Lived Curriculum: The Teacher at the Heart of the Protest

By Michael Maxwell & Carmel Roofe
University of the West Indies

When curriculum is understood as being constructed narratively through the construction and reconstruction of experience, what is valued are the stories lived and told by teachers and students of what is important, meaningful, relevant, and problematic for them. Curriculum then becomes what students and teachers experience relationally and situationally through undertaking a narrative construction and reconstruction of experience as they interact with each other. Individuals uniquely author these stories according to their own personal and situational particulars. Pinar (1975) describes this as a living biographical experience dealing with past, present, and future involving decisions made or not made. This biographic experience focuses on the living of the life, the running of the race, the individual in a particular space at a particular time, with life as the data source—*currere* (Grumet,1975; Pinar,1975). This is the lived curriculum; it is the lived experience of students and teachers in the classroom as they live out their lives individually and in relationship to one another. It is what Aoki (1993) refers to as the other curriculum. Aoki (1993) points out that this lived curriculum is not the curriculum as it is set out as a plan, but rather, it is a plan lived out. However, in spaces that were once colonized, such as Jamaica, actualizing the lived curriculum is a complex undertaking that requires pushing against prescriptions and systems that are hierarchical and deeply entrenched in the minds of students and teachers. In such spaces, *currere* becomes a prescribed race, in a particular space, at a particular time (Grumet, 1975) and a stifling of the lived experience in the present in order to adhere to traditions and maintain the status quo. The view of the curriculum as lived, therefore, is a rejection, a protest if you will against the traditional conception of curriculum.

Using an autobiographical lens, this paper seeks to explore how the lived curriculum is actualized in a Jamaican classroom through the role of the teacher (Mr. M). The intention is that this paper will serve as an inspiration to other Jamaican teachers to disrupt the traditional view of curriculum, which is often touted by policymakers.

Curriculum Organization and the Teacher's Role

At the secondary level, there are two types of public schools in Jamaica: government owned and run high schools (once called secondary schools but now known as upgraded high schools) and high schools owned by churches or trusts but funded by the government inclusive of paying the teachers in these schools. Schools of this second type are referred to as grant-aided high schools. Within these two types of schooling are remnants of the colonial legacy that give rise to tensions in how curriculum is thought about and actualized—tensions such as who attends which type of school, what subjects are offered, and what resources are available. Additionally, such tensions are linked to the examination-oriented nature of curriculum organization in these schools. Once students are placed in these schools, most of these tensions are borne out at the upper secondary school level. The upper secondary (Grades 10-11) curriculum is decided upon and driven by the syllabi of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

Grades 10-11 of secondary schooling are highly structured, examination oriented, and competitive, as students' success at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC) examinations determine how students articulate to the next phase of their lives.

Maxwell, M., & Roofe, C. (2020). Lived curriculum: The teacher at the heart of the protest. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 28–34.

At the end of Grade 9, students choose a number of subjects to pursue that align with their desired career paths or are given subjects to pursue based on the school's view of their attainment levels. Students then pursue these subjects for two years in Grades 10 and 11 and at the end of Grade 11 take the CSEC examination.

After CSEC, students may go on to community colleges, vocational colleges or certain universities, or move on to Sixth Form: Grades 12 and 13. CSEC is a prerequisite for these colleges and also for sixth form, which is an extension of the high school that serves as preparation for entrance into university, especially the University of the West Indies. Over the two years of Sixth Form, students choose a smaller number of subjects from those in which they had success at the CSEC level to continue. Students in Grades 12 and 13 take the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) also administered by CXC. CAPE is the prerequisite for the University of the West Indies and increasingly for the University of Technology: the two main traditional universities on the island.

Students' scores on the CSEC and CAPE examinations are used to determine teachers', students', and schools' success. As a result, emphasis at this level is placed on the coverage of content/syllabi, completion of past papers, and the passing of examinations. Curriculum takes on the traditional prescriptive approach and reflects a narrow view of curriculum, which limits possibilities for students in making sense of their world. In such a system, the teacher's role in helping students to make meaning and expand their world view from the content is critical. But often in these systems, the teacher's role is limited to that of a technician—implementer of someone else's vision of curriculum without much autonomy if any (Sachs, 2001; Winter 2017). However, given the importance of the lived curricula to students' understanding, interpretations, and construction of knowledge, teachers are called upon in such contexts to help students broaden their experiences and make connections between what they are learning and the world around them in meaningful ways. The teacher is called upon to become a curriculum maker with curriculum as symphony arising through learning and in interaction with students (Craig, 2006). The teacher then is at the heart of the curriculum in such systems. But in systems where teachers are used to being told what to do, it becomes a difficult undertaking to break out of this mould and to exercise autonomy in making decisions. This may create tension between one's own philosophical traditions and the pressures toward control and standardized examinations.

For the remainder of the paper, we share the journey of Mr. M, a classroom teacher who sought to break out of the mould and to help his students make meaning as they engaged with learning during an examination phase of their schooling. Through Mr. M's journey, we sought to answer the question, how can the lived curriculum be actualized in a Jamaican classroom? The question is answered through the analysis of interactions between Mr. M and his students, decisions made by leaders at Mr. M's school, and Mr. M's interpretation and action following those decisions. Pinar (1975) pointed out that educational experience could be examined biographically by accepting that one's biography contributed to one's formal studies. In this sense, the personal self and existential experience become the source of data (Pinar, 1975). Autobiography then can be considered as one's story of experience consisting of regression - looking back, progression - looking forward, analysis - stepping to see where one is, and synthesis - seeing how the past, present, and future are all integrated to allow for an understanding of the lived present (Pinar,1975). In this story of educational experience (*currere*) one also reflects to see how one is complicit in existing power structures (Pinar, 1977) and, hence, able to make necessary change.

Autobiography of Mr. M

Who am I? I am a Spanish teacher, French teacher, graduate student, and graduate researcher. I have been at the heart of the curriculum since 2001 in Jamaica. I have taught students at all levels including students at the CSEC and CAPE levels. Much of my concern revolves around the construct of curriculum as content, as product. I had always tried to maintain a constructivist classroom, as I learned from my Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Training; however, it was during my studies toward a Masters of Education in Curriculum Development that I first became introduced to the Reconceptualist view of curriculum. I confess that I did not really comprehend what that meant. It was not until I was conducting my study for that degree focusing on the perceptions and feelings of Jamaican high school students that it began making sense. Seeing their apathy, somewhat negative feelings, and reading and listening to their frustrations, uncertainty, and contradictory emotions from their reflective pieces and interviews was enlightening. I then understood curriculum as biography, *currere*, and the meaninglessness of school experience (Greene, 1971; Pinar, 1977). These CAPE students did not see their experiences toward these exams as positive. It was then that my protest truly began. I decided that, when I returned to my own classroom, I would not have my students endure this traditional concept of curriculum in which I had been complicit. It was time to change.

With my graduate experience, my protest began, and I looked to radicalize my teaching and actualize the lived curriculum. I no longer thought of curriculum in terms of the prescribed curriculum, the curriculum as plan (Aoki, 1993). I decided that I would no longer follow the status quo at my school in terms of in-class standardized testing and in terms of the role of the teacher as provider of knowledge and responses to prescribed questions from past examination papers and the reliance on the method of drill and practice for students' success. Instead I gave the students voice in the classroom as they learned and prepared for their examinations. This meant that when students had concerns on their minds not directly related to the subjects I taught, I would allow them the opportunity to discuss those concerns. I wanted to have the lived curriculum become fully actualized in my classroom. Instead of the monthly in-class standardized tests, I focused on classwork and homework assignments because I was concerned about the quality of the student experience. In lieu of these standardized tests, I gave students videos, portfolios, dialogues, and group assignments. I also gave students choice in their assignments and at times the opportunity to determine the ways in which they would show me what they had learned.

Students were provided with opportunities to vote on choice of assignments, were able to vote on the due dates of assignments, and even to suggest assignments to be done, which in several cases were accepted. During the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year, with my then fourth form (Grade 10) French students, I was teaching a particular topic (the Passé Composé: a past tense), but as we went through the class activity, Laura volunteered to come to the board to share her response to a question. She then went on to start explaining some vocabulary and grammar to her classmates. I recognized a "teachable" moment, and I stepped back to allow Laura to take charge of the class and to teach her classmates. My only intervention was to make clarification. Previously, I would not have done that, as I thought time was limited and I needed to cover the syllabus for the examination. However, with this method, as time progressed, this group of French students became more and more active in class. This was the curriculum coming alive in my classroom as, instead of choosing to assert my authority, I was recognizing Laura's personhood. It was not about me but about Laura

and her becoming. I had to step back, recognize that becoming, and indeed to allow her to become. Laura would once again take charge of the classroom at another time when I was running late for class and internal oral examinations were upon us. When I reached the classroom, Laura was already running the class, leading practice for the oral examinations. I sat and watched for a while before intervening to make some clarifications. Laura gave me a look indicating that I had taken over her class. I realized that I had talked too much, and I returned the class to Laura. I had to recognize Laura's uniqueness and her willingness to teach.

Other students besides Laura also sought and received opportunities to take control of the classroom and teach their peers. There were individual students who sought very hard to remain in the shadows, but even for those students, there was greater involvement in that, while not extroverted enough to take control, they were much more willing to share their work and even to volunteer responses in class. As a group, they were becoming. They became more connected to each other and to me as their teacher, and I became more connected to them. It was not simply a class, but rather a family. There was also a Spanish group of fourth formers (Grade 10) in 2015. I decided to give students individually or in pairs the responsibility of teaching specific topics—Por and Para, the Present Perfect and Pluperfect tenses—to their classmates. Ana, Marta, and Arissa had these responsibilities, and I only intervened for clarification. Ana and Marta prepared their lesson and requested that I ask for a projector, which I did. Not only did they teach the topic to their classmates, but they sought to ask their fellow classmates questions and went so far as to prepare a practice activity. Arissa taught her classmates while I was absent, and her classmates were able to tell me what they had learned while I was away, and they were able to show me the notes they had taken. I was following in the footsteps of Miss O who speaks of Heidegger's role of the teacher to let students learn and allow students to become (Aoki, 1993). This is the essence of the lived curriculum. I had to allow Laura, Ana, Arissa, and Marta to become.

Additionally, I found myself concerned that my students were learning languages of whiteness in a pre-dominantly Black country, seeing Spanish and French as languages of the original European countries. This meant that these languages were outside of these students' lived experiences. I decided then that I had to ensure that my students were introduced to the fact that these languages were not simply languages of white people, but also of people who looked just like them. In 2016, with Laura and her classmates, I introduced them to the French Muslim rapper's song "Il nous connaissent pas"(Translation: They do not know us) speaking to the alienation of young people. I used the song, to introduce the prescribed topic of Direct Object Pronouns, but this was not my only focus. We spoke about how they as adolescents felt and to what extent they could relate to the stories in the song from their own personal experience or knowing of others in situations similar to those depicted in the song. I then moved on to showing them the words of the song in French and asked them to provide a sight translation of their own. I asked them to identify the Object Pronouns and then moved on to showing them how the pronouns were used in the context of the French language and then examined the differences between the positioning of the pronouns between both languages. I was looking to reorient their thinking to see new perspectives, as Greene (1971) described the teacher's role, and to hopefully have them "lend the curriculum their life" (Greene, 1971, p. 262), for the curriculum is not simply to be experienced but to be lived. The curriculum for my students was then a symphony from cacophony. Each of their own experiences infused with this new experience becoming a part of each of them emerging with a curriculum of life and lives.

Aoki (1993) and Olson (2000) remind us that the lived curriculum is a curriculum of multiplicity, a story of lives as they intersect. It is an important consideration because as Greene (1971) reminds us:

> Curriculum, from the learner's standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp. Rarely does it signify possibility for him as an existing person, mainly concerned with making sense of his own lifeworld. (Greene, 1971, p. 255)

Having decided to protest, I deliberately ignored school requirements and the Head of Department's requirements for testing. I changed my focus from trying to teach them a curriculum read as official documents and focused instead on their experience in the classroom and the process of learning rather than on the outcomes of learning as measured by standardized tests.

This process was far more successful with the French group as a whole than the fourth form Spanish group, despite my best attempts, so one could not truthfully state that this group of Spanish students were transformed. Shifting students' thinking requires patience, as they are used to the traditional way of preparing for examination through drill and practice. I was calling students to shift from the known to the unknown, and this can be uncomfortable leading to resistance. The French third form group had a mixed outcome as some students continued to resist any attempt at becoming, concerned only about grades and the teacher as everything and all things. Yet I had reason to be happy with several students who became fully engaged with French and would seek to be fully and completely involved with classes—volunteering to take control of classroom activities under the guidance of the teacher. Indeed, while one can set forth one revolutionary action, its success is also dependent on the willingness of the students to participate in that revolution. One of the third form French students resisted me and my actions for nearly a year. It was not until near the end of the school year that she relented, and her performance improved dramatically. As Greene (1971) pointed out, when students find that their own conceptions of the world and its meaning no longer fit comfortably with the reality of their existence, they are then forced to confront the need for change.

Seeing the experiences of my students, I shared with the Head of Department (HoD) what I was doing. She indicated she already heard through the students but could not support my actions because this was not the route the school was taking. I also became concerned about students' career choices at the fourth form level being limiting. I sat and wrote a paper to my then principal to get the school to recognize the curriculum conceptualized as lived. I recommended that testing be de-emphasized and that subjects be pooled. Sadly, these were not acted upon then. No actions were taken on his part, not even bringing up the matters for a broader discussion with the staff. Disappointed as I was though not surprised, I did not broach the subject with other teachers in a specific sense. I did, however, discuss teaching in general with close colleagues and with members of my department. At least one colleague who was head of another department broached her teaching in a way that was not built on testing. While there was some broad agreement from other colleagues on a relational approach, the march and the drive toward testing as curriculum continued.

Not being able to control the actions of others, I could control my own, and so my protest continued on its long lonely road of subversion in action without

necessarily stating out loud what I was doing. My students were still performing well on examinations, and so there was no expressed concern about my methods. In many ways, it is most likely that teachers will have to be prepared to conduct some parts of their revolution quietly subverting the system from the inside. Though my protest continued it was largely unrecognized at the broader school level.

Implications of Actualizing the Lived Curriculum

For teachers, actualizing the lived curriculum is not a series of actions but a way of being. It means an adjustment to the way teachers think and teach as they seek to achieve curriculum ideals. It means that power is shared and that teachers are not always "the authority." The curriculum as plan is pervasive in Jamaica because many teachers, especially young teachers, are afraid to take bold action, as they fear being victimized. However, teachers and administrators are called upon to take gradual steps until the message permeates the schools and spaces in which they work.

For Teachers

If the lived curriculum is to be moved from the realm of the theoretical to the realm of the everyday, teachers must be introduced to *currere*. Pinar (1977) tells us that, through the method of *currere*, we are able to reflect on how we contribute to the maintenance of existing power structures. In Jamaica teachers themselves are products of colonial structures that sometimes give rise to unconscious biases and systems that oppress students in the classroom. Through reflection we can acquire the ability and power to make the necessary changes. Making such changes requires committing and re-committing to the protest against the alienating prescribed curriculum in Jamaica (Greene, 1971). *Currere* is one way of aiding teachers to re-attune, as it opens one up to reflection and self-critique and, hence, to making change. Through *currere* teachers can better see and understand who it is that they are. In this understanding, they may live a curriculum story that will allow them to understand that their students have their own stories. Every institution preparing teachers should introduce them to *currere* so that the lived curriculum can become fully actualized. The prescribed curriculum is nothing but a framework; true curriculum is lived out by students with their teachers and teachers with their students. Teachers must wage a battle against focusing on the curriculum as laid out in a plan or syllabus. Teachers must reorient themselves to the lived experience of the students in their care. This may mean choosing not to simply follow directions of others—possibly their own administrators—but rather being aware and alive to their respective pedagogic situations and act accordingly.

Each teacher needs to become aware of his or her students as individuals, recognising and acknowledging their individuality and building relationships that focus on the individual human being and not on the specific subject matter being taught. Greene (1971) suggested that the role of the teacher is to help students to combat meaninglessness, to open their eyes to seeing the world in new ways, and in so doing to make sense of the world in which they exist. However, before teachers can do this for their students, they must be able to do it for themselves. The teacher has to embody new assumptions reflective of her students and context while achieving the intended outcomes of the planned curriculum. In order to do this, the teacher must know each student. Moreover, the teacher needs at times to also step back from being *the* authoritative figure, allowing students to lead and discover and, hence, to become.

Teachers may need to protest the prescribed curriculum by directly engaging with their administrators in seeking to make change. They may need to engage in mass action

to ensure the quality of the student experience as the teachers of Oklahoma did during April 2 to April 11 of 2018. Those teachers may or may not know anything about the lived curriculum, but in that protest action, they were showing concern for the lived curriculum. It is up to each teacher in every classroom on the planet to fight to make the lived curriculum real. That fight may be in the individual classroom, adjusting one's ways of thinking and one's attitude to what curriculum is by being attuned to students and how the cultural environment of the classroom is designed.

For Administrators

Administrators need to recognize that the curriculum in school is not restricted to the subjects offered by the school and the respective syllabi. Administrators need to recognize that the students and teachers in the institutions they lead are living human beings with their own stories, and the school experience is only one part of those stories. Administrators need as well to listen to the voices of their teachers and students when they speak about the nature of experience within the school and to engage broader stakeholders to see how the lived experience of school may be improved. This should include school-based, co-operative, and collaborative curriculum planning. By working in this cooperative manner, giving voice to students and teachers and considering the totality of their experiences, we are as Aoki (1993) described it, legitimizing the lived curriculum.

References

Aoki, T. (1993). Legitimating lived curriculum: Towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, *8*(3), 255–268.

Craig, C. (2006). Why is dissemination so difficult? The nature of teacher knowledge and the spread of curriculum reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, *45*(2), 257–293.

Greene, M. (1971). Curriculum and consciousness. *Teachers College Record*, *73*(2), 253–270.

Grumet, M. (1975, April). *Existential and phenomenological foundations of currere: Self-report in curriculum inquiry*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.

Olson, M. (2000). Curriculum as a multistoried process. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *25*(3), 169–187.

Pinar, W. F. (1975, April). *The method of "currere."* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, Washington, D.C.

Pinar, W. F. (1977, April). *The reconceptualisation of curriculum studies*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, *16*(2), 149–161.

Winter, C. (2017). Curriculum policy reform in an era of technical accountability: 'Fixing' curriculum, teachers and students in English schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *49*(1), 55–74. DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2016.1205138