and visual feedback from participants, to inform my teaching practice.

Zignego, M. B., & Sellers, K. (2022). Not all who wander are lost: Navigating teacher literacy education in a pandemic. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 46–55.

My work changed fundamentally during the COVID pandemic, when my instruction, and that of the teachers I taught, moved online. This prompted intense self-doubt and professional questioning. My previous experiences seemed irrelevant to my new work reality, and that distinctive present shifted and altered as the pandemic raged on.

Kathleen

The pandemic left me unsure of my identity. When I met Mona, during a virtual conference of self-study researchers in the summer of 2020, I was, first and foremost, a Catholic high school teacher. I was entering my fifth year teaching, that threshold beyond which nearly half of American teachers never pass (Will, 2018). With the pandemic going strong, I knew a hard school year lay ahead, but I was resolved to cross that threshold in the classroom, just as I was resolved to continue, on schedule, my graduate studies in educational leadership, which had begun two years earlier. This is one key reason I was interested in collaborating with Mona. Though our areas of practice varied greatly, we were both committed to improving our respective teaching practice and sought a critical friend with whom we could share the journey. The pandemic, though, presented a fork in my path. Over the course of our first year of collaboration, my working conditions declined drastically, prompting me to leave my high school and pursue my doctorate full time. While this was my choice, and the right one, it still left me feeling unsure of myself. I could no longer say, “I’m a teacher,” and the loss of that identity shaped the way I engaged as a student and critical friend.

Mona and Kathleen

We began working together during a tenuous time for us both, far more so than we could have anticipated when we initiated our collaboration. Despite this uncertainty, we persisted in our work together, and that constancy created an anchor in the storm. In time, our collaboration grew into a real friendship, which revealed the depths to which care impacted our everyday practice as educators.

The Self in the Present

Mona

Currere asks us to examine the self in relation to the understandings derived from an educational experience (Pinar, 2004). Pre-pandemic, I was a seasoned classroom K4-12 teacher of 28 years. After decades in the classroom, I completed my doctorate in the fall of 2019 and, a few months later, started a new position as a TLE (teacher literacy educator). As a TLE, I taught in-service educators how to teach reading. I identified as a TLE and as an educator who was grounded and well-prepared to work in schools to troubleshoot, support, coach, analyze data, and provide comprehensive literacy support to in-service teachers in whatever way was needed. Then, the pandemic hit.

Overnight, my practice changed drastically. Teacher workshops and coaching sessions moved online, requiring I translate a lifetime of face-to-face teaching materials into a virtual delivery format, using digital platforms, skills, and technologies with which I was wholly unfamiliar. Schools’ and teachers’ learning needs changed too. Teachers were stressed in ways I’d never seen and focused on concerns besides literacy education. They began to raise questions about how to facilitate online, concurrent, and hybrid classes, even when the sessions were not about those topics. Teaching as I knew it was gone, yet I still expected myself to provide the same level of expertise in caring for and supporting in-service teachers.

This was complicated by the behaviors of in-service teachers I worked with. Many in-service teachers who complained about their students turning their cameras off and muting their microphones attended my virtual trainings with cameras off and microphones muted. I empathized with their frustration as I was unable to hear or see my online participants. I couldn't gather visual or auditory feedback to inform my next teaching moves or to connect with the in-service teachers as I once had. I was left feeling isolated, inept, and ultimately questioning my ability to facilitate learning for in-service teachers.

Kathleen

I was teaching full time during the first eight months of the pandemic. I experienced the overnight shift from in-person to virtual instruction. And like teachers everywhere, I found the transition jarring. What kinds of technology existed to facilitate learning virtually? How did the student-user experience vary from the teacher-user experience? What if they couldn't log in to class? What if they logged in but kept their cameras off? Were they even there? Many of these concerns became easier to manage with practice, but they continued to surface in the fall of 2020, when I began in fully-virtual instruction.

The Remembrances of the Past

Mona

To make sense of the present and improve our future practice, we often return to our past (Pinar, 1978, 2004). My elementary school experiences were unique. I attended a small, one room, ultra-conservative Catholic school. There was one teacher for first through eighth grade. The structure was hierarchical. It was a top-down, authoritarian, lecture-listen format with few, if any, interactions between me and the teacher. I was the only student in my grade, and I essentially taught myself through reading content and responding to tasks on worksheets.

This learning experience taught me that I needed to bring resources, critical thinking, and interactive teaching and learning experiences to my students and participants of all ages. Over the years, I have worked diligently to become a dynamic, responsive, reflective practitioner, and I became proficient at soliciting feedback from my participants, through their verbal and written responses, body language, and facial expressions. Or at least, so I thought. I had collected a lifetime of supplemental teaching materials, manipulatives, games, and activities created for face-to-face instruction.

Kathleen

I am the product of 18 consecutive years of Catholic education. I attended a thriving parochial school with a community of teachers that made me feel safe and seen. Each year felt like a new adventure with a new set of grade level teachers. Some were more traditional educators than others, but across grades and teachers, character was valued.

From my earliest years at the school, I remember our teachers celebrating our acts of kindness and compassion. Sister Marcia, my second grade teacher, was the most explicit. "Even if someone is mean to you, you have to kill them with kindness," she advised, and whenever she saw us doing a kind deed, she would send us to a fancy spiral-shaped jar, into which we got to deposit a kernel of popcorn (sometimes two or three if we were really excellent). Likewise, if we were unkind, we were instructed to remove kernels from the jar. The peer pressure this practice fostered was intense but effective. When the jar was full, we celebrated with a "popcorn party," with huge bags of movie theater popcorn. I was delighted by this experience and still remember the joy of seeing

bags of popcorn as big as my classmates and me. That kindness led to joy was a helpful lesson, which was taught beyond Sr. Marcia's class. As a school, we worked together to support international missions, study and memorialize the holocaust, and minister to the needs of our neighbors. When I entered high school, the academic expectations rose, but the commitment to community and character remained the same.

When I became a high school religion teacher, I looked back on my years of Catholic education for inspiration. So much of what I most valued in my education was the work outside the classroom—skipping recess to sing in choir, participating in science fair and student government, attending summer math camp hosted by my beloved fifth grade teacher, leading all-school assemblies and regional service projects, and listening to holocaust survivors tell their stories of WWII. I liked school well enough, and I remember many teachers fondly, but what I really loved was education about real things. Likewise, though I initially practiced more traditional teaching methods and struggled deeply to keep my students engaged, I eventually realized they wanted to do something real, just like I had as a student. So, as I redesigned our curriculum, I wove critical service learning into the entire learning experience. Each of my students would have the opportunity and support to study and respond to a need in their community, a process with which students engaged eagerly each school year, until COVID sent us home.

The Issue of the Present

Mona

As I entered the strange, new, virtual world of the pandemic, I found myself unable to continue to teach, interact, or solicit feedback from participants in my literacy trainings as I was accustomed. I needed to become proficient at using online platforms and resources, and all my supplemental teaching materials, manipulatives, games, and activities had to be moved into a format that could be viewed and used online. I invested tremendous effort in this task, yet I was unable to discern the level of satisfaction my participants felt toward my teaching, their learning, or the resources I was sharing. For the first time, I was unable to draw on my past experiences and content knowledge to support my work in the present. I was a fish out of water.

Early in the pandemic, I sought out and found a critical friend to collaborate with. Kathleen was a doctoral student at a university in the Midwest and an active classroom teacher. We met in the summer of 2020 and collaborated from then until this writing. Initially, we engaged in discussions aimed at constructing a classroom-based self-study of literacy instruction for in-service teachers. We wanted to utilize self-study methodology, as we felt it would allow us to delve more deeply into my TLE practice than we typically could achieve through traditional, isolated reflection or statistical analysis of data (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2011). While we often discussed current research and theory, we just as often drifted into conversations about our daily practice. Ours was a safe (albeit virtual) space, where we could unpack our daily struggles without the constraints of social convention or professional expectations. We didn't have to sugarcoat our experience and could examine them more openly and effectively together as a result. In time, we realized we had created a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994; Flessner, 2014), which was safe, bounded, and productive for reimagining answers to questions and solving problems during this time of unprecedented uncertainty (Hulme et al., 2009; Sawyer et al., 2016).

Indeed, as the pandemic intensified in the fall of 2020 and our in-person interactions narrowed, our virtual collaboration opened up new space to address our problems of practice. Yet, as schools vacillated between in-person, hybrid, and virtual instruction, our research questions likewise shifted to reflect near-daily changes in instructional settings,

teacher needs, and administrative requests. During this time, Kathleen collaborated with me and allowed me to manifest my vulnerability and insecurity as my critical friend, partner, and support system within this safe space, practices consistent with effective *currere* and self-study scholarship (Baer & Cavill, 2020). Eventually, we chose the question, "How can teacher literacy education be facilitated for in-service teachers in the context of the pandemic?" to guide our inquiry.

As we worked together, we began to realize that my reluctance to let go of past habits was creating an obstacle to forging new ways in the pandemic present. I was processing the loss of what I once had—immersive, in-person instruction; five senses to inform my instruction, moment-by-moment. Now, I had black boxes and silence, as though I were teaching into the void. Yet, as the pandemic continued, the need for quality literacy education took on greater urgency and complexity. What had worked with in-person teacher literacy education required significant adjustments to deliver in remote and/or hybrid instruction, not only so that teachers could learn to teach literacy more effectively, but so that they could learn to also deliver that instruction in virtual and/or hybrid settings. My lived experiences in the past were not sufficient to inform and navigate the present world as a TLE. I feared failure and felt inadequate to the task of teaching in and for this new reality. My research partner helped me deal with the intense insecurity and isolation of the pandemic, as well as supporting my new virtual work, while providing an additional perspective.

Kathleen

From the beginning of our collaboration, Mona and I were committed to learning together. Ours was a partnership founded for research. This was an exciting prospect for me initially, because it was the first time I collaborated with a researcher outside of my university. While I still identified primarily as a classroom teacher, I was eager to improve my qualitative inquiry skills and expand my professional network. This kept me focused as we entered the fall semester and designed our research project.

While I was teaching virtually from the start of the school year, Mona was still largely in-person. This informed our initial IRB proposal, which involved collecting data on-site at a charter school where Mona was teaching. Shortly after completing the IRB application, our study site went remote, forcing us to reconsider our entire research design and making our application moot. This was the beginning of a cascade of changes that unfolded throughout the fall and winter of 2020, into 2021.

It seemed that each time Mona and I logged in to our regular videoconference, we both had significant changes to report about our professional contexts. Sometimes, those changes included coaching each other in educational software that we were learning. This was particularly challenging for me, as I had always been a slow-adopter of new technologies. So, I was delighted one evening to be able to introduce Mona to the Pear Deck user experience. These moments of joy and practical support buoyed us as the object of our inquiry continued to change. Yes, we eventually landed on a research question that made sense for our context, but that didn't change the fact that our context was demoralizingly unstable—school closures; lack of clarity about when, or how, they might reopen; policies that changed daily; and a demand for professional flexibility that was unyielding. The instability left us feeling unmoored.

This became particularly true for me when I chose to leave my school mid-semester to escape an emotionally abusive administrator, whose hostility toward me had intensified during the pandemic. This was the hardest choice I'd ever made as a teacher, because I knew it would hurt my students who I cared deeply about. Yet, I also knew that I could not continue being the teacher they deserved, being treated as I was; if I didn't

change, I would break. So, I made the choice to leave the classroom, and after I did, I didn't know how to identify. I was no longer a teacher, even though I deeply empathized with the struggle of teachers and continued to care about past students, and I was not, as yet, a traditional doctoral student. Who, then, was I?

Working with Mona, I was still a researcher, her critical friend. And, freed of the emotional turbulence of my former school, I was able to listen and consider more deeply what was going on with her professional life. It was during this time, in January 2021, that we settled into our research path. Mona began sharing dozens of digitized materials that she had created throughout the fall semester. Prior to our meetings, I would read and take notes on these documents, generating questions or topics for our discussion. After reviewing a digital slide deck that Mona had created and delivered in the fall, I wrote in our notes, "curious to see you lead the whole session with the idea of 'support.' Did your feedback bear out that sentiment was received? It reminds me of Nel Noddings [sic] Care Theory. She posits, among other things, that care is reciprocal and must be acknowledged by the cared-for" (5 January 2021). Not only was Mona showing signs of caring for her students, but even at a distance, I was beginning to notice them.

Multi-faceted Pandemic Noticings

Mona: Facilitator Expertise and Content Knowledge

The delivery of this content information took on a new meaning within the pandemic setting. Skilled facilitation of learning, no matter whether the venue is virtual or face-to-face, should provide plenty of access points to information as well as opportunities for participants to participate and rehearse content with the goal of eventual learner autonomy (Fisher et al., 2016). My pandemic quandary was not only how to teach this, but also how to assess it. At first, I felt paralyzed with self-doubt and overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. I had never taught virtually or studied virtual literacy instruction. How was I to digitize all my resources and materials? How would I adapt my in-person activities for complete virtual instruction? And how would I know the engagement of participants if they had cameras off and were muted?

I still had a job to do, support teachers teaching kids to read. Only now, they were doing so in more challenging circumstances. Stasis wasn't an option, so I consumed research, connected with other educators, and attended trainings. Indeed, I attended any affordable training that I could find to support my work. Not only did this build my knowledge, but it helped me connect with my students' experience of virtual instruction and reflect on what makes for high quality teaching, answering the questions: What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? How will I know if they have learned it? (Fisher et al., 2016). Clarity is essential in instruction, more so than ever during this pandemic time (Tomlinson, 2021). So, I narrowed down my objectives and urged my participants to do the same when they taught. I reflected on the "why" of what we were doing and created authentic activities that were directly transferable to teacher practices. For example, I provided digital versions of phonics activities that were traditionally done in person. My participants shared their gratitude for these resources in the chat feature, the exit tickets, and in follow up emails.

During trainings in which I was a participant, I began to engage with the intent of deeply noticing my experiences in the virtual setting so that I could transfer them to my own work as a TLE. This helped me realize I disliked both my camera being on and speaking out in large groups. What I enjoyed was being silent and anonymous, just soaking in the learning. Additionally, I didn't want to write my thoughts in the general chat where everyone could see, but rather I fancied direct messaging the facilitator. In my reflections with Kathleen, we discussed how, pre-pandemic, my assumption was that

I had read the feedback from the room simply by facial expressions and verbal feedback. Now, consciously putting myself in my students' shoes, I realized that I had not been equitable. Not all participants are comfortable or motivated to engage in that manner. Further, limiting the way I allowed virtual participation, constrained feedback to those few who were comfortable sharing in front of a large group.

This realization led me to revise my instructional strategies. I began to offer participants the option to direct message me in the chat. This change allowed me to receive instant questions, information, and feedback from in-service teachers in a way that was anonymous, low stakes, and not possible in a face-to-face setting. I also began to use technology, like Padlet and Jamboard, that allowed me to replicate some of my face-to-face activities in ways that were engaging, meaningful, and could also be anonymous. This added feature of anonymity was particularly appealing because participants could engage in learning on their terms, and I could solicit feedback to help me plan instruction. As I processed and accepted the changes going on around me and became fluent in virtual technologies, I learned how to translate my past experiences and present instructional process into meaningful insights that could inform my future work.

Kathleen: Seeing Care Clearly

Once I began looking for signs of caring, I saw it everywhere in Mona's work and the struggle she was experiencing transitioning to remote instruction. While she was hyper-focused on learning how to improve her practice in virtual mediums, she struggled to find satisfaction in the process. This was puzzling at first, because she continued to get lots of positive feedback from participants, and school leaders regularly asked for more support after being introduced to her. She was clearly valued for her expertise, yet virtual instruction continued to be unsatisfying. Why?

Nel Noddings (2009, 2012) theorized that care is part of reciprocal ethical practice. In classrooms, it is not enough for a teacher to say they care about their students or even for them to show it through actions. For care to be effective and to animate the student-teacher relationship, it has to be felt by those cared-for, generally students, and acknowledged by them to the one doing the caring, generally the teacher. Noddings (2009) gives in-person examples of this, like students physically acknowledging teachers, or refusing to do so, when they walk into a classroom. Imagine a kindergartener who runs up to hug their teacher randomly during the school day. Such spontaneous responses are part of a cycle of caring that must be completed for the carer to feel fulfilled. Absent such reciprocity by the one cared for, the carer does not know that their efforts to care have been successful, a situation that has ethical implications.

Like all teachers, me included, who have struggled during this pandemic to adjust to the sensory deprivation of teaching to blank and muted screens, the lack of visual and verbal feedback left Mona exhausted and full of self-doubt. Following her delivery of one PD, she wrote in our joint research journal, "Feeling like I am not cut out for this. Feedback was good, but hardly any participant interaction. I felt like I was just doing all the talking. … Just not feeling good about any of this right now" (11 January 2021). While much of Mona's commentary in our journal and throughout our conversations concerned how she felt she wasn't getting the data she needed from her participants vis-à-vis audio-visual cues, underlying this, I suspect, was a much more personal concern: teaching virtually had interrupted the care cycle as she had known it. The same in-the-moment audio-visual cues she had used her whole life to informally assess her students' engagement and comprehension also confirmed whether or not her students felt cared-for by her. Teaching into the void of blank screens and muted participants left her uncertain of whether she was doing right by her students. Indeed, in a journal memo

the same week, Mona wrote, "I care so much and the PD becomes so personal as I invest more and more time and energy. Finding balance is hard for me" (12 January 2021). If care theory is correct, which I suspect it is, for Mona to find peace of mind about and balance in her practice, she needed to find a way to complete the care cycle in the virtual learning environment.

Mona: Care Theory Makes an Impact

As I connected with Kathleen, she introduced me to Care Theory (Noddings, 2012). I came to understand that teaching and learning are closely tied to a cycle of care, and learning is a by-product of this relationship (Hinsdale, 2016). Within the pandemic context, I not only felt unable to care for my in-service teachers in my sessions, but I did not feel a reciprocal caring from them. This was most certainly contributing to my feelings of isolation, ineptitude, and being out of my element. Caring is connecting through relations, and I did not feel like I could engage in a relationship with in-service teachers I could not see or hear. So, I began to problem solve and troubleshoot as to how I could connect with my in-service teachers in this pandemic setting. I offered them options to engage in the chat that gave them safety and anonymity. I imagined them and what they might look like so I could better teach them, and I sent love and caring to them through the virtual space verbally and in writing throughout my presentations. I let go of my need to see and hear feedback to teach. Instead, I employed exit tickets, chat conversations, and follow-up emails to solicit feedback. As I connected with my participants in these new ways, the cycle was recreated without the visual or verbal cues that I was used to.

Kathleen

As I reflect on the past year and a half of collaborating with Mona, I realize that working with her gave me purpose and focus, as I grew into a new identity as a researcher and graduate student. My departure from teaching was traumatic for me, not only because I didn't know how to identify, but because the way I had been treated by my former administrator interrupted the kind and caring relationships that I had been taught and wanted to share with my students. Being able to help Mona in a safe, open, and unpolitical way soothed some part of who I am during this very turbulent time. I realized that care was operative not only in student-teacher relationships, but in my future life as a researcher and critical friend.

Mona and Kathleen: The Present as a Result of These Experiences

As we write this, the pandemic continues. The recently-identified Omicron variant is causing a new spike in infections (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Our personal and professional lives have permanently changed because of pandemic events.

Mona

I am again able to draw from past experiences to inform my present teaching and life choices. I live and teach in-service teachers differently. I try to understand and care for humanity and the individual more clearly in my everyday life. I exercise self-care in ways that were foreign to my pre-pandemic routine. In my teaching practice, I consciously try to avoid putting unspoken expectations on educators to give me feedback in narrow ways. As one example, when interacting with in-service teachers as a TLE, I no longer expect people to speak out loud or interact with the whole group. I've realized it neither provides accurate feedback nor gives everyone a voice. Instead, I now provide

some content information and then provide time for participants to engage silently with material and then with the person next to them. I walk the room searching for those who have much to offer but might not volunteer to speak in a group setting. Once I find them, I validate what they have to offer the group and do a friendly cold call asking them to share their knowledge and expertise with the whole group—if they feel comfortable. I am looking to get accurate feedback from all my in-service teachers who are attending training, not just the ones comfortable sharing in a large group setting.

Mona and Kathleen

The critical friendship and self-study in which we engaged has resulted in a metamorphosis of sorts. We both are more at peace in our roles as researchers and educators. Working together to address problems of practice has helped us grow not simply as educators, but as people. Confronting ourselves together, in our Third Space, without judgment and with deep care has helped us realize that care is an essential part of our teaching practice—care for our students, care for each other, and care for those near to us, including ourselves. The pandemic pushed us to change, but working together helped us to change for the better.

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The *Nomadic* Curriculum for the Digital Age

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In examining our instructional and technological experiences during the pandemic, we realized that the state of the curriculum was changing right before our eyes. As we analyzed our experiences using Pinar's *currere* process, we decided that it was necessary to initiate a critical scholarly conversation about the need for an innovative and nomadic curriculum for the digital age. We pondered if the curriculum should focus on the abstract concepts essential to understanding disciplinary concepts, as Shulman (1986) suggests, that drive the design of curricular examples and explanations in learning experiences. Or, should the curriculum encompass methodologies with techno-knowledge, as Mishra and Koehler (2006) promote, including technological expertise in various platforms to effectively select and use when teaching specific curricular concepts. Or, is the curriculum simply a process of our becoming? We realized that, because society was becoming more technologically dependent, we had to ask ourselves what the future curriculum would become. The experiences that we and the educational system faced during the pandemic created a state of uncertainty for the field of curriculum. However, we realized that concerns over teaching content through a virtual medium effectively opened the door for the redesigning, reimagining, and reinvention of curriculum beyond the 21st century. We, therefore, conclude that the future curriculum must harness the fluidity of social media ecologies and the innovation of technology to craft a nomadic lived curricular experience.

The Future Curriculum

We drew inspiration from Williamson (2013) and Eaton (2018) and our lived experiences as curriculum and instructional technology coordinators during the pandemic to shed light on the design and purpose of the future curriculum. In order to begin to define the curriculum for the future, we combined Williamson's (2013) notion of "becoming" and Eaton's (2018) notion of "nomadic" identities to suggest that the curriculum of the future is changing. Eaton (2018) explains that social media functions as a medium for students to be "nomadic" (p. 60) throughout their lives, moving outside of the space in the classroom into a digital space. Students use digital spaces to form identity and find community support. As curriculum scholars, we consider how students can reject the identity formed by traditional curricular experiences as students work across various ecologies. However, Williamson (2013) writes that the traditional curriculum emphasizes an understanding of the past that results in the creation of a "retrospective identity" (p. 107) in which students use what they learn to guide their hopes and dreams for the future. On the other hand, Williamson argues that the future curriculum entails a "prospective identity" (p. 107–108) designed to shift and adapt to change molded by students' future goals. In the realm of the do-it-yourself culture, there is an infinite amount of learning and experiences that can occur, and the digital age "repositions" learning as a "lifestyle choice" (p. 108).

However, we identified an important tension emerging between Williamson's (2013) idea of constraining "multiple-choice identities" (p. 108) on social media platforms and Eaton's (2018) idea that social media ecologies allow for "nomadic" identities. Considering Williamson's perspective, the future curriculum becomes a

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"DIY project" (p. 108), in which identity is assembled much like a pre-packaged item. Eaton (2018), though, argues that we must abandon "either-or-thinking" and instead "embrace both-and-thinking" (p. 70) and not constrain ourselves to one check box on social media but instead change as we become someone new through our experiences. We then considered Moereira's (2016) argument that curriculum should reflect the needs of practitioners and bridge the gap between what it should be, what it currently is, and possibly what it can become. From this conceptual inspiration, we realized that, to begin understanding what the future post-pandemic curriculum in a technologically dependent society would look like, we needed to become reflective practitioners and understand what we were becoming. Through our *currere*, we explored the possibility that the future curriculum could have *nomadic* tendencies through which knowledge becomes fluid and is contingent on individual experiences and frames the "becoming" experience for practitioners.

Inspiration for *Currere*

In order to explore what the nomadic "becoming" curriculum of the future might entail, we used Pinar's (2011) method of *currere*, as does Suarez (2019), to explore our lived experiences with curriculum during the pandemic critically. Through the use of *currere*, we analyzed our personal experiences as instructional and technology coordinators to "study ourselves and learn from ourselves" (Suarez, 2019, p. 137) and imagine what the curriculum of the future might look like post-pandemic. Pinar's (1975) belief that we must "become students of ourselves" (as quoted in Suarez, 2019, p. 137) guides our inquiry as we reflect on our experiences and develop understanding, which for us is to understand the future curriculum. In addition, we reflected on our virtual classroom observations, professional development sessions provided for practitioners, and personal work experiences we encountered during the pandemic. Specifically, we utilized our experiences as we rewrote, redesigned, and implemented technology-infused curriculum and professional development in face-to-face, hybrid, and remote-only learning environments.

Our *Currere* Experience

To initiate the *currere* process, we individually reflected on our experiences beginning March 2020, when we both received directives to prepare for remote learning. As a curriculum and instruction coordinator, Blanca reflected on her experiences with the curriculum's design, delivery, and implementation. As an instructional technology specialist, Brittni reflected on her experiences with technology implementation and professional development preparation for teachers. As we navigated through the *currere* process, we realized that we had different roles during the pandemic as we initiated the regressive stage. However, as we analyzed our experiences during the progressive, synthetical, and analytical stages, we noticed a convergence of curricular thought as we witnessed what the curriculum was becoming and what it could become in the future.

REGRESSIVE: The Start of the Pandemic

Blanca

I recall the day when I received a text message from my executive director telling me I had to cut my spring break short and go to the office to prepare "digital activities" for students to do at home with no books. I recall compiling a packet for an entire six

weeks of 175 pages for students to complete at home. I thought, what is the point? How are these assignments going to be graded? Assignments would be "dropped off" by parents and left to "die" for at least two weeks before being graded. I thought to myself, W*hat kind of curriculum is that? Is it even curriculum?* After completing my curriculum packet and handing it to the print shop to be disbursed to the campus, I began to work remotely from home. I had no clue what I was supposed to do when working from home. *How was I supposed to monitor instruction if I was used to physically walking into classrooms and observing teachers deliver instruction and teach the curriculum and students show evidence of interacting or experiencing the curriculum? How would I know if the curriculum was effective if not all teachers had Google Classrooms set up or knew how to use Google Meet/Zoom to interact with students? How were students supposed to experience any curriculum if they had no devices or Internet access?* I thought to myself that the face-to-face curriculum that we had in place was long gone and could not work in this environment—the digital environment—and giving students a packet of busywork was by no means any curriculum but a mere attempt at keeping students busy to provide some semblance of "education" at home.

After the end of the school year in May, I retooled based on the last two and half months of wondering what the next school year would look like and what that would mean for my job as an instructional coordinator and the curriculum. I recall adapting the curriculum to function digitally by making live experiences with rich conversations digital and interactive without paper-pencil tasks through technology tools such as HyperDocs and Google Suite. Teachers and students had access to a live digital document at their fingertips that could transport them to a place in search of information, completion of a task, or opportunity to play with content all by themselves.

BRITTNI

I remember reading on my technology blogs that other countries and some cities in the states would possibly be going into lockdown mode, and their curriculum and teaching were moving to a digital platform. I showed my technology director what I was reading before spring break, and our team came up with a game plan if this crazy lockdown would happen for some reason. Our initial thoughts were that it would only be for one week if we were to shut down. Thus, our game plan was to have teams of three on-call each day to provide support for teachers and students. The teams would rotate roles between phone duty and in-person technical support and services every day. We had the phones routed to our laptops, so we would each act based on the technology support needed when someone would call. In my role, I was to help teachers with their lessons by making them printable and digital packets for online learning. I asked myself: *How do I make my curriculum digital? What if the students do not have internet access or devices to access the curriculum? How do we distribute hot spots and determine who gets them? How do we get our students actually to turn in their work? How do we prepare our teachers for using technology?*

I realized there were no answers to these questions yet, but we had to continue to support the students and staff in any way we could. We had to go to the technology office, wear masks, and maintain social distance to hand out Chromebook devices and hot spots. We had a drive-through line to pass out items to students and service devices to teachers so they could teach virtually from home. To our surprise, this one-week shutdown game plan turned into a lockdown game plan for the rest of the school year. I continued working with my staff to digitize the curriculum and teach virtually.

PROGRESSIVE: What Could the Curriculum Become?

Blanca & Brittni

We visited countless virtual classrooms for one academic school year and realized that the future curriculum could change with the right tools and guidance. We observed that some teachers were venturing out, and they were using tools like *EdPuzzle*, *Nearpod*, and *Padlet* to make their online teaching more engaging and establish group discussions without students being next to their peers in class. Teachers were, in essence, making their curriculum nomadic and shifting their technology practices to adapt to the current situation. Unbeknownst to practitioners, students were leading a double life during class—having their camera on and giving the impression of listening attentively but in reality, surfing the Internet, watching *Youtube*, listening to music, or playing video games while being in class. However, the simultaneous shifting of presence during virtual learning opened the door to considering multiple curriculum learning ecologies that could allow students the opportunity to craft their curricular path and tailor their own experiences. It is this nomadic shifting that we envision for the future curriculum.

ANALYTICAL: Imagining the Future Curriculum

Blanca & Brittni

In discussing our analytical phase, we realized that there was tension between the teachers and the curriculum because the curriculum's design did not match the virtual ecology. We both had converted a written curriculum into a digital format but had not leveraged technology to make the curriculum something better or different. We showed teachers how to convert lessons into PDFs that students could annotate with extensions such as *Kami*. Despite the curricular limitations, some teachers wanted to move forward with delivering a technology-integrated curriculum virtually, but some still longed for the old ways—teacher led instruction and paper-pencil tasks. Teachers complained about the lack of student engagement with the virtual curriculum. We asked ourselves how the future curriculum, if completely virtual, would provide for the development of students as individuals. Would it provide multiple paths of learning so practitioners could tailor the curricular experience to the needs of students, or would it confine practitioners to one path instead of a nomadic identity in which they might become critical, creative, and reflective practitioners who are continuously evolving?

SYNTHETICAL: Readjusting our Curricular Perspectives for the Future Curriculum

Blanca & Brittni

As we pondered our experiences in the synthetical stage, we readjusted our curricular perspectives for the future curriculum. We envision that the future curriculum will embrace lived experiences as a catalyst for helping practitioners become better versions of themselves. The curriculum will enable learners to have experiences beyond brick and mortar classrooms through technology tools. Learner interest for future aspirations will guide the learning experiences but adjust continuously based on their developing identity. However, we realize that this requires a curricular paradigmatic shift from teacher-led, paper-based instruction to student-led, blended learning models. It is also necessary that practitioners abandon constraining thinking and embrace "both-

and thinking" to see curriculum as both written and living to make room for student choice to guide their learning experiences. We have concluded that student choice will lead the future curriculum resulting in an evolving curricular experience custom-made for students by students.

Our *Currere* Awakening

Guided by our *currere* exercise, first, we agree that curriculum is produced through social interaction for both "present and emerging purposes" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012, p. 1). We suggest that the future curriculum lies between a humanist and Reconceptualist approach. From the humanist perspective, the curriculum focuses on the active engagement of practitioners resulting in "socialization and life adjustment" (p. 7). Practitioners' self-awareness, identity, and consciousness have a role in the curriculum. Reconceptualists, however, view curriculum as a "communal conversation" (p. 8) in an open-ended system that does not close. Positioning these two ideas, we consider that the future curriculum may have to embrace dialogue and experiences of practitioners in order to collectively frame an evolving curricular experience that can extend beyond the four walls of a room to carry over to the global world via social media ecologies. The expanding lived experiences of practitioners will shift back and forth due to social or virtual interaction as they "become" a better version of themselves. The "communal" acquisition of experiential knowledge will broaden with increasing experiences made possible through digital spaces.

Second, digital culture will become part of the future curriculum. As we reflected on our experiences, we recalled that teachers frequently changed technological mediums used to deliver instruction during the pandemic to engage students and combat student boredom. Technology tools that were once "new" had become "old" and "boring," and teachers showed continual desire to learn something new and exciting to engage students. Because of the evolving availability of information and rapid innovation of technology, the curriculum design needs to allow for continual change and determine how technologically infused pedagogical practices can help students become producers of knowledge. Backes et al. (2021) write that "available knowledge and social interaction possibilities always exceed the control of curricula" (p. 11), and in the future curriculum, endless lived experiences will become the curriculum. Through their lived experiences and dialogues, students can empower themselves and share knowledge that becomes knowledge for someone else that is not in the written or taught curriculum. Because students' experiences are different, the formation of lived curricular knowledge guides what we know. Public pedagogy, via social media ecologies, can "produce more critical and compassionate modes of subjectivity" (Giroux, 2015, p. 109), indicating that, in the digital age, curriculum practitioners can utilize their lived experiences to critique the status quo and their knowledge construction to become a better version of themselves.

Third, we believe that future curriculum based on lived experiences can become nomadic. Changes in society resulted in differing perspectives and lived experiences; hence, knowledge will change. Lived experiences can transform, support, or repudiate someone else's understanding of knowledge. Thus, students' lived experiences are an essential dialogue that plays a pivotal role in the nomadic curriculum. No two curricular dialogues will be the same, but their essence will change based on the discussants' perceptions, ideas, and experiences.

Last, we consider Freire's (1968/2005) argument that "without communication, there can be no true education" (p. 93) and, therefore, suggest that the future curriculum must allow for dialogue and communication among its practitioners. The internet and social media possibilities afford an endless array of communication modes for

practitioners to engage in dialogue beyond the classroom to extend globally. If lived experiences, including virtual dialogues, are nurtured in the classroom, then the curriculum will become partially socially constructed by the participants' discourses, making room for curricular opportunities not explicitly part of the written curriculum. We conclude that we must embrace the openness of curriculum and see it as a "journey, rather than a destination" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2012, p. 13)—a journey that does not end but is filled with experiences as we become "reflective practitioners" (p. 17) who continuously evolve in the future curriculum.

Implications for Educational Practitioners

As we endured the pandemic in our respective curriculum and instructional technology positions, we got a behind-the-scenes look at curriculum transformation. Now, as we ponder our experiences during the pandemic through *currere*, we find ourselves engaged in a sort of dialectical thinking that, as defined by Carr and Kemis (1983 as quoted in McLaren, 1992), is an evolving form of thinking that entails constant shifting (nomadic) reflection between "being and becoming" (p. 61). We witnessed a curriculum shift from traditional paper-pencil tasks to daily digital tasks during the pandemic. We witnessed curricular experiences focused on abstract concepts delivered with multiple representations using various technology tools that changed from teacher to teacher and class by class depending on the practitioner's technology expertise. However, despite the curricular efforts of practitioners, the recipients of the curriculum were not engaged because, while life around them was changing, in essence, the curriculum teachers were implementing had not changed; only the delivery medium had changed. Practitioners failed to harness the potential of using students' lived experiences as they traversed their curricular journey in a virtual ecology. McLaren (1992) explains that we generate knowledge in our minds through interactions with others; thus, it is socially constructed. Lived experiences produce contextual knowledge that will shift and become more profound, clearer, or redefined with continued interaction. In terms of curriculum, relying on lived experiences to guide curriculum in the digital age brings relevance to curriculum and, as McLaren (1992) implies, can lead to transformation if the knowledge gained from lived experiences empowers other scholars or practitioners.

As curriculum scholars, we owe it to our practitioners to delve into the realm of curriculum theory to fine-tune the underpinnings of what it takes to craft an experience in the digital age. Schubert (2010) writes that "the unexamined curriculum is not worth offering" (p. 22). In our respective positions as curriculum and instructional technology coordinators, we have a duty and responsibility to reexamine curriculum to allow for the integration of student choice, voice, and lived experience in a format that incorporates the needs of the digital generation—the ability to shift and change their mind, choice, and identity. The curriculum is responsible for crafting learning experiences for practitioners that help them "become" a better version of themselves instead of constraining them. As curriculum scholars, we are responsible for guiding practitioners in designing curriculum that prepares students to become successful in the digital age. In the uncertainty of today's society, it is essential to capitalize on students' experiences, since ultimately, they are the ones who will continue the journey that we call life.

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The Feel of *Currere*

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*The author would like to thank Olivia Ferrazza for granting permission to use her expressive piece *Nostalgic Grief* in this article.

> The problem is I don't know shit, nor care, about 'the way things are.' I hail from the exotic land of ... THINGS THE WAY I LIKE 'EM. It's just up the street.
> -Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run*

"*Currere* … is the study of educational experience," writes William Pinar (1975, p. 400). The focus of this article is on what that sentence—and the subsequent *currere* process outlined by Pinar (1994)—means to me. Could my interpretation benefit myself and others interested in enhancing educational experience? I think it might, because when diving into Pinar's writing I was taken aback by his use of an often-used, but misunderstood, four-letter F word (a good one).

Background

I am not a curriculum theorist but when my colleague, Tom Poetter, introduced me to *currere* a few years ago, the word stuck in my head like "Costanza" from the classic Seinfeld "Roasted Chicken" episode (season 8, episode 8). Pinar's approach, what little I understood of it from one reading (i.e., an essay on the *currere* method [Pinar, 1994]), resonated with my natural inclination to be drawn to ideas/concepts that are complex, deep, and focus on the self (e.g., flow, psychological wellbeing). In addition, as I will discuss in more detail, Pinar uses words that jibe with my take on the world—he talks my language, so to speak. Most importantly, he uses that one word in various writings that I was not expecting, a word that has been at the core of my teaching, research, and writing in recent years, and I will explore this word's understated role in *currere* a bit later in the article. But some background may help before getting into all that.

For better or worse, my high school and undergraduate experience involved total immersion in sports and physical education, respectively. I thought I was going to be an elementary PE teacher, but one thing led to another … which then evolved over many graduate school and professor years into interests in sport, exercise, and health psychology, optimal performance and positive psychology, and psychological well-being. These interests wrapped around many varied experiences, also over many years inside and outside of academe, such as: onion farm worker, PE director at a Boys (now Boys & Girls) Club, editor of a sports coaching newsletter, sportswriter, and founder/former director of Miami University's employee health and well-being program (sadly, now defunct), to name just a few. My latest faculty profile on the Department of Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Health website at Miami is as follows:

> I like writing books/articles that explore novel ideas/stories for enhancing health behavior change and high quality performance via *positive subjective experience* (e.g., flow). My current interests probe the intersection between optimal well-being and healthy living within sustainable environments. I'm also interested in the "why" and "how" of implementing activities and facilitating experiences to enhance sustainable well-being across the lifespan in various life contexts, such as worksites, schools, and universities.

Kimiecki, J. (2022). The feel of *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 63–73.

I share this profile and italicized *positive subjective experience* for the purposes of this article as this phrase best captures my life's work, which is a central theme in almost everything I've ever written, whether it be academic articles or nonfiction and fiction books for a general audience. So, getting to a key point in a roundabout way: when initially reading Pinar's literary opus he called *currere*, I immediately felt a connection but had no foggy notion what to do with regressive–progressive–analytical–synthetical. So, I let it be. Sometimes in the various classes I teach, *currere* would annoyingly pop into my head, like "Caaaa–stan-za," as I use a mix of narrative pedagogy, self-reflection, and free association combined with interactive activities and expressive writing (e.g., capstone course in Expressive Writing in Health and Medicine).

Invariably, when given the chance in the right circumstances, the vast majority of students in the courses I teach let go and write about experiences of losing their selves, being alone, or feeling restricted as a result of their schooling (not just college) as well as the kind of culture in which they live. This experience was particularly evident in my students' writing in the fall semester of 2021, which compelled me to take a deeper dive into my teaching approaches and writing interests and their potential link to *currere*. I am cautiously optimistic that, by making these connections/observations, *currere* may spring to life for myself and perhaps add another voice calling for the inclusion and exploration of both the teacher's and student's inner world (inner curriculum) as the roots of educational experience.

As is evident, the process that sparked this article was haphazard. Guided by my quasi-journalistic past, I began to search (not a systematic review by any means) William Pinar and uncovered a YouTube video of him reading a paper in reply to an Elliot Eisner paper at the 1976 *Milwaukee Curriculum Theory Conference* (for a transcription, see Murillo & Pinar, 2019). Spellbound, I watched the video and read the transcription many times. In the video, Pinar berates Eisner with his more than 10-minute reply while they are sitting arm's length from each other. In addition, I read Pinar's (1975) chapters in *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* along with *currere*-type writings by him and other scholars (e.g., Adams & Buffington-Adams, 2020; Baszile, 2017; Malin, 2018) in the *Currere Exchange Journal* and myriad curricular-oriented journals.

The remainder of this article focuses on the processes and outcomes of my so-called *currere* adventure by highlighting the Grand Canyon gap between schooling (outer curriculum) and education (inner curriculum) and then transitioning into why Pinar's use of one word necessitates a call for a *currere* encore.

Outer Curriculum

For argument's sake, let's assume that the definition of learning should include at least some of what Goodson and Gill (2011) propose:

> Our vision for learning encompasses meaning-making, connecting to what is valuable and worthwhile in what humans do, being and becoming … the development of the mind, body, heart, and spirit … learning concerns the flourishing of individual human beings and realisation of their fullest capacities. (pp. 114–115)

So at least some of what is called learning from K thru higher education should address meaning-making, the whole person, flourishing, and reaching one's potential, whatever that might be. Positive subjective experience, anyone? Obviously, this view of learning, as Gill and Thomson (2009) contend, involves much more than

teaching traditionally conceived knowledge or skills—the outer curriculum. But we are imprisoned by the outer curriculum as Baszile (2017) has noted, "We teach them [students] instead that the primary purpose of education is to get a job. … In this way education gets reduced to schooling" (p. vii). Curriculum theorists and educational philosophers have argued for decades, even centuries, against the dominance of an outer curriculum schooling model, to no avail.

Why? Why after almost 50 years have Pinar's curriculum Reconceptualists and their descendants failed miserably in their fight to stave off the outer curriculum's onslaught on education and learning? That is, why are the vast majority of teachers and students still being schooled?

Space limitations prevent a full-blown discussion of the origins and entrenchment of the outer curriculum in Western society. Briefly, the schooling paradigm has been called the "banking" model, where knowledge is "deposited, stored, and used" (hooks, 1994, p. 5), or the "digestive" concept of knowledge (Freire, 1970, p. 7). Smith (2013) sums it up: "the student's mind is understood as something akin to a blank slate upon which knowledge is simply inscribed with little regard for the consequences or subjectivity of the learner" (p. 7). According to Pinar (1975), much of the curriculum within school environments focuses on "the observable, the external, the public" wrapped around knowledge objectives and goals involving materials, something external, to be encountered (p. 400). Importantly, as Pinar and others write about, this outer curriculum is devoid of body and feeling, reflecting cultural conditioning: "acquisitive, compulsively consumptive marketplace modes of the larger culture" (Pinar, 1975, p. 406). It is not surprising, then, that Baszile's earlier point about education becoming schooling by acquiring the knowledge and credentials you need to "get a job" has become the primary function of schools. We are in the throes of a market society/consumption culture that emphasizes precisely what schooling is all about: money, goods, "learning" outcomes, and goals and objectives.

In a market society, "market thinking and market relationships invade every human activity," asserts Sandel (2012, p. 187). Interestingly, around the time when Pinar (1975) was developing and writing about the *currere* process, in the late 1960s/early 1970s, economists such as Phelps (2013) suggest that mass flourishing was beginning to decline as the culture shifted to a market society resulting in a "palpable decrease in vitalism" (p. 316). Addressing the connection between consumption and youth, Kasser et al.'s (2004) work clearly demonstrates that late adolescents who have strong materialistic values report lower self-actualization and vitality. In examining the influence of a market society, Giroux (2011) acknowledges that all education is political, and he argues that the insertion of market forces into education emphasizes schooling rather than helping students be "self-reflective, critical, and self-conscious about their relationship with others and to know something about their relationship with the larger world" (para. 30).

It is impossible, then, to separate culture from schooling, and the market society, as Sandel (2012) declares, is as strong as it's ever been and getting stronger. Thus, it is not surprising at all that teachers adopt banking or digestive pedagogical methods and that students are being schooled rather than experiencing an education. Young people have been sold a bill of goods about school and, encouraged by sellout adults, have been willing to pay an exorbitant price, to give up huge chunks of themselves to "get a job" (or get into graduate school to get a better job). As a return on their investment, students getting schooled in a market society have given up play to gain depression, anxiety, and loneliness (see Kimiecik & Teas, 2020, for an overview). Here is a writing piece from one of my students (fall 2021) that describes her experience:

Nostalgic Grief
I wonder what it's like to be a kid.
So peaceful, so uncensored, so intuitive, so uncomplicated.
Running around on the lawn chasing fireflies in princess pajamas.
Grass threading between dirty toes as the summer sun dips below the treeline, painting the sky pink.
Maybe, if she's lucky, she will trap a firefly between her palms.
Heart warm like the glow streaking through the cracks between her fingers.
She understands the majestic nature of being a human.
To be alive is invigorating, sensational, and precious.

I wonder what it's like to be a kid.
Covered head to toe in dirt from the softball field.
Must, sweat, a little blood on the knees, and a smile.
She had love and spirit for the game, screaming chants through the holes in the dugout fence.
She was unafraid, fearless, and hopeful.
Not thinking about the worst that could happen, but rather the best that could happen.
Not a care in the world but what type of ice cream she was choosing on the ride home.

I wonder what it's like to be a kid.
I now walk around with anxiety in my throat,
social standards in my head, a tunnel focus on the future.
I'm deeply afraid of messing up, of not doing enough.
I'm deeply afraid to love something, knowing the worst that could happen.
I've lost the child that once lived in this body.
Even if I stretch out my hand, could I reach her?

Humans, we have a problem. If the human being is not included in (i.e., removed from) the outer curriculum, learning, real learning, will suffer, and so will everyone involved. A call for the inner curriculum should be louder than ever, beginning with a curtain call for Pinar's *currere*. Pinar and other curriculum Reconceptualists (e.g., see Postman, 1985) anticipated the woeful state of affairs described in this section, reflected in my student's writing, by introducing and emphasizing the inner curriculum. For me, Pinar stands out here, and so I turn now to his (and my) view of the inner curriculum, *currere*.

Inner Curriculum

Pinar's (1975) three chapters in *Curriculum Theorizing*, his brief, but fierce, 1976 reply to Eisner, and his 1975 *The Method of Currere* essay (Pinar, 1994) provide the framework for his inner curriculum approach, which begins with the individual, the self. It is no surprise that he believes it's a mistake to "have aspirations" for schools: "due to their relation to the culture they are beyond our control, beyond any group's control" (Murillo & Pinar, 2019, p. 164). As discussed above, schooling ignores educational experience to the point that experience is forgotten, which makes one "numb to body, to feeling" (p. 164). Pinar's focus turns to the individual, the self, as the pathway to discovering the nature of one's inner experience, what he calls *lebenswelt*. Baszile

(2017) agrees that *currere* "positions the self to examine the self" (p. viii). It is through this turning inward into the self, into the experience of one's educational journey, that a change of consciousness is experienced, leading to individual transcendence or transformation. Only then can collective change occur.

How does this actually happen? Pinar proposes one way. His *currere* process has been outlined in several places, so I won't delve into the details of the interrelated regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical process. What has most captured my interest is Pinar's (1975) emphasis on the subconscious, or what he calls the preconceptual: "Part of what we must do is reestablish contact with the preconceptual and describe the essences of both substances and situations as they disclose themselves to us" (p. 423). Baszile (2017) interprets it as follows: "*currere* can help us identify subconscious thoughts and patterns of thinking that explain our actions, and with this awareness, we can work to decolonize both our thinking and our actions" (p. viii).

But what is the preconceptual and how does one actually reestablish contact with it?

Pinar suggests we begin by going back to our early educational experiences (regressive). Certainly, this approach has merit as Poetter (2021) has demonstrated when he revisited his experiences with his fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Kemp. However, as Adams and Buffington-Adams (2020) point out, the *currere* process is very difficult to do, especially alone. In addition, there are other challenges with this part of the *currere* process. Kahneman, the Nobel Prize-winning behavioral economist, concludes that people "are systematically wrong about their affective memories" (Kahneman & Smith, 2002, para. 81). Furthermore, thoughts are not always what they appear to be because, as Wright (2017) observes, thoughts and beliefs "often seem to have feelings attached to them" (p. 115), especially a certain type that Damasio (2010) calls as-if feelings—"composite perceptions … images of actions rather than actions themselves" (pp. 109–110). These images of actions differ from emotions, which are body-mind judgments of real-time experiences (Damasio, 2010; Fredrickson, 2001; Nussbaum, 2001), and are stored in the brain. As-if feelings are not dependent on actions, but rather are grounded in images of pseudo experience.

And here's an added problem with feelings tied to thoughts. They are powerful, long-lasting, and biased towards making us feel good, or at least feel better, rather than providing us with accurate information about the past, present, or future (Wilson, 2002). We are up against a powerful feel-good criterion blinded by an inner cocktail of biased thoughts and beliefs awash in feelings. This leads to self-delusion or what Kahneman (2011) calls "cognitive illusions" (p. 27). Leary (2004) agrees: "we are nearly blind to the illusions we have about ourselves" (p. 56), as does Wilson (2002) who calls humans "masterly spin doctors" and observes, "The conflict between the need to be accurate and the desire to feel good about ourselves is one of the major battlegrounds of the self" (pp. 38–39).

Images appear to be winning the battle (Boorstin, 1961). McGilchrist's (2019) brain lateralization theory presents an abundance of evidence to support his hypothesis that our existence in modern society is dominated by a *re-presentation* of experience. This re-presentation is a second-order reality encompassing our thoughts, beliefs, and as-if feelings, rather than first-order presence that functions "without awareness or the necessity of the perceptual monitoring" (Gallagher, 2005, p. 24). Living in such a way "experience becomes little more than interior decoration" (Boorstin, 1961, p. 180).

I am not suggesting that partaking in *currere*'s "intellectual expenditure" (Pinar, 1975, p. 409) is ineffective or not worth exploring, far from it. What is gnawing at me is

how, or what, reestablishes connection with the preconceptual, especially given some of the challenges described above. What will get us to the deeper layer Jung (1939) calls the "personal unconscious" (p. 53) that is inborn or what Heidegger et al. (1962) label as "fundamental structures" (p. 42) of human existence? These questions seem important because I feel this is where Pinar wants *currere* to take us. So, what is missing from the descriptions/writings/stories of the *currere* process that would overcome the described challenges and enhance, or enable, the process of reconnecting with the preconceptual? The answer may lie with that one F word uttered repeatedly by Pinar himself when replying to Eisner: *Feel.*

Feel the Inner Curriculum

Pinar ends his 1976 response with this:

> If we could really *feel* it in the bowels, in the groin, in the throat, in the breast, we would go into the streets and stop the war, stop slavery, stop the prisons, stop the killings, stop destruction. I might learn what love is. When we *feel*, we will *feel* the emergency. When we *feel* the emergency, we will act. And when we act, we will then change the world. (Murillo & Pinar, 2019, p. 164, emphasis added)

Why was I stopped in my tracks by Pinar's Feel call to action? My working hypothesis (about 20 years in the making) is that Pinar's "when we feel" is *the* preconceptual, the first-order presence. Feel is inborn, universal, the deeper layer, the fundamental structure, and could lead to what Pinar (1975) calls the "collective unconscious" (p. 410). Pinar (1975) also writes that the *currere* process unveils a coherence that is lived, a "felt one" (pp. 19–20).

Why am I making such a hullabaloo about one four-letter F word? Because I strongly suspect we (humans) cannot get to first-order presence, the preconceptual, without including the most natural part of ourselves: Feel or the felt experience. Pinar knew this in 1976 (probably earlier). But that is exactly what we have not been doing. We have relegated Feel to be a benchwarmer when she/he is the best player on the team and should be playing in the game. Without nurturing our natural Feel, we are being played by The Game instead of playing the game. We are being schooled rather than experiencing an education over a lifetime.

If you read Pinar's ending quote again, you can sense that feel and the body are inextricably connected. The preconceptual has to begin and end with the body—the bowels, the groin, the throat, the breast. As soon as I read Pinar's exhortation to Feel, I remembered how I wrote about experiencing my Feel in a race years ago during my adventure as a wannabe masters runner:

> My legs were beginning to get that heavy feeling, just as they always did at about this point in my races. But this time I was ready. I embraced the discomfort by relaxing as best I could. Keep the form, I reminded myself. Then I pumped the arms more quickly—the legs have to turn over faster—and kept my eyes glued on the pack in front of me. I was gaining ground. I was embracing the pain. Rather than just surviving, I was racing … I had finally broken through and experienced the feel that drew me to this quest in the first place: strength, power, rhythm, and speed. (Kimiecik & Newburg, 2009, p. 37)

Embodied cognition is one arm of neuroscience that has evolved to explore the body's central role in cognition. Cappuccio (2015) writes "our body shapes what our

mind can do" (p. 213), and Freund (1990) declares, "Mind acts through the body" (p. 457). Thus, the body forms the core of all human experience, and Harris et al. (2015) implore, "It is now the turn of our own bodies to take central stage" (p. 8). Bodily processes, or the presence of biologically-steeped *a priori* structures, underlie consciousness (Khachouf et al., 2013). Feel and the body go together like peas and carrots. Without Feel, we become "numbed to experience, the mind functions without anchoring in body and feeling" (Murillo & Pinar, 2019, p. 164).

In sum, I am suggesting that "the 'feel' of an action is not the same as thoughts/feelings about the situation" (Gendlin, 1962, p. 69). The former is first-order presence, whereas the latter is second-order reality. As Vygotsky (1962) exclaims, "In the beginning was the deed. The word was not the beginning—action was there first" (p. 153). The body leads the way. How? With feel. Feel was there first, before thought, before words. Feel is primordial. Feel is the source; feel emanates from the body and, in fact, lies at the core of our lived and experienced body. Feel is the body signaling the mind to focus attention on the object (i.e., interest). Feel is the soul of our lived and experienced body. Feel or feeling, not feelings, is the universal preconceptual as Weber (2016) explains:

> Feeling … is the only scale that can express what is relevant for a living being. Feeling is the common language of all cells and all beings, the language of bodies and of poets. Only decisions taken in this language can have effects in the real world. And they can only work if the body retranslates them into the swelling of its muscles and the tension of its limbs. This is the decisive difference between the sphere of organisms and the world of machines. (p. 123)

To avoid becoming machines, we must Feel to reestablish contact with the preconceptual. I am proposing that Feel is the body's experience and skill of sensing and knowing what's happening in the moment; feel is the informed energy that enables teachers, students, learners, performers to do what needs doing and to know when they have done it well.

There are so many ways to incorporate Feel into both formal and informal *currere*-type processes for ourselves and our students (see Kimiecik, 2010). One way outlined by Baszile (2017) is via autobiographical artifacts from others who, in this case, appear to be living feel-based lives. I find and share these life stories with my students and encourage them to write their own focusing on how things feel or felt or will feel (e.g., *Nostalgic Grief*).

One such story I highlight is of Dawn Staley, Head Women's Basketball Coach at the University of South Carolina. Staley, who grew up in poverty in North Philadelphia, was a highly decorated player at the University of Virginia and a gold-medal Olympian, but she is an even better coach. She has written about her life experiences as a Black woman (e.g., Staley, 2015, 2018) and was also interviewed about her story by Newburg (2009) and Gay (2021). Her story is about how she coped with the outer curriculum by creating her inner curriculum, with feel, and reflects all phases of *currere*—regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. Staley built what she felt starting at an early age. She writes:

> The big field behind our row house had a softball field, basketball court and baseball field all within it. It wasn't one of those fancy facilities with nicely drawn chalk lines. Nah—the projects don't have those. We had to hand paint every line. We had to create everything. We even made a track. Not one of those nice Olympic tracks. We had to hand-draw the lanes. They weren't straight lines but they were enough to

> understand which lane was yours when the relay races started … We made baskets out of crates for the basketball court. Just cut the bottom out of the crate and nail it to a piece of wood. Boom—you got a backboard. (Staley, 2018, para. 4–5)

In this *regressive* fragment, Staley examines the beginnings of her inner curriculum with action and Feel: "we had to create everything." As Pinar (1994) writes, "the past is entered, lived in, but not necessarily succumbed to" (p. 23). Staley observes that she created things to make her experience happen. She literally built what she needed to play basketball, to do what she liked doing. Newburg (2009) interviewed Staley just before she was to try out for her first of three Olympic teams:

> Winning the gold medal is my goal, not my dream. My dream is about playing to win as often as possible with and against the best women basketball players in the world. Winning the gold medal as a goal gives me some direction, but my dream is something I need to live every day. And I'm doing that each time I play to win. ... When I'm playing to win, that's when I feel resonance. If I win, that's great. I want to win and having the gold medal as my goal forces me to play to win. But what I love to do, what my dream is, is to play to win. (p. 66)

In this *analytical* fragment, Staley reveals her biographic present in such a way to free herself from pressure; as Pinar (1994) writes, she is "more free to freely choose the present, and the future" (p. 26). The gold medal is part of the outer curriculum, not the lived present, whereas her dream of playing to win formed the core of her inner curriculum, where she felt what she called resonance.

When Staley became a coach, she writes, she realized the connection with her players would be the secret to great coaching, and this set the stage for how she wanted to feel as a coach. Staley didn't know the specifics of how to do it when she arrived at South Carolina to coach, but she followed her inner curriculum, her Feel, that took her into the future (*progressive*):

> I need to have a personal relationship with each player. I, just like they do, have to be invested. Something other than basketball has to draw me to them. Basketball is the immediate common ground between us, of course, but I'm talking about a personal level. I like to have something more. … But after seven years and after building personal relationships with these players—relationships that require reciprocal trust and vulnerability—that guard is down. They're seeing more of me—who I really am—than any other place I've been. I'm more myself now. That feeling of letting my guard down allows me to give my all. I credit our players for allowing me to coach the way I do—I don't have to censor anything. I don't have to put on airs. *I feel what I feel when I feel it, and then I express it*. That's what the people and players of South Carolina have done: help me be myself (Staley, 2015, para. 15, 20, emphasis added)

Staley's Feel of coaching keeps her in first-order presence as much as possible, which personifies the inner curriculum, rather than the outer curriculum's second order reality of past or future. "The present does not easily find its way into the category of goals, objections, or purposes," writes Huebner (1975, p. 239). In Staley's interview with Gay (2021), she states, "I don't set goals. I never wanted to be a coach" (n.p.).

Concluding with the *synthetical*, Pinar (1994) says to put all of it aside and then in your own voice ask, "what is the meaning of the present?" (p. 26). Staley (2015) answers, "I'm an example for living for what you love. And it brought me to them" (para. 31).

Encore

This article was my call for an encore song of the *currere* band, moving Feel from backup singer to lead vocalist. But it won't be easy to get *currere* back out on the stage of life. The outer curriculum permeates all aspects of Western society thwarting educational experience disguised as schooling at every turn. The only resistance, the only hope, is to Feel, to create our own song and invite others to sing along. We all have this capability to Feel. Cantril (1967) identified it years ago: "Feeling, then, appears to be the great activating force, the motivator against which all else that happens to the human being is measured and judged" (p. 96). He titled his article, "Sentio, Ergo Sum." Pinar knew it, no, felt it in his reply to Eisner.

I Feel, Therefore, I Am.

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Sadness and Education: Emotion, *Currere*, and La Dispute's *Wildlife*

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Questions of Sadness

Is it ever appropriate to show sadness as a teacher? Not disappointment, not empathy for another's loss or grief, but our own personal sadness. This question has haunted my teaching since my earliest professional experiences.

In the fall of 2009, I was a second-year undergraduate student beginning my first practicum at an elementary school in Québec, Canada. I was 19 years old; I had a shaken and erratic life and a tenuous hold on reality—all of which was physically manifest. I wore my hair in a long, chaotic, unkempt ponytail. I had a pencil thin moustache and a soul patch. I wore a long fur coat that was many times too big and black jeans and t-shirts.

I certainly didn't look like any teacher I had ever had. But perhaps the most striking thing about my physical appearance in those days was my sullen visage and my sad eyes. The previous year of university life had left me lost and broken. The unwelcomed end of a high school relationship, the death of a once-close friend, a general feeling of outsiderness that I still carry with me, and the physical distance between my family and me all contributed to my sadness. At my lowest point, I was e-mailing back and forth daily with an online depression support hotline—it was the only way I knew how to ask for help. I kept most things inside, and no one at the university noticed. I still went to classes, and at the end of September, I had to step into my first teaching experience.

When sadness is our everyday reality, we don't always think it strange or problematic. Sometimes, we need others to hold up a mirror to us before we see ourselves as we are. My supervising teacher waited until the last day of my practicum to hold up that mirror. About halfway through our conversation, I realized she was giving me a failing grade on my evaluation. She had several professional reasons—my inability to talk to her about what I was feeling regarding the class, my lack of long-term planning, and my bizarre attire—but her main justification for giving me a failing grade, it seemed, was the fact that I didn't smile at my colleagues in the hallways. She said that I didn't look *happy* to be there.

This experience, more than a decade ago now, has stayed with me, and so has my sadness. Now a scholar of curriculum studies, however, I find myself preoccupied with a larger question: What does sadness teach? This question, I think, is best answered through the process of *currere* (Pinar, 1994). An autobiographical approach to curriculum theorizing, *currere* works in four moments: the regressive, the progressive, the analytic, and the synthetic. These moments work at the intersection of psychoanalytic, feminist, and phenomenological theorizing (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), and they tend to bleed into one another rhizomatically (McNulty, 2019).

Though primarily focused on lived experiences, Pinar (Pinar & Grumet, 2015; see also Pinar, 1994) also highlighted the role literature can play in understanding one's curricular experiences in *currere*. Indeed, Pinar has often discussed the way literature informed the initial concept of *currere* (Pinar, 2020). Rather than literature, however, music has taught me the most about sadness. Specifically, this paper draws on the album *Wildlife* by the American post-hardcore band La Dispute[1] as a source of my theorizing.

Downey, A. M. (2022). Sadness and education: Emotion, *currere*, and La Dispute's *Wildlife*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 74–83.

Modeled after the poem, *Pale Fire*, by Vladimir Nabokov (1962), *Wildlife* is a portrait of sadness, and it is often noted for its emotionally evocative lyrics (Andrews, 2011), which vividly address loss, coping, death, and hope. Through its lyrics, *Wildlife* provides a mirror for my own everyday sadness and a site to examine the meaning of that sadness beyond simple articulations of blame or relief.

In the next section, I situate my thinking about sadness within the larger bodies of literature on education, emotion, and psychoanalysis. From there, I engage the process of *currere* in conversation with *Wildlife.* I begin, as does the album, in speaking of loss and storying my own sadness. I then discuss the idea of coping with loss before moving into a discussion of death and concluding in hope. The structure of this essay, thus, follows the form of *Wildlife* closely and loosely corresponds to the four moments of *currere* (Pinar, 1994).

Emotion and Education

Historically, educational theory and practice have been disengaged from emotion, focusing more on the social and intellectual development of students. Feminist theorizing challenged this exclusion of emotion from education (e.g., hooks, 1994), as did Paulo Freire's (1997) foundational emphasis on radical love and Daniel Goleman's (1997) work on emotional intelligence. Recent trends around social and emotional learning (Humphrey et al., 2020), the role of emotions in social justice education (Boler, 1999), and the affective turn in education (Dernikos et al., 2020) have followed suit.

Since the Reconceptualization in the 1970s, curriculum studies has worked alongside many of these trends, and *currere* specifically has been one of the key spaces in which the emotional dimensions of education have been, and continue to be, explored. Recent articles in the *Currere Exchange Journal*, for example, have noted the emotionally satisfying charge of *currere*'s synthetic moment (Noreiga-Mundaroy, 2021), the socio-pedagogical significance of witnessing students' emotions (Googins, 2021), and the push and pull of anxieties and intimacies amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Mayoh-Bauche, 2021). Both curriculum studies and *currere*, however, continue to be misunderstood outside the field (Morris, 2019) and maintain limited influence on public schooling. Thus, while the above trends have generated valuable language for discussing the emotional lives of teachers and students, there remains a normativity attached to positive emotion in schools. Indeed, the goal of both emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997) and emotional literacy (Humphrey et al., 2020) seems to be the management and alleviation of negative emotion. This normative positivity is sometimes strategically mobilized to silence critiques of racism (DiAngelo, 2021; Matias, 2016; Saul, 2021b) and serious discussions about unpleasant realities, such as the likelihood of dystopian climate change (Saul, 2021a). In effect, the desire to keep education a positive experience for everyone works to silence those who do not see or experience it as such.

Again, *currere* proves the exception to this tacit (sometimes toxic) positivity, as one recent article explicitly suggested that teachers ought not to try and resolve student emotion, but rather serve as a witness to those emotions (Googins, 2021). Indeed, *currere* can be a sort of witnessing—a witnessing through writing of the self making sense of itself. The current paper, then, seeks to witness the curriculum of everyday sadness.

Here, I am specifically interested in sadness, which is distinct from the clinical term "depression" by virtue of the former's shorter, though often recursive, timeframe. Essentially, I am concerned with mourning rather than melancholia in the Freudian sense (Freud, 2005; see also Mitchell & Black, 2016). Depression, or melancholia, is a serious

condition, with severe cases showing a lack of agency over one's perceptions of reality. Sadness, or mourning, is temporary—though haunting—and usually linked to a specific loss. I am, however, not convinced that there are always clearly observable delineations between these terms. I, thus, turn to the psychoanalytic literature beyond Freud toward a broader view of psychological issues, treating one's internal landscape as a unique entity rather than an easily categorized clinical presentation (Mitchell & Black, 2016).

Within the psychoanalytic literature, different framings of depression and sadness exist. Melanie Klein, for example, posited that ego development happened in two stages: the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive (Segal, 1973). Non-psychotic adults move between these phases, and problems arise only when one gets stuck. The depressive position, which has more to do with sadness than depression *per se*, takes on a recursive quality throughout our lives: "The depressive position is never fully worked through. The anxieties pertaining to ambivalence and guilt, as well as situations of loss, which reawaken depressive experiences, are always with us" (Segal, 1973, p. 80). In other words, as with most psychoanalytic frameworks (Mitchell & Black, 2016), formative experiences in our childhood provide a map for understanding subsequent experience, and loss events in adulthood can reawaken the experiences of loss in childhood.

Often seen as an orthodox voice in psychoanalysis, Charles Brenner (1982) suggested the mapping of previous experience, inclusive of conscious and unconscious thought, onto the present moment as one half of what makes affect.[2] He defines this "idea" as a category that includes "memories, mental representations of objects, mental representations of one's own physical sensations, etc." (Brenner, 1982, p. 43). With negative affect, a distinction can be made between affects rooted in a fear of what might be, such as anxiety, and affects associated with things that have already happened, such as misery or discontent. The second half of Brenner's framework is sensation, which can be divided into pleasure and unpleasure and can also be described by magnitude. An intense unpleasure leads to a different affect than a mild unpleasure. Sadness can be thusly understood as a *mildly* unpleasurable affect with ideational inspiration in the having been.

Beyond psychoanalysis, I also understand emotion as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Specifically, Sara Ahmed (2014) offers an avenue to make sense of the way emotions disperse among groups and how certain emotions "stick" more than others. Though not explicitly discussed by Ahmed, sadness, in this social framing, can be understood as not only happening inside the individual, but also in and through their interactions with other bodies and as intensifying through repeated interactions.

These myriad frameworks for understanding emotion all inform my thinking. I have offered some discussion of them toward situating this paper within a larger conversation. In the next section, I begin the work of *currere*.

Loss

My *currere* process always begins with freewriting in a notebook—notes, poems, long sections of stream of consciousness prose. When I sit down at the computer to write the papers that result from this free writing, I tend to frame *currere* as a storytelling process. I often ask myself something like: "What stories focus the thoughts emergent from the free writing?"

At all stages of the *currere* story told in this paper, the personal is echoed, evoked, and enhanced through conversation with the album *Wildlife*. *Wildlife* is narratively framed as a collection of short stories and monologues penned by a single author—

the narrator (they/them). The narrator begins each of *Wildlife*'s four sections with a monologue, then shares a series of stories upon which they also offer commentary.

Wildlife's first section deals with loss. The opening track, "a Departure,"[3] features the narrator questioning their sanity. They suggest they are absent minded and preoccupied with death. The narrator carries on saying that they hadn't always felt this way, but then there came a loss, which the narrator frames as a departure. The narrator leaves the precise quality of this departure up for interpretation. In interviews, lyricist Jordan Dreyer (2012) has said that he wanted the loss to be ambiguous, allowing the listener to see themselves in it.

In this departure, I do see my own. The memories are scattered and disjointed but visceral. I remember sitting in my grade eight art classroom, defending myself from insults and physical attacks of people I thought were my friends. I remember the teacher's silence. I remember leaving the room without permission and wandering the halls. I remember sitting on a curb outside the school crying. I remember feeling like, and identifying as, a social outcast. I remember never feeling safe or happy in school after that.

The three narrative tracks in the opening section of the album, "Harder Harmonies," "St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church Blues," and "Edit Your Hometown," offer stories that echo my own. "Harder Harmonies" depicts a gifted artist who is unable to make their life work outside of their art. "St. Paul" paints an image of a church, once a vibrant community, now fallen into disrepair. "Hometown" tells the story of an older man who is bitter about never having left his hometown, and the narrator wonders if they are the same—if both dwell too long on loss.

Here, there are reverberations too. I remember all the things I couldn't make work—relationships, careers, images of myself—and how the sense of loss that came with those things led to a near obsessional consideration of what might have been. Indeed, my whole first year of teaching was marked by a dwelling on the ending of a relationship that directly preceded the beginning of my contract. I didn't know how to be a teacher that first year. I didn't know how to be me. I hadn't yet recovered from the myriad losses that marked my teacher training, and despite the façade of happiness I presented to students, my eyes stayed sad.

Analytically, the opening section of *Wildlife* begs the question of whether sadness always has a departure. Most classically-oriented psychoanalysts would say yes—it is the imprint of childhood through which we come to understand our subsequent experiences, particularly loss. There is always a departure, but that departure happens much before we are aware. The departure in *Wildlife*, then, is a reactivation of a primary loss, and my sadness today, yesterday, and tomorrow is a lingering reactivation of a departure made in my teenage years—or earlier, in childhood. As suggested through Klein above, these reactivations are normative rather than exceptional.

Coping

The second section of *Wildlife* depicts the pull toward relief from sadness through different coping mechanisms. The monologue that begins the second section, "a Letter," responds directly to the first section's emphasis on loss with the narrator detailing the reasons they haven't been able to move on from their departure. The song's last line, however, questions whether the narrator ever tried at all and seems to suggest a new or renewed willingness to move on, to try again.

The two narrative songs in the second section, “Safe in the Forest” and “The Most Beautiful Bitter Fruit,” show attempts at coping with loss. “Forest” depicts two extremes of social engagement: isolation and immersion. At the beginning of the song, the speaker moves out of town to an isolated area before returning to a city and surrounding themselves with community at the end of the song. “Most Beautiful” deals in temporary physical connection and, more precisely, sexual fantasy: “was our touch half as sacred as I made it seem, or just another fabrication of a half dream” (La Dispute, 2011d, 3:01). In an interview on the song, Dreyer (2012) said that it could really be about anything with which one becomes infatuated after loss: work, a relationship, or drugs. Reflecting on the second section of the album, Dreyer (2012) expressed uncertainty about whether these coping strategies are necessarily bad, only that that they distract from the issue at hand. Indeed, while necessary, relief is only ever temporary, and recovery is never absolute; the imprint of loss remains felt throughout the body and the mind (Downey, 2021).

I’ve tried to cope with my sadness and loss through isolation. For several years, I lived and worked in a remote Northern community. I spent most of those years trying to “figure myself out,” reading books, and generally avoiding any sort of social gathering. That time was meaningful for me, and at the end of it, I did feel happy for a time. But eventually the sadness returned. New losses, both conscious and unconscious, brought me back to those formative experiences of outsiderness. There wasn’t an escape, only temporary relief.

Seeking relief from sadness, then, is something akin to coping with loss—it may be necessary at certain points in our lives, but ultimately it doesn’t help us to integrate the experience into who we are. That integration, I suggest, is the true future found in sadness—the progressive (Pinar, 1994) vision of my sadness’s curriculum.

Death

The third section of *Wildlife* deals with death. In the section’s opening monologue, “a Poem,” the narrator wrestles with whether their personal pain is significant or if, because it is self-inflicted in the narrator’s eyes, it somehow loses its significance. The monologue also functions as a response to the coping mechanisms in the second section, where the narrator wants and turns toward death as the ultimate loss and potentially a source of true relief from suffering: “Only death unimpeded, not slowing it’s pace, brings that petty, old worry and wonder away” (La Dispute, 2011b, 2:42).

The three narratives in the third section are elaborate and vivid stories of traumatic tragedy, all derived from Dreyer’s (2012) real-life experiences. The first song, “King Park,” tells the story of a gang-related drive-by resulting in the death of an unaffiliated child. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the shooter was only 20 years old. He barricades himself in a hotel room and shouts through the door at his uncle, who is trying to talk the shooter into giving himself up. In his emotional plea, the shooter wonders if he can be forgiven for the murder, asking, “Can I still get into heaven if I kill myself?” (La Dispute, 2011c, 6:20). The song concludes with the narrator leaving, not wanting to know how the scene ends. The next song, “Edward Benz, 27 Times,” shares the story of a man, Edward, whose son is severely mentally ill. The song comes to a climax when the son locks himself inside his house, with his mother on the outside rushing to the pharmacy to get his perception refilled—pills the son had stopped taking because they made him sleep too much. The father arrives at the house and forces his way in, where the son stabs him 27 times. Miraculously, the father survives, and the son is taken away

by police. At the end of the song, the narrator looks at the depth of this tragedy and of Edward's resolve to continue caring for his family, including his son, and finds no words to respond. The final song in the third section, "I See Everything," depicts a teacher sharing personal journal entries from when she lost her son to cancer. The climax of the song occurs rapidly: after several entries where the son's health improves, there are a rapid series of entries that suggest things are getting worse, culminating in the son's death. The song ends with the narrator comparing their pain to that of the child and the other characters in this section, ultimately finding their own pain lacking.

The songs in this section are, for me, the most evocative on the album. They are the songs that drew me in and inspired me to write this paper. Before doing any research, I heard them as songs of everyday tragedy—heartbreaking stories without clear blame or easy relief. These sufferings had no reason, and that has stayed with me. After listening to the record repeatedly and searching out interviews about it, I am still struck by the songs, and they leave me with the same unnameable emotion that they always have. It is perhaps the same feeling the narrator has at the end of "I See Everything"—an empathetic speechlessness, a simultaneous emptiness and fullness, a quiet contemplative pause. None of these descriptors name it precisely, so I have taken to calling it sadness. This sadness is not unlike the sadness that has followed me throughout my life, but here it is shared with others through witnessing. In that, I find a community of everyday sadness—a community of people grieving loss, however ambiguous—and my own sadness seems lighter.

A few years ago, I was on my way to a conference. I had arrived late because of flight cancelations, and the shuttle I had booked was already gone. Without an additional fee, a driver agreed to take me the two hours outside of the city where the conference was being held. I thanked him profusely, and he said it wasn't a problem—he lived in that area anyway. We talked in easy and relaxed tones throughout the drive, and gradually he started to tell me about his challenges with gambling addiction. In turn, I shared some of my own struggles. When we arrived, I thanked him again, both for the ride and for the conversation—I already knew it would stay with me.

What I felt after that two-hour drive was the same thing I feel when I listen to the songs in the third section of *Wildlife.* It is, I think, possibly the same emotion that compels Marla Morris (2019), after sharing her own journey with ovarian cancer, to write "dying of terminal cancer brings nothing, nothingness" (p. 10), thus, bucking the pull toward the redemptive arch of emotional recovery so common in education life writing and the corresponding trend toward normative positivity in schools. Nothingness, grief, sadness, empathetic contemplation—call it what you will, it has been where I have learned the most about what it means to be alive.

Hope

Wildlife closes off with a fourth section about hope. The monologue, "a Broken Jar," is a moment of clarity for the narrator, who can see that their whole life has been defined by, or structured in response to, a particular loss. With that clarity, however, there is still lingering uncertainty about how to move forward. In that way, "a Broken Jar," functions as a transition from the songs about death into those about hope.

The two songs that conclude the album, "all our bruised bodies and the whole heart shrinks" and "You and I in Unison," combine the narrator's voice and elements of narrative. "bruised bodies" suggests a universality to suffering: "Have you had a moment [that] forced the whole heart to grow or retract?" (La Dispute, 2011a, 1:03), and

the suggestion is that we all have. There is a moment in the middle of the song where the narrator flirts with the edges of nihilism, and at the end of the song, this seems a distinct possibility—that the narrator may end up only seeing meaninglessness in suffering. "You and I in Unison," however, alleviates this tension and brings the record—and the narrator's struggle with loss—to a close with the acceptance that "everybody has to let go someday" (La Dispute, 2011e, 3:02). The narrator isn't there yet—nor perhaps am I—and indeed, letting go isn't a total goodbye as much as an integration of the experience into who we are now: "Until I die, I will sing our names in unison" (La Dispute, 2011e, 3:55).

As above, I think that integration is a version of what is proposed in the synthetic moment of *currere*. The outcome of this writing, then, is that my sadness isn't something from which I am trying to recover, nor something I want to cope with or escape from. It is a part of me, and the work I am about—the course I am running—is to try and integrate it into my understanding of who I am.

Sadness and other discomforts need to be brought into the fold of who we are. We can't do that alone. We need others to help witness us (Googins, 2021) and sometimes to let us know what they see—to mirror back what we look or sound like. This, I think, is the task of a teacher. I use the word teacher here in a broad sense, and I am thinking about education not in the limited bureaucratic ways to which we have become accustomed. Indeed, I am thinking about education in the possible, not in the actual.

The actuality of education is, by definition, rather restrictive. So too was it in Freud's day. Indeed, Freud saw psychoanalysis as an "after education," something undertaken to deal with the repressions we experience in our upbringing (Britzman, 2021). Today, I think of the way certain topics are off limits in education and the way certain conversations are policed for their tone (Saad, 2020; Saul, 2021b). I think of this more broadly as the necessity of keeping education a positive space for all—the stickiness (Ahmed, 2014) of positive emotion in education.

Death, for example, is rarely discussed in public education despite more than 20 years of literature calling for its inclusion in the scope of curriculum (e.g., Durant, 2018; Pinar, 1992; Wass, 2004). Death is a part of human life and a significant factor in the meaning of human existence (Braidotti, 2013), yet public education remains disengaged from it. Part of the reason death isn't discussed in education is because there is a history of it not being a pleasant thing to talk about, especially with children. It is, thus, one manifestation of the idea that education need not look at the ugliness of human existence unless it is historically significant, like the holocaust.

Saul (2021a) offers another example in the likelihood of dystopian climate change. For Saul, public schooling seems unwilling to address the bleak possibilities of our planetary future. The same old myth of hard work yielding security is perpetuated in education despite the evidence that such a future is unrealistic and that we are much more likely living at the doorstep of dystopia, as Saul puts it. I would add to Saul's analysis that the failure to engage the realities climate change is a result of the same sticky positive emotion that disallows meaningful discussion of death in the classroom.

That sticky positivity also silences conversations about racism in some contexts. In another paper, Saul (2021b) names this as the "niceness" problem of education. The problem with niceness is that it rejects the specificity of naming harm to protect the feelings of people involved. Such is often the case in dealing with instances of racism. A person feels wronged by a racist incident or remark and comes forward to discuss it. The wronged person is specific in their use of terms like "anti-black" or "anti-

Indigenous" racism, but the response from the institution is codified in the language of multiculturalism, inclusivity, and mutual respect. Frustrated, the wronged person leaves the situation rolling their eyes. Such a case is described by Saul and by many others daily.

Some name this stickiness an extension of toxic positivity. I see it as an overarching necessity of maintaining positivity in schooling. The psychological mechanisms behind this positivity are more intricate than I can discuss here, but I suspect a large part of it has to do with the progressive inheritance of education, stemming from John Dewey and earlier Herbert Spencer (Egan, 2003). Education is always oriented toward the future and, as such, it is sometimes ignorant of its present realities, especially when those realities shake its very foundations.

Wildlife teaches that there is beauty in the difficult things in life—the things that force our hearts to grow or shrink. It also teaches that we can't run from our losses, nor smother them in infatuation. Most importantly, it teaches that we aren't alone in our suffering. Education can take a lesson from this. We can't run from the realities of the now any more than we can pretend that our students don't get sad sometimes. If we choose to engage the negative more directly, we can emerge, just like the narrator of *Wildlife*, better for the having been.

I look back at the teenager who walked through the halls of his high school feeling unsafe and afraid as the same person who walked through the halls of his first practicum school with sad eyes. That person is the same person who, today, walks through the hallways of a university looking frustrated, preoccupied, and perplexed—the same person who still feels like an outsider in most situations. My sadness isn't going anywhere; the imprint of sadness will always be there. It is a part of me.

As to the question that began this paper: "Is it ever appropriate to show sadness as a teacher," I think it's time we answered that in the affirmative, if not to start unsticking positive emotion from education, then to show our students that it is a normal part of human existence to feel sad.

I remember a morning in my grade six class where we were asked to teach lessons on emotional intelligence. The activity—not of my design—was for students to decorate a leaf and then pin it on our "tree of feelings" on the branch that most closely spoke to their daily emotional norm. In my class of 17, the happy branch was overburdened with leaves, and one lonely leaf was pinned to the sad branch. I watched as the student pinned it there. They turned to me afterwards and asked, "Why does everyone feel happy all the time?" It was a genuine puzzlement, a rare moment when the interior lives of others were displayed externally and where the student's own internal landscape was measured as different.

I opened my mouth to respond, but the recess bell rang, and chairs began to rustle with commotion. I got up to ensure that materials were put away, and when I looked back, the student's gaze lingered, and perhaps my memory fades, but I thought I saw loneliness there.

When the students returned from recess, my own leaf, newly decorated, was quietly pinned to the sad branch.

We never talked about it. I never told that student how true I was being to myself in that moment; I never saw the opportunity, but if I had the moment back, I might tell them, "Yes, I feel sad much of the time too."

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Endnotes

[1] At the time of recording *Wildlife*, the members of La Dispute were Jordan Dryer, Kevin Whittemore, Chad Sterenberg, Adam Vass, and Brad Vander Lugt. Additional recording personnel can be found at the following url: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_(La_Dispute_album). The album is available for purchase and streaming at the following url: https://ladispute.bandcamp.com/album/wildlife-2.

[2] In this paper, I use affect and emotion somewhat interchangeably following the individual author's usage. I do so in full awareness of, and perhaps resistance to, the distinctions that have been drawn between these terms (see also Ahmed, 2014).

[3] Capitalization of the title for each song follows the convention of the album.

Pinar's Path: Autoethnography for Critical Change

By Josh Montgomery

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The following represents an autoethnographic exploration of my own past from the perspective of my experience as a teacher of high schoolers in a rural school with a majority Chicana/o student population. I struggled to engage many of these students in our American history and New Mexico history courses. It took the effort of engaging in critical self-reflection, in the form of this autoethnography, to determine a potential cause and, more importantly, a potential solution. As a guiding framework, I selected William Pinar's (1975/1994) *currere* (or, as you will see, perhaps he selected me). In Pinar's (1975/1994) conception, our curriculum decision-making reflects our collected experiences discovered through a process of deep self-reflection. The journey on this path occurred over 4 steps:

- regressive (examining the past)
- progressive (opportunity to think about the future, but from the past)
- analytical (creating subjective space as freedom from the moment)
- synthetic (how has my understanding changed through the first three steps?)

A questioning of narratives is the crux of this autoethnographic journey, a complex and critical self-re-evaluation of how I taught history to my students, many of whom were alienated from the subject matter I was teaching (Adams, 2017; Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Harris & Watson-Vandiver, 2020; Marx et al., 2017; Reed-Danahay, 2017). It was this process—merged with Pinar's (1975/1994) path of *currere*—and the realization that my classroom practice was disempowering for many of my students that the narrative threads of the journey tied together. I hope that, through a similar process of self-exploration, practitioners can begin to take a more reflective lens to their engagement with students in the classroom and alter their teaching approaches to challenge ideologies and replace our tacit theorizing with overt, resulting in extending social goods to all of our students (Gee, 2015). It was only when I examined my curricula decision-making and then created a dialogue with my students that I was able to understand how my practice and facilitation disenfranchised my students of color—ironically, the very students whose history I was teaching. Finally, as I worked through the process I discovered that it was not enough to present this effort through academic discourse alone, but to expand the audience through telling a multi-modal narrative via a short graphic novelization.

Pinar's Path: Regressive

Pinar's regressive phase of exploration concerns the journey back in time to assess the events that form a person's learning experiences. Many of the ways we interact with the various forms of expression, the multimodalities of communication (Heath & Street, 2008), shape our basic conceptions of ourselves and our place in the world. This initial step represents the core assumption required for launching into reflexive autoethnographic processes. Through the recollection of how we as eventual teachers acquired modes of learning and discourse, we can more clearly divine our biases and collaborate to better reach an increasingly diverse student population (Burdell &

Montgomery, J. (2022). Pinar's path: Autoethnography for critical change. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 84–98.

Swadener, 1999). We start at the beginning, or at least the earliest we remember, and carry the process, Pinar's (1975/1994) regressive status, through the course of becoming educators.

The early investigation of these learning practices provides evidence of my introduction to learning in the American experience (Hamilton, 2010). I went from an impoverished background to one firmly middle class, from subsidized housing where life existed on the streets to a suburban home where life revolved around a hearth. If books represented an entrance into a middle-class life, particularly for those decidedly not middle class, then this early experience typified the idea, deeply embedded in American culture, that reading was what those striving for improvement did (Erekson, 2014). This idea embedded itself in a future social studies teacher as emblematic of the (T)ruth of a teleologic, or whiggish, reading of history, one oriented toward promulgating a master myth of inevitable positivity and progress and the attendant individual blame when unachieved (Bialostok, 2014; Gee, 2015; Graff, 2010; Pinar, 2015). As Mary Montavon (2018) writes, it takes courage (and perhaps some recklessness) to challenge this meta-narrative of churning consumptive progress.

Pastimes like reading represented a path to knowledge, the appropriate kind, assuming one was interacting with the right sorts of things, in the right sorts of places (Bialostok, 2014). This internalized message informed what sort of person one can be and acted to signify that identity to others in a similar realm. Parents, representing for many of us the vessel for first exposure to this neo-liberal worldview, employed their funds of knowledge based on their own reading of the world around them (Moll, 2015). Scribner (1984) provides an interesting framework for how we adapt to changing surroundings. The first of Scribner's metaphors is adaptation, learning seen through a lens of skills that serve immediate personal or social needs. I employed adaptation to a new context by transforming myself (or *being* transformed) from someone who played Space Invaders in his free time (or more likely, watched my older brothers play) to someone who picked up a book and, thus equipped, could talk about the ideas therein. The notion that learning and discourse provided a set of tools for not just the passive acquisition of information, but the accumulation of information for the purpose of creating and expressing new ideas altered my perception from a unimodal conception to a multimodal one (Brock et al., 2015). The evocation of this early experience potentially allows for more complex ways of interpreting learning while also uncovering the formation of a co-constructed identity. Further, the exploration uncovers wider trends in the standardization of learning and of students as productive capital (Gilbert, 2018).

Pinar's Path: Progressive

When thrust into a middle-class home with new emphases and different worries, I was forced to accommodate differing or perhaps more scripted conceptions of learning and, more fundamentally, alter my identity. Previous systems of knowledge building used to navigate far different streets were no longer necessary; really, they were actively discouraged. I had to reconcile two different worlds, for although my mother had read to me, the world I had previously been immersed in was alien to this new reality.

The version of dialogue I was now being socialized into was perceived as more cultured, more sophisticated, a better way to prepare oneself for a future in a status-obsessed competitive system. I could see the vital difference between the apartment I had come from—surrounded by busy roads, a junkyard, and packs of aimless kids—and this new world—big yard, big house, normal parental working hours and a bedroom for

each of us. One might assume I ought to have been primed for school, versed just enough in the sorts of socialized norms, values, and discourse espoused in the classroom. Alas, that was not the case.

If we accept Gee's (2015) theory that identity is bound up in discourse, and discourse is dominated by the cultural tracers that people are exposed to from earliest interactions, then we flirt with sticky territory surrounding subversion and alienation. If we accept, too, traditional pedagogic methods, we ask our students to check identity at the door of the classroom. It is a big ask. It also solidifies a system of defining deficiency (Graff, 2017), one that serves to select students based on their fit into the dominant ethos. Through a reading of Heath's (1982) groundbreaking ethnography of the early 1980s, we determine that, if deficiency exists, it is likely in school's inability to coax from kids the various tools they use for translating the world around them. This echoes my own experience, uncovered during the progressive phase. In short, I look back at my experience of schooling through the eyes of a frustrated kid but with the current evolving perspective of a Ph.D. … in education.

Through a critical assessment and the progressive aspect of Pinar's (1975/1994) framework, I grew enamored of the liberatory potential of narrative building. I prefer James Gee's (2015) idea of constructing interactions with learning around a central tenet, that building meaning should never result in the dominance of one over another. This gets us into some difficult terrain regarding schools. If it can be shown that the current structure of education ossifies class and ethnic difference while simultaneously acknowledging that schools are the medium through which society is made continuous, then it becomes necessary to envision a new educational framework, one that is likely radically different than that today (Gee, 2015). Pinar's progressive mode requires us to look at our past experiences but from a perspective of current understandings. Through the progressive angle, I attempt to apply everything I have learned, both formally and informally, to the reappraisal my experiences as a young man in school, and further, to utilize this view to make changes that could have benefitted me, and may benefit my current students. If we are able to establish a shared praxis, where teacher and student share in the meaning making and critical self-reflection equally then further use that meaning to make positive changes to shared community, then I think we are on the way to realizing a vision not just of Gee, but Freire (1970), Habermas (see White & Farr, 2012) and Dewey (1938/1998).

Pinar's Path: Analytical

I struggled in school, driven mainly by my resistance to have my learning mapped out for me. I was far happier, I think, to select my own course. Through the combination of taking a critical approach to my schooling and choosing my own path of learning, I can create a subjective space to analyze my current practice. The goal, through a process such as this autoethnography, is to establish my own story of learning, much as Resnick and Resnick (1977) do on a cultural scale, elucidating the roots of not only American habits with the concept of education, but divining foundational principles of American culture in the process. How much do the ways we interact with the various forms of expression, the multimodalities of communication, shape our basic conceptions of ourselves and our place in the world (Heath & Street, 2008)? How much of my identity: history guy, critic, reader of non-fiction, was established by my early experience with these systems of socialization—the importance of reading, the vitality of ideas? I have often wondered, could I be a similar person if I had not moved to a middle-class house swimming in books and people reading them. Or, more succinctly, do we make learning, or does it make us?

The foundation of this subjective space is the emphasis on the practice of critical self-reflection both in the origins of my learned self and my practice of educating (Brock et al., 2015). Subjective space allows me to analyze the role I play in maintaining a system of control, I am not a meaning maker, but a translator of meaning that favors some over others. This sort of challenge to conceptions of education threatens, perhaps, the social glue, the "stabiliz(ation)" that forges "common ground" (Gee, 2015, p. 27). And, if schooling actively perpetuates a "culture of inequality," then its justifiable dismantling may create a contentious new common ground (Gee, 2015, p. 43).

The idea-making surrounding the analytical part of the path is a mirror of the micro- and macro-scale questioning it produces. I contest my choices in the classroom, exposing the choices others make. It starts out personally and expands ecologically. As my acculturation into new forms of knowledge acquisition changed, so too did those factors marking my experience as mainstream or middle class (Heath, 1982). As my personal education conceptions were widening, so too were conceptions of learning on a social scale and, consequentially, the contradictions posed of its understanding. The challenge in the analytical phase is collecting these realizations impacting teaching practice and working with students to enable them to better challenge these systems that disfavor them.

This process, Freire (1970) inspired, is the framework that I couched my own autoethnographic journey in. Guided by the evolving dialogue created with students, I searched my own past for clues to my practice, ruminated about how I could alter future practice to better serve students, then altered that practice outside the moment. The final step conflated the first three and allowed me to look through literature to determine the ways the content, and how I unquestioningly delivered it, contributed to the long arc of dispossessing and disempowering my Chicana/o students.

Pinar's Path: Synthetic

And here the paths converge in my own experience of critical self-analysis, the establishment of a dialogue with my students, and the impact on my *currere* and classroom practice. While teaching high school social studies in Northern New Mexico, I conducted an investigation of the impact of classroom discourse surrounding New Mexico history on students of Chicana/o descent. I researched the literature on the development of the texts and on traditional attitudes of Anglo dominance and victory narratives. More importantly, I addressed the strategies needed to create engagement of my students when discussing episodes in history that led to their cultural dislocation following the American conquest of Northern Mexico after the Mexican American War (Grandin, 2019; Guardino, 2018; Guy & Sheridan, 1998; Moffette & Walters, 2008). I incorporated liberation theology, dialectics, and critical reading to design a methodology that can create in Chicana/o students' ownership of this period of history, as opposed to displacement. In the course of this study, I solicited the perspectives—through dialogue—of high school aged Chicana/o students and a Chicana/o teacher of history to inform the potential effectiveness of previously mentioned methodologies.

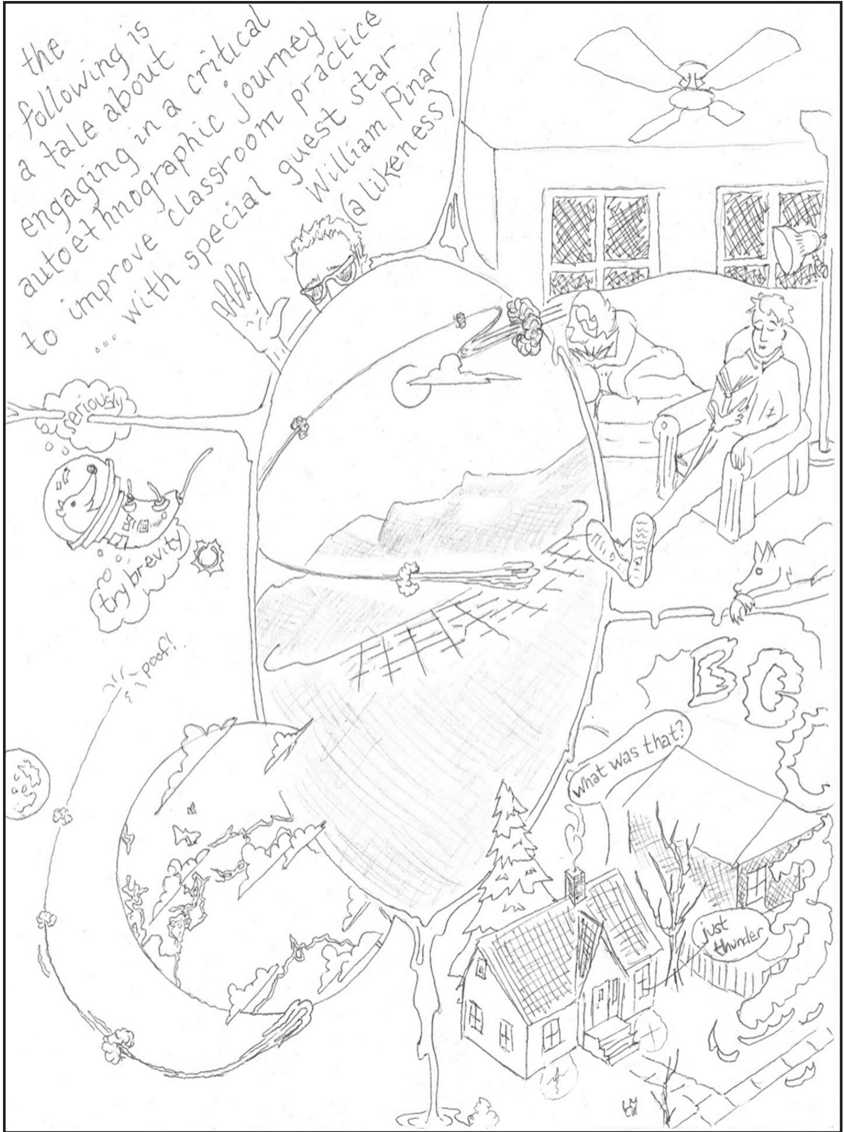
Through a literature review, discussion, and a growing exposure to liberatory pedagogy, I hoped to challenge the traditional narrative pushed in New Mexico classrooms. Previously, the story line was one of the triumph of Anglo ingenuity over Mexican ineptitude, one that required a scaffold of Mexican as other: mysterious, lazy, superstitious, feminine. In contrast, Anglo settlers were depicted invariably as bold, initiating, masculine, and brave (Deverell, 2005; Moore, 1976; Turner, 1921). As contemporary discourse, disempowering narratives find their way into discussion on borders and boundaries, buttressing conceptions of otherness founded in previous

historical foundations (Greer et al., 2007; Lee, 2002; Mendoza, 2018; Salamon, 2008; Sowards, 2019). This is the dominant story told in New Mexico classrooms as indicated by texts and state mandated testing and delivered to student populations that are predominantly of color in a colonized land. What effect did this narrative form have on attitudes of enfranchisement and power? When Mexicans were victorious, as at the Alamo, they were vindictive, cruel, and cheats; when they were defeated, as in New Mexico during the Mexican American War, they were naïve, cowardly, and venal. This, at the core, as I explored it, was a curriculum of dis-empowerment for students who could rightfully claim a compelling narrative, who could point to a powerful primary discourse (Gee, 2015) provided in their communities, but who faced a decidedly different experience when they arrived in New Mexico History class.

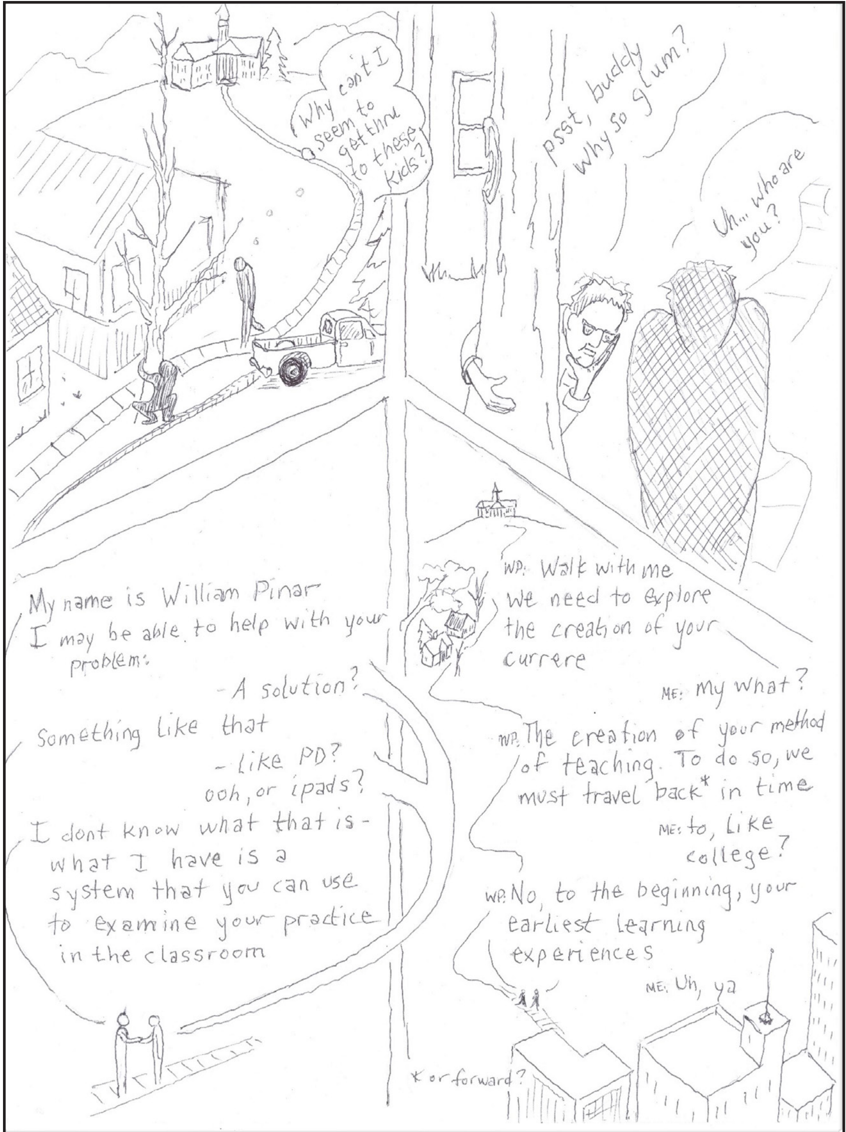
Instead of continuing this long narrative of dispossession, I instead encouraged students in a program of active community engagement, finding a history of New Mexico in the complex webs of communities across the northern part of the state. We investigated current challenges related to water rights, community erosion, climate change, and relations with indigenous and Anglo peoples. We then explored potential solutions. A central goal of this re-imagined pedagogy, informed by student need, was to appreciate the history of New Mexico as one still emerging and the students as active authors of that history (Kincheloe, 2009). Instead of reading history, we were writing it.

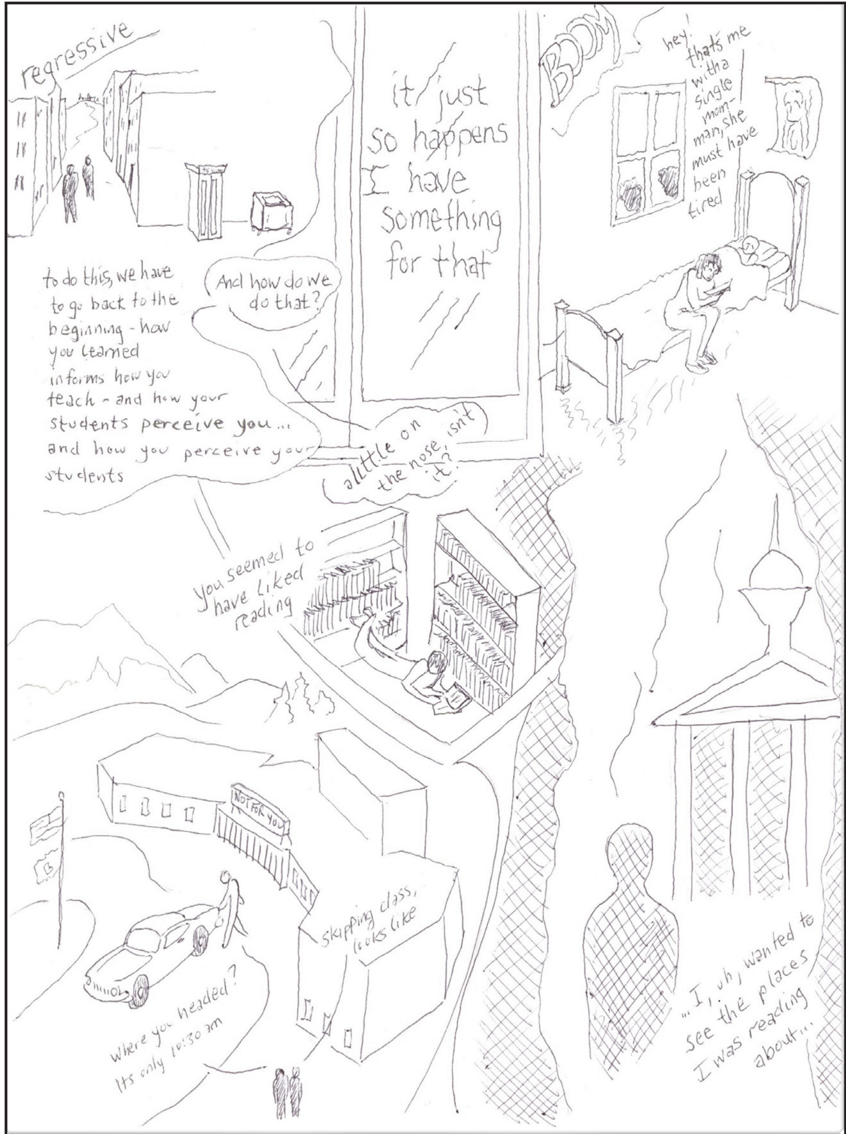
Pinar's Analytic in Practice—The Graphic Novel

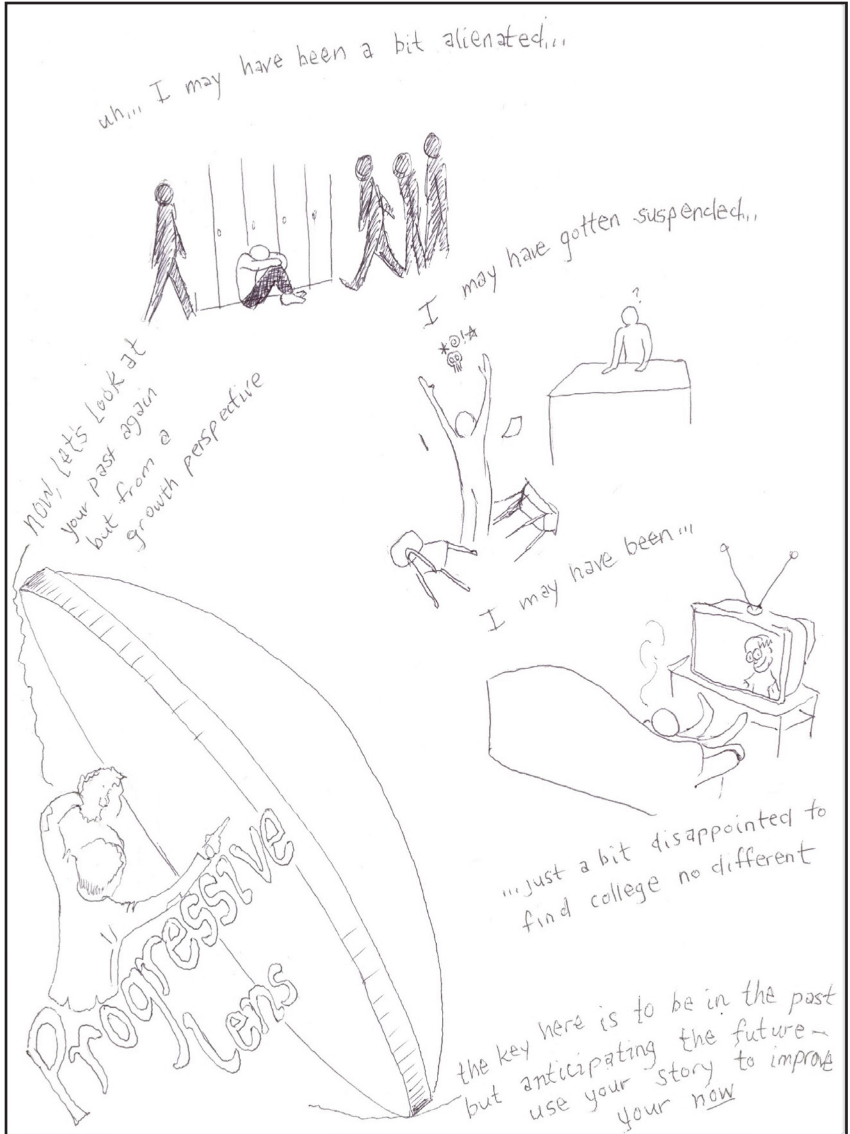
An embrace of Pinar's Path, *currere*, and the critical appraisal of curricular choices can lead to positive change in classrooms. Changes in the classroom can begin to alter the dominant narrative and incorporate disparate voices. We can participate in this change through our classroom discourse, first through a reflective model that allows us to critically analyze the role of multimodal texts through a lens of author intent, audience reception, and socio-political context (Serafini, 2015). We may also begin to take a more in-depth approach to the selection of varied resources, particularly those that students have a natural tendency towards, such as graphic novels. These may serve modes of learning that engage students, all students, in not just the story structure, but in ways of telling stories and anchoring stories within student experience (Lenters, 2018). If students are to find in school the skills necessary to navigate an ever more complex world, one where the drivers of public opinion, and those who seek advantage or profit, grow more sophisticated, they need better tools to discern intent and the critical thinking to determine for whom these messages are meant and to what ends (van Leeuwen, 2017). Or more flatly: I needed, and my Chicana/o students need, a reason to pay attention, to come to school.

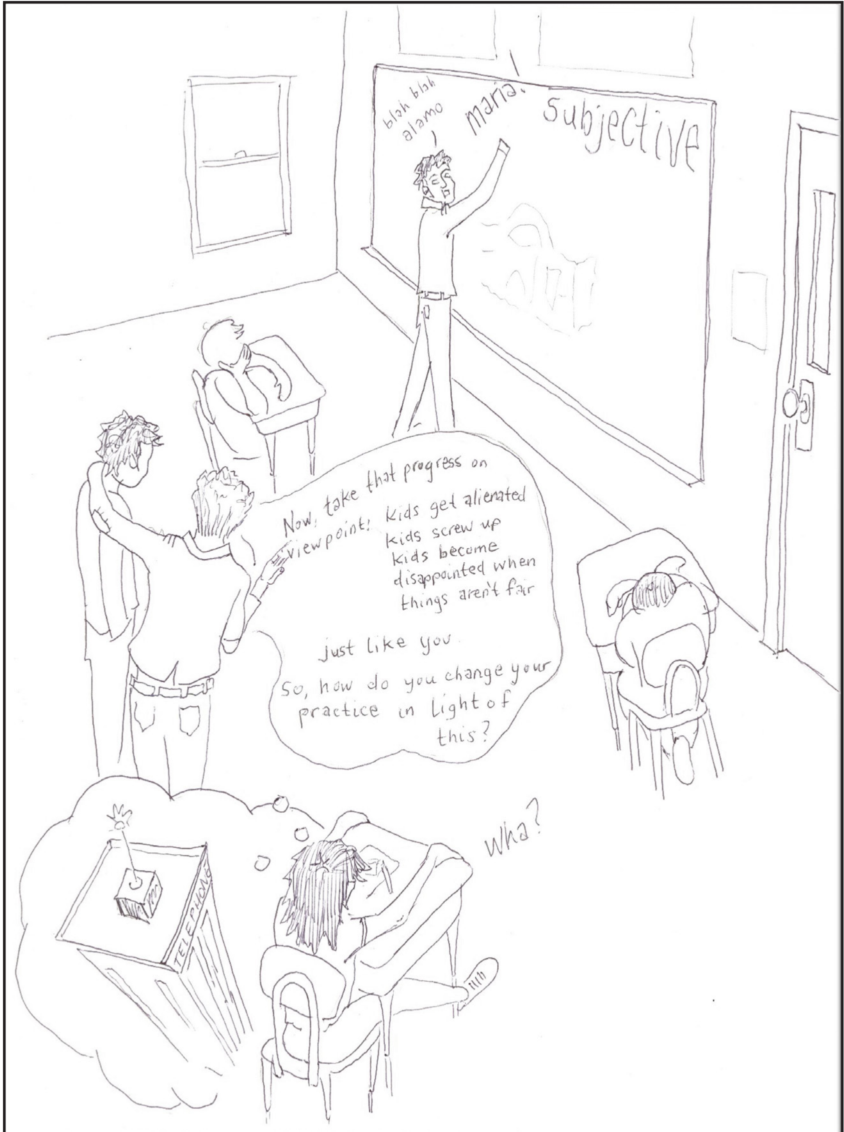

the following is a tale about engaging in a critical autoethnographic journey to improve classroom practice ...with special guest star William Pinar (a likeness)
seriously
try brevity
poof!
what was that?
just thunder
BC

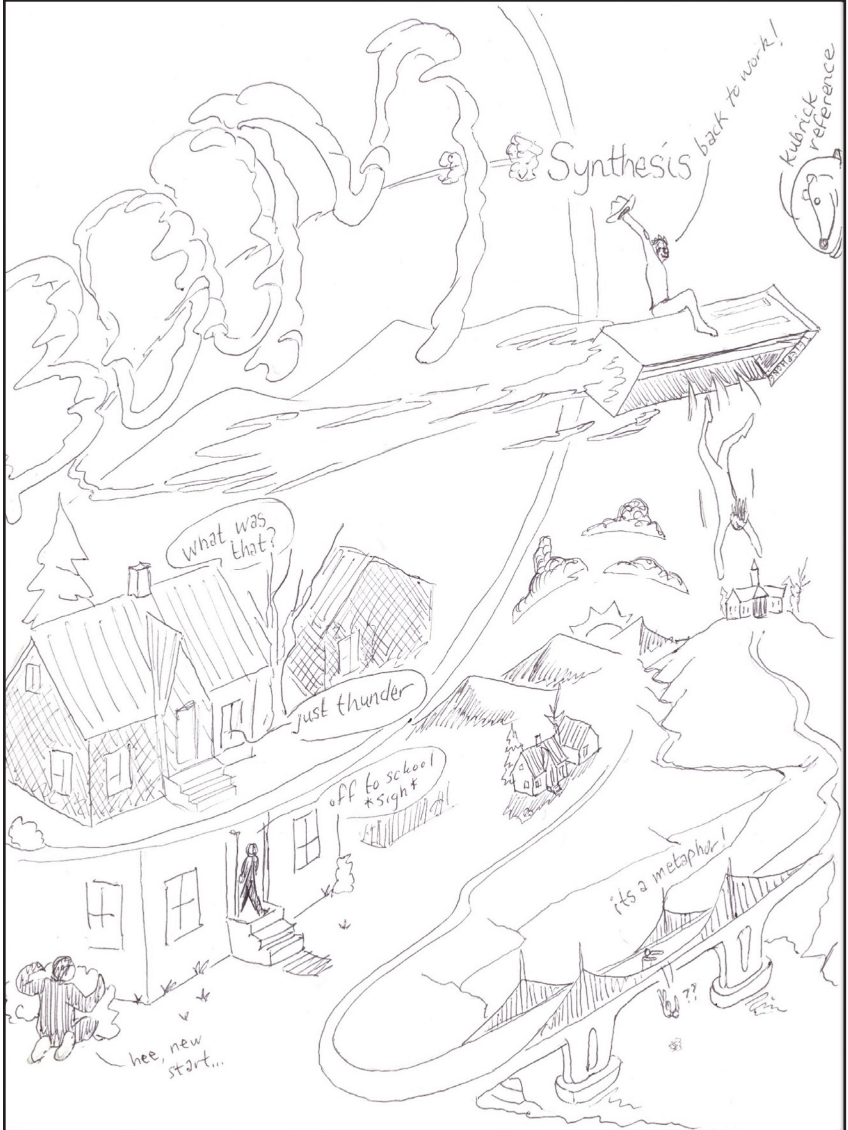
teacher trudges faithfully to school
So the heroes at the Alamo bravely fought off hoardes of... Maria!
TELEPHONE
MARIA pay attention
poof!
wha? why?
I am so done with this bullshi
because I am done with your daydreaming & bad attitude - office... Now

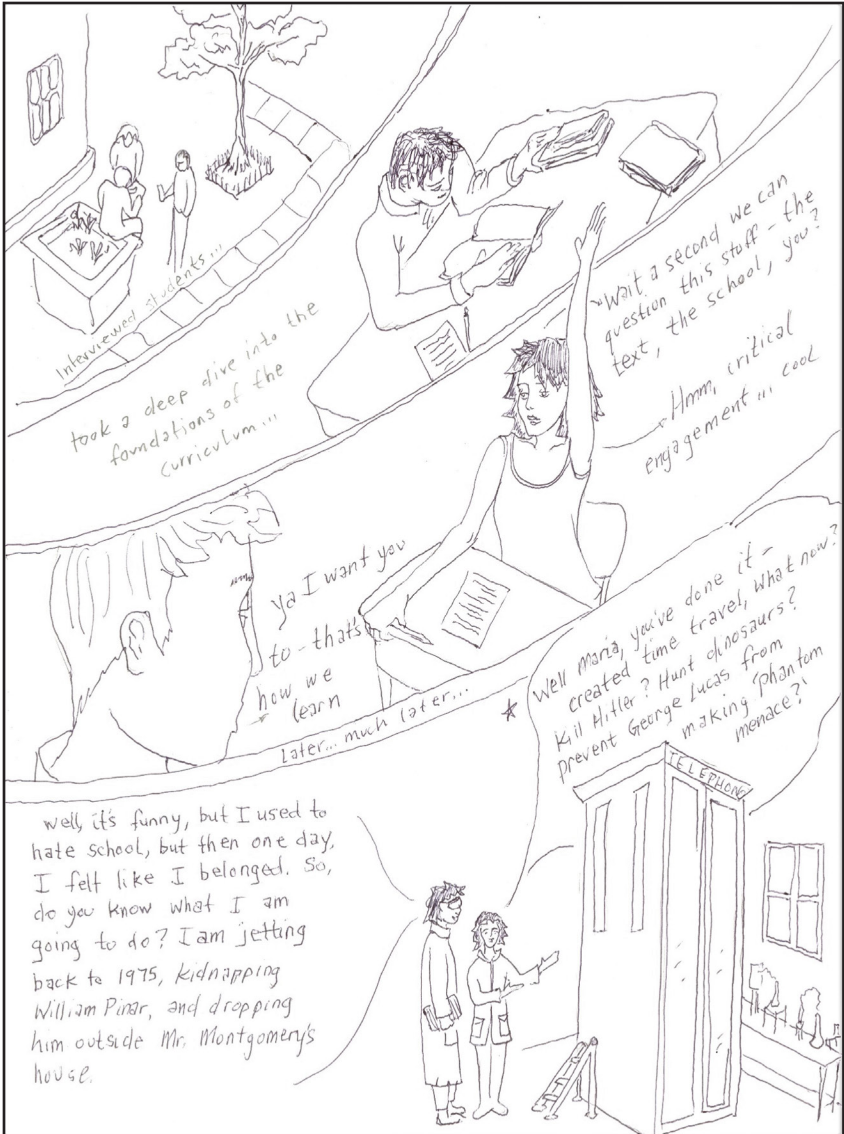

Why can't I seem to get thru to these kids?
psst, buddy why so glum?
Uh... who are you?
My name is William Pinar I may be able to help with your problem.
- A solution?
Something like that
- like PD? ooh, or ipads?
I dont know what that is - what I have is a system that you can use to examine your practice in the classroom
WP: Walk with me we need to explore the creation of your currere
ME: my what?
WP: The creation of your method of teaching. To do so, we must travel back* in time
ME: to, like college?
WP: No, to the beginning, your earliest learning experiences
ME: Uh, ya
* or forward?


regressive
it just so happens I have something for that
BOOM
hey! that's me with a single mom-man, she must have been tired
to do this, we have to go back to the beginning - how you learned informs how you teach - and how your students perceive you... and how you perceive your students
And how do we do that?
a little on the nose, isn't it?
you seemed to have liked reading
NOT FOR YOU
skipping class, looks like
where you headed? Its only 10:30 am
... I, uh, wanted to see the places I was reading about...


uh... I may have been a bit alienated...
I may have gotten suspended...
now, let's look at your past again but from a growth perspective
I may have been...
...just a bit disappointed to find college no different
Progressive Lens
the key here is to be in the past but anticipating the future - use your story to improve your now


blah blah
alamo
maria.
subjective
Now, take that progress on viewpoint: kids get alienated
kids screw up
kids become disappointed when things aren't fair
just like you
So, how do you change your practice in light of this?
wha?


Synthesis
back to work!
kubrick reference
what was that?
just thunder
off to school *sigh*
it's a metaphor!
??
hee, new start...


Interviewed students...
took a deep dive into the foundations of the curriculum...
Wait a second we can question this stuff - the text, the school, you?
Hmm, critical engagement... cool
ya I want you to - that's how we learn
Later... much later...
Well Maria, you've done it - created time travel, what now? Kill Hitler? Hunt dinosaurs? prevent George Lucas from making 'phantom menace?'
TELEPHONE
well, it's funny, but I used to hate school, but then one day, I felt like I belonged. So, do you know what I am going to do? I am jetting back to 1975, kidnapping William Pinar, and dropping him outside Mr. Montgomery's house.

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Currere Prayers of a New Father

By Kevin M. Talbert
The College of Idaho

Prologue

Amos Talbert made ours a joyous family of three upon his birth on October 12, 2021.

I (Past)

My Father

You'll never meet my father, your grandfather, in person or get know him for yourself. He died four years before you were born. All you'll know of him will be photos, stories. Both are often neatly curated to portray their subject in the simplest and best possible light. Of course, memory is also imperfect, tinged with emotion that imbues the memory with a particular hue. Thus, my own memories of your grandfather are interwoven with many emotions that I have not yet fully accounted for yet shape the way I recount him to you. My relationship with my own father, such as it was, deeply impacts my image of what being a father means, the type of father I do and don't want to be.

I tell you all of this, son, to let you in on a little secret: there's a big part of me that is afraid to be your dad. You see, I am like my father in many ways. During a year of online pandemic teaching, I often saw him as I looked at myself on screen, his facial expressions reflected in mine, our countenances no doubt converging via DNA and disposition, perhaps more so especially as the road through middle-age accelerates. Beyond similar facial features, we shared a few interests that allowed safe ground for a détente that my father really never achieved with my older brother (your uncle): baseball; reading, especially historical non-fiction and biography; a love of music (his tastes nearly exclusively classical) and going to the theatre; working puzzles; being involved in church activities, to name a few. My father was often inflexible, his way or the highway, and he was a legendary curmudgeon—damning various aspects of modern culture or all of it, really, among his most revered past times. I, too, can be inflexible, craving and clinging to routine, expressing consternation at new or unfamiliar opportunities, experiences, people. My dad's curmedgeonliness made me miss out on opportunities as a kid, and my own sometimes still continues to rob me of the joy of new adventures. (I'm thankful that your mom graciously and gracefully navigates this aspect of my personality. She's a great encourager and has a gentle way of getting me to come around to new things so that I don't rob myself of joyous opportunities.)

On their own, maybe these shared personality traits are inconsequential, mere generational quirks. Unfortunately, though, despite some of our similarities, the defining traits of my relationship with my father were (my) fear (of him) and (his) anger. While I sometimes try to claim we had a poor relationship, I more often question whether we truly even had one. Ours was tremulous at best. Certainly, I felt little intimacy with my father despite our similarities. I don't remember my father ever saying, "I love you," neither to me nor my brothers nor to my mother. He was far more likely to use words that were hurtful, biting, especially toward mom. I do remember acts of commitment, acts of generosity and charity toward me/us that can easily be construed as loving, and I can take that as perhaps the best he could muster. As I understand it, he had a tense

Talbert, K. M. (2022). *Currere* prayers of a new father. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 99–102.

relationship with his own father, so maybe he simply did not have a helpful model of a loving father from which to follow.

Consequently, son, my prayer as our relationship develops over the years is that I find a way to interrupt the poor father/son relational cycle that has characterized the previous three generations of my family. Ultimately, I am not the same person as my father, despite our similarities, and I am working to temper those parts of myself that are tempted by anger and bitterness. I want our relationship to be peaceful. I want you to always feel certain that I love you!

II (Present)

The World at the Time of Your Birth

Amos, parents across generations express their desire for their child to inherit a better world than they were born into, and certainly, your mom and I pray the same for you. We are by no means the first parents to worry about the world into which they have brought their child. Still, we echo those generational laments for the cruel world we wish we could protect you from and hope to equip you for.

You are born into a fraught time in our country and our world. The pain and suffering of our present is nearly overwhelming. Over the past two years, nearly one million Americans (*New York Times*, 2020) and more than six million people worldwide (Wikimedia, 2021) have died from the COVID-19 virus. More than 140,000 children in the United States lost a caregiver to the disease (National Institutes of Health, 2021). Believe it or not, many people in the U.S., including in our own Idaho community, even protested the simplest measures to mitigate the virus's spread. Mass-casualty shootings are now so regular that they barely make news unless they include double-digit fatalities. There was even a shooting at the mall in nearby Boise when you were scarcely two weeks old that killed three people. Police officers and civilians in many cities continue to hunt Black Americans with little consequence. The U.S. military only recently disengaged after 20 years of perpetual war in Afghanistan. In the last several months, multiple natural disasters, from record heat waves to fires, hurricanes, and floods, have devastated communities. Christian nationalism and market fundamentalism buttress an insurgent fascism, of which the attempted coup of January 6, 2021, is a stark example. A vocal minority of people in the U.S. are outraged about schools teaching students that it's wrong to be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.

Yet, despite all of this, the world is not all bad; love endures, and people resist hatred and evil-doing. One of my favorite educators, a gentle man and great educator named Mr. Rogers who lived and taught when I was growing up, once reminded people to "look for the helpers" when bad things happened (Rogers, 2004, p. 6). Even with all of the bad things happening in our world, there are many people who are doing their best to care for others and to make the world a better place for people to live. There are very real evils in the world, and denying that fact won't change it. But for every evil, there are also people working to resist that evil and to transform circumstances so they are more just, more loving, more equitable, more sustainable. And, because of this, you need to know a little about…

III (Future)

Your Name

I want to say a little about why your mom and I chose your name because our choice was, in part, a response to the world at the time you were born. Of course, we like

the sound of your name, and we like that it is a bit "old school." We don't expect you to meet many other Amoses, to always have another Amos in your class at school. Our hope was, in short, that it would be sort of uniquely timeless.

Most especially, though, we gave you your name because of its meaning and its historical connections. You share your name with a Hebrew prophet, one of the "minor prophets" of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. A prophet's job was to bear witness, to critique the society falling short of God's purposes for his people, especially that His will be done among/through them. In his particular case, the prophet Amos decried the corruption of the religious authorities of his day, especially those who used their wealth to consolidate their power while those who were poor continued to suffer. Notably, his righteous fury was directed "within the body" of his own religion rather than at outsiders. His was not primarily a directive for those not "chosen by God" (i.e., Gentiles) to repent. Rather, it was a searing rebuke of those who claimed to be God's chosen people yet who did not live according to his commands, especially his command to take care of the poor and needy, those who hold the least power in society. As Amos professed it, God desires to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2022, Amos 5:24).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., used that same verse from the book of Amos many times during his own prophetic ministry to illustrate the call for racial and economic justice. During his ministry, Dr. King called the nation to account for the sins of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation that left so many White and Black Americans (and people around the world) alike suffering. Like the prophet Amos himself, many of Dr. King's most pointed critiques were for members of his own faith tradition, i.e., Christians, and other religious leaders who continued to perpetuate racist structures, segregation chief among them, even in their own churches.

So, my child, I say all this in part to let you know that your mom and I both pray not just that you look for the helpers, but that you become one of the helpers. We don't mean this to be a burden, and surely we do not mean for you to be an actual prophet! (On the contrary, the name Amos has been linked to the Hebrew word amos, which means "borne by God" or "carried by God.") Rather, your name reflects your mom's and my earnest prayers that you participate in the holy work of repairing our world. Even as I was unable to repair the breaks in my relationship with my father, I pray that you and I will always work to repair whatever fractures there might be in our relationship.

Amos, the future is not guaranteed, not automatic. It is something we must make—together—with other people. It will be tempting to look around at the world and think it has always been this way and couldn't be any other way. Really, though, things are as people made them, and thus, if we want a different world, we have to struggle for it. Your mother and I want you to always look where there is suffering and join the work to alleviate it. You are very much our prayer for the future—your life is one way we project hope into the dark world!

I know it may seem unfair to ask you to carry this weight of the world with your simple name. We don't expect you to carry it alone; it's a burden that your mother and I share also (among countless other people in your life from your church, friends, etc.). We desire to model for you what it means to work for just and loving relationships, and however imperfectly we do so, we pray for grace as we do our best to raise you in this world. We love you. We are so glad you have come into our world and are overjoyed to meet you.

Amen.

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bell hooks: Radical Love Personified

By Rachel Radina
Miami University

bell hooks was a powerful educator, activist, and scholar who truly embodied radical love. As a working class, Black feminist, she unapologetically critiqued the many forms of oppression in society through her eloquent writing and captivating talks in various academic and activist circles. She was an inspirational person and has left a lasting mark in the hearts and minds of the many people who cherish her work. The world has lost a powerful Black woman who taught those of us who read and valued her scholarship, teaching, and activism how to be a little braver, bolder, and unapologetic in our own work. Although she has physically left this earth, her spirit, her words, her wisdom, and her radical love lives on. She will not be forgotten because her words have meant so much to so many people. bell hooks, born Gloria Jean Watkins on September 25, 1952, and died on December 15, 2021, is someone I never met, but she spoke to me from the page like no other author ever has or ever could. bell hooks is an important part of my education journey, and *currere* is a framework that fits well with her writing.

She is powerful, passionate, courageous
She is the truth teller you didn't know you needed
She is the wind in your sails when you need an extra push
She is the words of wisdom when you can't hold on to hope
She is the storyteller who inspires you to tell and weave your own stories
She is the activist who pushes you out of silence
She is engaged pedagogy and radical love personified
She gives you critical hope when the sun refuses to shine
She is a light in the darkness and a glimmer in the stream
She is a working class, Black, radical feminist, and she will never be silent
She is bell hooks

The Power of the Pen

I am because the story is. *-bell hooks, 2010*

James Baldwin (1963) powerfully wrote,

> You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive. (p. 89)

This is how I felt when I first read bell hooks. One of my first transformative experiences in grad school was finding the scholarship of bell hooks. Her words spoke to me and began to heal the wounds I had incurred so long ago. Although I will forever be haunted and shaped by my prior schooling and personal experiences, the memories are no longer a painful wound; now they act as a compass leading the way and helping me navigate the spaces within the academy, spaces that often feel unloving, violent, and hostile. I learned

Radina, R. (2022). bell hooks: Radical love personified. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 103–106.

that my experiences, both good and bad, shape who I am as an educator, an activist, and a scholar. bell hooks (2000b) helped me come to class consciousness through her powerful book, *where we stand: Class Matters.* Prior to reading this book, I had not yet made sense of the ways in which my social class had impacted and continues to impact my educational experiences. hooks opened the door to *currere* before I knew what *currere* was and before I had fully begun to examine my own educational trajectory. hooks had her own need to reflect on the past and the present in order to envision the way forward.

> Writing about the past often places one at risk for evoking a nostalgia that simply looks back with longing and idealizes. Locating a space of genuineness, of integrity as I recall the past and endeavor to connect it to the ideals and yearnings of the present has been crucial to my process. (hooks, 2009, p. 4)

hooks writes about the importance of memory and reminds us that "memories offer us a world where there is no death, where we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection" (p. 5). It's important that we tap into our memories as a space for self-reflection, a way of being in the present moment and a tool for imagining the future.

How the Past Haunts Us

> *Examining life retrospectively we are there and not there, watching and watched.*
>
> *-bell hooks, 1996*

I grew up in the presence of powerful, independent women. At the time it just seemed natural, but in the absence of men, the women in my life were able to more fully step into their power. I do not mean to suggest that women cannot do so in the company of men, but it is much harder to do so when patriarchy and toxic masculinity are the foundation of those relationships. Women can also perpetuate these same patterns of oppression, but in that space where men did not govern our existence (at least not at home), there was a beautiful freedom that I often see absent in many other families. At the same time, my family feared that we, my sister and I, would be harmed by men. We were ferociously protected from that anticipated harm and to our own detriment in many ways. From these independent strong women, we learned to be fearful, silent, and compliant, all while watching those same women rebel against the system. It was confusing, suffocating, and profoundly shaped who I am today. bell hooks (2009) describes this dualism in her book, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, "To me the family has always been that place of familiarity that holds and hurts us" (p. 59). Love and protection can stifle self-actualization, even when well intentioned. I learned to be quiet and to make myself small. It took many years to understand how to tap into my own power and how to use my power in the service of equity and justice. One of the women who helped me find my voice and learn to "talk back" was bell hooks (1989, p. 5). She states the importance of coming to voice:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (hooks, 1989, p. 9)

I recognize that our experiences are very different, particularly in regard to race, yet her work speaks across race. However, it is important that I recognize, as a white woman,

that I have unearned privilege that helps to mitigate the oppressive conditions placed on working class women. Whiteness has shaped me and is something that I must personally reflect upon and work through—this is lifelong work. I believe reading, valuing, and giving credit to the work of Black feminists is part of that work. Without their words, their work, their ability to persist despite the multiple forms of oppression they face, I would not be the scholar or the person I am today.

Radical Love in the Present

> *Remember your roots, the seeds of resistance sowed into the soil with love, and hope for the future will be the freedom fighters who emerge tomorrow.*
>
> *-Radina, 2018*

Currently, I am working on being present for my students, my family, friends, and colleagues. I want to engage with the people I care about through the notion of radical love and walk alongside others as they step into their own power. hooks's (2002) writing acts as a powerful guide to help us begin to embody radical love: "We need to return to love and reclaim its transformative power" (p. 15). But we must also remember that "love is an action, a participatory emotion" (hooks, 2000a, p. 165). Further, "We should not conceptualize love as a noun, but as a verb, an action that is fueled by our deepest hopes and dreams for a future that is yet to be" (Radina & Schwartz, 2019, p. 5). Radical love requires humility, courage, vulnerability, and grace. Radical love creates a path that is intertwined with critical hope—both require action. bell hooks embodied radical love in teaching, scholarship, activism, and community building. Her words capture not only the tragedy of our current conditions, but the possibility of transformation through collective struggle. This collective struggle must be grounded in radical love and pushed forward through critical hope. Many conceptualize hope as merely thinking a new reality into existence, but critical hope requires action. Radical love and critical hope without action dissipate into the air and turn to dust—radical love and critical hope are embedded in our bones and, thus, cannot be separated from the ways in which we move in this world. bell hooks's words help us remember: "Life is full of peaks and valleys, triumphs and tribulations. We often cause ourselves suffering, by wanting only to live in a world that is flat, plain, consistent" (p. 26). There is beauty in the struggle for justice—we need to conceptualize the struggle as a way of being in the world. hooks (2000a) reminds us that "all of the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic" (p. 98). However, just as important is the notion that "there can be no love without justice" (hooks, 2002, p. 66). Radical love propels us forward, tapping into critical hope and prompting us to take action.

Moving Forward

> *I have always come home to Kentucky but I was just visiting. Now I have come home to stay—to stay forever is what I dream even though I know that everyday dreams change.*
>
> *-hooks*, *2009*

It is with heavy hearts that we move forward without this beautiful soul walking in this world. Yet, hooks planted so many seeds of resistance, we can now wander through the beautiful garden her life's work has left behind. She is forever with us through her words, her actions, her unapologetic embodiment of radical love and critical hope. Those who are mourning this loss may find comfort in her words, "Love empowers us to live fully and die well. Death becomes, then, not an end to life but a part of living"

(hooks, 2000a, p. 197). This begs the question, how do we carry this work forward? How do we sow our own seeds of resistance and cultivate gardens that are fertilized by radical love? We do so by refusing to remain silent about the things that matter and by working in solidarity with our students, peers, and the communities where our work is grounded. "The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be" (hooks, 2000a, p. 33). Truth telling requires educators to be courageous, vulnerable, and unapologetic. This is the embodiment of "education as the practice of freedom" and creates space for educators to raise the critical consciousness of their students (hooks, 2010, p. 27). However, this is not a one-way process; teachers are engaged in the learning process.

> When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not simply seek to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (hooks, 1994, p. 21)

This way of being in the classroom also allows us to better support students who have been historically marginalized. We must work to decolonize our curriculum and pedagogy to better serve all of our students. We must embody radical love in our classrooms, because "love will always move us away from domination in all its forms. Love will always challenge and change us" (hooks, 2003, p.137).

Finally, we carry this work forward by continuing to raise up the voices of educator-scholar activists like bell hooks, who have helped to create a strong foundation and a lighted pathway for the struggle ahead. We do so by recognizing the work of women of color, whose work is often pushed to the margins. As hooks suggested, we move this work from the margins to the center by never forgetting the women who made this movement and continue to oil the wheels of resistance. As a white woman, I can work on being a co-conspirator by taking action, raising my voice and most importantly supporting, loving, and working in solidarity with women of color. Thank you bell hooks! The world will never be the same because of your powerful words, courage, activism, and embodiment of radical love.

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Ambulare

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The Field of Curriculum is Dead

In the early days of my postgraduate studies, my fellow students and I were asked to read Joseph Schwab's (1969) "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum." Schwab began this article with the following, provocative declaration: "The field of curriculum is moribund. It is unable, by its present methods and principles, to continue its work and contribute significantly to the advancement of education" (Schwab, 1969, p. 1).

At first, I thought, "Wait a minute. It's dead? I'm just getting started!" It was a strange introduction to curriculum theory and theorizing, and in those few moments, I felt more like a medical student examining a corpse than an educator coming to terms with a living, breathing body of theoretical work intended to inform how curriculum workers come to create, experience, and understand curriculum. My state of discombobulation was eased somewhat after reading Schwab's reasons for his post-mortem analysis. According to him, the cause of death was an "inveterate and unexamined reliance on theory" (p. 1) in areas in which he felt theory was either inappropriate, inadequate, or both. Additionally, he argued that several "flights" of and from the field, including an unrestrained pursuit of theories and meta-theories, the dogmatic preservation and rearticulation of tradition(s), and what he described as the "eristic, contentious, and ad hominem debate" (p. 4) among curriculum scholars contributed to this crisis. Fortunately, although Schwab believed the field to be dying, he also believed it could be resurrected through a "renaissance" if those concerned with curricular work withdrew from abstract and often divergent theoretical pursuits and instead focused on the practical, quasi-practical, and the eclectic. In this paper, I focus primarily on "the practical." For Schwab, the practical does not refer to the quotidian and often banal exigencies of teaching and learning. Rather, the practical is the "discipline concerned with choice and action" that leads to "defensible decisions" (p. 2). My inclination when reading Schwab and considering the "practical" and "theoretic" is to interpret his emphasis on "choice and action" as a central concern for the achievement of agency.

The Practical, Agency and Praxis

Currently, my thoughts on agency are largely informed by Dewey's (1916, 1933, 1934, 1938) general educational theory, work on inquiry, and, more specifically, his philosophy of experience. Of particular significance are his criteria for experience: Continuity (i.e., how experiences flow from and into other experiences) and Interaction/Transaction (i.e., the purposeful engagement between an individual and their environment). Equally important to my understanding of agency is Freire's (2005) emphasis on conscientização (i.e., critical consciousness) and his problem-solving pedagogy that involves critically-oriented, dialectical dialogue generated through an unwavering commitment to our "ontological vocation" of becoming more fully human (p. 74) that is energised by a radical hope for real, social transformation. In many ways, Dewey and Freire complement one another as they both share aims of enabling the joint-communication of experience in achieving individual, group, and broader social aims. For both Freire and Dewey, action—doing, the practical, is inextricably allied to reflection and theory—in other words, agency and praxis are intimately and ultimately conjoined.

Smith, K. (2022). *Ambulare*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 107–115.

From this position, the achievement of agency is reliant upon the critical consideration of actions occurring in socio-cultural contexts undertaken in the present, informed by past experiences, and shaped by aspirations for experiences in the future. Agency, for me, is something that is "achieved through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 132). This ecological understanding of agency is supplemented by Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) definition, which argues agency is

> the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

Emirbayer and Mische, in their attempts to theorize how humans achieve agency, developed the "chordal triad," a model for agency comprised of iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative dimensions or tones. The iterative dimension refers to the "selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action," while the projective encompasses the "imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action." Finally, the practical-evaluative element entails the "capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action" (p. 971, emphasis mine). In each situation and through experience, our agentic potential, according to Emirbayer and Mische, can be understood through a chordal triad composed of various tones that are arranged, performed, and perceived in particular ways through the practical negotiation of choices and the determination of action. The achievement of agency through reflective engagements with the past, in consideration of ideas and imaginings of the future, and orchestrated and synthesised through inquiries into and about our present share a striking similarity to praxis, which Freire (2005) defines as "The action and reflection of men and women upon their world to transform it" (p. 79). From this understanding, agency and praxis—the synergistic amalgamation of action, reflection, and theory that comprises the foundations for learning, informs our ontological being/becoming, and produces the self—are inseparable. Agency—the negotiation of choices and action—is unconditionally and irrevocably tethered to reflections and theories of the "practical."

Currere

William Pinar (1975) responded to Schwab's morbid diagnosis with *currere*, a reconceptualization of curriculum theorising emerging from phenomenological and existential philosophy and psycho-analytic techniques, with the process and outcomes of these considerations being represented through four stages of critical self-reflection:

- The Regressive—remembering/restorying episodes from our past
- The Progressive—imagining our future
- The Analytic—analysing and comprehending our "now"
- The Synthetic—constructing new "knowings"—ways of understanding, being, and acting that enable us to better understand the relationship between choices, actions, and their consequences in working towards desired aims.

Riceour (1988, as cited in Goodson and Gill, 2014) writes that "the 'self' of self-knowledge is the fruit of an examined life" (p. 33). *Currere* is a form of self-examination

focused on the aim of transforming simple and often assumed understandings of, and associations with, curriculum into "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2011, p. 32). These conversations are both political processes for identifying and negotiating values, as well as attempts to locate, recognize, and understand how our subjective experiences as educators/learners (Freire, 2005) inform our curricular work, with these efforts often being organized through specific aims, such as the actualization of socially-just and/or transformative education (Baszile, 2017).

There have been numerous critiques of *currere* since its introduction in the mid-1970s (Connelly & Xu, 2013; Westbury, 2007, 2008; Van Manen, 1978; Wraga, 1999; Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003). Deng (2013, 2018), using Schwab's "the practical" as a diagnostic tool for what he believes is the current "crisis" in curriculum theorizing argues that reconceptualist approaches extend and reinforce many of the "flights" mentioned by Schwab. Additionally, he argues such approaches sustain a fascination with "eccentric and exotic" theories and models that exacerbate the "crisis" in curriculum rather than offering suitable solutions, with the culmination of these efforts effectively contributing to a complete abandonment of the "original subject of curriculum studies (i.e., practice and the inner work of schooling as an institution)" (Deng, 2018, p. 705). Many of these critiques include important considerations for those involved in reconceptualist and postreconceptualist theorising, and I share some concerns held by these scholars. However, my position is that too severe of a "flight" to practice and the inner work of schooling (i.e., choices and action) without accommodating approaches for reflection and enabling theorization will not solve any crises existing in the field of curriculum or in the actual goings-on of teaching and learning in school. This is simply because such an approach would fail to comprehensively acknowledge how individuals come to understand how to navigate choice(s) and action(s), and how these decisions produce multiple possibilities and expressions of their agentic potential.

Some Trouble with the Method

I have always had a complicated relationship with *currere*. I understood it was intended to enable one to "sketch the relations among school knowledge, life-history, and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 515), and at first glance, this seemed like a fairly straightforward undertaking. *Currere* is a four-step process of careful, creative, and critical self-investigation involving the construction and rumination of the self within various temporal, experiential, and relational contexts, all circumscribed by a desire to enhance our understanding and awareness of our educational-selves. What this means for me is that *currere* is curricular work centered on the aim of making sense of our values, how they contribute to our understanding of self, and how these new considerations inform meaningful expressions of the kinds of educational experiences we believe others and we deserve, as well as insight into how we can create them.

Of course, understanding *currere* is not doing *currere*—and it was in the "doing" of *currere* where I struggled most. Every time I attempted it, I was beset by distracting (often debilitating) questions. "Am I doing this right?" "Is this *currere*?" "How can I know?" When faced with these questions, I'd return to Pinar's work to see if I could glean some insight into how to go about the method. Unfortunately, I often found articles on *currere* to be prolix, recondite, and, at times, more of an obstacle than an aid in helping me come to terms with "doing" *currere*. Additionally, examples of *currere*, which are regularly engaging, thought-provoking, and in some cases challenging can also seem methodologically ambiguous and often fail to convey how the process was undertaken by the author(s), leaving the details of their *currere* undisclosed and unexamined.

My ongoing uncertainty about the process led me to practice *currere* privately, primarily as a method of curricular, pedagogical, and personal development. I explored my uneasiness with the process in small-scale experiences with students and/or colleagues in seminars and workshops, but never as a research activity that I intended to share widely or publish. Kierkegaard (1843) writes that life must be lived forward but understood backward, and perhaps that is why, although I struggled with doing *currere*, I was still persuaded by its promise. As a general recapitulation of the Chordal Triad and praxis, *currere* enables us to examine life in both directions, with healthy pauses in-between to situate ourselves in "the now," and to perceive how future, past, and present are entangled in the choices before us, the decisions we make, and actions we take. Unfortunately, while I believed in and pursued the promise of the method, I had yet to figure out how to "do" *currere*.

We Make the Road by Walking

A few years ago, my wife and I moved our little family to a small town in the south Wales valleys. My mother was born and raised in this area before meeting my father and eventually immigrating to the States in 1964. As a child, her stories of Wales and the occasional visits to my extended family indelibly fixed in my mind a strong, unwavering desire to live in Wales. In *Cymraeg*, the Welsh language, that sensation is called *Hiraeth*, a term that refers to a kind of melancholy, longing for home—a disquieted desire that can only be placated by living in Wales. After settling into our new home and realizing that *Hiraeth*, while eased, never completely goes away, I grew more and more curious about the generations of my family who lived here before me. My mother, our family's genealogical expert, was eager to share her stories, and it wasn't long before we were holding weekly sessions online where I would record our conversations about our family and the narrow valleys they once called home.

One evening, my mother mentioned that she wished she could visit an old parish church positioned high upon the hilltops above the Cynon and Rhondda valleys to view the birth, baptism, and other historical records stored there. This small stone church is special. It's situated in an ancient, holy place dating back to and most likely beyond the sixth century. The beautiful old building, erected sometime in the 12th century, has been a site for various pilgrimages with worshippers climbing the steep mountainsides to receive inspiration, revelation, and a sense of the supernatural. "You know, your great-great-grandfather used to walk up the mountain to that church," she said, and for some reason, the notion of following in the footsteps of family members generations before me caught my imagination. That's when I decided to go walking, first to the ancient church frequented by my great-great-grandfather and then to new destinations and locales—Iron Age cairns, Roman marching camps, and, of course, the occasional village pub for a cheeky pint! Clambering up mountainsides, winding along banks and rivers, and striding across undulating grasslands and fields that lead to remote and sundry locations is where I connected with and indulged notions of family, setting, and self. Goodson and Gill (2014) write "to understand ourselves is to understand ourselves in action" (p. 32), and it was during these episodes of action, of walking over, under, and through the wilder spaces and places of the valleys that I began to learn about *currere*.

I call these expeditions my "reading walks." My routine usually consists of packing a small rucksack with a light lunch, some water, a notepad and pen, and something to read. Then I grab my walking stick and headphones and head out the door. During a reading walk, I either read as I'm walking, or I'll break off from the winding trail and head into the woods, sitting under lofty bows and listening to the sounds of rocks and trees as I delve into my reading. Sometimes I listen to music, sometimes I don't, but

during these walks, I'm purposefully trying to situate myself wholly into the experience and "in the midst of those phenomena" (Abram, 2010, p. 9) that add meaning to the experience and are conducive to me achieving my aims.

For the past few months, my contemplations have focused almost exclusively on a module I designed and convene called "Radical Education." This module is my modest attempt to introduce students in their final year of undergraduate study to various philosophies of education so that through thinking philosophically about educational problems they can come to identify the roots of those issues and collectively investigate, through dialectical discussions organized through an "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994), solutions and alternative courses of action. As part of this module, I don't simply want to introduce students to ideas. I want to embody notions of philosophical thinking, conscientization, and "engaged pedagogy." I aspire to personify these concepts and qualities through the enactment of my pedagogy—or, perhaps more accurately, depending on the degree of success in achieving this aim—the enactment of our pedagogy.

Part of this process, whether I'm walking or taking a break, involves me recalling, interrogating, and re-storying my experiences as a learner when first coming to grips with these concepts. This leads to considerations of how those experiences contribute to what I hope to achieve with my students. In short, I'm considering the future potential of what the shared educational experiences with my students might be. Of course, then I must consider what I am doing now so that I can analyze and evaluate my present circumstances in light of the knowledge and insight I've gained from the past and future. Finally, I am sometimes able to derive a better sense of what choices are available to me now and what actions (and consequences) those choices may lead to in the future.

For me, this process is indicative of three, key dispositions of those engaged in reflective activity described by Dewey (1933): open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Open-mindedness "is an active desire to listen to more ideas than one, to give full attention to alternative possibilities, and to recognize the possibility of error even in beliefs that are dearest to us" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 10). Responsibility refers to personal, academic, and socio-political consequences (Pollard & Tann, 1994), and wholeheartedness is an earnest commitment to both open-mindedness and responsibility and our due diligence in the enactment of those principles in our reflective and pedagogical undertakings. The sounds, smells, sights, and other sensations brought into close communication with me through this solitary immersion are necessary components of this meditation. I extend my open-mindedness to the contributions of trees, wind, and birds and to the characteristics of my ambulatory proceedings, which are slow, measured, and subject to change if I so desire. I recognize my responsibilities in a more-than-human sense, connecting my reflective considerations to the immediate circumstances of my students and me, and how the ripples of our pedagogical engagements extend beyond the limits of our classroom and further into the wider world of their current and future realities and potentialities. With each walk, I rediscover a sense of wholeheartedness, as with each series of reflection I am reminded of my motivations for these journeys and the benefits they produce.

While I discovered *currere* sometime ago, I didn't understand how to make the process mine, to give it meaning for me (and ultimately my students), until my reading walks. For me, *currere*, with an emphasis on "running the race" was the wrong method, the wrong metaphor. My method is not *currere*. It is *Ambulare*.

The Running of The Race

My understanding of *currere* emerged from praxis: action, reflection, and theory. During my reading walks, my mind and body ambled through varied landscapes as I

contemplated past, future, and present experiences. I theorized their significance and meaning in relation to what I understood to be my values and how this undertaking infused my sense of agentic potential with purpose. This occurred to some degree through an unintentional departure from *currere*. As the infinitive form of the word curriculum, *currere* emphasizes the "running" of a race, and that emphasis not only represents many of the issues I believe are troubling education today, but also potentially characterises and circumscribes our curriculum theorizing and consideration of choices and actions through discourses such as speed, competition, and a focus on outcomes.

The race itself, with a set beginning and end, along with its emphasis on speed, competition, and outcomes forces a compression of experience. Speed is important. A race isn't a race without speed and a concern over who is fastest and who will win. There is a deadline, an audience, a ceremony, a medal—a winner and a loser. I'm reminded of Guto Nyth Bran (a.k.a. Griffith Morgan) a local folk hero and legendary runner from the south Wales valleys. He is buried in the cemetery of the ancient, stone church on the hill that my great-great-grandfather once frequented. Legend has it that, in 1737, Guto ran 12 miles in 53 minutes. What an achievement! Immediately after winning the race, Guto's sweetheart rushed to his side and held him in her arms as she congratulated him on his victory. He then collapsed and died. While running can have salubrious effects, a fixation on racing and its appurtenances can offer more liabilities than advantages.

Of course, the "illusion of speed is the belief that it saves time," but speed accelerates time (Gros, 2015, p. 37). Walking, on the other hand, liberates us from these obsessions. When walking, we do not have to propel ourselves forward at the quickest speed possible. Our pace quickens or slows depending on what we choose to experience. Our focus is not fixed solely on the finish line. We are not concerned with medals and laurels. We can divert from the path and explore alternative trajectories or even decide to return home if we feel unprepared or unsure about the road ahead. Walking erases (e-races?) curriculum. It is not a race to be run. There is no race. There is no racecourse. All these characteristics constitute a liberation from time, and "with the liberation from time comes an alienation from speed" (Gros, 2015, p. 4).

Ambulare, which simply means "to walk," offers a philosophical alternative to *currere*. It rejects "the race" and "running" in favor of more valuable concerns than speed, competition, and ranking. It emphasizes health and wellbeing, in both an individual and socio-cultural sense. Walking, unlike racing, is conducive to other activities that nourish us—eating, drinking, laughing, listening, and more. *Ambulare* also acknowledges alternative routes, choices, opportunities, avenues, and trajectories. There is no fixation on the course, finish line, or stopwatch. We can accelerate, decelerate, veer, turn, or simply stop—whatever is needed. Finally, *Ambulare* argues that it is better to walk than run, in most situations, and that it is better to take time when engaging in complicated conversations.

> During long, easy walks, on well-traced routes, when all you have to do is follow an interminable set of hairpins, you hatch a thousand plans, invent a thousand tales. The body slowly advances, with measured steps, and that same tranquillity gives the mind a day off. Relieved of duty by the automatic functioning of the body, it follows up its fantasies and projects itself into a labyrinth of stories. While the gentle shock-free rolling of happy legs drives the evolving narrative forward: Challenges arise, their solutions are found, fresh ambushes appear. As you follow the wide, single, clearly marked route, a thousand bifurcations swarm in your mind. The heart takes one and renounces another, then chooses a third. It wanders away, comes back. (Gros, 2015, p. 69)

Not All Who Wander are Lost

The virtues, aims, and method of *currere* did not become apparent to me while "running the race." Rather, it occurred through ambulatory expeditions stretched out over the course of weeks and months of me walking through and over the south Wales valleys. It was in consideration of *currere* and its four steps that I recognized I was personifying the method through my walking. While walking, I often looked back along the trail, thinking about the different characteristics, circumstances, and experiences of that stretch of road before turning my gaze towards the summit, lake, church, or whatever goal I had in mind. Then, I would take stock of my current situation, often admiring the view and evaluating my progress and process before thinking about my next steps. It was thinking about these steps where things "clicked." Praxis, agency, and *currere* are all concerned with purposeful reflection on action undertaken in various temporal and relational contexts, the generation of images of our potential, future actions, and evaluations of how we currently negotiate choices, actions, and consequences. Goodson and Gill (2014) argue that "whilst we are examining our phenomenological experiences, the transition from experience itself to reflection and to interpretation permits us to illuminate our scope of action" (p. 37), and it was through serendipitous happenstance that I realized that *Ambulare* enabled me to employ the method of *currere* at my own pace, and through this reinterpretation, I have come to recognize its potential in illuminating my "scope for action"—my potential for agency, if you will, set within my contexts of teaching and learning. Further still, it has emphasized for me the ethical and moral dimension of autobiographical reflection: "the key question for men [sic] is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (MacIntyre, 1984, as quoted by Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 33).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I discussed Schwab's famous diagnosis of the field of curriculum and his call for an emphasis on "the practical." *Currere*, as a response to this call, has been both celebrated and criticized, with criticisms arguing that it fails to acknowledge the "discipline of choices and action." In *We Make the Road by Walking*, Myles Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990) reminds us that, in teaching and learning, it's essential that you start where people are. He then continues,

> But then if you don't have some vision of what ought to be or what they can become, then you have no way of contributing anything to the process. Your theory determines what you want to do in terms of helping people grow. (p. 100)

In walking my road, I believe I have come to a greater understanding of Pinar's method and its offering as a response to reconceptualize curriculum theorizing. In my rearticulation of *currere* as *Ambulare*, I slowed the process down and embedded it in meaningful activities that enabled me to be more open-minded, responsible to and for my knowings, and to purposefully examine my commitment to theorizing my pedagogical and curricular work. Through this purposeful deceleration, the characteristics of autobiographical theorizing, praxis, and agency (as understood through the Chordal Triad) became entangled as a single entity, a *Gestalt*, where the organization of concepts and ideas combine as a representation of knowledge and understanding of my pedagogical/curricular practice/praxis that is greater than the sum of its parts. As a result, *Ambulare* aligns to theories of agency and praxis, of the practical considerations of enacting values in educational settings that make a difference in the lives of those who experience them. Through

this autobiographical account, I have attempted to demonstrate that autobiographical curriculum theorizing is both relevant and appropriate to considerations of how to negotiate choices and action set within contexts of teaching and learning. As a result, and particularly as a researcher and educator, I have better realized the methods of self-examination and the fruits they bear. Perhaps most important, I have gained a greater understanding of the relationship between action, reflection, and theory—of praxis, its association with agency, and "the practical."

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A Word: *Currere* as Poetry

By Aaron M. Donaldson
Independent Scholar

W. F. Pinar (1975) laid out *currere* as a self-investigation of the evolution of educational experiences and interests over time, recommending four conceptual steps be followed: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical. My *currere* poem is separated into these four sections with the use of a numbering system. I have looked back on my educational past, taking notice of school artifacts (Pinar, 1975) from my childhood through graduate school and then on to my time working in education. As the poem title implies, much of educational experiences are connected to language. The poem progresses to a focus on "what is not yet the case" (Pinar, 1975, p. 9) in terms of educational traits, interests, and relationships. The poem's third section appropriately analyzes the present, adding a moral and emotional layer (Pinar, 1975). Finally, the poem concludes with a synthesis of my contributions—or lack thereof—to the broader educational and philosophical condition.

My poem incorporates several structural components of previously published *currere* poems. Like Amatullah (2018) and Cooper (2019), my poem integrates written components into a larger whole while also juxtaposing them. Specifically, my poem is a combination of three separate poetic styles: sestets in iambic pentameter on the left, a villanelle on the right, and a final section that alternates in meter from dactylic to anapestic and resembles a French *lai*. Similar to Bawa (2018), I use symbolism and figurative language (e.g., scent, second-born) to present themes. Grubb's (2017) combination of everyday circumstances and deeper meaning inspired my poetic treatment of everyday tutoring experience alongside ontological concerns. As in MacDonald et al. (2018), my poem blends several different "voices," although mine are all personal. The sestets involve an initial, abrupt listing in "noun-phrase" form of artifacts, events, relationships, etc., followed by a parenthetical statement that less objectively provides an explanation, comment, or sarcasm. This call-and-response stands in contrast to the voice of the villanelle, which is theoretical, questioning, and sagely. In so doing, the poem presents the thematic concerns from multiple theoretical frames in a way not unlike Poetter's (2018) poem about Mars. Finally, Sparber's (2018) oral and visual elements proved useful in my reliance on rhyming, alliteration, assonance, and horizontal alignment of verses.

In hopes of avoiding a simple dichotomy, two divergent educational theories are considered: the value-based approach of Dutch theorist Gert Biesta and the evidence-based learning advocated by Australian statistician John Hattie. The latter's (Hattie, 2011) work on teaching strategies that objectively "work" in the form of measurable outcomes is intentionally relevant to the traditional classroom and consistent with the expectations of administrators in contemporary American higher education institutions. Hattie (2011) is immersed in a numbers-driven world that uses business language like "transparency," "feedback," and "engagement" (p. 139). Education or, more specifically, learning is an evaluative relationship between teacher and student, with the bulk of the responsibility falling on the former (Hattie, 2015). A meta-analysis of quantitative educational studies dealing with strategic learning interventions was conducted by Hattie to create a conceptual framework for learning (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). The model is methodical and statistical (e.g., heavy use of effect size), allowing the educator

Donaldson, A. M. (2022). A word: *Currere* as poetry. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 116–119.

to optimize the "science of learning" (Hattie & Donoghue, 2018). At its core, Hattie's learning model is unabashedly empirical, making it intriguing in the modern world of higher education. The poem pays homage to this mindset and its role in my past educational experiences, including memorization of Greek and Latin roots to win the county spelling bee, desires for effectiveness in my work, and an admittedly naïve desire to bundle up the bulk of educational theory into a concise package of dichotomies and perspectives.

Biesta's (2010) criticism of evidence-based practice, a popular perspective he describes as "intuitively appealing" (p. 492), is thoroughly epistemological. He argues that education, by its nature, is not as predictable or linear a system as one might find in a laboratory, and as such, the relationship between causes and effects is not so easily measured. He argues instead for a teacher's decision-making process to prioritize values before outcomes, warning against an overly capitalistic approach to education (Biesta, 2013). His model of education (Biesta, 2017) emphasizes relationships and self-awareness/self-growth as co-partners with skill-based learning. Biesta's (2020) article celebrates the two relational values in an icon like Rosa Parks, whose educational outcomes, he argues, might lack in qualifications but excel in cultural and social measures. This three-fold view of education appears occasionally in my poem, including references to purpose, community, and consensus.

Despite their obvious influence, the ideas of both Biesta and Hattie are ultimately subservient to the primary role of language in my educational experience, giving me not only the tool to make sense of and evaluate their perspectives but also to be heard in my telling and re-telling. The poem wrestles with the balance between self-reflection and external obligations to others who might be considered, metaphorically, as "second-born." Identity, passion, purpose, and community are all topics tied, at a root level, to ontological concerns, but they are also bounded in a lived way by day-to-day responsibilities and work that are more than just mere "words."

A word

1

Designed evangelism (Sunday school),
Strategic Hellenism (spelling bees),
Socratic symbolism (English lit),
Linguistic mechanisms (grammar tools),
Determined optimism (Ed. degree),
And … cynicism (teacher "benefit").

If not for the scent and sway of a word,
from Naomi to Noam, Webster to Whitman,
will the story of a second-born be heard?

Nouns do not emerge as names conferred,
Teacher, Tutor, American, Appalachian,
if not for the scent and sway of a word.

2
A patient student (test of learner's will)
Or theory master (gauge of scholarship);
A good rapport (ability to lead)
Or some resilience (valued teacher's skill);
A clever writer (mark of craftsmanship)
Or empathetic tutor (guaran-teed).

If the path of a responsible leader lies inward,
or the genius of a teacher owes the academician,
will the story of a second-born be heard?

Would purpose follow evidence forward,
outcome upon outcome in human evolution,
if not for the scent and sway of a word?

3
The English language (disarray aside)
The language learner (practice makes belief);
An innovative project (self-esteem)
A thoughtful conversation (dignified);
Instructing one-on-one (discreet and brief)
Achieving bold consensus (such a dream!).

Taste the fruits of labor suitably offered,
but doors shut as quickly as open,
if not for the scent and sway of a word.

Such is the course here recurred:
to listen, to read, to write, to question,
"Will the story of a second-born be heard,
if not for the scent and sway of a word?"

4
Sensing a mystery immanent,
seeking identity management,
searching for ego enlightenment—
rudiment.

In the end, a tautology may,
in community, strengthen to, say,
an ontology: "There is no day
like today."

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Marguerite Duras: Literary Fiction and *Currere*

By Marla Morris
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Marguerite Duras, the French novelist, has not been written about much in curriculum studies. I would like to introduce curriculum studies scholars to her (1958/1965) novel titled *Moderato Cantabile* that broke ground not only for French intellectuals, but for women writers in particular.

The questions I ask turn on what Duras teaches about memory, history, and autobiography (namely, *currere*). This essay addresses issues of *currere* in the intersections of literary fiction, academic life, and my work as a chaplain in a trauma hospital. What interests me is the way in which literary fiction, memory and history, politics and the personal, intersect and intertwine.

Germaine Brée (1965) comments that Marguerite Duras's (1958/1965) novel *Moderato Cantabile* is written in a fragmented style whereby the "dialogue" is "picked up, repeated, broken, ambiguous" (p. ix). Three characters in the story are Anne, Chauvin, and a child. Here, we have the unholy trinity, the father, the son, and the holy spirit (and an extra, the sadistic piano teacher, Mademoiselle Giroud, as if in a Strindberg play). Anne is the (un)holy spirit, the specter. The son disappears in the end (another specter).

Anne says at the end of the story that she is dead. Because I am not a literary critic and have very little knowledge of Duras's *oeuvre*. I will approach this essay from a deconstructive reading, because I do have some familiarity with the work of Derrida (1994) and his notion of the specter. Of course, Derrida takes this idea of specter from Marx and Engels (1848/1978), as they say that communism is the specter that haunts Europe.

Derrida (1994) argues in his book, *Specters of Marx*, that Marx is a specter—not because of communism—but because of his unfortunate erasure. The interesting thing about Derrida's (1994) writings on the *Specters of Marx* is that what he seems to intimate is that specters—in a most Freudian sense—come back, that specters are to-come—as Derrida would put it; the more Marx is made to disappear, the stronger is his spirit (in a weird Hegelian sense perhaps?). This is what Freud would call the return of the repressed.

Through the male gaze—the misogynist male gaze, one might say—Anne, in Duras's (1958/1965) novel, would be considered little more than a hysterical woman. Of course, that Anne is hysterical is ridiculous. But that is the way women are portrayed if they show an ounce of emotion. Freud (1953) famously wrote about Dora—who suffered from hysteria: that unfortunate term. But what some readers might not know is that Freud argued elsewhere that hysteria is a problem to which both men and women (whatever those signifiers mean today?) are (both) subject.

The term hysteria—as it got handed down in the psychological literature(s)—is so woman-hating—so incredibly misogynist—that I do not see any way to resuscitate the term. Hysteria, as Freud conceptualized it, is also called conversion disorder—another unfortunate (medicalized) term that designates a psychosomatic defense mechanism whereby psyche transfers its disarray onto soma. But aren't *psychesoma* one thing? Joyce McDougall (1989) and other psychoanalysts seem to think so. Horrific repressed childhood memories—especially of sexual assault, incest, or rape—in cases of conversion disorder—get transferred onto the body in, for example, the loss of some

Morris, M. (2022). Marguerite Duras: Literary fiction and *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(1), 120–130.

sense, like the inability to see or move an arm. In the case of Freud's (1953) Dora, fainting spells (syncopes? perhaps, see Nancy, 1991 p. 99), losing consciousness, or even "fits" resembling epileptic episodes have no detectable—physical—cause.

Freud was an MD, a neurologist, but became so disgusted by the narrowness of the field of neurology that he abandoned it for psychoanalysis, a field he invented. He entertained all kinds of strange phenomena and—given that he began his career using hypnotism only to drop it when he found that hypnosis was not systematic enough to explain complex psychic issues—he systematized psyche by using his psychoanalytic *method* (which became known as the talking cure).

Deconstruction is a kind of reading, for Derrida, that is *not* a method, but a form of textual renderings that upend, dismantle, turn upside down concepts that are taken-for-granted and perhaps even, as Adorno would put it, reified. It is important to clarify, however, that deconstruction is not destruction. It is the re-reading and reiteration of the old—turning the old into what is otherwise—if you will.

Differance, one of Derrida's (1976) major concepts, means the delayed and deferred meaning of text (everything is text for Derrida). *Differance*, a very Freudian concept, means several things at once. First, it suggests that a text's meaning is always already delayed—that which escapes understanding initially later comes back, perhaps to haunt. Simultaneously (or not) meaning gets deferred—that is, placed elsewhere or projected elsewhere or in utterly bizarre formations (i.e., reaction formation, parapraxis). Moreover, there is always already a remainder, a cinder, a hinge, something left over—as Derrida put it.

With the Derridean deconstructive in mind, I return to Duras's (1958/1965) novel, *Moderato Cantabile.* I have been pondering this story for some time and still can make little sense of it—*and*—it haunts me. First, because it is a haunting story, and second, perhaps, because I do not understand it. Maybe I never will.

It is this inability to grasp what this story means that intrigues; that it is haunting in some weird, indelible way unnerves.

Freud—much like Derrida—was more concerned with what it is that the analysand *does* with the material at hand than with remembering or understanding some kind of literal truth. That freely associated thought brings up from the unconscious—through dreamwork—patches of repressed childhood memories might remain murky still.

Like Freud, Derrida's deconstructive project was not an effort to destruct, but to take apart (analyze) and put together (synthesize that which is broken). However, the synthesis of that which is broken does not guarantee wholeness or even understanding. Perhaps, if anything, the synthesis remains fragmented, never to by wholly understood.

What Duras's (1958/1965) novel is about leaves me utterly baffled. Love and hate (eros and Thanatos as Freud would put it) have something to do with it. The story opens with a man strangling his wife in the open on the street for everyone to see. Romance gone bad is the story of many marriages where hate overpowers love. Freud once remarked that hate was stronger than love (exactly not the Christian sentimentality that most Austrians embraced). In fact, at the end of his life Freud came to the conclusion that people were (in a loose translation of the German) "pigs." As he ironically signed the papers to get out of Austria with his daughter, Anna, when he was at the age of 80 or so, he wrote: "The Nazis come highly recommended." The soldiers were so stupid that they had no idea that Freud was insulting them, and they let him go.

The pain of Duras's character, Anne, and her drinking, perhaps, covered over (psychologically) the lack of love in her life—or the complete inability to love. She

seemed rather cold and indifferent to her child. This, indeed, troubles. Anne all but completely ignores her child. Her son seems to be little more than a nuisance; she does not really want him around at all.

The lack of love or too much love—the impression Barthes (1977) leaves in his *Lover's Discourse*—are too much to bear. Somehow Barthes' is difficult to digest, just as Duras but for completely opposite reasons. Both texts, ironically, overflow the with impossible love.

One wonders how central a concept love has been or not in the history of philosophy. Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) is one of the few philosophers in the Western tradition who writes about love and yet … so central is this a concept in literary history. Plato's (ca. 385 B.C.E./2008) Socrates—in the *Symposium*—is not shy to talk of his love for Alcibiades. But after Socrates, love gets dropped from the philosophical canon—as if it is too embarrassing a subject. Why is it, I wonder, that novelists seem so much more at home writing about love than philosophers? Philosophers miss the very thing that is right in front of them. Love and hate are every-day affairs. But they are not trivial—as Freud knew only too well.

When Derrida is asked in the film *Derrida* about the concept of love (Dick & Ziering, 2002), he is almost taken aback by the question; he seems almost blushingly embarrassed. This is reminiscent of Derrida's (2008) admitting shame and embarrassment standing naked in front of his cat in *The Animal that therefore I Am*.

And why, Derrida (2008) asks, would his cat make him feel shame and embarrassment? *The Animal that therefore I Am* surprisingly stirred much conversation—and even controversy. An entire issue of *Yale French Studies* (Senior et al., 2015) was devoted to Derrida's cat. I thought that this was rather humorous. And I also thought that only Derrida could get away with writing a philosophical treatise on his cat. If I had done a book like that, publishers would have certainly not taken me seriously—because I am not Derrida, and I am not famous—or male.

It is interesting that Donna Haraway criticized Derrida because he did not draw on literature(s) in human—animal studies. Perhaps she was angry because Derrida did not cite her. One of Haraway's latest books was about her dog. At any rate, the issue that Haraway raised turns on the politics of citation and the canon(s). American scholars—in my impression—are utterly anal about proper citation. The French do not seem to be so concerned with that. They seem to borrow from others without much concern about who said what first. Perhaps American scholars are anal because they come from a Puritan tradition; whereas, the French do not.

Nietzsche (1910/2004)—who never minced words, especially in his disdain for academia generally and the German education system specifically—stated in no uncertain terms that German public schools turned out "*stupid*" people (notably, a word he repeats throughout his work over and over, e.g., 1882/1974, 1878/1996, 1910/2004, 1908/2009). Is American public education much different from this? No. In fact, American public education was borne of the Germanic traditions. Public schools in the United States were built on German ideas. "Stupid" people come out of public schools in the United States not because of the teachers but because of state mandates that force teachers to teach to the test or risk losing their jobs. It is ironic, then, that American scholars—who came out of public schools—are forced—stupidly—to not think. Perhaps the politics of citation in the United States is what it is to keep American scholars from thinking at all. Being buried in citations is a hallmark of the way American intellectuals are trained. But it was not always this way. The piling up of citations seems to have increased since, say, the 1920s perhaps because numbers, impact factors and statistics—bean counting—are all. The reason I digress here is that there is no reason that Derrida should have had to

cite anyone he chose not to. But Haraway's kind of critique—the lack of citation—is an American-made phenomenon. Perhaps it is part of the "natureculture," "oncomouse" culture, we have inherited—to, ironically, cite Haraway (1997). And to draw on Haraway, it is impossible to step outside of one's culture—to pretend a God's eye view as she puts it (drawing on another scholar). Academe is a political game—a *Glass Bead Game*, indeed, as Hermann Hesse (1990) would have put it.

After this lengthy digression, let us look at what Derrida says about love—the least talked about subject in philosophy.

Derrida—reminiscent of the Hebrew prophets who declare "I cannot carry out Yahweh's commands" and then do anyway—when asked about love declares that he cannot talk about love. But after protesting too much—as Shakespeare would put it—he proceeds to give long and detailed monologue on love after all (Dick & Ziering, 2002).

Philosophical musing(s) on love—as Jean-Luc Nancy (1996) points out—seem to be mostly absent throughout the history of Western philosophy, as I mentioned earlier. Although students of Greek philosophy know that the love of wisdom comes from the *engendered* Greek concept (*Sophia*). But most (male) philosophers (again, this needs qualification because let us not forget that Judith Butler [2006] once famously said that gender is *performative*) ignore that fact that *Sophia* is wisdom and the beginning of philosophy.

Philosophy seems particularly problematic in its history because women have been erased from the canon. Not only that. Male philosophers tend to ignore the fact that concepts are engendered. And it is no accident that male Eurocentric philosophers have historically denigrated the body because anything connected to the body—that which is sensual, the senses—is associated with women, and most men are—let's face it—misogynist. It wasn't until Merleau-Ponty (1958) began a discussion on the body that this concept found a place in the Western philosophical tradition. But his notion of the body seemed so abstract that it seemed rather (post)human or not human at all. The body—whatever that means—is engendered (in all of the performative complexity of the word, as Judith Butler might put it). Merleau-Ponty's body was not only "without organs"—as Deleuze and Guattari (2000) might have said, drawing on Schreber and perhaps Artaud—Merleau-Ponty's body was without emotion, gender, sexuality, age, and so forth.

Hannah Arendt—perhaps the most well-known philosopher of her generation—is nowhere to be found in what are considered definitive histories of philosophy (see Bertrand Russell, 1972, and A.C. Grayling, 2019, for example). And if one Googles American philosophers—it is odd and perhaps not surprising to note—what comes up are images of mostly white men—and one woman. Of course, there are many philosophers who are women but even Google is sexist. Can an algorithm be sexist?

It is notable that postmodern philosopher of science, Michel Serres (1998), tells us in his conversations with Bruno Latour that it was Simone Weil—a woman of great intellectual stature who is totally ignored in both academic theology and philosophy—who changed his life. It was Simone Weil, Serres says, who changed the direction of his intellectual career: he gave up his career as a scientist and became philosopher-poet (Serres & Latour, 1998). I cannot recall any other male philosopher—ever— mentioning that a woman—an intellectual and theologian at that—had made any great impact on him. In fact, it is well known that some male philosophers, like John Dewey, appropriated the work of Jane Addams (and his wife) without giving either of them credit. It is also the scandal that some argue that it was Simone de Beauvoir who actually wrote Sartre's (1943/1993) *Being and Nothingness.* I do not know if this is true, but this has been discussed in the literature by well-respected scholars.

It is refreshing, then, to study what I would consider to be the *philosophical fiction* of Marguerite Duras. In my field—curriculum studies (see Pinar, 1994)—the late Maxine Greene (1967, 2000, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c)—well known professor at Teachers College, Columbia—*dared* to integrate fiction into philosophy in the 1940s—while her male colleagues were probably horrified.

Maxine Greene—over time—became the most prominent woman philosopher at Teachers College, Columbia, setting the stage for many women in the field of education to do the kind of work we do today. Generally speaking, neither educationists nor American philosophers are comfortable integrating fiction with philosophy—still today. One of the writers Greene never integrated into her work is Marguerite Duras.

It is time for philosophers to begin this important conversation on why Duras has been excluded (with a few exceptions) from the canon(s) of literatures taught in American schools and universities. Duras's work—something I had never been introduced to in university—is new to me. Her novel, *Moderato Cantabile*, is of major importance to many canons and literatures. Perhaps when this book was first written, her work was widely read in the United States, but I was born in 1962, so I wouldn't know.

When a book stays in one's psyche—builds a place in the psyche, if you will—there is something to it. Duras's book puzzles. It intrigues and raises philosophical and psychoanalytic questions. What is love? What is hate? Why is murder wrong? What is it to fantasize about a murder or even one's own murder? What is drinking really about? Why numb the psyche? A mother's love or lack thereof for her own child? Julia Kristeva could perhaps address this better than most. Melanie Klein might wonder what the child thought of his mother. The mother-son relationship is something in which Freud would have been interested. Martin Buber might have written about the "narrow ridge" between the I-Thou, especially when a child's mother abandons him—whether literally or figuratively. (Buber's mother did abandon him as a small child). It seems to me that (psychologically) Anne, Duras's troubling protagonist—had abandoned her child. The sadistic piano lessons were certainly a form of abandonment in a cruel sense. Abandonment can be sadistic and cruel.

Duras's (1958/1965) novel, *Moderato Cantabile*, haunts me still because I keep ruminating over it, asking myself all of the kinds of questions I mentioned above. And strangely, I am still trying to figure out if—in fact—any of the characters were really alive to begin with. Were they all really dead? Were they ghosts, or as Derrida would put it, *Revenants*?

At the end of Duras's novel, Anne's son—who is but a child—disappears. Startlingly, Anne proclaims that she is dead. And that is where the novel ends. Was this character, Anne, always already dead psychically? (psychic deadness is something about which Michael Eigen [1999] has written in *Toxic Nourishment*). Her ever-present drinking habits suggested that she wanted to wash away her aliveness. She so wanted to become continually, comfortably numb (as Pink Floyd would put it). Or was she going to be murdered by her husband too in the future to-come (as Derrida might put it)? Was that her worry? Readers are left without an answer. And isn't that what philosophy should be? Questions without answers?

Anne obsesses about the murder scene that begins the novel. The repeated questions she either mutters to herself or directs at Chauvin seem almost disturbing. It seems as if she does not really address Chauvin at all; she uses him as just someone to bounce thoughts off of. It is as if Chauvin is not really there to Anne. Anne is not really present—psychologically—to anyone either; she is absently numb in her wine glass. It seems almost as if she is completely dissociated.

Fiction and Autobiography: Curriculum Studies and (Auto)Philosophy

Recently I attended a workshop titled "Autophilosophy." This is a major move for philosophers because autobiography in philosophy seems to still be a taboo subject. In curriculum studies, autobiography as a genre has been well established since the 1970s. The Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies occurred after the Kent State nightmare, one of the first major shootings on a college campus in the United States. In discussion with William F. Pinar—the Father of the Reconceptualization—I had asked him why he got a PhD in Education and not in English, since he had been a high school English teacher. He told me that when Kent State occurred he knew that the problems that faced us had more to do with our educational system than with most anything else. I suppose Pinar felt a calling to get a PhD in Education because he knew that there was something seriously wrong with our educational system. And in education, the work still needs to be done. School shootings have only increased since Kent State as we know. And now on some college campuses students are even allowed to carry guns into classrooms—a recipe for disaster and grade inflation, no doubt. Pinar's (1994) groundbreaking book, *Autobiography*, *Sexuality and Politics*, set the stage for many in the Reconceptualization; Pinar opened the door to doing autobiographical work in the field of education.

Currere—the Latin root of the word curriculum—translates loosely as the Husserlian word *erlebnis* or lived experience. Lived experience in any form of education, whether it is in formal institutions or on the street education—as it were—from the Gramscian position of the organic intellectual—forms the groundless ground (in the deconstructive sense) of the work that I have been doing for the last 25 or so years. But still, academic journals and publishing houses are not exactly friendly to work in autobiography or narratives that seem too personal. I find this utterly ridiculous in the year 2021. I do think that there is a gendered nature to writing in a more personal style and that male editors in particular do not like the fact that the *personal is the political* and do not like personal narrative of any sort.

To hear a white male academic suggest that the personal is not political or that everything is NOT political is rather shocking to me, for everything *is* political. It is easy for a white male to say that everything is NOT political because being a white male is a positionality of privilege.

To speak or not to speak is political. To write or not to write is also political. Sustained silence is simply not an option; it is hardly ethical. Sustained silence in the face of oppression (or things gone wrong) is completely untenable. If not now when? The famous Rabbi once said. Now is the time to speak. All of us in academe are under fire from the right, and many of our jobs are on the line because of the increasing fascism that is invading state run universities in Republican strongholds. Tenure has been yanked out from under us; many have lost their jobs because of speaking out against non-mask and non-vaccine mandates. Those of us who are immune-compromised fear dying from COVID because of being forced to work in emotionally damaging and downright deadly face to face situations (teaching in overcrowded classrooms).

Autobiography is not only an interesting genre; *it is political.* More than ever, we need to speak and not remain silent. Book burnings on campuses, book banning in schools, professors being fired for speaking out or being forced to teach while being sick, being threatened with termination if we are not aligned with right wing ideologies are real horrors happening right now across the United States. It has never been more imperative that we tell our stories.

I am currently working on an autobiography about chaplaincy, philosophy, and curriculum studies, theology and literary criticism, and the story that I tell in this short

essay is just a small part of the kinds of life and death experiences I deal with every time I step into the hospital as a chaplain. The stakes at the hospital are high. The stakes at the university are high as well, but in very different ways.

We need to learn from history—namely 1933 Germany—state-run universities and the dangers of alignment with right wing governments. Alignment in Germany meant the Final Solution, the genocide of 6 million Jews, 6 million others who were Catholic, gypsies, those with disabilities, political activists against Hitler (e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

"The Fear of Writing"—something about which Derrida speaks on *youtube*—is the fear of taking a stand, the fear of speaking truth to power. The fear to do philosophy—at all—or do curriculum theorizing at all—in the face of increasing pressure of the right is real (felt) and present (precarious) danger. Judith Butler (2020) writes about the *precarious life*. Those of us working in state run institutions in right wing strong-holds are living in precarious states—both literally and figuratively. If not now when? Fear can hold us back and stifle us or empower us to go to what Freud called *The Mystic Writing Pad*.

In my book on the Holocaust (Morris, 2001), I argued that autobiography, psychoanalysis, fiction, history, and philosophy informed different perspectives on writing about the Holocaust from the position of a third generation American Jew. I also suggested in that text that fiction and history are related but that history follows rules whereas fiction does not. That the Holocaust was not a fiction is obvious. Thus, literary fictions about the Holocaust as expressions of horror and not lies or revisionism are Kantian categorical imperatives, if you will. As I like to read just about everything and anything, doing inter-disciplinary studies has always been attractive to me. Before entering college, I read a lot of poetry and a lot of fiction. But then that abruptly stopped upon entering college. I have taken up reading fiction and poetry again now at the age of 60. My love is for that which is poetic—whether it is literally poetry or literary fiction or philosophy or the poetics of educational writing (yes, and there is such a thing)—without reducing things to quantification and what Derrida called "vulgar empiricism."

I think the reason that fiction affects us more so than, say, historiography, is that it, in some ways, speaks emotionally. Historical writing tends to be flat and even boring. Historians' methodologies restrict what it is they can and cannot say, how they say what they say, and so forth. But historiography did not always read this way. Herodotus embellished. He was a poet-philosopher-historian. But after neo-positivism, historians are wedded to a method that erases any trace of emotion or embellishment. Historical writing is hardly poetic. Historical writing also erases the writer's autobiography. Fiction does not. Fiction is not bound by rules or methods. Fiction writers often hide themselves in their novels. Much of fiction is coded-autobiography. Camus' (1995) *The First Man* is fiction; however, it is the most autobiographical work he had ever written. Proust's work is partly autobiographical—and partly cover-ups according to Saul Friedländer (2020). Thomas Wolfe's (2006) novel, *Look Homeward Angel*, is highly autobiographical. Virginia Woolf's (1989) novel, *To the Lighthouse*, is also highly autobiographical—coded of course because it deals with her own experiences, some think, of incest. Nietzsche once commented that philosophers read to find themselves in others' texts. He also said that whatever one writes is probably autobiographical, even if that is not the writer's intention.

The reader's relation to the writer is often complicated by transference, repression, and forgetting—or even mimesis. It is no accident that we read who we do. Nietzsche once remarked that we look for ourselves in the books we read. We look to make identifications with writers. That is probably—unconsciously—the case. Perhaps our

attractions to certain writers are unconscious, but still Freud (in a way like Nietzsche) would say that there is probably an unconscious relation to what one chooses to read.

Marguerite Duras: Mimesis and the Chaplain

Perhaps one of the reasons that Duras's novel struck me is that, upon further reflection, the story reminded me of an incident that happened in my own life and brought up memories that I would have rather forgotten. Duras's (1958/1965) novel allowed me to freely associate. I chalk this uncanny experience between reading Duras and a specific event that occurred at the hospital to mimesis or even transference. Dura's novel hit me like a ton of bricks. Upon finishing the novel, I was stunned, but I could not figure out why.

Although I am primarily an academic, I also work at a level one trauma hospital as a chaplain. My training was in both religious studies and psychodynamic psychotherapy. As a hospital chaplain, one of my duties is to take care of patients and their families, especially when family members are dying or on the edge of death. I have seen so much death, so much suffering. I have seen things no one should ever see. Sometimes, a particular case stands out more so than others because the details are overwhelmingly horrible and, in fact, haunting.

Duras's novel brought up one particular case I worked on. I sometimes work with detectives when a murder occurs. In this particular case, I was assigned to meet a woman and her boyfriend in the trauma bay. I noticed that detectives were hovering nearby.

A child was taken to pediatric ICU, while the mother and her boyfriend were standing in the trauma bay speaking with the physicians. I soon learned that the child had been shot in the head while playing outside of his house. That was the story I was initially told. When I was called in to take care of the mother, while the surgeons broke the bad news that the child more than likely would die, I consulted the detectives in the hallway.

I secretly played the part of chaplain-detective—deconstructive critic—trying to figure out who did it. I asked the detective if the mother or the boyfriend was a person of interest. I knew from my previous experiences that usually the ones who seemed least likely to commit such crimes were the very people who, in fact, often did. The detective said, no, that the mother and boyfriend were not persons of interest. Stupidly, I believed him (see for instance, Avital Ronnell's [2002] book on *Stupidity*). That was my first mistake.

I sat with the mother for some three hours in the family room, while the medical team readied the child for surgery (which was hopeless). I noticed that the mother seemed a bit off—psychologically—perhaps she suffered from some kind of schizo-affective disorder. I didn't know for certain because I am not a psychologist.

So, of course, I felt bad that she seemed not to be making sense of things, but then again she did seem to be making sense of things; while she seemed lucid, she seemed kind of crazy too. When she started talking about devils, I knew she wasn't exactly sane.

In the middle of the madness of talking about devils, the mother (whose child had been shot in the head) was busy making at least 20 phone calls or thereabouts on her cell phone repeating the same story over and over again to all of her friends. She said something to the effect that the child was playing in the yard while she was in the house sleeping. The child, she said, was shot in the head by a drive-by shooter—something common in her neighborhood. She kept saying that something like this had happened just weeks before to someone else's child. She repeated the story *verbatim about 20 times*, in every single phone call. I thought, well, if she could repeat the same story verbatim 20 times, maybe she wasn't so crazy after all. I offered to buy her a soda

while the medical team waited on the surgeons to take her son to the operating theater. Three hours had gone by. As a chaplain, my job is to sit and wait and to be patient, to be there for the person who is suffering. Waiting is not easy. I kept watching the clock, and it never seemed to move. It was 10:00 pm when the nurses called the mother into the child's room. I walked with the mother to the child's room, and upon entering the pediatric ICU, once again, I saw detectives hovering nearby. I began wondering why they were there if the mother was not a person of interest, but I did not think about it too much. The mother tearfully said goodbye to her little boy as they wheeled him away. I said goodbye to the mother, charted, and went home.

As a chaplain, we never find out the end of the story. We just move on to the next trauma. But several days later, I just happened to read in the newspaper that two people were charged with the murder of a child. Their photos—the mother's and the boyfriend's mugshots—were in the paper. This was the mother with whom I was sitting for three hours out of my chaplaincy duties—who murdered her own child, who shot her own child in the head, who lied to every one of her friends on the phone, who lied to me, who lied to the doctors.

"She did do it. She killed her own child. Oh my God!" I thought. I sat with a murderer for three hours. I was totally duped. If I had known all along that this woman murdered her child, would I still have stayed with her for three hours in my capacity as hospital chaplain? I thought, after all there are chaplains who work with murderers in prison. I wondered, however, had I known that this woman murdered her child, would I have been able to be a chaplain for her? I couldn't answer that question, even to myself.

I was embarrassed and ashamed that I did not go with my gut feeling—I knew right off that the mother murdered her child, but the detective lied to me. Usually, detectives will confide in chaplains and tell the truth. But these detectives did not do that. Being duped—by the detectives and the mother—was not a good feeling. And of course, I was horrified that a mother would shoot her son in the head and kill him. The child had died on the operating table.

So when I read Duras's (1958/1965) story, I read it as a detective-deconstructionist and wondered whether Anne and her child were dead to begin with? I began to wonder if they were just specters? Was it that Anne had already been murdered by Chauvin who was also a ghost? Maybe before they all died and became ghosts, Chauvin—who could have been her husband in real life—strangled her? And where was the child at the end of the story? Perhaps the child never existed to begin with? Perhaps it was all just a bad dream. Perhaps my experience at the hospital waiting for three hours with the mother/murderer was just a bad dream as well.

I think Duras's point in this story was to leave it intentionally weird and vague. Duras was trying to put some kind of specter in the heads of readers—to leave them with that remainder that Derrida wrote about, that un-nameable Beckettian thing that one cannot get a handle on. A story without a clear plot or clear ending, or clear anything, does in fact leave one wondering. The story was in no way logical; it did not seem to really have a trajectory other than the continual sadistic piano lessons and the continual drinking.

My convoluted interpretation(s) of Dura's (1958/1965) story are probably way off the mark. But does that matter? Freud would say no. Derrida would say no. Derrida (1976) would also say that the deferred and delayed meaning—through the deconstructive project—the fact that this story has been bothering me for a month, that it allowed me to freely associate a horror in my own life, an embarrassment and shame—not about a cat in the bathroom where I am standing naked, but about being duped by a murderer—is what matters.

On one last note—as it were—the title of Duras's (1958/1965) story, *Moderato Cantabile*, made little sense to me. "Moderately and singingly" is the loose (and probably stupid) Wikipedia translation.

The sadism of the piano teacher bothered me because I, too, had many sadistic piano teachers who banged rulers on the piano. In fact—and indeed weirdly—I had a piano teacher at X university who I couldn't stand. He would literally bang a ruler on the piano while smoking cigarettes, making me play the left hand first and then the right hand, over and over and over again. I thought, this is not how one learns to play the piano. I thought the man insanely sadistic. Ironically and perhaps strangely he kept calling me Anne. My name is not Anne, note even close. I kept telling him that, but he never seemed to hear me. That the protagonist of Duras's story is named Anne brought back the horrors of sadistic piano teachers and all the reasons I got out of the business of classical music.

Oh my God, I thought, I truly am haunted by specters, not only of a murderer, but of a sadistic piano teacher who called me Anne; that piano teacher never did learn my name. So Duras's (1958/1965) story haunts me on several different levels.

I learned from a seminar I took with Elie During on *The Form of Chance* (at the European Graduate School) the wisdom of the French poet Mallarme who famously said: "Never rule out chance with the throw of the dice." Is this all chance? Are all these ghostly/ghastly coincidences between Duras's story and my own autobiography chance? Jung might call these chance coincidences *synchronicities.* Yet, I don't know what to make of any of this. My story ends like Duras's novel—without closure, without logical sequence, without sense. Is that not the heart of philosophy? As Jean-Luc Nancy (1997) suggested, we can no longer make sense of the world. It is the what-does-not-make-sense that makes for philosophical discussion. If the world were a place where things were as Descartes dreamt up—the indubitable *Cogito*—wouldn't everything be boring, neat, and tidy—no surprises? A world where this is a Leibnizian pre-established harmony would be a pretty boring place.

I'd rather live in a world of weirdness and non-understanding, a world that puzzles and surprises, even if the specters haunt indelibly. We live in a Kafkaesque (1915) world where gatekeepers of memory hide behind more gatekeepers who hide behind more gatekeepers. Ever unpeeling the union of memory is a continual mystery and one must unpeel the union ever so slowly—*Moderato Cantabile.*

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