

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 homosexual¹ 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

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-changing'. 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 SCHOOL²: 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 states, "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

<p>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."</p>	<p>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."</p>	<p>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."</p>
<p>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."</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>		<p>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.</p>
<p>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."</p>	<p>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."</p>	<p>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."</p>

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 or 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 syncretical 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

¹In this paper, I use period terminology.

²(Wilson & Love, 1963)

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