

“THE DAILY GRIND” AND DUALITY OF “GOING BACK HOME”

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In spring of 2024, my colleague, Lauren, asked me, Jody, if I would be her friend ... her *critical* friend, to be more specific. Lauren was about to embark on her fall semester sabbatical from her teacher educator position at Xavier University. During that time, she was going to teach in a 6th grade classroom, and she was going to enact a self-study (LaBoskey, 2004). She had done some research and reading on ventures back into a K-12 classroom space for teacher educators, specifically those engaged in self-studies, the experience of going back “home,” and she came across some literature about the benefits of having a “critical friend,” someone who could be a source of feedback and help to address the concerns found in “the difficulty of assessing one’s own practice and reframing it” (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 108). Lauren had decided that one way she wanted to gather data for her study was through daily blog posts, and she wondered if I would be willing to read the posts and critically engage in her reflections and experiences. I immediately agreed.

I was drawn to this experience for several reasons. First—like Lauren—I believe that spending time in K-12 classrooms is essential for university-based teacher educators. So many of us lose touch with the “daily grind” (Jackson, 1968, p. 1) of the lives of K-12 teachers, with the highs and lows of classroom life with children and young people and colleagues and administrators and parents. Going back into the K-12 classroom can provide essential learning for those of us who have jumped into higher education spaces. In my doctoral work and for much of my scholarly journey since, I have engaged in reading about teacher educators returning to the classroom (Christenbury, 2007; McDonough, 2017; Michie, 2019; Peercy, 2014; Poetter, 2012; Scherff & Kaplan, 2006; Spiteri, 2010). Like Lauren, I, too, had an itch to return to K-12 teaching, but here Lauren was actually *doing it!* I wanted to hear about the experience and could think of no better way to do that than to read her daily blogs.

Second—Lauren and I had spent time together troubling the theory-to-practice divide that exists in teacher preparation programs. We both consider ourselves critical scholars, and we both have engaged in curriculum theorizing, but we also both formerly were practicing K-12 teachers and subsequently have taught methods classes for several years, and we see the theory-practice divide often. That there is a tension between the theoretical foundations of our programs and the daily practice of K-12 teachers is not new knowledge; troubling how we can do better for our students—our pre-service teachers—has driven both of us during our time in higher education. So, I wanted to see how Lauren would balance that tension, that duality that she would surely experience. How would she be able to take her critical stance and transfer that into critical pedagogy in her sabbatical classroom, all while meeting the demands of that space, the demands of her host teacher’s very real, very important obligations as the teacher of record?

Finally—I knew that Lauren and I would get a chance to write about this experience and share what we learned (and are still learning). Lauren’s self-study and the fall we spent knee-deep in her experiences speak to Pinar’s (1994) question that drives *currere*: “What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (p. 20). I knew Lauren would come away from her time in the classroom with not only practical ways of applying new knowledge but also some



ideas about teachers' lives and how we can prepare our university students to step into these spaces better equipped to be in it for the long haul.

Pinar (1994), through *currere*, urges us to consider the past, the present, and the future to synthesize our experiences, to interrogate our “relation to the Self, and its evolution and education” (p. 19). Through the *currere* method, a teacher-scholar can deeply consider Pinar’s (1994) foundational question: “What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (p. 20). Poetter (2024) uses the concept of “Curriculum Fragments” to do this work. Poetter (2024) defines curriculum “as a dynamic, experiential happening among living things such as human beings, and not merely as a static, scripted, sluggish entity that forms the basis of lesson plans and scripted activities in schools and college classrooms” (p. 1). Poetter asserts that curriculum—“teaching and learning and educating and thereby becoming more richly human”—is deeply personal and educative and informative and life-giving. When Pinar (1994) writes about the *currere* method, how we engage in our educational past, present, and future to achieve a synthesis of sorts, he likens our memories and musings, the words used to describe them, to photographs. Poetter’s (2024) “photographs” are his fragments, “relatively short bits of experience, happenings in the world, narrate[d] ... as stories” (p. 3). These fragments—short, biographical bits—give form to the humanity of curriculum, our lived experiences *as* curriculum, and illustrate how to enact the method of *currere*.

In this essay, we (Lauren and Jody) share Lauren’s blog posts as fragments and Jody’s comments as “reflective interludes” (Poetter, 2024, p. 5). Homing in on the recurrent threads of “the daily grind,” as theorized by Jackson (1968), and the concept of teacher educator/K-12 teacher duality, as explored by McDonough (2017), Lauren’s fragments (blog posts) illustrate her educative experiences, and Jody’s “reflective interludes” (Poetter, 2024, p. 5) help to synthesize the data, to elicit “the meaning of the present” (Pinar, 1994, p. 26), and—for us—“deeper knowledge and understanding, of both [our] field of study and that field’s symbolic relation to [our] evolving biography” (p. 27).

“THE DAILY GRIND”

AUGUST 28, 2024

LAUREN: BLOG POST

This is how I remember it was being a science teacher—always dragging in materials. Stuff is so important! Today was ice vs. dry ice observations. Here was my morning:

4:30am - Alarm goes off.

5:00am - Meet friends to run - speedwork for Queen Bee training.

6:10am - Grab coffee to go from Starbucks.

6:20am - Lurk outside of Graeter's until it opens at 6:30am. The lady let me in a few minutes early, yay! Buy dry ice for today's observation (can't buy it the night before or it will just be gone; Graeter's is the only place in the area that has it). Use PTA funds and make sure I don't get charged tax.

6:35am - Rush home to shower.

7:20am - Arrive at school. Throw down materials.



- 7:30am - Writing in content areas PD. Some good ideas, but meh in the morning when you are trying to get ready for the day.
- 8:05am - Set up for dry ice observations. Needed a hot plate to add thermal energy to both ice and dry ice.
- 8:10am - Students start arriving.

Starting to regret choosing this unit, but it went well and was highly engaging, encouraging good observations and questions. But I am so tired.

On grading - Over the past week, I also graded a few things, which reminded me just how much I dislike grading the same thing in the same way over and over again. I much prefer to sit with an individual or group and discuss work. Thankfully, I only have one class of 32, but I remember the days of grading 125 of the same thing and thinking, even if I spend one minute on each one, that's over two hours of my time. What does this mean for my work with teacher candidates? A philosophy of assessment is essential. What are you trying to do with each assignment that is graded. Do they all need grading? Self-grading, peer grading, what else is beneficial? Perhaps this is less of a concern for Primary majors since they may have just one or two classes of students, but for those in 6th and up, they likely have 4-6 classes. The time is too much, but also when the time is too much, the quality is low. I'm a fan of completion grades for things that I think are important to do/participate in, but not as important that there are right answers yet. In my own methods class, I moved quickly from grading their big lesson plan at the end to meeting on each section as we covered it and helping students make choices and changes. By the end they were a joy to grade because I had been intimately involved in the process. How to do this with kids in science?

JODY: COMMENT

Lauren,

The schedule you provided from 4:30am to 8:10am is EXHAUSTING, and yet it is what I remember as well! Not dry ice, obv, but the rushing around that can only occur within a specific time period. Yes - I understand the after-thought of - Should I have really chosen this for my first unit? But I love that you chose to lean in on this first lesson. It sets a tone, really.

So - what I am really thinking about now is the notion of time. How to most value it, how to be efficient but also personalized, how to set it aside, how to calm our own angst around it. I think your discussion around grading is important. I think your discussion around running around to prep is important. And each of these topics merits our attention with teacher candidates. But I am left thinking about what I wrote to you on Sunday - is there a work-life balance? How do we teach this? How do we balance quality feedback and attention to students, while saving ourselves? How can we realistically set our teacher candidates up for the actual elements of the job and for success simultaneously?

I have no answers, but I love the questions.

**NOVEMBER 12, 2024, AND NOVEMBER 13, 2024***LAUREN: BLOG POST**The Honeymoon is Over*

It was a good run. It's November and I only have 10 days left at [this school]. I feel comfortable there and feel like I'm doing good work and will miss it so much, but I finally feel ready to go back to [my institution].

There's so much to unpack about this day. I really feel the impossible work of teachers. The amount, the emotion in it, and the constant noise (literal and figurative) that surround a school day. I don't think I could do this full time again ... or I do, but I think I would be the old grouchy teacher.

1. Test corrections and reflecting on what was learned

Students completed test corrections and the average score on the test is now an 83%. I feel like the corrections and reflections were fair. I would make a lot of edits to the test (and will for Mrs. Y to use soon). I also realized that, when teaching over multiple years, you get better at constructing usable tests and also pointing students to the right concepts during instruction to help them be better at the tests. This does not make the test invalid (statistically, it's not valid either), rather it is a way that teaching starts to align as a whole in a way that makes students successful in that particular classroom. I'm not sure this success would translate to the state tests, however. Yesterday, when the grades were published in Canvas (not the final grade, but parents didn't know that), the parent of a student in my class emailed. She wanted to know if he could retake the test (she didn't know about the corrections yet). I used his corrections and gave him full credit instead of half credit for each one. I'm not really sure why I did that ... to appease the parent?

2. A student issue right at the end of class

Ugh - this student is in trouble in several classes but not usually in science because he likes it. I mentioned him before and I have noticed that it's a trend since Mrs. X is gone, but also I feel like the way I tried to teach today was less hands-on and less interesting to him. Today, he was being destructive with scissors. Before I could register what he was doing - Mrs. W told him to stop doing that and to put the scissors away. It's important to note here that she did this before it registered with me. It's so hard to be trying to walk a class through an activity with accuracy and enthusiasm, with 32 students. There is ALWAYS someone whispering or poking at something or whatever and you have to tune it out to deliver ... and I can tune it out to a certain extent, but it also throws me off just a bit and has me tripping over reading things or giving instructions at times. IT IS SO HARD. I know I got better at this, and it makes me feel like I have ADHD, and maybe I do, but I think it would be a challenge for anyone. So, then I'm tuning out the noise further, and we are finishing up the activity. It's another computer simulation with a very loud noise when you click on something. Everyone is doing it together, so it should be quiet except when we all move to the next thing. This student's computer is constantly making the noise as he clicks around however he sees fit. Yet, I still ignore that. Class is nearly over, and I look over. He starts being destructive again with the scissors, and I take away his recess telling him that he can make it right then. He starts shouting, and I respond. I don't even believe in taking away



recess! I can't remember exactly what was said after that aside from me saying I would be contacting his dad, but he got mad, and Mrs. W asked if we should add disrespect to the email, and I said yes. Not my best moment, but also the disrespect was kind of unreal. And teachers deal with much worse. I'm not sure I would sign up for that for 34 years. At least I know that his homeroom teacher is in daily contact with the parents and they are supportive or that would cause even more stress.

3. Teacher camaraderie that comes from these difficult student issues

As soon as this happened, Mrs. W texted the team. I actually leaned over to her and said I wasn't even sure if I could take his recess today, but I just reacted. Right away the team is saying that they will contact the parent and put it in the online system for documentation. Mrs. W and I both sent details, and I sent a picture of the folder. I am slightly embarrassed, but also I know this is not some unusual situation with this student. It's just the first time that I've had an issue like this, and again, I feel the weight of being the professor who should be amazing in all the things. I am not, and I feel a little like giving up. After class, I stepped out in the hall, and Mrs. Z was there being supportive and incredulous at the situation. I offered to call the student's dad, but she said that she would take care of it. The teacher who has him right before lunch said that she would make sure he did what he was supposed to do (to make it right) and then stand on the wall at recess. I felt very supported by the teachers, and I remember how teachers get through all of this. I felt more a part of the team today than I had before. In my shame, they said, it's not you, and we'll help take care of it. And maybe it IS me, but I needed to hear that and feel that. Teaching is so much. It's so much planning and grading and teaching, but even if you think you have that figured out, it's noise and lack of attention, and then parents are mad and then a student acts up and it's just. so. much. All in just one period.

[Thank god it was pajama day, so at least I was in my pajama pants.]

Rollercoaster of Teaching

What a difference a day makes! Today was great... the student came to me and apologized immediately. (The principal called home last night. I appreciate the support and realize how protected I am from parents.) I thanked him for apologizing. I said if he's bored, I have a cool science book on my desk that he can look at in those moments before starting to destroy anything. He seemed back to himself, so that was good. Word from the teachers in the morning was that there was an even bigger student issue in the afternoon. A student got mad and ripped a paper in half and tried to run away. What a day!

In class, students worked really well on the new project together. They are researching a water contamination issue in Ohio, and they seemed really invested, for the most part. It's the kind of high-level thinking activity that I think is great for advanced students.

I brought in a game as a reward if they worked hard, but I forgot to tell them about it until halfway through class. Something started going wrong with Canvas (on their end), so for the last 10 minutes, we played the game. Students had fun, and it lightened the mood. Ended on a much better note!



I am working on thank you gifts for teachers and notes for students for my last day. I decided on little bundt cakes for teachers with thank you notes and a multi-color pen for students. I plan to write each of them an encouraging note. I will miss this place! [Add on - team meeting this morning was talking about Tier 2 students. It's hard to think of those students that need some help, but not as much as students on IEPs and whatnot. There are SO MANY things to think about, and this is another very important one to add to the list of many important ones.]

JODY: COMMENT

I am thinking about this post, paired with your November 12th post. This is aptly named “Roller Coaster of Teaching,” lol. I read this in my email when you posted last week, and I thought about the drama of the previous day with the scissor/student episode. I thought about how emotional I am (I know this is not about me, but I get my teacher feelings going when I read your posts!!). I am working very hard as I age to be less reactive and emotional and instead to take deep breaths and let things settle a bit. But the last two days' posts have me thinking about those teaching days when events or disturbances would just throw everything for a loop! Of course, this still happens to me now! (Case in point: the faculty assembly meeting) Throughout this semester, we have discussed just how conflicting everything in teaching is. We have also talked about how it often overtakes one's personal life, how it enters the personal space. When I think about these last two days with you, and really many events over the semester, it makes me think about how many things come at teachers and how fast they come ... And then go! Just the emotional ups and downs of working within a bureaucracy that is fraught with contradictions, alongside working with children and their families, all while teachers are working to separate the public and the private, is conflicting.

DUALITY OF IDENTITY

AUGUST 9, 2024

LAUREN: BLOG POST

Dr. Lauren

I'm not sure what bearing this has on my RQ, but I think it deserves its own post. Some background ... when I finished my PhD, I got a job working part time at a junior high. I was also adjuncting part time at [a university]. I was self-conscious about having a PhD and what other teachers might think about it, so I decided to just go by Mrs. Lauren to fit in better. Philosophically, I'm opposed to this, knowing that more women do not use their title than men and that someone might use a man's title without having the sort of negative feelings they might have toward a woman. Also, I think it's good for kids to see a female who has a doctorate. But, I guess at that time, fitting in and having teacher camaraderie was more important to me and honestly, my ego is not that tied up in requiring people to use a certain title. At the end of the year, a student who had



found out that I had a PhD said, “Mrs. Lauren, why don't you go by Dr.? You earned it.” That has stayed with me.

So, when I was visiting the school at the end of last year, the teacher just introduced me to the class as Ms. Lauren. I didn't say anything, but it was on my mind. This summer, as we were planning, she asked what I wanted to go by. I explained that I didn't really care, but that at [my institution] with students, I go by Dr. Lauren. Both teachers, Mrs. X and Mrs. Y were there, and they said, “You're like Dr. Biden! You should go by Dr.!” So, I decided that I will go by Dr. even though it does make me uncomfortable in this setting. I am completely used to it in a higher ed setting. I made a little name tag for my desk, and the office asked me to fill out one of those About Me pages to hang in the hallway. I used Dr. for both, but I was still feeling a little unsure.

Last night was the family picnic at the school. Students and families came to have hot dogs and play and meet their teachers. Mrs. X used Dr., but it sounded like she was also uncomfortable saying it (or was it just me?). She used it to introduce me to another teacher, and I was like, just Lauren for peers and Dr. for kids. No families really asked, but some seemed a bit confused. I am definitely overthinking this, but apparently, I do not like feeling like I stand out, even if it is a perceived positive. I just think it will be a barrier for me fitting into the school culture ... which had me thinking of something [my colleague] said, “You can never go back home.” The first time I heard this phrase was from a teacher who had left my school (I got her position) and went into administration. She wasn't all that happy about it and was thinking about coming back but said the same thing. “You can never really go back home.” I've thought about it a lot as someone who still identifies first as a teacher. I think of those years fondly and there's always something in the back of my mind telling me that I could go back if I wanted/needed to. But can I? Even in this short term, dipping a toe in, capacity? [My colleague] said that we are changed by our experiences, especially the transformative theoretical work done in a doctoral program, and we just aren't the same so when we go back, it's not the same. Home isn't the same either. And so what will it be like to go back, as Dr. Lauren? I can go by Mrs., but I am Dr. Lauren. I am not just teaching, I am writing and theorizing about my time back in school. As much as I want to experience the joys of classroom teaching and the camaraderie of the profession again, I am an outsider, and I'm not sure even getting a full-time job in a K-12 school would change that.

JODY: COMMENT

I read this post last week, and I have been thinking about it. I am co-teaching a class this semester with a colleague who is not “Dr.,” so I am self-conscious about calling myself Dr. while I am standing next to her! And I have grappled with the Dr. label for so long. I wrote a short essay about it a few years ago. (I am going to try and dig it up.) My English teacher roots had me thinking of Romeo's “What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet,” where Shakespeare says names are irrelevant. I thought of this next to John Proctor's proclamation: “How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!” in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which posits that a name is EVERYTHING. These literary illusions don't really get to THIS particular issue, though, do they? Really - it's about power, feminism, humility, identity, and all of the personal feelings and tendrils wrapped around these notions.

I wrote in my last comment that you are living a dual life, and this post only adds to this puzzle. Mrs. X's lack of comfort is unfortunate, but it doesn't change the fact that you ARE Dr.



Lauren! You are HER!!! (Does this hearken the “He is HIM” language of young people?? I hope so!) I don't want to speak for you or others here, so I will leave this part in first person: I wonder when I will ever be able to simply stand strong and proud in my accomplishments, strengths, and successes. Why is it so hard for me (women) to project our power instead of apologize? Even in this environment where you are a guest and feeling like an outsider: you are an EXPERT in the field; not to mention - you are really nice and helpful and collaborative and innovative. I hope you settle into your power in this environment.

SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

LAUREN: BLOG POST

Epic Fail from the Tech Professor

Today before school and during plan was a lot more of discussing Kitchen Chemistry and then making last minute changes that really challenge me as someone who likes to carefully create and then execute a plan. Thankfully the next unit is different content between the advanced and regular classes, so I can really create the plan for advanced and take that off their plate while they create the regular classes' work. I am designing a 4 week plan for Earth's Cycles. Both Mrs. X and Mrs. Y think they are boring standards, so I feel motivated to make it fun and meaningful.

Yesterday, Mrs. X wanted to give a pretest on the metric system. Mrs. Y created a 4-question pretest in Canvas, but Mrs. X wanted to use the post-test as the pretest. This was quite a bit longer and more detailed. She wanted it to be digital and auto-graded. The way [this district's] systems work is complicated. They have Google, but not Google Classroom. Instead, they have Canvas. If they want a digital quiz, they can use a Google form, but it won't be auto-graded. They still have to grade it and put it into TAC. If the quiz is in Canvas though, it is auto-graded and then can be synced up to TAC. Since I know Canvas well (and told Mrs. X that I was an expert), I offered to create a quiz that could be auto-graded. I created it yesterday and shared it with Mrs. X.

First, Mrs. X still had the old quiz in, and the students started the four-question quiz. I was watching them and told her I thought this was the wrong quiz. We got that figured out, and they started the new quiz. In my quiz, I used matching, fill in the blank, and multiple fill in the blank, so that the entire quiz would auto-grade. The first thing I noticed is that some of my “multiple fill in the blank” questions weren't working, but some were. I investigated and realized that the ones where I had a decimal point were not working. Apparently, the decimal point messes up the formatting somehow. That wasn't a me problem, but then I had to fix the problem. I made changes to the original quiz and broke those questions up into several multiple-choice questions. I reuploaded this to Mrs. X's class and realized that, since one class had taken it already, it didn't just add a new one, it replaced the one they had taken, but their answers were still there, the quiz format was just different and they all look like they have a lower score. That's fine, I plan to use fudge points and go over each one to fix that mistake. As I looked at each one, I realized that I did not predict very well what a 6th grader might type in for a fill in the blank. First, they spelled a lot wrong, and I couldn't predict all of their misspellings. Second, I made a blank for a number and included the units so that they wouldn't have to include the units, but then they did include the units. Lastly, on some, I thought I had included the right answer plus a bunch of different possible answers, but only the possible answers were there. I also think I noticed that Canvas also counts



capital letters as different from lower case in fill in the blank! What a nightmare. So, I fixed as much as possible for her next three classes but will be “hand” grading each one to account for my mistakes and the limitations of Canvas.

A few things I learned is that, though I was trying to recreate the test with fidelity, fill in the blank is not best for use with 6th graders. Next time, I would create multiple choice instead. Or, I would have them write a short answer and just hand grade. It might have been better to focus on the content outcomes for matter and include a few metric questions.

JODY: COMMENT

Okay Lauren ... This week was a doozy! I have so many thoughts, and I read them all in a row, so I hope I don't forget some of the particulars.

I can't stop thinking about the conundrum of time, planning, the standards, activities, technology, chaos, 6th grade, and all the things in between. In reflecting on all you have written in the last two weeks, which I digested in one sitting, it seems like the chaos began with trying to spend time executing a unit from Teachers Pay Teachers not created by ANY of the people teaching it. I have continued to go back to this! As educators working in teacher prep programs, we want to make sure we teach candidates that their time is valuable and that there are many great resources out there for them and that not everything needs to be created from scratch. HOWEVER, not all resources are created equally AND one should never just take someone else's unit/lesson and drop it in! Your reflection about a “dress rehearsal” connects here. If what we are doing doesn't fit with all the relevant elements, it might be destined to fail or at least be chaotic. When we are planning, I think of all that must be considered: the curriculum (standards), the students in our classrooms, our own philosophical orientation to teaching, our values and how they are present in our decisions, and so much more.

I am glad you can focus on the Earth's Cycles. Because life in [your school] 6th grade is a little crazy!

CONCLUSION

William Ayers (2001) says “A life in teaching is a stitched-together affair, a crazy quilt of odd pieces and scrounged materials, equal parts invention and imposition” (p. 1). In her time during sabbatical, Lauren so quickly flipped the switch into that “life in teaching,” the “crazy quilt” of her experiences. As Lauren and I dialogued through sabbatical, we both couldn't help but linger on her reflections about that life, about the near-constant pull to be “teacher-ing” at any possible moment alongside the push and pull of her dual identities. Lauren describes the chaos of her days, illustrating how she contends with the sheer volume of obligations, decisions, steps, time constraints, student issues, and complicated relationships, which all, of course, harkened her back to her own early days as a K-12 teacher. And she describes how she was so often conflicted about her role in that space, as a teacher educator, as a former K-12 teacher, as a scholar, and more. This essay includes just five of Lauren's 78 posts, but her experience was rife with questions and reflections around the lived curriculum of teachers: the demands, the doubts, and the joy of that space. “What has been and what is now the nature of our educational experience?” What an apt



question that Lauren and I, along with teachers in the field, will continue to grapple with as we contend with the chaos and duality that a life in teaching certainly includes.

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