

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.

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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