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

"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?

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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

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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

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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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