

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A CURRERE APPROACH TO PERSONAL GROWTH AND LEARNING

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ALWAYS LEARNING

Teachers who position themselves as learners engage in a critical reorientation of professional identity—one that disrupts the traditional hierarchy of knowledge transmission and instead foregrounds reciprocity, inquiry, and reflexivity. Through this framing, teaching is not a static performance of expertise but an evolving practice shaped by ongoing encounters with students, colleagues, and contacts. Graduate-level scholarship has increasingly emphasized that such a stance requires systematic humility and acknowledgment that pedagogical knowledge is always partial, situated, and subject to revision. When educators adopt a learner's mindset, they become more attuned to the complexities of cognition, motivation, and social interaction that characterize authentic learning environments. This shift not only enhances instructional responsiveness but also models intellectual curiosity and adaptability—dispositions essential for learners navigating rapidly changing knowledge landscapes.

Central to this transformation is the teacher's capacity to critically engage with their own history as a student. Autobiographical reflection serves as a powerful analytic tool, enabling educators to dig into our prior experiences of schooling and examine how these experiences inform present beliefs and practices. Memories of assessment, authority, inclusion, or marginalization are not inert; they actively shape pedagogical decisions, often in implicit ways. By interrogating these internalized narratives, teachers can identify inherited assumptions about learning and power and consciously reconstruct their approaches to better align with equitable, student-centered principles. In this sense, learning from one's own educational past is not merely introspective but transformative, fostering a more deliberate and ethically grounded practice that bridges personal history with professional growth (Poetter, 2025).

RED—THAT'S THE COLOR I WANT TO BE

In first grade, I thought I was a great reader. My parents read to me each night, and I always got to choose the book. Usually, it was the Berenstain Bears or Dr. Seuss. Books made me feel smart. I would flip the pages and read along with my parents. I guess I should have thought more about how easy books were to read at home, but at school, everything took longer to sound out and understand. I would start a word, get frustrated, restart, restart again, then find my teacher looking at me expectantly. I would lose track of where I was and what I was reading, and I would have to restart another time. I loved repetitive tasks and repetitive language. Maybe that's why I loved poetry as a teen. Looking back, I realize I wasn't actually a great reader; what I was doing was memorizing and reciting the books that had been read to me a million times.

One day in class, Mrs. Miller assigned us to reading groups, which were color-coded; mine was orange. She would call over a group, read with us, then send us back to our desks with



questions to answer and a small follow-up activity. I was blissfully unaware that our groups were leveled-based on our reading abilities and that our teacher had been given a specific curriculum to follow. I clearly remember the day, however, when I saw the book Mrs. Miller was reading with the next group. I wanted to read that book, not the one I had been given in my orange group. I told her I wanted to read the book, and she said, “This book is for the kids who can read it.” I thought to myself, “I can read ... why can’t I try to read *that* book?” Mrs. Miller then told me I would need to pass the reading test at the end of the week in order to move up into the next group. I had never realized this was a “race.” I would have been much more motivated to do my best and grow had this knowledge been shared with me from the beginning.

Mrs. Miller was the sweetest teacher and saw that I wanted to do better. She had me complete the reading test for the red group that Friday. I passed, so she had me read the book aloud—the one I had been eyeing earlier in the week. I didn’t know how to sound out all of the words, and I stumbled, but instead of punishing me, she had me take the book home to practice over the weekend. I felt really stupid having asked to read at a higher level and embarrassed because I fumbled when reading aloud to my teacher. No child should be made to feel less intelligent, but I understand that, at the time, this was the curriculum that was available and being used widely throughout the U.S. Mrs. Miller was simply following the script assigned. She gave me the opportunity to move ahead and join the red group, but I wasn’t ready. I wanted to read a more interesting book, but ultimately, I wasn’t prepared for the grammar in the red group. I was happy that she let me experience the book, since I took an interest in it, which is what we want our students to feel when they pick up a book or story to read.

Now, looking back as an adult, I realize that making reading a “race” is not the route we want to take as educators. We should strive to have our students succeed at comprehension, fluency, and structural analysis of words. Using leveled curricula that rely heavily on a script limits the interest of the students, as well as the creative autonomy educators were taught to possess. Placing “learning” at the center of the curriculum instead of “understanding” enables the adoption of a scripted curriculum and focus on the reception of information rather than the delivery. As a result, scripted curricula often promote a culture of compliance rather than a culture of inquiry. Adaptation is the tool that transforms a standardized script into a responsive dialogue, which is where true understanding is forged. Unfortunately, my teacher did not adapt her script, but at least she let me attempt to read a book I was interested in.

LOOKING TO THE PAST

At its core, *currere* asks educators to examine their past experiences, imagine future possibilities, analyze present realities, and synthesize these insights into meaningful action. I have spent the last few months in my graduate curriculum studies class learning about what drives me as an educator and what improvements I can make in my students’ learning experiences. Looking into my past has caused me to reflect on the deeply ingrained, unconscious feelings and dispositions I developed as a pupil, which are exerting a continuing influence on my actions and reactions as an educator. The *currere* process positions teachers to use these lived experiences (Pinar, 2019) not as passive recipients of professional development, but as active intellectuals engaged in understanding their own practice. Learning to use our experiences as knowledge and the basis for instructional change is only now being taught in universities across the U.S. Research shows that human behavior and learning are grounded in processes where thinking and feelings



are closely connected (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Using what I know from my own educational history, along with educational theories, I feel I am more prepared to offer my students an adapted curriculum that keeps them engaged, even if this wasn't always the case.

GREEN—NEW AS DAY (ONE)

I had been hired two days before school began. Two days are not long enough to learn your job in any business, much less as a teacher in an elementary school. I started the year as a new hire from the HR department, which didn't make my new principal happy. Mrs. G was one of the most undignified, scapegoating, conniving humans I have ever had the pleasure to work for. She made my life a living hell. When I first met her, we were at our opening meeting, introductions and the like; she had the audacity to tell everyone that she was "happy to have everyone hired onto my team ... except Alicia. I didn't hire her. HR did." It was at this point that I knew she was not going to be helpful, much less pleasant towards me.

Later in the day, when I asked what materials I should grab from the storage room to get familiar with while I was in my teeny, tiny office, she walked me back to the office storage room. When I asked her what materials I should use, she literally just motioned to the room with a sweep of her hand, then walked back to her office. This room was the dumping ground for the entire building. It was huge and cold. It held materials from all grades and probably from the past 20 years on its floor-to-ceiling metal shelves. The room held all the school's current instructional materials, so I was tasked with looking through it all to find what was age-appropriate for my students on IEP's. I had never been an intervention specialist before, but I was up for the challenge because HR promised I would have help, training, and guidance. The amount of material was vast and overwhelming. What books are Tier One? What are intervention resources? I honestly had no idea. Do we have a copy for each student, or do I make copies for them? Do I use a scripted curriculum or just wing it and teach directly to the standards? I teared up a bit, I must admit. I had no idea where to start and no one to guide me.

After taking what felt like one of every teacher's manual upstairs, I went to find my lead special ed. teacher. Mrs. B was not much older than me, maybe a year or two, but she had been working in schools since she graduated. I was just returning from staying home for seven years. She sat down and tried to help me choose the right programs to use with each group and the lesson to start on that would cover the largest number of students' IEP goals. Mrs. B helped as much as she could, but she had her own room to get ready for the year, her own schedule to write, and her aides to instruct. I couldn't monopolize her time. She couldn't do more than offer advice that first day. I went to my tiny office and hid for the rest of the day, trying to make sense of my groups of students, how to create a schedule, and when to pull and push into which teacher's general education room.

After the year started and we had spent some time together doing the beginning-of-the-year activities, I learned more about my students and their abilities. I was feeling confident and ready to begin teaching—that was, until I was called into a meeting with the principal and the special education supervisor. The principal all but berated me for not using the correct programs with the correct students. I tried to defend myself. I tried to ask for help and guidance, but none was given. I wasn't there for help or guidance; I was there to be made a fool. I went back to my office feeling more defeated than ever. I called my husband and told him I wanted to quit. I couldn't handle the shame and embarrassment of not knowing what I was supposed to be doing. I know now that I



was intentionally being hazed; it wasn't the first time in this building or with this principal. Mrs. G didn't want me there, and she was doing everything in her power to make me leave, since she had no grounds to let me go.

I took the materials home and began to look through them. I needed to find a place to start with each group. I was thankful the teacher's guide was scripted. As a first-year teacher with seven groups in seven different places, I needed all the help I could get. Each program was focused on a different math or reading topic, which made it hard to create groups but gave me the opportunity to learn deeply about each topic. The scripted programs also gave me many options and strategies to review and fill in the gaps my students had. I was grateful to see the materials present the math in similar ways to the grade level they were originally taught but with a twist aimed at allowing older students to make the connections and grow. Boy, did they grow. My students were lauded in the building as having the highest growth on their math MAP tests that year—not that this helped me gain some acknowledgement and validation for a job well done from Mrs. G. She never once left me a note of support or recognition. Luckily, I had formed relationships with other teachers in the building who praised my students' gains.

I spent my entire first year deep in scripted programs for math and reading. I think that is what has helped me adapt to changing grade levels several times over the years. I learned to pick up a program, use it, modify it, and get results from my students. I learned more about how to fill gaps for my lowest students by using those methodical, scaffolded materials. I see that the programs we use in schools are not a one-size-fits-all solution, but they should be offered as a starting point and a guided list to use as Tier One instruction. As for Mrs. G, she was let go from the district two years later when they decided not to renew her contract.

LOOKING FORWARD

Issues of power and agency remain central to understanding how scripted curriculum shapes teaching practices. Powell et al. (2017) argue that highly structured curricula can limit teacher autonomy by positioning educators within constrained decision-making roles, thereby, reducing opportunities for professional judgment. Similarly, Golann (2021) demonstrates how scripting normalizes compliance-oriented teaching practices, shaping both teacher behavior and student engagement in ways that prioritize control over creativity. These dynamics highlight the tension between standardization and professional agency. While a scripted curriculum may promote consistency, it often does so at the expense of teacher autonomy and responsiveness.

Bridging this divide requires re-envisioning scripted materials as flexible guides rather than mandates, allowing teachers to exercise professional discretion and connect theoretical insights to the lived realities of their classrooms (Golann, 2021; Powell et al., 2017). Early on in my career, I was happy to read from a script and adopt a program. After finding my sense of autonomy and doing more research, I learned how to modify a scripted curriculum and adapt it to my students' interests. Current teacher education programs do not take into account the nature of current classrooms; they still have students create lesson plans and activities, which do not realistically align with our curriculum. Preservice teachers should be shown the research on adapting scripted curricula so they are prepared upon entering the field. Instead of strict adoption, schools can honor teacher expertise and build the trust necessary for professional judgment to flourish (Nikolaidis et al., 2024).



Educators also need to ask, “What can I learn from my past?” and “How can I use my experience as a learner to influence the children I teach?” Administrators need to provide opportunities within the building for educators to reflect and transform their personal beliefs into curricular experiences and share with other educators to create meaningful moments of intellectual understanding and curiosity. Education is an ever-changing field that requires teachers and administrators to share and reflect as they grow. It is our civic duty to provide the highest education available and produce an engaged learner. Our founders wanted the general population to vote and be educated enough to vote. They created our government to function for and by the public. It is our duty as educators to see that our students grow up to become thinkers and learn to question what they hear.

PINK—FILLED WITH HOPE

Looking back upon my early education experiences made me realize that my childhood was well-instructed and very creative. When I compare these happy memories to my current classroom, I can see some glaring differences. I, too, use a scripted curriculum and follow it more closely than I fear I should. My lessons are not always engaging or interesting. I genuinely enjoy having a set of materials to base my daily lessons on. They have the state standards, examples, and references on misconceptions. I know that preset pencil-and-paper lessons are not very creative or interesting, but they provide rigor and scaffolded problems. Many years of experience have led me to understand that no curriculum is the whole story. We as educators need to provide our students with differentiation, not a one-size-fits-all approach. I don’t want to teach the same way every day, droning on and on while my students tune me out. I want them engaged, challenged, and thinking creatively. This is my challenge moving forward: doing what is best for my students, not just blindly following the commands of the district or state.

Recently, I attended a professional development (PD) session regarding gifted thinking processes and questioning strategies. I went into this training thinking it was going to be another “talk at me session.” I had very low expectations and even lower desire to attend. I’m busy—every day. I have a million tasks to complete, meetings to schedule, and parents to call. There were three of us “older-grade teachers” at this session; the younger-grade teachers were attending the afternoon session. We sat down in the empty classroom next to mine, familiar with our presenter from the Educational Service Center (ESC)—a tall, slim man who dresses like a magician in black pants with white dress shirt, sleeves rolled up to the elbows, burgundy satin vest, and a burgundy bow tie. We knew him to be a bit eccentric, wicked smart, and knowledgeable about gifted services. With that said, I still didn’t want to take my time to learn another skill I “might” use. But I sat down to complete the first activity with my coworkers, ready to move on and be told where to find a few resources.

Instead, I found myself digging in, excited to discuss how kids stall and what may be holding them back when solving math word problems or equations. I was confronted with one of my own demons in math—open-middle problems. (There are multiple ways to approach and solve a problem, and students can choose their own path). The three of us worked together, quite well, I must say, giggling and trying to solve an open middle problem in as many ways as we could manage. Not knowing if my answer is correct or complete drives me crazy. The lack of control and self-doubt are enough to make me never want to solve a problem again. I grew up with serious self-doubt in math, so bringing it back up as an adult, in front of others, was frustrating. Luckily,



I wasn't the only one who was frustrated; we each expressed how disheartened we were, trying to prove we could solve a simple problem in front of each other. We learned that our presenter had been quietly guiding us, leading with questions, offering a question every once in a while. The feelings of embarrassment and frustration melted away and became feelings of confidence. We learned that we had to offer guidance and reassurance to our students, the same way our presenter offered us support. In the end, we prevailed, and our presenter lauded us with praise and candy.

We then spent the next hour discussing different ways students answer different types of questions, practicing open-ended questioning, and how to continue the conversation or shift towards a topic you want them to discuss. In math, we need to teach children that it's okay not always to have the correct answer and that getting something wrong isn't the end of the world but a place to begin a new adventure. We discussed book authors to pursue and potentially read together.

I learned more in two short hours about how to get children thinking and using information they already know than I learned in my entire undergrad program. It was the light I needed. I needed someone to show me a new path and a new way of thinking. My lessons have become monotonous, tedious, and rather boring. I know this, but I soldier on, using my curriculum, preparing for the testing season. I am not the teacher I want to be right now. I want to be exciting and engaging, but challenges appear, and sometimes steady and predictable are acceptable.

What is the nature of a teacher's educational journey? How do we become the educators we want to be? Scripted curriculum isn't inherently the problem—it's rigidity. Pinar's work suggests that education should center on subjective experience and intellectual engagement. Therefore, the solution is not abandoning scripted curriculum, but reclaiming teacher agency within it. I have become complacent. I've lost my sense of agency. We must continue to examine our understanding of our own practice and become engaged learners ourselves. Maintaining compliance will only lead to a lack of bridging theory to classroom reality. We need to encourage our coworkers and staff to examine their practices and reflect on their own pasts in order to understand their present. I've learned that the *currere* method can help facilitate conversations around a teacher's perceptions and biases. As Pinar emphasizes, *currere* and reconceptualization of curriculum emphasize operationalizing this idea by helping teachers redesign instruction in ways that foster authentic thinking and student voice.

GOLD—RICH WITH KNOWLEDGE

I am studying to be a school leader right now. If I walked into my own classroom, I would see students behaving, sitting around the room, and even working with a partner. Everyone is working, but are they truly engaged? Maybe some are. I want my teachers to offer their best. I know that takes many forms, and there are going to be hard days, but reflecting upon my own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher has made me realize that I need to show up and be my best each day; otherwise, the kids will just mimic my mediocre attitude towards learning. As an administrator, my responsibility will be to inspire and encourage my staff to teach to the best of their abilities each day. I would expect them to be engaging and creative, not to read from a script each day. The teachers should know their students and their different learning styles, which they can use to prepare lessons, modify the curriculum, and inspire.

In the future, I hope to offer a PD book club. PD is regarded as one of the worst parts of teaching, so why not make it fun and useful? Several great books are highly recommended by



members of our ESC and our leadership team. We could use these books to guide a discussion around questioning strategies, building lists of questions on chart paper or a shared Google doc. Modification of lessons we already use in our scripted curricula can help us reach our highest learners as well as stretch those in Tier One. Teachers who are willing to allow others to observe would be providing growth opportunities and valuable collaboration time afterwards to discuss positives and limitations and perhaps new ideas for expanding the curriculum and connecting with children.

As a leader, I want to encourage and guide our staff to develop a stronger professional agency. A subtle change can make a huge difference in the outcomes of our students. We can teach them to become thinkers, not merely doers. When we become self-aware and clarify our teaching beliefs, we directly influence our teaching practices and establish a sense of power and competency in our careers.

Learning together creates a sense of community and builds culture. Teachers who are engaged in learning from their past and applying their own knowledge will help shape the future. Forcing teachers to ignore their personal experiences and professional expertise in favor of a “pre-packaged” manual can narrow the curriculum and negatively affect teacher identity.

USING WHAT WE KNOW

Scripted curriculum occupies a contested space between “knowing” and “thinking” in contemporary classrooms. Drawing on Pinar’s emphasis on curriculum as an intellectual and reflective process, critics argue that rigid scripts risk reducing knowledge to memorization rather than fostering deep understanding. Scripted programs are often designed to ensure consistency, efficiency, and coverage of standards, which can support novice teachers and promote equitable access to core content. Indeed, Fitz and Nikolaidis (2019) note that proponents frame scripted curriculum as a mechanism for delivering uniform, high-quality instruction across diverse contexts. However, the standardization can blur the distinction between authentic knowledge construction and rote compliance, positioning teachers as implementers rather than as intellectual agents and students as passive recipients rather than as active thinkers (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2019; Pinar, 2019).

Strengths of scripted curriculum are, therefore, inseparable from its limitations. On one hand, it provides clear instructional pathways, reduces the planning burden, and can serve as a scaffold for teachers who are developing pedagogical expertise. Research by Vaughan et al. (2015) highlights that structured materials can support fidelity of instruction and alignment with standards when implemented with flexibility. On the other hand, scholars like Valdez (2021) emphasize that over-reliance on scripted curriculum constrains responsiveness to students’ cultural, cognitive, and contextual needs. Fitz and Nikolaidis (2019) further argue that the highly controlled nature of scripted curriculum limits both teacher autonomy and student intellectual participation, undermining democratic educational aims. In this sense, scripted curriculum can favor memorization and procedural compliance over critical thinking, inquiry, and meaning-making (Valdez, 2021; Vaughn et al., 2015). There has been ample study into the way educators teach; even with the aforementioned research, educators are still blindly reading from a script and losing their sense of autonomy. We see this leading to teacher burnout and attrition.

Areas for improvement lie in reimagining the scripted curriculum as a flexible tool rather than a prescriptive mandate. A more balanced approach would retain the organizational strengths



of scripting while restoring professional discretion, allowing teachers to adapt lessons in ways that promote higher-order thinking and authentic knowledge construction. Consistent with Pinar's (2019) vision of curriculum as lived experience, this shift requires positioning teachers as curriculum makers who interpret and modify scripts in response to the needs of their students. Ultimately, the influence of scripted curriculum on current teaching practices reflects a broader tension between efficiency and intellectual freedom—one that demands careful recalibration if schools are to cultivate not just knowledgeable students, but thoughtful and engaged learners.

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