

AN ENGLISH-SPEAKER-OF-OTHER-LANGUAGES (ESOL) EDUCATOR'S *CURRERE* OF LONELINESS

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As a pupil and an educator of English-Speakers-of Other-Languages (ESOL), I have found it challenging to interpret my educational experiences. Especially after reading historian George Mosse's (2000) notion of education, I wonder if I have pursued education as "an open-ended process without set goals" (p. 184), wherein self-improvement is the aim. I also struggle to understand the full scope of my self-improvement. This lack of understanding about my education, as both a learner and an educator, has left me feeling educationally isolated, although my educational journey has been filled with the presence of classmates, teachers, colleagues, administrators, textbooks, societal values, and pedagogic practices. Curriculum theorist William Pinar (2011) posited that techno-scientism based neoliberal education bleaches subjectivity from curricular discourse. This dissociates an individual with the curriculum and education at large. In this article, through the autobiographical method of *curre*, which considers individuals' educational experiences (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), I aim to examine my own educational experiences and derive insights from my educational loneliness. In doing so, I document my lived experiences as a student and an educator following *curre*'s first two of the four-stage mechanisms, namely regression and progression. Then I psychoanalytically interpret these experiences in light of the other two stages, analysis and synthesis.

SEEING MY EDUCATIONAL LIFE REGRESSIVELY

Pinar and Grumet's (2015) prompts for regression guided my revisit to the educational past. In regression, an autobiographer focuses on their educational experience and "takes special notice of ... past life-in-schools ... past life-with-school-teachers and ... past life-with-books and other school-related artifacts" to probe what is "not ordinarily seen" or what is "taken-for-granted" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 73). The purpose is to review "the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (p. 71). Accordingly, I begin my *curre* by regressing to the pre-2004 educational phase of my life when I began schooling. As will unfold in the following section, at this stage I barely had the language and contextual relevance to process and comprehend loneliness, because my father was still alive and he protected my bubble of connection and fulfillment. Therefore, all my life experiences during this period made me perceive loneliness as an alien feeling that I could not describe. To visually depict the foreignness of loneliness to me, I have presented my educational experiences from the pre-2004 era under the subheading "The pre-2004 Era" appearing in a relatively less familiar font *AMATIC SC*. The period from 2004, when my

father passed away, until 2023, marked my growing acquaintance with loneliness. So, for example, the final numeral in the year of the subheading “200 5: The Epiphany” is detached from the others to signify my eventual alienation. The feeling gradually amplified between 2006 and 2019, resulting in the year component of the subheadings appearing as “2 0 0 6” and “2 0 1 9.” As for “2 0 23”, the early part of the year signified isolation that, later in the year, transitioned to a more connected feeling. However, because I started writing this *curre* in 2024, I have placed prior events in the regression stage.

THE PRE-2004 ERA

THE RUNNING

“Run fast, Shuvo, so that no one can catch you,” I can hear the inner me saying as I sprint across the school playground. My heart is pounding, but I cannot stop running. I don’t want to stop—I don’t want to get caught. This run is special. I can feel the presence of a new friend—the fresh morning air. The faster I run, the more it envelopes me. I am now way beyond my playmates’ reach, but I still have a companion. This friend is not always with me, but it is always there when no one else is around. This friend shows up when I am running fast. Being at school every morning is worth it. Who wants to miss playing *chor-police*? Isn’t it exciting to keep running away as a *chor* and make the police chase the thief?

The bell is ringing. Time to say goodbye to my airy friend. Everyone is heading to the classroom. Time for the first class of the day. I wish I could stay a little longer here in the playground, far from the lecture that the teacher will start delivering in five minutes, oh no, ten minutes; actually, I don’t know when the teacher will be at their table in the classroom. What’s wrong with running a bit more? The teacher will be late anyway. Running is better than sitting in the classroom for the teacher’s lecture, gazing at the sky through the rusty iron bars of the large window. The lectures are so boring. I have no choice but to follow the others to class. I don’t want to get caned. It hurts. I would rather go to the class.

GETTING SPANKED IN GRADE 4—I’M NOT ALONE

The math teacher is not coming today. Yay! We won’t have to study for the next 45 minutes. I can go out in the playground and enjoy. It’s so quiet out there! Everyone is in their class. The calmness is fascinating. This playground is so crowded and noisy when all the students are outside the class! But what if a teacher comes in to substitute for the regular teacher? What if Jollad Sir finds me outside? He’ll spank me to a flatbread. I better stay inside.



See, you think of the devil, and the devil is here. Jollad Sir is here for the remainder of the class time. Let me concentrate on his lesson. I'll get a beating if he asks me to solve a problem, and I fail to solve it.

Oh no! My attempt to hide hasn't worked. I have to go to the blackboard. Now, I have to solve a problem. My heart is racing like a drum. I know how to solve this problem. I am trying to calm myself down. My mathematical brain is going blank at the fear of being caned with each second sprinting by. Anxious, helpless me, standing in front of the whole class, has accepted defeat in solving the problem. Before any more thoughts can play in my mind, my body is shivering at the sudden shock of being whacked on the bottom. I can feel two strong blows, yet I am calming myself down. I don't have to be embarrassed—others are also getting spanked. I'm not alone.

200 5: THE EPIPHANY

The clock says it is just 10 minutes to three pm. Since breakfast, my personal study session has been slow—not satisfactory. My 17-year-old body is not feeling one hundred percent either. I'm hungry, I think. I know my body well. My energy level is dipping as usual. I am convincing myself that this happens when I haven't eaten for some time. The lunch hour is long gone. But why don't I have an appetite? I don't feel like eating. Listening to the radio isn't interesting, although it has been on for a while. TV isn't attractive either. If *baba* were alive, *maa* would have been home now. I would be done with lunch by now, and *maa* would be having her afternoon nap. Maybe we would have a guest drop by. *Maa* wouldn't mind offering them tea, perhaps lunch as well. The guest is *Narayana* (an epithet of God Vishnu) and ought to be treated well.

Where are those guests, relatives, *Narayanans*? Since *baba* passed away, not a single visitor has been here at this hour. Why don't they come to visit me? I have no one around. It's so empty. So many people used to be around when *baba* was there. Everyone has deserted me.

200 6: IN THE PHYSICS CLASS, STILL NOT IN THE PHYSICS CLASS

The view of the window leading onto the street is captivating. Perhaps it feels more alluring than what it actually is. Everything else is appealing when you are in a physics class super disengaging. The teacher is trying his best by lecturing and drawing on the blackboard, but I cannot hear anything other than the lecture. I don't know why I have to study the lesson. The lesson and I are poles apart—as if I'm the only soul in the classroom who is lost. I'm with 60 students and the teacher; still I'm alone. The lesson is not for me, and I'm not for the lesson. I belong to life outside the classroom—on the street where the rickshaw puller is singing and pulling the rickshaw, in the tree branch near the window where a crow is resting in the scorching summer heat. I feel like a stranger in the classroom. I'm just on my own.

2019: ALIENATION AT FACULTY EVALUATION

I am forcing my static eyes to roll over the 10 evaluation criteria. The appalled eyes are stuck. My dear students, who I had assisted both during and outside the semester's consultation period on lessons such as topic sentences and APA citations, have accused me of not being available for consultation! According to their evaluations, I haven't put any effort into teaching paraphrasing and essay writing using a variety of audio-visual aids. A good percentage of the students have blindly ticked the box that says the instructor did not use technology while teaching! I'm now searching for the basis for the accusation that I did not cover all of the content of the syllabus. My memory is flashing back to the moments when I was referring the students to the course delivery plan once a week throughout the term to help them keep track of the course's progress. The more I see the treacherous digits in the evaluation paper, the more perspiration trickles down my forehead inside the air-conditioned office. My senses are slowly being numbed by feelings of shame and betrayal. I keep wondering how, even after my selfless teaching efforts, they could return the poorest faculty evaluation scores I'd ever received. Let me place the evaluations inside the envelope, cast the packet into the dark locker, and get busy with the official work needing to be completed. But who do I share this with? My colleagues would judge me to death if they came to know about this. It is suffocating to keep it to myself. I have no choice but to repress it. I'm alone in my journey to redeem myself.

2023: LIBRARY FOR LIFE

It's not even 5 pm, and it's getting dark—a common scene during the Canadian winter. The weather app is showing that the temperature is below zero outside. The dullness of the day has found a perfect match in the cold darkness. My craving to talk to the first person of the day is mounting. How does my voice sound? Let me check. *Aaaaaaaa uuuuuuuu*. It feels like I'm hearing my voice for the first time after ages. It is so empty all around. The curtain is certainly not blocking the view outside. It's been sleeping on the sidelines since morning. I can count the number of humans I have seen today on one hand. I can't stay home any longer.

I knew the university library would be a good place to see some lives. It is such a fulfilling feeling. The group of students on the sofa must be undergrads still in their teens. Their cascade of laughter shatters the silence of the library's quiet zone. They sprawl across the chairs. No issues even if we don't interact. Human presence counts. I've got company. It's not as desolate as it was at home.

MY EDUCATIONAL LIFE IN PROGRESSION

After regressing, I will now “free associatively” ascertain my current “intellectual interests” (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 76) and the loneliness surrounding them. As an educator, I specifically consider the emotional and intellectual aspects of my teaching experience and my relationships with students and colleagues, as suggested by Pinar and Grumet. I also imagine a future as an academic at this stage of *curre-izing* my lonesome educational experiences. As such, the eventually parting numbers in the subheading “20 2 4: Pedagogy of the Unknowns” portrays the development of my loneliness from a state of optimism and connection. Conversely, subheadings with a tightly knit composition, such as “2027: Voiceless Murmur” and “2030: Solitude,” symbolize hope within solitude.

20 2 4: PEDAGOGY OF THE UNKNOWN

This term, the 300-level pre-service teacher preparation course is being offered in a different format. We, the two TAs, are assisting the professor to conduct the classes. What an opportunity to learn about teaching firsthand from a professor! I’ve been doing a happy dance in my head since the start of the term. This is my chance to close the socio-cultural gap in my understanding of North American undergraduates. I think I’ll get to understand the students more than I did last year—how they respond to a brown, male TA’s presence in the classroom, what teaching-learning style they prefer, what they don’t appreciate. I’m going to learn all these in a scaffolded style, under the professor’s supervision.

This week’s class has been different from the last three weeks. What is Winnie the Pooh! Is this a character, a situation, or an institution? What is the socio-political connotation of “I heart Canadian oil and gas”? The professor and the students look like they are on the same page except for me. I know the meme they are talking about, but I’m clueless about Winnie the Pooh. Why do people discreetly mention their love of Canadian oil and gas? I feel like a stupid stranger here. I don’t know anything about Canadian socio-cultural references. So, what’s my role in this class?

2027: VOICELESS MURMUR

The closer my PhD defense is approaching, the louder the whisper is getting. All those hopes, expectations, and passions are murmuring, “How will Shuvo get an academic job now? When will he get permanent residence? Will he return to Bangladesh? What is he going to do for his mother?” With the whispering turning into clamoring, I miss out on hearing others. It is all too much to digest. I can’t compromise on the quality of 200-plus pages of dissertation revision. The committee has worked hard to let me reach this stage of the research. The taste of success is sweet but comes at a high price. It’s like mouth freshener cooling down the inside of the mouth but

leaving the tongue paralyzingly sweet. For the next four months, I must forget that I have a tongue. I have to block out all those murmurings. I don't want to feel lost in this shrilling cacophony of pleasing people. Let me get the degree first.

But would I really get a job at a university? Would I get one in Alberta? Clueless. I don't know, but I can't return home now. Breathing feels heavy thinking of returning to the same dusty, humid, crowded city. How would I be able to address my chronologically senior colleagues as "Sir," and "Madam" in my emails? Who would I have coffee with discussing *curre* and Aoki's brilliance? All these years of PhD learning will be trashed, consigned to the same traditional curriculum, learning objectives, assessments, and grades. This is going to be the death of my PhD. I'll be a dead body rotting in broad daylight, attracting insects with no one to bury me, my curriculum soul. This is becoming overwhelming. Let me go back to the literature review chapter. I can't leave out reviewing Bamberg's recent article.

2030: SOLITUDE

I'm loving this part of life. A tenure track faculty position, personal office space to work and study, *maa* at our place in Canada, a life partner at work—all supporting my endeavor to publish a book based on my PhD dissertation. My voluntary role as a loneliness and emotion education specialist at the community radio station is making a difference. The listeners are now more aware of the characteristics of loneliness. They are spreading awareness regarding addressing loneliness and alienation among their friends and family.

I'm intricately connected with my support system—*maa*, classroom teaching, research, my partner, my community. Still, there is a transparent curtain between me and all these relationships. None of them compete with each other but interact for mutual growth. A warm solitude exists. This solitude is composed of an orchestrated symphony. The melody of solitude is about to shift, as I'll be out with my human companions for a summer retreat in the woods, a space to absorb the melodious solitude of mother nature.

ANALYSIS OF THE REGRESSIVE AND THE PROGRESSIVE

Moving on to the analysis stage, I analytically describe "the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them" to ascertain "how ... the future [is] present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, pp. 77–78). As the following sections demonstrate, my *curre* exhibits a discursive and complex relationship between the past and the future and marks the omnipresence of the present in the future and the past.

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF PAST AND FUTURE

My past and future are in constant interaction through my lived experiences. The relationship is like a sand-filled hourglass, where both ends are identical but constantly connected by the flow of sand, which represents my lived experiences. My future aspirations are direct responses to past experiences. The experiences of being deserted by relatives in 2004 and of a panic attack on a desolate evening in 2023 were the background of my desire in 2030 for emotional support from my mother and the imagined community. Similarly, my desire to continue growing academically through research publications has roots in my fondness for running as a child. Running used to provide me with what psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott (1958) termed an “ego orgasm” (p. 419). According to Winnicott, children reap orgasmic pleasure when they physically participate in games. The pleasure that I acquired from running motivates me for the same through academic reading and writing in my biographic future and stirs my future drive to publish. Moreover, my future wish to have a retreat in the woods links to my past way of life. When I used to run in the school playground, I found companionship in the fresh morning air; it was a sign of my “longing for company ... for relief from unhappiness at being alone” (Mendelson, 1990, p. 339). The comforting connection that I formed with nature in the past continues into my future. This imagined connection with nature ultimately helps me cope with loneliness.

The future-past relationship is complex beyond these apparently linear conditions. Normatively speaking, the 2004 experience of being abandoned should not have sculpted my future aspirations, as even in the absence of relatives I resided in a tight-knit community, a quintessential trait of Old Dhaka. Still, I was alone because, in social psychologists Cacioppo and Patrick’s (2008) view, I lacked quality connection with the community. Thus, the future depends not only on the experiences of the past, but also on the nature of those experiences. This explains that my aspiration to be a part of Canadian academia might have emerged from my disconnection with the Canadian teaching-learning culture.

Although the past and the future are interconnected, the experience of loneliness is discursive rather than correlational. This means that a past experience of loneliness does not predetermine future experiences with it. This is evident in my own life: I felt alone in the absence of connection with a proximally closer community in Bangladesh, yet I feel a sense of fulfillment in my desire for a social connection with an imagined community in Canada. Psychoanalyst J. Roof (2022) explained, “the human subject is never in command of itself, is never self-same, its unconscious always infused with the plethora of dynamically structuring vectors beyond itself” (p. 778). This intrinsically unstable human condition explains my varying experiences of loneliness in the past that I will continue experiencing in the future.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE PRESENT

My present is present in the future multidimensionally. First, my current educational experiences scaffold future professional preparations. For example, my role as a graduate teaching assistant provides me with the opportunity to get acquainted with the socio-culturality of a Canadian undergraduate classroom under the professor's scaffolded approach. To me, this scaffolding is like being in an "internal environment" with the support of an introjected mother (Winnicott, 1958, p. 419). According to Winnicott, the shelter of an ego-supportive mother or caregiver creates a favorable environment for children that orientates them to solitude. The scaffolded graduate teaching assistantship experience similarly sows the seeds of my professional growth as an educator in North America for a future time when I will be on my own in the classroom with my curriculum. The supportive learning atmosphere inspires me to envision a future life quilted with multifarious support systems. Thus, my present resides in my future. My present also crafts a lonesome future for me as an educator. Culture and context-specific materials, such as the "Winnie the Pooh" meme or the "I heart Canadian oil and gas" sticker, are unfamiliar to me. Their usage as teaching-learning materials makes me feel like an outsider in a classroom where I am meant to offer teaching assistance. The experience reminds me of my position as a person originating from the Global South who is on an eternal journey toward understanding North American culture. This, in turn, affects how I imagine an isolated future for myself as an educator in North America.

My present feeling of being pedagogically ostracized in the classroom replicates some past feelings I have had. I had a similar sense of exclusion during a high school English grammar class, where the teacher's rapid teaching pace left me behind. I grew up learning that a good learner is "unacceptable as he is, and in order to be acceptable, both to himself and to others, he must be like" the better ones (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 15). Therefore, I followed what the "better" students were doing: working on the assigned exercises without asking any questions. This estrangement of my true self led to a feeling of isolation that was amplified later in 2005 during the alienation from my relatives. Thus, the current feeling of being on the educational margins was already scripted in my past experiences.

THE SYNTHESIS

In the final stage of *curre*, I assemble responses to prompts such as, "What is the meaning of the present?" and "What conceptual gestalt is finally visible?" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 78). Regarding the first prompt, the present has educative value in that it offers newer meaning to lived experiences from the past that can be projected into the future. For example, my present feeling of aloneness as a teaching assistant sheds light on my "estrangement from Self due to modeling" (p. 13) as a sophomore. Speaking from a critical perspective, the estrangement that cultivated my loneliness is not innocent. It has roots in the human capitalist education system (Kress & Lake,

2015). According to Kress and Lake, this model of education treats students as a source of human capital to be educated and exploited for economic gain. Educational institutions that conform to this form of education push students and teachers to model, for example, political heroes, cultural ambassadors, and better-performing peers (Pinar & Grumet, 2015). My past, in light of the present, suggests that, as I conformed to my institutional norm of modeling “good students,” I experienced a system-induced self-estrangement and eventually loneliness.

As to the second prompt, the three previous stages of my *curre* derive a bilayered understanding concerning loneliness. First, loneliness is a complex and evolving concept. It is also a discursive experience that shifts in form and meaning across different life stages. For instance, loneliness was an alien feeling to me in my childhood. It transformed into a sense of abandonment after my father’s death and later into a professional alienation in the Canadian classroom. Second, the transformation of loneliness is not necessarily a linear process of decline. The building blocks of my future aspirations include my ego-orgasmic joy of running alone and pain of professional disappointment in 2019. These experiences have taught me to differentiate between loneliness and a chosen solitude. Hence, my imagined future is not one of complete connection; rather, it is a solitude that values a sense of self yet is intricately connected with other significant elements of my educational life. Thus, loneliness, in all its forms, has been a transformative process that has led me to a more intentional and fulfilling way of being.

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