

## CONTEXT

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE OPEN UNIVERSITY SUBMISSIONS

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Curriculum, as noted by the creator of *currere*, “*is a complicated conversation*” (Pinar, 2011, p.1). Indeed, Pinar (2011) notes in his introduction to *currere* that it focuses on the lived experience of curriculum, privileging individual experiences whilst also recognising the importance of action and interaction in thinking about the curriculum.

Curriculum development has been a key focus of action and interaction for educators in Wales for the last ten years, and in many ways, Welsh Government (WG) has embraced complicated conversations around curriculum development, through involving all stakeholders in discussions of the development and implementation of a national curriculum framework. The notion of subsidiarity of curriculum, proposed by Donaldson (2015), was embraced in the design of the national curriculum framework for Wales, which was developed by teachers and key stakeholders. The resulting Curriculum for Wales framework (WG, 2019), driven by four key purposes, is to act as a guide for schools to develop their own school level curricula, with pupil voice and pupil experiences key drivers for the resulting school level curriculum. Hence, teachers, and arguably to some extent pupils in Wales, have become curriculum developers. Pinar (2011) implies that lived experiences of teachers shapes their curriculum enactment, and the timely *Currere Cymru* project (e.g., Smith, 2024) focuses on exploring how *currere* might support teachers’ understanding and engagement with curriculum development.

Our Open University in Wales *currere* team, as part of the *Currere Cymru* project, consists of four educators: two teacher educators on the PGCE programme at the Open University in Wales (Jonathan and Rachel W.) and two teachers, also student-teacher mentors, from Open University in Wales partner schools (Anthony and Rachel T.). Collectively, we reflected on our own lived experiences of curriculum, as pupils, as teachers, and as teacher educators. Engaging in the regressive stage of *currere* (Pinar, 1975/1994) showed us that we all had, unsurprisingly, different experiences of curriculum. Following this regressive stage, we had complicated but very enjoyable and thought-provoking conversations about what a curriculum should and could be, reflecting Pinar’s (1975/1994) progressive stage of *currere*.

To provide some context to our collection of work, our lived experiences and how this has influenced our views on curriculum are briefly summarised below:

Anthony noted how he did not understand what school was for, especially when remembering experiences like being told he was no good at something he loved. Totally switched off by school, Anthony left school with one qualification yet clearly he had a curiosity for learning, and a love of images and art initiated learning about so much, developing his own curriculum through his own interests. As a teacher, he aims to inclusively inspire curiosity and self-fulfilment with learners.

Rachel T. recalled being viewed a daydreamer and developing a feeling that her passion for art and creativity were seen as “soft,” less important than more “serious” subjects like language. Yet as a teacher, Rachel T. draws on creativity as a teacher and sees this a real strength in her profession, and she argues that daydreaming could be viewed as spending time deep in thought.

Rachel T. considered that her experiences of curriculum led her believe certain subjects or skills were more valuable than others and that she still sees this view now. She noted that the development of technology, and particularly artificial intelligence (AI), will affect what might be valuable skills and knowledge in the future and argued that a focus on employability in a curriculum cannot be successful when jobs are likely to change. Rachel T. sees well-being and readiness to learn as key drivers for curriculum.

Jonathan discussed his school experiences as mundane. He recalled experiences such as music lessons that involved little more than copying from an overhead projector, and only later he became aware that for others music was something to be enjoyed through active experiences such as experimenting with musical instruments. He spoke of learning in this way as a loss of cultural experience. As a scientist, he applied his study of evolution to reflect on whether education systems and their curricula should be like stable biological systems, favouring the average, or whether they should be more complex and dynamic, favouring adaptation and divergence.

I, Rachel W., noted I was a conformist who experienced what might be seen as a very traditional curriculum. I sought subjects that gave security, which were logical and structured, and this is what led me to an interest in mathematics. I could be seen as the “average” learner in Jonathan’s biological analogy, experiencing a stable system and being successful in it. I also embrace complexity, not just in mathematics, but in schools and educational systems, and I envision a broad and balanced curriculum that provides accessible pathways in an inclusive way.

It is perhaps unsurprising that as a mathematician, I am drawn to seeking connections and to using mathematical terms to discuss our work. For example, what connected all of our curriculum experiences is the recognition of individual passions and strengths, which we used as lenses for our experiences. We could not determine whether these strengths are innate abilities or whether our curricular experiences have developed them, intentionally (through conforming) or unintentionally (through not wanting to conform). Trying to do so would only result in a circular argument.

Divergence and convergence were key features of our collective conversations. Our very diverse experiences and subsequent conversations in which we analysed and synthesised our experiences did allow us to converge because we all agreed that a curriculum should be inclusive and engaging and should provide experiences that inspire, challenge, and encourage active experimentation and curiosity. To apply another mathematical analogy, we wondered whether this was something that might never be truly possible, but nevertheless something that we could possibly tend, and certainly aim, towards.

Divergence and convergence also figures in the way we have presented our *currere* work. The work is collected into three pieces: the reflections from the regressive stage of *currere* allowed us to consider the progressive, and an analysis and synthesis of the divergences and convergence has been presented by Anthony Lewis in his wonderful artwork. Rachel Thomas in “Are We Ready to Build a Successful Future?” and Jonathan Giddy in “Ordinary Joe” have developed their regressive work further in their own *currere* pieces.

## REFERENCES

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