Pinar's Path: Autoethnography for Critical Change
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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 &

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
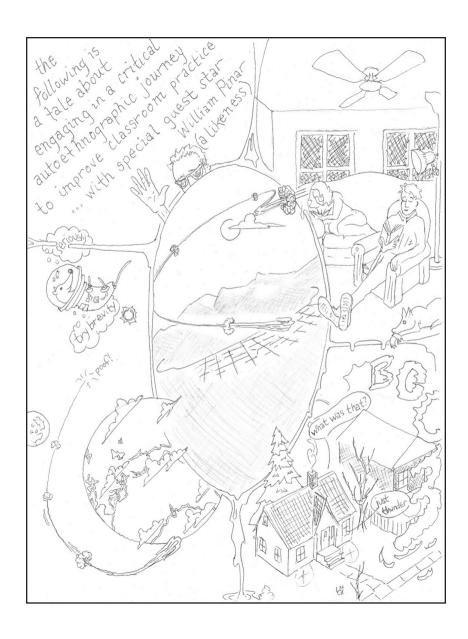
historical foundations (Greer et al., 2007; Lee, 2002; Mendoza, 2018; Salamon, 2008; Sowards, 2019). This is the dominant story told in New Mexico classrooms as indicated by texts and state mandated testing and delivered to student populations that are predominantly of color in a colonized land. What 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.
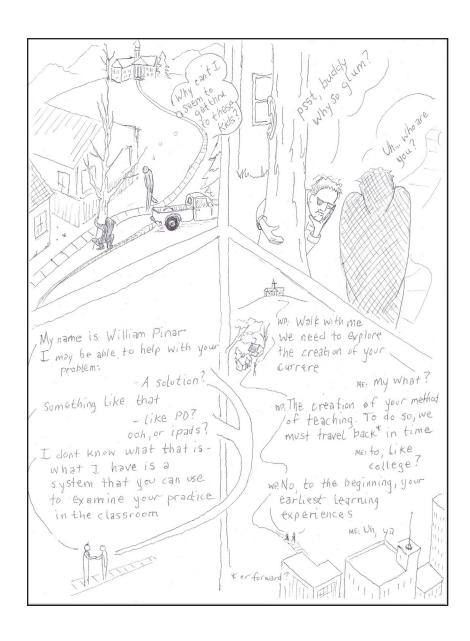
Instead of continuing this long narrative of dispossession, I instead encouraged students in a program of active community engagement, finding a history of New Mexico in the complex webs of communities across the northern part of the state. We investigated current challenges related to water rights, 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.
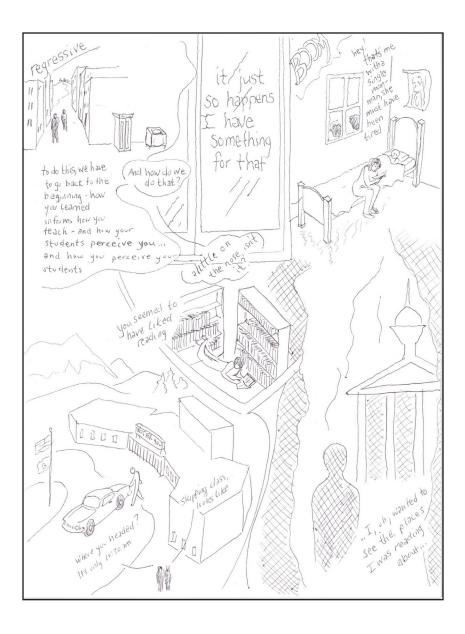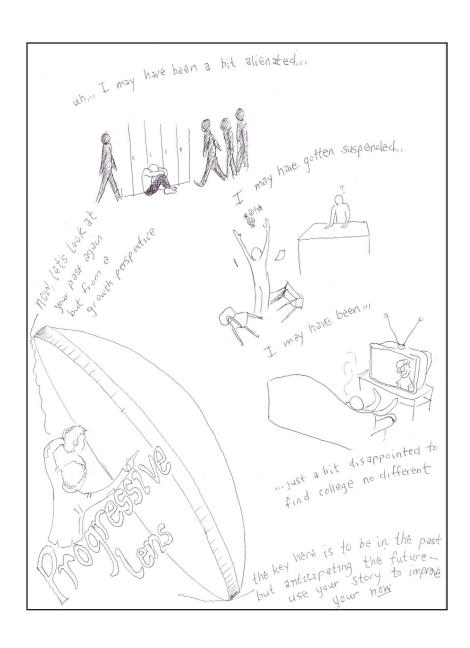
Pinar's Analytic in Practice—The Graphic Novel

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.
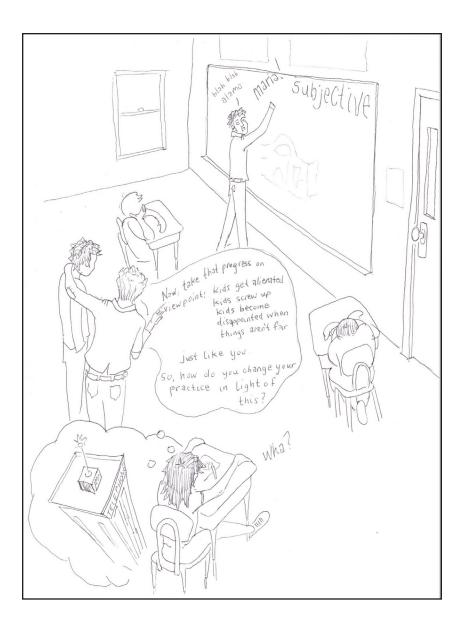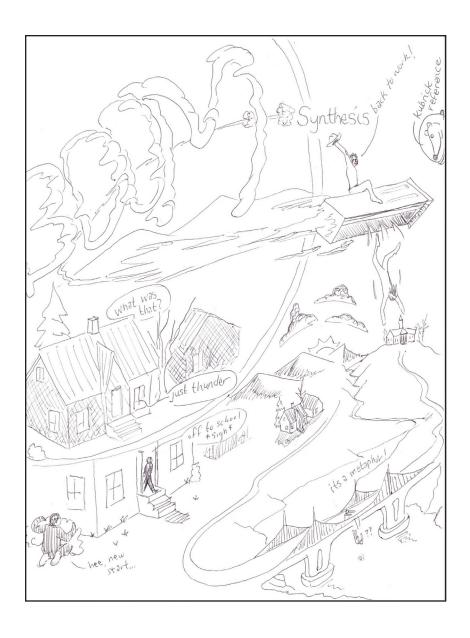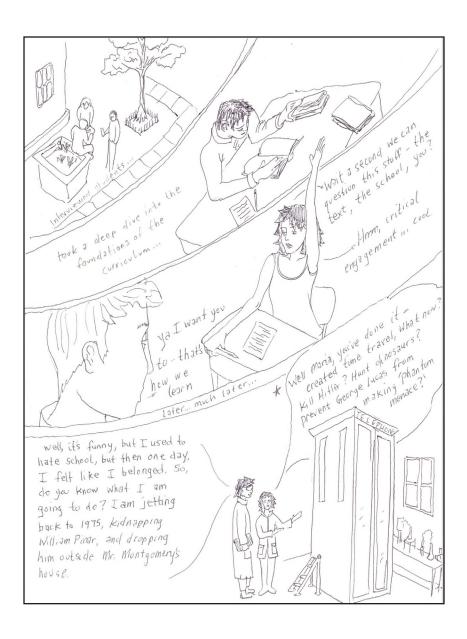
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