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"None of Us:" Four Poems About Dad

(for James Anthony Daspit, Jr., May 7, 1929 – March 21, 2020)

By Toby Daspit
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

7-23-17

sunday morning
and dad just called to
tell me about a dream
he had

something he has never done before.

seems we were driving
in his first truck
a '55 black Dodge
with a stick shift on the steering column

a truck he sold decades ago.

of course dad was driving
because I didn't know how
to drive a stick
when he owned
that truck

still don't

still don't speak the languages of
machinists and electricians and
carpenters
that he was fluent in

just like his father
and
his brothers
and
my brothers.

I speak from a different lexicon
one where gravity curls
and stars splinter
and madness manifests
in places mostpeople
never see.

Daspit, T. (2021). "None of us:" Four poems about dad. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 1–5.

in the dream
my dad says he suddenly
couldn't drive the truck

much like he no longer calls us by
our given names
but by the brothers he's buried.

he stopped the truck
turned to me
said
"your turn."

12.10.17

my dad fumbled for words more than usual
today at lunch, confusing not only the waitress
but us.

"where am i?" he asked more than once
claiming to know where "the forest" was
and where "beyond" was and knowing that this place
was never those things.

it took a while for my
mom to explain to the waitress, and to us,
that those were clubs on the main highway
between where she grew up and where he
did.

we drove that main highway on the way back home
as we have countless times
as it has tethered my dad to my mom's family
for over sixty years
and has a long cord wrapped around my heart too.

he noted where "the forest" and "beyond" should
have been, understood that the buildings were
no longer there, that some things have changed,
"but not that much," he insisted, "the road looks pretty
much the same."

i was driving my mom's car, and everyone in the car
knew there weren't going to be too many more of these
lunches, what with the way time is, the way things change,
even if not that much.

6-19-2020

dad died
two days
before the lockdown.
we knew it was coming
ever since he woke up
in the middle of the night
and stood over his flashlight collection
and fell
from the latest stroke.

we knew it
even
before this life

of feeding tubes
heart monitors
catheters
dialysis
breathing treatments
speech therapy
blood work
diapers.

the week after the funeral
mom asked to
watch the

Hank Williams movie
she saw with me
and my sister
years ago
in a theater
only us
in attendance.

I Saw the Light.

When it ended
she said
“Dad never liked Hank Williams much.”

11.7.2020

you could ride the elevator up to see your
dad on the 4th floor of the hospital
and down to get back to work
or home
or the grocery store

every day for the six weeks after the stroke
for six weeks after mom heard him collapse on their bedroom floor
in the middle of the night
couldn't move him
so she tucked a pillow under his head
put a blanket over him
and waited until morning to call us.

you could ride the elevator every day and rarely see the same
faces

but you know the looks . . .
the questions (will she make it out of here?)
the fears (will he ever walk again?)
the panic (why don't they recognize me?)

you nod
they nod
sometimes someone says something about the weather
or comments on the pretty flowers in someone's hands.

almost always
we bless each former stranger as they exit on
their floor
we whisper, "good luck."

you could drive every morning before work
and every afternoon after work
to that hell house of a "skilled nursing facility"
walk through the halls of dementia
and amputees and desperation
to room 427
to listen to dad's same pleas
"when we go home don't forget the TV!"
"they sure got a lot of regulations in this place"
"well isn't this a fine predicament -- I'm a baby again, in diapers"

but after the first couple of days you begin to read
the nametags on the nurses and the caretakers
you begin to do more than nod at folks who
never
ever
have anyone visit them.

within a couple of weeks your sister
who is there day after day with mom
begins to take you outside for smoke breaks
introduces you to the cats she gives treats to
brings you to Ruth's room and introduces you
to Ruth and her roommate Clara.

Ruth hides her cigarettes
with my sister's consent
in my dad's room lest her family find out.

you're walking back from a friday meeting on campus to your office
valentine's day
without any thought of the day other than it's a friday
and what's the seafood special they'll bring my mom
to hear your sister's voice
"don't panic . . . we're taking dad to the emergency room . . .
he's non-responsive but he's ok"

I beat them to the emergency room.

you ride the elevator on sunday to see your dad in the
6th floor post-intensive care unit
and you realize that you're seeing
many of the same faces from 2 months ago

and when you ride the elevator down to go to the cafeteria
you recognize Chaplain Inez
and Stephanie and Maggie and Traci, 4th floor nurses
and when you get in line in the cafeteria
the woman scooping the meat into the taco salad says
"back honey?"

my dad asks

when I make it back up for my shift
and relieve my sister and mom so they can go home
for a quick bath, a change of clothes

"if I lost all of this"

and he waves his IV and monitor laden arms at the
various tubes he's connected to

"would I just disappear?"

since even on his deathbed (a month away if you're curious)
my dad could smell the bullshit
miles away.

I look at him
then back at the television
that's always on

"no dad, you won't disappear
none of us in this hospital will.
none of us."

Trauma and Grief in the Classroom: Creating a Space for Empathy, Compassion, and Allyship

By Jody Googins
Xavier University

As I stood in front of my class and looked out at their faces, I found myself at a loss for words. Several of my students were quietly weeping; others sat wide-eyed and stunned. The grief in the air was heavy, and I felt helpless under its weight. I naively told them to get out their textbooks and try to read, and I agonized over what I should do next, over what I could say. I can remember wringing my hands and looking around, praying for a lifeline. At that moment, a trusted colleague walked by my classroom and looked in; she sensed my helplessness, my incompetence. She entered the room and began, "Hi guys. Why don't you put down your books, and let's talk about this." She said all the right things and eased their grief in that moment. My class soon was engaged in a cathartic conversation—a testimony of sorts—about their classmate, their dear friend, who had died in a car accident that weekend. I sat on the periphery of the conversation, really on the periphery of my abilities to be an empathetic, compassionate teacher and ally to my students. While I had experienced the devastating deaths of students and students' loved ones in my short career up to that point, I had yet to experience the weight of a tragedy like this placed directly in front of me, begging me to be better and to do better, to engage in both hearing and responding.

It is difficult to write about this experience and to come to terms with the feeling of naiveté and ineptitude, to acknowledge that I did not know how to handle this situation. As an experienced teacher now, as one who has lived through many different situations with students and who has experienced great loss myself, I see my younger self as novice and unprepared, maybe too insulated in the world in which I was raised and lived. I often come back to that day in my classroom, that day when I was so inept, so unprepared to support my students in their grief, in the heaviness of their emotions. I was a good teacher at that time; my instructional methods were sound, and I had excellent rapport with my students. I was organized and consistently evaluated at a high level. But none of that, and none of my own life experiences, prepared me for that moment with my students. And it was a moment in which they needed me. Desperately.

The truth is—there is no class in teacher preparation that teaches us how to be prepared when a student dies, when a student loses a parent or a relative or a dear friend. There is no handbook for what to do when we sense a student has an eating disorder or is slowly sinking under the weight of depression. Pre-service teacher programs are, more often than not, devoid of classes that prepare teachers for the realities of grief, depression, anxiety, racism, classism, sexism, and so much more that students must contend with in their lives. There is no class called Trauma 101 in which pre-service teachers learn the correct reactions, the correct responses. (Is there even a correct response?) But the reality is that teachers, often by the simple rule of proximity, are the first responders, the confidantes. Teachers are called on to triage when students' lives are upended or even when students' lives are simply off-kilter. And this is hard.

I have chosen to write about teachers' classroom lives and the pervasive presence of trauma and grief because it is not something that is discussed enough. Our teachers are woefully underprepared and then, consequently, overwhelmed when dealing with all that students bring with them into the classroom. In short—It's a lot. Teachers are often

Googins, J. (2021). Trauma and grief in the classroom: Creating a space for empathy, compassion, and allyship. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 6–12.

looked to "for advice, comfort, and support" (Pereira-Webber & Pereira-Webber, 2014, p. 103). In the wake of tragedy, students often share that "it was our teachers who provided the crucial support that enabled our class to cope" (Pereira-Webber & Pereira-Webber, 2014, p. 103). The act of teaching calls us to see and hear—to critically witness—our students. Critical witnessing (Dutro, 2011) asks us to both listen to and engage with our students. It is what I was unable to do all those years ago in that classroom. For me, listening to and acknowledging the heavy feelings and grief in the room and then connecting to it while acknowledging that there are certainly distinct differences in my own experiences and those of my students was just so difficult. As teachers, though, we are called to witness the experiences—the grief, the trauma, the emotions, the sorrow, the sheer weight—of all of our students. It is part of the job. I believe that through critical witnessing and testimony (Dutro, 2011) teachers can begin their journey to the practice of an emotional pedagogy (Densmore-James & Yocum, 2015) that can create a space for empathy, compassion, and allyship.

Whenever I think about the act of teaching, I return to a passage in William Ayers' (2001) book *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher.* Ayers says that teaching "includes a splendorous range of actions" (p. 4). He says, "teaching is instructing, advising, counseling, organizing, assessing, guiding, goading, showing, managing, modeling, coaching, disciplining, prodding, preaching, persuading, proselytizing, listening, interacting, nursing, and inspiring" (p. 4). I know this to be true. I have lived it. But I was *not* prepared for it. And I worry that many young teachers are not prepared for it either.

So what are we confronting in our classrooms today? According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2020a, 2020b), 17% of youth ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder, and only 51% of those youth get treatment in a given year. Alyssa Nadworny (2015) found that, "1 in 20 children will lose a parent by the time he or she graduates from high school. And that doesn't include the many more kids who will lose a sibling, grandparent or close friend" (para. 7). Further, "7 out of 10 teachers have a student currently in their classroom who is grieving" (para. 8). Students are engaging in more screen time and social media interactions than ever. Researchers tell us that the increased use of social media and screen time has coincided with increased levels of anxiety and depression in our young people (Barrett, 2018). As of the writing of this essay, we are in the 10th month of a global pandemic, which has resulted in roughly 73% of all school districts engaging in remote learning for their students (Lieberman, 2020, para. 2), which, in turn, limits students' access to mental health services, as "schools are 'the de facto mental health system for many children and adolescents'" (Terada, 2020, para. 13). These statistics do not even begin to tell the whole story. We have students who suffer from a large range of trauma: mental and physical ailments; grief; bullying; homelessness; abuse; lack of access to resources, food, support, medication, and healthcare; racism; poverty; low self-esteem; and so much more. To quote The Offspring, "The Kids Aren't Alright." I'm not sure the teachers are either.

Recently, one of my friends—a wonderful teacher—talked about having to make a really tough phone call. *The* phone call. She said she makes a few every year, with

the frequency increasing in recent years. Her calls are mostly about mental health concerns—concerns she gleans through student writing or conversations. She has called about suspected eating disorders, suspicion of self-harm, or symptoms of depression and/or anxiety. This time, she was placing a call to a mom about concerns that her student may engage in self-harm. He had lost his father in the past year and had begun writing about it. His writing was often dark, revealing inner suffering the student was experiencing. My friend knew the phone conversation would be hard, but she was concerned and knew she would appreciate the same phone call if it was her own child. She admitted, though, that making these phone calls had never been easy, and she was less inclined to make them earlier in her career. This particular phone call went well. The mom, too, had concerns, and the student had been attending counseling. There was reassurance that both my friend and the parent were on the same page; both were seeing signs that concerned them but also behavior that showed the student was seeking help and trusting adults in his life. After this phone call, a small weight was lifted from the teacher's shoulders, and she knew she was doing right by this student. Unfortunately, it doesn't always go this way.

In my own teaching life, I have often been overwhelmed by the range of crises faced by my students from day to day. Conversations with students are intense; their writing is often raw. Those tough phone calls home do not always go well. Parents and guardians struggle under the same weight as their children, or they might not even have a sense of what is going on. My education degree didn't teach me about the art of emotional triage for students; I didn't learn how to make a parent phone call. Even at my first teaching job, there was no direction, no tutorial about what to do when a student shared a crisis with me or about talking to parents. Essentially, I was on my own. The general rule is baptism by fire. In teaching, "there is an underlying professional legacy of sorts that instructs teachers to only think of the business of the classroom even while ignoring the reality of a need for being attuned to our students' emotions" (Densmore-James & Yocum, 2015, p. 119). This "professional legacy" also fences out the acknowledgement of personal, emotional contact with parents, contact that reveals and reinforces humanity and shared concern for students. I distinctly remember when one of my students, one who had begun to hang out in my room more and more often during lunch, told me about a trusted adult in her life who had begun to make her feel uneasy. She described a tangled relationship in which I could sense a grooming of sorts, an unhealthy power dynamic in which my student was trapped, unable to disengage. Her growing presence in my classroom was a cry for help, an effort to navigate what she knew to be an unhealthy situation. After learning about this relationship, I knew I had to call home, and her parents had no idea what I was talking about. The situation was one that required the support of counselors, administrators, and parents. And my student had entrusted all of this to me. This is typical of a teacher's life with students. It leads us to wonder what we can be doing differently to support our teachers and students as they navigate the complexities of trauma, crisis, and grief.

On April 20, 1999, as a young adult studying to be a teacher, I, along with many others across the United States and the world, watched as unspeakable tragedy played out before my eyes. We watched as the first mass school shooting in U.S. history unfolded at Columbine High School in Colorado. I struggled to make sense of what was happening on my television screen. The images of students and teachers escaping through windows,

of students with their hands up being evacuated from the school, of the police holding their lines outside of the building, filled my screen. I struggled to make sense of the event that day and in its aftermath, as we learned about the students who planned and executed the mass murder, the details of their plans, and the clues they had left along the way. It haunts me still. I did not understand what that event would mean to me as a soon-to-be teacher; I did not know how that event would manifest itself in so many ways in my life as an English teacher. At that time, we had never experienced such tragedy, such an unspeakable assault on our schools, perpetrated by students. Really—before that event, student cries for help were often chalked up to *kids will be kids*.

As an English teacher who worked hard to build relationships, I read countless pieces of writing and I had countless conversations that I could say were calls for help or red flags to varying degrees. I distinctly remember the first time a student submitted a writing piece to me that had red flags. The writing detailed violence and sexual perversion. It was my first-year teaching, and I was incredibly naïve. I went to my department head who told me I needed to call home. I cannot recall the specifics of that phone call now, but I am certain I fell short. I believe my response was probably to enact censorship of some sort, to tell the student and his parents that he should not write about violence, to dismiss the content altogether. In truth, I was probably insulating myself from confrontation, from having to have that hard conversation. I know now that silence is damaging. Ignoring what students are saying, what I am seeing, is not the answer. This *falling short* occurred many times, I am sure. I was simply unprepared to deal with student trauma, especially as it manifested itself through writing and one-on-one conversations. Early on in my career, I am not sure I understood the severity of students' calls for help, of the possible peril they might have been in. It is not something we talked about when I was studying to be a teacher, and my own experiences had not prepared me with the skills I would need to react appropriately, to see red flags for what they were, to be an ally but also to know when to sound the alarm.

In 2010, just a year or so after the experience I described in my classroom with student grief, I read the book, *Columbine*, by Dave Cullen (2009). In this book, the author examined the April 20, 1999, mass school shooting at Columbine High School. He traced the roots of the event, illuminating the missed red flags that were present from the two young perpetrators. The students wrote about their intentions to execute this mass murder; they gave testimony via writing to their teachers. Their teachers commented on their writing pieces about the inappropriateness of the content, urging for censorship. The writing probably left teachers unsettled, unsure what to make of it. But there was no recognition of the crucial *red flag* in these instances. Although "the instructors were criticized for inadequate responses" (Brown & Buskey, 2014, p. 37), I think it can be said that it is not that the teachers were inept or uncaring. At that time, we just didn't know. Nothing like that had ever happened before. When I read *Columbine* in 2010, this part stuck with me. The lesson I learned wasn't necessarily about school shootings; it was about *paying attention*. It was about critically witnessing our students, and it was also about learning when to humbly acknowledge all the tough stuff that is present in their lives and its place in our classroom.

In the examination of sharing trauma in the classroom, specifically through literacy, Elizabeth Dutro (2011) acknowledged that "emotions are part and parcel of literature study and of classroom life and too often bracketed from our notions of what constitutes an education or a curriculum" (p. 193). I don't believe that emotions should only be shared through the vehicle of literature. In short, "the hard stuff of life is important in classrooms" (p. 193). In literature, we read stories that are sad, tragic, anger-inducing, joyful, or raw. Sometimes the stories are fictional; often they are memoirs or another

non-fiction genre, though. We learn about the wounded, about the suffering of others as a part of curriculum. By extension, I believe one way we can support teachers when they are navigating the emotions of their classrooms is through critical witnessing. Teachers can be critical witnesses to the stories of their students in the classroom, as a vehicle to build emotional intelligence and to enact an emotional pedagogy, as a way for teachers to begin to cope.

Densmore-James and Yocum (2015) contended that we should engage in "a more holistic emotional pedagogy … that encompasses providing instruction with knowledge of the whole spectrum of emotional motivators and outcomes from joy to sorrow" (p. 121). When students are encouraged to share their narratives—narratives of grief, joy, sorrow, cultural identities, familial relationships, trauma—we are giving students an environment in which they can learn to confront their emotions. And we, too, can give testimony. In this way, we can build a bridge to our students. After all, the acknowledgement of our own humanity connects us to our students in intimate ways. It allows us "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students" (hooks, 1994, p. 13). We can engage in what Dutro (2011) coined "the circle of testimony-witness" (p. 197). This invokes the interconnectedness of Freire's (1998) teaching and learning, his idea that "there is … no teaching without learning" (p. 31). In "the circle of testimony-witness" (Dutro, 2011, p. 197), teachers engage as both "witnesses to student experiences and testifiers to their own" (p. 198). Dutro (2011) posited:

> This sharing of students' wounds requires us to awaken to the ways our stories are connected to those we witness. At the same time, those connections must be allowed to reveal the potentially different ways that we and students are positioned by our challenges. Our testimony, then, functions as a conscious, risky move to share the vulnerability that is inherent in classrooms, while remaining aware of how privilege and power shape the stakes of those exposures. These two moves—a self-conscious attention to both the connection and difference between one's own and others' testimonies—constitute what I call *critical witnessing*. (p. 199)

When we acknowledge that *the kids aren't alright*, it only makes sense to acknowledge that we might not be either. When we give space for students' emotions and experiences, even when they include the hard stuff of grief and trauma and sorrow and sadness, we are giving space for healing. And we don't have to be experts in *anything* to simply listen, learn, and respond in kind.

So, what now? Why am I writing about this? The truth is that lately I'm not really alright myself. In the 12 or so years since that day in my classroom, my own life has been intimately affected by the loss of loved ones, and I have felt the grief that my students were feeling that day. On that day, I didn't know how it felt, but I also didn't let them tell me. I didn't know how heavy it was, how it wrapped itself around one's shoulders and created a can't-be-ignored presence. I didn't know it wasn't something I couldn't simply fix. Now I understand. I know it's hard to see beyond grief that envelopes our feelings, grief that is layered and unpredictable. I know that, as time passes, a small slice of grief will remain forever but that the heavy layers would soon begin to peel away and lighten. I know this now because I, too, have experienced it. The truth is, though, one's own experiences in grief are not necessary for a teacher to be able to listen and

learn, to be able to see and understand a cry for help, a red flag, or a situation that one shouldn't carry alone. So while experiencing trauma and tragedy helps us relate to our students, just as being a parent helps us understand what it is like to be a parent, it is not a necessary condition for us to be able to connect, to *see* and *hear* our students and all they are trying to tell us in spoken and unspoken ways, to critically witness their stories and then give testimony to our own.

I am no longer a high school teacher; now I am a teacher educator. In my work with pre-service teachers, student trauma, and how my pre-service teachers will be equipped to deal with it, is never far from my mind. I want to talk to my pre-service teachers about those moments when they will be stuck in front of their class, speechless and confused, sad and lacking confidence. We ask teachers to do so much, to carry so much. While we might be tempted to insulate ourselves from all that is uncomfortable, perhaps the acknowledgement that we do not necessarily have the answers, that there isn't necessarily a *correct* response, that we are, indeed, uncomfortable, is essential. My trusted colleague—the one who saved me that day so many years ago—possessed the ability to listen and learn and engage and help begin to *heal* my grieving students. She didn't offer a panacea for their suffering; there is no panacea that can be offered, and she knew that. I know it now, too. But she witnessed their experiences and gave testimony of her own, reinforcing the shared humanity of a classroom that includes the empathy, compassion, and allyship of an emotional pedagogy.

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Posthuman Embodiments and Overuse Injuries Amid COVID-19

By Adrian M. Downey
Mount Saint Vincent University

Seeking a Curriculum of Injury

Capitalist accelerationism names the relentless quickening of the Western societal pulse—the heartbeat driving our economy, social institutions, and jobs. It is not difficult to observe. Two-day shipping and self-checkouts, for example, speak to the relentless speed and efficiency demanded in capitalism's current form, and we who teach are not exempt from this economically-driven race to nowhere. Have you felt it—students, parents, and administrators asking for, sometimes demanding, more of your attention with a frighteningly immediate timeframe in their request? I have, more readily each year. It can be exhausting.

Sudden absence often leaves behind a specter that renders the recently departed knowable in a new light. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in early March of 2020, I was struck by accelerationism's presence in my own life through its absence all around me. Do you remember the empty streets, blocks of closed shop fronts, and the campus ghost town left in the wake of a total societal shutdown? I remember it. It was not just a slower tempo, but a full stop; a collective pause between run-on sentences. But for me, and I suspect for many others in postsecondary education, the pause never came. I observed this stillness from the window of my home office, where I worked eight or more hours every day trying to finish my dissertation, attending meetings, and teaching my spring courses online and earlier than expected.

It was in this disjointed temporal climate, where the outside world slowed to a stop and my own life became busier than it ever had been, that I began to think about my body. My reconsideration was forced, brought about by overuse injuries in both of my arms and one of my legs. These injuries slowed, but did not stop, my progress, and while they were not a direct result of COVID-19, the change from working in my well-equipped office at the university to the small two-bedroom apartment I share with my partner certainly did not make things easy. I wondered if others felt the same way or experienced similar problems, but it seemed that many people enjoyed working from home. If their relationships with their bodies changed, it was for the better, as there was more time to enjoy home-cooked meals and to exercise.

I am still living with these injuries, and in addition to my efforts at rehabilitation through the guidance of a physiotherapist, I am actively trying to find meaning in them and learn more about how they have changed the relationships between my body, my self, my mind, and my work. I am actively seeking a curriculum of injury. Celeste Snowber's 2016 book, *Embodied Inquiry*, asks us to dwell within our bodies and (re) consider our relationships with our physical selves—injuries and all. I am trying to do that now. I am trying to (re)think and (re)build the computer-body assemblage, trying to adapt to the body-cane assemblage, trying to honour the agency of my adductor muscles and listen carefully to their muffled voices. I am trying to understand my body and its otherwises from the inside, but I cannot ignore the external factors either. We are still in the middle of a pandemic, and academia is not *back to normal*—whatever that means. This, and many other things, form my curriculum of injury. It is a curriculum that is always particular to the individual, but a course many have run (e.g., Morris,

Downey, A. M. (2021). Posthuman embodiments and overuse injuries amid COVID-19. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 13–21.

1999). Thus, just as Snowber's *Embodied Inquiry* is an invitation to (re)consider our bodies, the curriculum of injury is also an invitation to (re)consider our bodies and their relationships to the social and more-than-human worlds.

The purpose of this essay is to engage in the process of *currere* (Pinar, 1994, 2012; Pinar & Grumet, 2015) around these injuries and my own sense of my body toward elucidating, uncovering, or perhaps storying my own curriculum of injury. *Currere* has its intellectual roots in feminist, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic theories (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), and in that it deals largely with the internal dimension of curriculum as a verb—the subject's movement between moments of becoming. *Currere* has been critiqued as an apolitical sort of curricular engagement, but Pinar has written back to that critique (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), and many in curriculum theory today follow his lead in believing that social change begins with internal change (e.g., Kumar, 2013). Where the social is concerned, my own curriculum of injury is embedded in a critique of work (Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011), postindustrial capitalism (Bauman, 2007; Sennett, 1998), and the way neoliberalism infiltrates education (Kumar, 2019; Ross & Gibson, 2007). I know all too well the way Western capitalism and its obsession with work has written itself into my body. I work too much—that much is implicit in the label of "overuse injuries." I have overused my body, and I suspect I am not alone in this. Thus, part of my *currere* here is engaged with how neoliberal capitalism has seeped into my own sense of self-worth in hopes of speaking back to the larger societal phenomenon of capitalist accelerationism.

While the inward direction of *currere* has been tempered in terms of its implications for the social dimensions of reality (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), less has been written about how *currere* might address the more-than-human and non-human. There is tension here in that some posthumanists and/or "new" materialists downplay the significance of the subject (e.g., Latour, 2005), favoring an object-oriented ontology—a sort of "new" empiricism (St. Pierre et al., 2016). Braidotti (2019), however, has critiqued these object-centered visions of posthumanism, pointing out how they can erase social differences that still have tangible effects on people's lives. Braidotti's (2019) own vision of the posthuman subject as an assemblage of geo/techno/bio/logical entities with social forces acting upon it from "above" and psychological forces acting on it from "below" offers a space for an internal inquiry, such as *currere*, to produce affective and material ripples for both the subject-assemblage and the social dimensions of reality.

In other words, Braidotti's vision of a critical posthumanism opens the door for *currere* to engage not just with the self as unitary (but fragmented) consciousness, but also with the self as agentive/vital material assemblage and the self as social agent. This particular frame of reference, then, affords both a consideration of personal thoughts and feelings about my injuries and an engagement with the assemblages that now help form my self: the cane-hand-leg assemblage and the keyboard-finger assemblage, for example. This critical posthumanist frame acknowledges the interconnectedness of the internal world and physical reality, but it also enables an engagement with the social world. In this essay, then, I enter into the process of *currere* with critical posthumanism and critique of neoliberal capitalism filtering freely into my thoughts.

Toward methodological clarity, I have divided the remainder of this essay into four main sections, each corresponding to a moment in Pinar's (1994) method of *currere*: the regressive, the progressive, the analytic, and the synthetic. Although some sections below are more narrative than others, within the paper as a whole, I attempt to weave story and theory together toward deepening understandings of my own embodied relationship

to my overuse injuries and toward elucidating a curriculum of injury in relationship with the wider conversation of (curriculum) theory. I conclude this essay by briefly pulling the threads of my discussion into the current socio-enviro-political context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In closing, I suggest *currere*—indeed, any curriculum—cannot remain static amid, nor be examined apart from, a changing world. The social and the psychological work together on our material realities and help form our subjects—we are products of a diffused agency, and that gives *currere* a renewed potential for social and curricular change.

Storying Embodiment and Injury

My first sense of embodiment came through rhythm. In high school, I was fortunate enough to learn percussion from an inspiring teacher. As I began to practice snare drum rudiments, I started to develop an undulating sense of rhythm—a left and right side of the beat based on which hand was hitting the drum at what portion of the pulse. Later on, in university and while teaching, these rudiments became a source of relaxation, easing my body into a calmer state. The rhythm was so deeply engrained in my body that when I listened to music, my body would often move of its own accord—not as steady or as relaxed as when I was playing, rather through a series of twitches.

The first and most vivid memory of these twitches came when listening to the record, *Jane Doe*, by the American hardcore band Converge. I was at a friend's apartment in the first year of my undergraduate degree. There were five of us there, all of whom were music majors. Like most nights, we took turns passing around the auxiliary cable to share music from our Mp3 players. *Jane Doe* is a relentless, heavy, driving, and unapologetically rhythmic record. I closed my eyes, and after a few songs, my body started to twitch. It was compelling music, gripping music, and I wanted to share in the experience of creating it—my body was reaching out for it, trying to respond to the rhythms being played over the stereo. Today, I might say that the sound waves and my body were intra-active (Barad, 2007).

A few years later, my sense of embodiment changed with my first overuse injury. It happened during the 2011 winter reading break in the drum room at my university. While practicing, I felt something pop in my wrist but did not think much of it. I had exams and concerts coming up, and I needed to practice. As I continued to practice, the popping happened a few more times, and my wrist started to hurt, a lot. I stopped for the day and went home, dejected. It got much worse over the next few days (likely because I refused to rest it properly), and by the end of the week, I couldn't play at all. Concerts were canceled, exams were rearranged, and my sense of self started to crumble. Music was everything to me at that time in my life, and not being able to participate in it left me feeling lost.

By the next fall, I had recovered enough to play a bit, and it gradually got better after that until the winter of 2014. I was teaching then, and as I sat down at the drumkit to have a bit of fun before the start of my weekend, I felt a familiar pop. I stopped immediately that time, but it was still a six-month recovery before I could play again. In the meantime, I focused on my teaching. Things were good with my wrists until August of 2019 when it flared up again, likely because I had been typing too much. This time, the issues were in both my wrists. Physiotherapy and physicians have done all kinds of tests and assessments over the years, and they often label it an overuse injury. There is not any permanent nerve damage, they say, just muscular discomfort and weakness. None of our searches for underlying causes beyond my own behaviors have yielded any

results. This time it has been a bit longer than six months with my wrists—a year and a half at the time of writing. Things have gotten better, of course, but never as good as they were. The amount I can type in a given day is dependent how my wrists feel, and that really limits how much work I can do. Perhaps most disheartening is the fact that I have not played music since August 2019, and I am not sure I ever will again.

This is not the end of my overuse injury story. There is one more chapter. The most recent and most raw of my injuries, a strain on/in my left adductor, is the driving force behind this inquiry. Stretching after a weekend run in April, 2020, I heard a loud pop in my knee followed by agonizing pain. I teleconferenced with a doctor a few days later. Six to eight weeks, he said and sent me to a physiotherapist who provided exercises that I performed daily. Eight weeks later, things felt better, but not good, and a pattern started to develop. Things get better but never as good as they were, and then they get worse. As I write this, I am in week 34 of my injury, just beyond the six-month anniversary. In that time, I've started a new job, finished my doctoral program, published papers, taught courses, and attended more meetings than I can count. And I am starting to wonder if that is the problem.

The Futurity of Acceptance

I dream of recovery, but the reality of the situation is that my future more likely lies with acceptance. In that, there is perhaps something of an allegory for western society more broadly. Both social and personal futures of recovery deal in the utopic—the perfect nowhere of imagination (Zamalin, 2019), impossible yet powerful in its role as futurity or making a vision of the future tangible in the present (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Recovery implies a return to a state of wholeness or to an original capacity, but recovery is never quite possible. Always the recursive return to health is marked by the journey—we cannot help but be changed by the process. In this way, recovery is a utopia; it is a dream of what could be, but one that is always ultimately "not yet."

I do not mean to sound defeatist in this, only to acknowledge that any return is always changed by the having been. I may someday be able to work all day—or to play music again—without constantly thinking about whether or not my wrist can handle it, but the process of living with these injuries has fundamentally changed my sense of embodiment. My experience of these injuries has changed the way I feel my wrists and my legs and altered the way I live with/in my body as a whole. Even if I recover in a medical sense, I will never again live without knowing the tightness of a wrist flexor, weakness in an adductor, or the impingement of an ulnar nerve—not in an abstract sense, but in a lived, embodied sense. The possibility of a future marked by recovery (complete return), then, is impossible.

So too must any vision of a societal future be informed by an awareness of what is now. This is one of the key points of Braidotti's (2019) discussion of affirmative ethics. Like many writing today—at posthuman convergence, or the intersection of the Sixth Extinction Event and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Braidotti, 2019, 2020); in the socio-economic and environmental precarity of postindustrial capitalism (Bauman, 2007); amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic (Downey, 2020)—Braidotti (2019, 2020) is concerned with finding ways of creating more just and equitable societal structures in the future. Unlike those who seek utopic technological solutions to the problems of today and those critics who see dystopia as an imminent reality, Braidotti finds ways forward in the affirmative: "We need to resist with equal lucidity the pull of apocalyptic thinking as well as the abyss of self-pity: this is a time to organize, not to

agonize" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 467). The affirmative is not blindly optimistic; it stays with the difficult critiques that can be levied at our present social context and allows them to inform what will be. The affirmative takes postindustrial capitalism, socio-technological acceleration, and the resulting affective exhaustion as simple facts—this is how the world is, now—and, rather than lament their existence, demands that we engage with them toward change. That systemic change must reflect our understandings of how social forces act in our biopolitical and necropolitical realities, but also on our techno/geo/bio/logical assemblages—our posthuman subjects—and on those vital/material assemblages of which we are not a part.

In this, affirmative ethics is one step removed from a futurity. It does not render possible futures as knowable in the present, rather it offers terms of engagement that will yield a different future. Affirmative ethics, however, requires us as a society to accept the reality of what is. By accepting the facts of the world in its present state, we are free to start remaking the world through creative responses to critiques of what is. In my reading, affirmative ethics looks at capitalist acceleration and says "Okay, now what? Can we do better?"

A future made knowable through acceptance—through the affirmative—resonates at the micro level of my bodily assemblage as well. Before that future can become knowable, however, the affirmative demands an intimate knowledge and sustained critique of what is. The affirmative is not optimistic as much as it is realistic, secular, and materialist. Here, although *currere* is essentially a non-linear process and "should be understood as a set of interconnected, rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) moments that 'frame' the complex process of conscious self-actualization" (McNulty, 2019, p. 75), the method does provide a helpful structure in the encouragement to separate out the present from the future and the past before allowing them to inform one another in the synthetic moment (Pinar, 1994). In the following analytic section, I entertain the actuality of my present daily embodiment—both physical and affective—before returning to the question of societal futures in the subsequent synthetic section.

What is: Body and Affect

The acceptance of what is comes with limitations. In my initial experiences with overuse injuries, the loss of the ability to play music was a limitation not only on my societal productivity, but also on my sense of self. Though perhaps less traumatic, the limitations of my current situation are no less a loss.

So far today, November 19, 2020, I have typed about 500 words, and my wrists are calling out for a break. I have obliged them several times already this morning, and I will continue to do so throughout the day. This frustrates me. I have had this essay sketched in my mind for months, but teaching online, other writing projects, and corresponding with students has taken up the majority of my typing capacity since September. It is now my second day in this section, November 20, 2020; I have only written about 100 words so far, and I am hoping to be able to finish this section before I need a break. My leg is uncomfortable today. There is a tightness in the adductor itself and a tingle in the inside of my calf radiating down to my big toe. My physiotherapist says the tingling is because there is a nerve compressed somewhere near the adductor. It is not really a pain as much as it is a constant annoyance—almost like a mild burn on my skin. I have changed my sitting position a number of times in this writing session, and I just did so again after that clause. In my final round of edits before submission beginning on December 28, 2020, the tingle has moved around my foot and now resides in my heel. My right bicep tendon is particularly agitated as well.

As alluded to above, a number of new bodily assemblages have formed. The cane-hand-leg assemblage is new and tricky to navigate. Originally, the cane-hand-leg assemblage was intended to help me navigate the stairs in my apartment building, which are difficult with my adductor problems. Indeed, two days ago I heard someone cough at the bottom of the stairwell, and I abandoned the cane in favor of speed, COVID-19 paranoia having gotten the better of me. I am living with the consequences today in the form of a renewed intensity to the discomfort in my leg. The cane-hand-leg assemblage is constantly intra-acting with the wrist, the wrist flexor, and the ulnar nerve. When there is too much pressure, the wrist flexor cries out. Then the next day, when the computer-body assemblage reforms, the wrist flexors are less keen to engage. On days like that, the computer sits eagerly waiting, and the fingers sulk about, unwilling to participate without the support of their kin.

Here, I am perhaps projecting my own affect—that which precedes emotion (Braidotti, 2019) but really could be considered emotion (Ahmed, 2014)—onto my bodily others. In that way, my internal psychology is acting on the subject assemblage. This internal dimension of the now makes clear the difficulty of acceptance.

My legs have prevented me from exercising for the past seven months, and my body has changed as a result. Here there is a socially constructed ideal—the fit/ideal body—to which I cannot measure. Ideals, in general, are always abstract, unattainable, and utopic. Curriculum theorist Ashwani Kumar (2013) has written about the way that ideals create an internal, psychological process of continual striving. We are never satisfied with what we are because we are constantly measuring ourselves against what we *should* or *must* be. My bodily limitations interfere with my pursuit of these ideals. My physical appearance is not what I would like it to be—I am failing to actualize my ideal, which has been forced on me through socialization—so I should exercise. I cannot exercise because of my overuse injuries. I am left with an uncomfortable, anxious emotion I can never name in the moment, a desire to do something and a feeling of helplessness.

These feelings are the everyday reality of my present. No matter how I name them or how thoroughly I can prove them logically false, their presence lingers at the periphery of every interaction. Kumar (2013) names the acceptance of what is as a starting point of what he calls meditative inquiry. Kumar says that accepting ourselves as we are, rather than trying to strive toward a societally constructed ideal, can break us out of the cycle of comparative and hierarchical thinking endemic to Western society (see also Krishnamurti, 1968). If we see ourselves as the flawed and imperfect human beings we truly are and accept that reality in our hearts, we will no longer desire to be other than that. If I can only accept that I am valuable apart from my work—apart from my productivity, apart from my physical appearance, apart from my strength and masculinity—I will be free from the negative affect that traps me in a cycle of *should* and *must*. Acceptance, then, is a space that joins the present to the future, but as I suggest in the next section, I am not sure acceptance is as easy as writing the word over and over would make it seem.

Toward an Ongoing Acceptance

Perhaps there is a hope for the future in the acceptance of what is. Acceptance, however, is not a simple *now*, but rather an ever-ongoing series of them; it is less a state of being and more a constant becoming. Acceptance is a mindful engagement with the critique and affect of the present (and its past) that will inform the future. Acceptance is the affirmative, and the affirmative demands acceptance. If we are to accept the present, we must understand it—not through particular, separated lenses, but in its actuality,

particularly its effects on and in material reality. Here, I draw on the micro instance of work as an allegorical stand-in for Western society more broadly.

I am frustrated. My frustration is with an ideal of myself as a productive researcher—a good employee, a good worker. This frustration must be understood within the societal context of the postindustrial economy and specifically the way neoliberal ideology infiltrates the perception of self. Under the neoliberalism and flexible capitalism of the current era, ever-increasing demands for productivity are held in place through shifting risk to individual actors (i.e., workers, entrepreneurs) rather than corporate or government entities. Individual actors can be simultaneously alienated from and fiercely devoted to their work (Snyder, 2016; see also Frayne, 2015). Work obsession provides an example of the wider phenomenon. In the corporate and academic worlds, work obsession is not only normative, but expected (Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011), and the measure of work is largely external. Hourly wages surveil the body's presence; per-piece and per-project wages reward completion over process; and even those given to writing and thinking in an academic sense are judged primarily on the external/extrinsic value of the task: books, articles, lectures, service, and teaching. The constant measurement of our output begins to seep into our own self-image, and suddenly our self-worth is measured in productivity (Frayne, 2015)—I am only valuable to the degree to which I am productive at my given task. In this way, the external structures of capitalism seep into our own self-image, limiting the shape of our interiorities by way of ideological saturation facilitated by the ubiquity of a supposedly benign societal obsession with work.

In the present moment, I am frustrated by my perceived failure to be as productive as I would like. Following Kumar (2013) and the above, however, I am more accurately frustrated by my perceived failure to be as productive as my affective, embodied sense of neoliberal capitalist ideology would like. Frustration arises from an arbitrary, constructed ideal toward which I strive but ultimately fail to meet. The affirmative, however, acknowledges the *real* demand for a certain level of productivity to the economy, to our sense of self, and to helping our institutions function. This is where the affirmative demands a progressive and ongoing acceptance. It is not enough to cognitively know that these ideals—whether of body or of work—are socially constructed; rather, we must keep that knowledge close to us, embody it, and let it affect our assembled self as we vision the future and actively enact our constant becoming(s).

At the micro instance of my body, acceptance comes in waves: a crest of calm after two hours of uninterrupted cooperation between the computer-body-chair assemblage, but a trough of anxiety and frustration after a restless night of leg-bed disagreement. There is perhaps a similar quality to Western society as well: at moments it seems like we can all pull together to remake our world into something equitable and just, but at others that which divides us seems insurmountable. Braidotti (2019) says "we are all in this together, but we are not one and the same" (p. 52). Acceptance in the affirmative means we need to engage in ongoing and mindful attentiveness to the facts of our difference—there are real social oppressions in our world that must be actively considered as we move forward. These issues will never be "solved"—that would be utopic. We must, thus, ready ourselves for the hard work of sustaining engagement. That is the affirmative futurity of acceptance. That is what I am learning now through the curriculum of injury.

Acceptance and Futurity Amid COVID-19

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we have become eminently aware of our viral others and the ways they interact with our social and economic worlds. Here, I recall those closed shop fronts, the phantom cough at the bottom of the stairwell, and the now

almost 10 months of working from home, all of which were caused in some part by a virus acting on what we perceive as our human world. These microbial others are not new. They are always co-present with us as we walk, run, sleep, work, and create. In the last year, however, we have become attuned to their presence in new ways, and perhaps that attunement is a lesson worth learning.

Currere has an incredible educational and theoretical potential evidenced by the many quality works found in the *Currere Exchange Journal*. To this day, whenever I teach *currere* in curriculum courses, students are amazed that their experiences count as theory and can indeed be seen as valuable in the complicated conversation of curriculum (Pinar, 2012). *Currere* also has a political power, both in the transformation of the self and in the place of prominence given to personal experience—sometimes akin to the counter-hegemonic function of storytelling in Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The transformative potential of self-inquiry, however, not only acts in/on the human social world, but also on/in/with the more-than-human. While in critical posthumanism the psychological and social forces above and below the subject work on/in/with material realities, the more immediate implication of self-inquiry for the more-than-human is that internal change through *currere* can bring an attunement to the more-than-human. By going inward and "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016, n.p.) of our self, we can see the trouble of others—human and more-than-human alike—in more complex, nuanced, and empathetic ways. In this, *currere* offers a way forward at this "unprecedented" moment of socio-environmental and economic precarity, curricular uncertainty, and constant change.

Currere offers the gift of attunement to the curriculum of injury, the curriculum of loss, and the curriculum of the more-than-human, and it can do so through the affirmative. It can enact a futurity of ongoing acceptance of our microbial others and their trouble through a continuous internal engagement with the critique and the affect of what is—in this moment, relentless speed and total exhaustion (Braidotti, 2019, 2020). *Currere*, however, cannot do these things without itself being open to change. Here, I have brought critical posthumanism and critique of neoliberalism into conversation with *currere*, and in that, it has changed. Such change is necessary at this moment—not just for *currere*, but all curriculum. We cannot stay static amid a chaotic and unpredictable world. Just as *currere* must change, it can also offer the path to change—an inward path toward understanding what is. *Currere* can be the path to accepting and moving forward with/in the curriculum of planetary injury.

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Be Silent, Flee, or Be Courageous: *Currere* and Duoethnography

By Janet Lynn Kuhnke, Sandra Jack-Malik, & Laura Jane Dann
Cape Breton University

Regressive: Janet Almost Spoke…

I am coming up the backstairs of the house.
I am young, seven or eight.
I hesitantly reach forward to hold your warm, gentle, safe hand.
I feel an intense pressure to stop the events. I need to tell you!
In my mind, I whisper, breathlessly, "...wait, I have to tell you."
I hear my tiny voice say instead "...school was good today."
The words I must say are stuck, while bits of me are being frayed away.
I fear what may happen,
I am told I am a bad girl, and it is my fault.
I am told no one will believe me.
So I do not tell you, the person who would have stopped it.

To begin writing this *currere*, I reflected on the work of Maxime Greene (1995) who reminded me to focus on the shapes of childhood recalled:

> It is appropriate here to examine more closely the idea of the search, or quest. … I find the very effort to shape the materials of lived experience into narrative to be a source of meaning making. It is because we are reflecting back to when we tell our stories, that we may be able to recapture the nascent *logos*—our mind just before it emerged from the perceived and vivid and began abstracting. If we cannot "but orientate ourselves to the good," as we invent our narratives, "and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives: then we must also "inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'" (Taylor, 1989, pp. 51–52 as cited in Greene, 1995, p. 75)

Describing adverse events[1] results in tensions[2] (Clandinin, 2013). In the midst of these tension filled memories, I am reminded that I did not speak up as a child. It has been my experience, however, that *currere* can be a path to greater understanding and insight. Today, as a tenure track hire, I experience frustration when these memories shape (Clandinin, 2013) my efforts to communicate. Crites (1979) describes this as a genuine predicament because I understand that, if I am to interrupt these tensions, I must speak up, share, and contribute. Moreover, I must do these things without evoking painful, shame-filled reactions (Brown, 2017).

Progressive: An Invitation to Attend

Sandra, my research partner at the university where we work and my friend, invited me to join her at the *currere*[3] conference. She attended the previous year and described a powerfully inclusive experience. Before making the decision to attend, I read literature related to the *currere* method (Pinar, 1975, 1978, 2012). Once at Miami University, the site of the conference, I listened to conference remarks (Poetter & Taliaferro Baszile, 2019) and felt included. I also participated in engaging, collaborative sessions.

Jack-Malik, S., Kuhnke, J. L., & Dann, L. J. (2021). Be silent, flee, or be courageous: *Currere* and duoethnography. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 22–35.

I deepened my understanding of *currere* as methodology. What I heard and felt was congruent with who I am struggling to become as an educator within the academy (Berg & Seeber, 2016). I felt 'pulled in'[4] (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020) and wanted to linger and learn. These feelings were in stark contrast to the communication-related tensions I regularly experience as I endeavor to understand and make myself understood within the academy.

Sitting at a table as part of a small group, I continued to be pulled in as we discussed how *currere* can inform our work as faculty. I described challenges when participating in meetings and when sending and receiving email. I am at times overwhelmed by messages. I find it difficult to locate the salient points (Decker & Decker, 2015). I require time to think deeply about and discuss over the phone, or in person, the contents. I need communication where I can read body language and hear the rhythms of speech; however, the immediacy of email, the expectation for quick response, and the time limitations on meetings (Berg & Seeber, 2013) are counterintuitive to my process. As a result, I am often left wondering how to align my skill set within the communication environment of the academy. I wonder how it is possible to engage in communicative processes in educative (Dewey, 1938) ways. After multiple communication failures, I experience what van der Kolk (2014) described as triggered responses:

> manifesting in various ways … some may shut down emotionally and [some pretend to] not feel any obvious changes. However, in the lab we have no problem detecting their racing hearts … these reactions are irrational and largely outside of the people's control. Intense and barely controllable urges and emotions make people feel crazy—and make them feel they don't belong to the human race … as a result shame becomes the dominant emotion and hiding the truth the central preoccupation. (p. 67)

My triggered response is the result of my inability to "gain control over the residues of past trauma" (p. 4). Communication that results in me feeling uninformed or misinformed leads me towards memories of adverse events soaked in shame; "a rich emotion that evokes both the moral consciousness necessary for maintaining social order … and repercussions from personal struggles involving dishonour, humiliation, or ridicule" (Figley, 2012, p. 621). During communication failure and the triggered response, I feel small and not valued; I need to flee (van der Kolk, 2014).

Regressive and Reconceptualization of Present Circumstances

At my table and within the safety of our *currere* group, I shared my desire to begin the process of inquiring into my complex relationship with communication failure. Pinar (2012) reminds me that, "to stimulate memories … one free associates … to re-enter the past, and to thereby enlarge—and transform—one's memory. In doing so, one regresses, that is, re-experiences, to the extent that it is possible, the past" (p. 45).

I was surprized when I shared; however, honesty resulted in momentary relief. Later that night, I asked myself why I am afraid "to let my true self be seen and known" (Brown, 2010, p. 6). This was followed by, "Who do I think I am?" I slipped back into the safety of silence. I wanted to "stop taking risks or hide the experiences in parts of … [my life] that … [I] fear others might judge" (p. xvii). Simultaneously I am angered by "feeling[s] of being locked out of the possibility of human connection and of being powerless to change the situation … a sense of hopelessness and desperation" (p. 29). I desperately wanted to interrupt and change my reactions—to create space where I could purposefully and educatively (Dewey, 1938) respond (Pinar, 2012).

Returned to Canada With an Emotional Hangover

When I arrived home and sat in the safety of my writing space, I wondered about my readiness to inquire into memories triggered by communication failures. I wanted to begin the journey because my competent "cover story, … [my] plausible rendering of the person's action and experience, even though its plausibility … [had] worn rather thin" (Crites, 1979, p. 126).

I began my inquiry with research literature; it is my safe place. Therefore, I turned my attention to reading about links between adverse events and communication failures (van der Kolk, 2014). However, no matter how often I attempted to separate myself through reading and through engagement in the *currere* process, each time we returned to this work and each time I thought about it, I was immersed in the swampy, unlit, messiness of endured events; it is part of me.

Learning about the Tenants of Duoethnography

Amid thinking about my communication failures and while writing this *currere*, Sandra called. She shared an article that described the tenants of duoethnography, "a report of a living, dynamic … collaborat[ion]" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). She suggested it would give our conversations structure and help to navigate feelings of shame and desires to flee. I was not interested; I was safe with the familiarity of *currere*. Sandra insisted; therefore, I read about duoethnography and learned the methodology is "dialogic … and heteroglossia" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13), with the presence of two or more voices and viewpoints. There is no space for silence within the structure of duoethnography, which insists on two or more voices communicating (Johnson & Hineman, 2019).

Secret No Longer

Knowing I would be discussing adverse events, I continued to read. I understood that the ability to describe personal experiences is "likened to reaching down … a deep well to pick up small fragile figures while … wearing thick leather mittens" (Kagan as cited in van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 239–240). Nevertheless, reading was comforting and informative because my experiences were reflected in the literature. I experienced a fleeting sense of possibility reading about the links between effective communication and feeling connected. Brown (2007) states, "we are wired for connection. [We] have the basic need to feel accepted and to believe that we belong and are valued" (p. 279).

Greene (1995) reminded me that "the reading of literature may nurture all kinds of understanding of lived structures of meaning, although not chronologically necessarily, not in any particular logical order" (p. 76).

I have been unable to satisfactorily and consistently understand my history as a shaping influence on my academic communications, other than knowing I am routinely deposited within the past. These memories overwhelm my ability to understand, while making visible, cracks in my well-constructed cover-story (Crites, 1979). I returned to my beloved *Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams, 1992) and like Skin Horse, I recognized that my "brown coat was bald in patches and showed seams underneath" (p. 4). I lingered with Nicholson's illustrations in that book, because they provide a space where I can safely consider other understandings. van der Kolk (2014) argues:

> all trauma is preverbal … traumatized children "lose their tongues" and refuse to speak. … Even years later traumatized people often have enormous difficulty telling other people what has happened to them. Their bodies re-experience terror, rage,

> and helplessness, as well as the impulse to fight or flee, but these feelings are almost impossible to articulate. Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past. (p. 43)

As I read, I reached out to my trusted sister, Laura. Krammer and Mangiardi (2012) state that the "dynamic interplay of … critically questioning minds can transform, create, and expand each participant's understanding … moving in, around, and beyond the topic at hand" (pp. 43–44). I believed my sister and Sandra could help me disrupt my "narrative of self at the personal level by questioning held beliefs" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 15). However, I continued to cling to a need to be vigilant, while keeping watch over secrets—a narrative I learned years ago—"childhood secrets must not be disrupted!" (see Figure 1). I wondered how can I keep my secrets while interrupting their negative shaping influences?

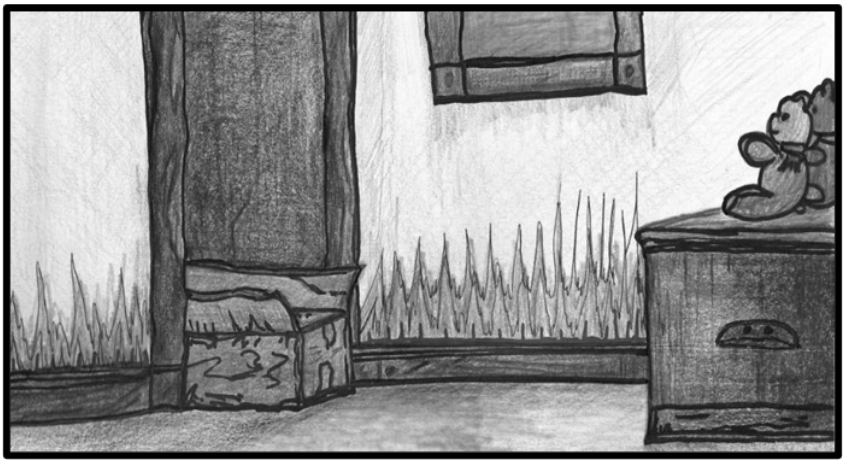

Figure 1: Fear is on display along the bottom of the wall as seen by an increasingly rapid heart rate. (Coloured pencil on paper)

Sandra emailed and reminded me that we agreed to attend to the dialogic space inherent in duoethnography. She also reminded me that she was able to share her shame filled, fatso story (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020) because I am trustworthy. I know I am with trusted friends; therefore, other possibilities exist (van der Kolk, 2014). And so, the conversation tentatively continued. I regularly felt unwell, my chest pounding, tachycardia and fear prevailed—my box of secrets cracking open. Greene (1995) comforted me:

> This is not, I want to stress, a memory game. This kind of search is intended to restore visibility to the shapes of primordial, perceived landscape; and I have discovered that literature … has the potential of making visible what has sunk out of sight, of restoring a lost vision and a lost spontaneity. (p. 77)

During an online writing session, Sandra asked permission to read and edit. I hoped editing would not cause harm. Yet, the next day, I was not prepared to hear Sandra say that reading and editing my work did in fact cause harm. I was silent and listened.

> *Sandra*: Reading your *currere* is[5] demanding. It reminds me of the work I did as a school administrator when I came alongside children and families in crisis. It also invites memories of the childhood abuse I endured. It requires steel-like mental strength to read your stories without giving over and falling into my own morass. I am unsuccessful. I will go to my grave with an image of a slightly out of reach hiding place that contained photographs your child self was unable to reach. Reading and responding injures me because I feel weak and selfish because I labelled my memories as less horrific than what you endured. I am off kilter because I believe I am not entitled to these thoughts and feelings. Yet in the same breath, I know they represent my humility. Where did I get the idea to rank abuse in terms of which stories are more horrific? And now this dangerous conversation feels like it is about me. I am seething because I feel my silence is part of the reason abusers do what they do. As a woman, I regularly refuse to talk about abusive memories, and I too contribute to silence.

We continued to chat and returned to the tenants of duoethnography. We were reminded that the approach allows "for emergent meanings and meaning making to become dialogic within the text and between the text and the reader, problematizing reader (and inquirer) alignment with implicit metanarratives"[6] (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 10).

> *Janet*: Why am I committed to the notion of causing **no harm**? Why do I attempt to orchestrate my life and the lives of those I care for around situations that might cause harm? Why do I believe I am responsible for Sandra's feelings? Roach Smith (2011), provides guidance—never write "a story because you want to exact revenge or betray someone … [and] do no harm" (p. 21).
>
> I wanted to protect Sandra; however, I felt myself wanting more to disappear and discontinue the *currere* and duoethnography. There were moments when I did disappear. My sister and Sandra insisted I return and be present. Feeling the safety of our collaborative space, we tentatively began to consider the possibility of shifting our stories through our ongoing efforts to write, speak, and create.

Greene (1995) described this as the changing of "shapes and structures of a perceived world, even though they have been layered over" and cloistered over time (p. 77). As I read and as we discuss, I am beginning to understand the differences between exacting revenge, which I am not doing, and a concern for the wellbeing of others. I appreciate that I am not responsible for Sandra's experiences when reading and editing this work; however, I know my concern for her is reflective of a relationship grounded in trust and care. Knowing this, speaking it, and writing it down represents change; change will begin when I "practice [extra] ordinary courage" (Brown, 2007, p. 285). This *currere* is an example of extraordinary courage!

The Regressive Turn

Being mindful of Dewey's (1938) continuity, alongside my early familial curriculum making,[7] I inquired into my communication experiences. I regularly feel deep physical aches in association with, during, and after my efforts to communicate. Left with cavernous pain, I become less verbal and hesitant to communicate (van der

Kolk, 2014). I feel ashamed for not processing communications. I feel frozen in time. I disappear into darkness.

> *Janet* (over the phone): I'm afraid of my trueness showing. I don't feel I can speak my truth. Yet, the *currere* and the duoethnography make me think I can move away from fear and disconnection; I want to be courageous, not in a heroic sense, but in a vulnerable way (Brown, 2010). I want to feel and talk, not flee. I want to experience what Greene (1977) described as wide awakeness.

Moving Forward and Backward in Time and With Experiences

In the next few months while engaging these processes, I repeatedly sat across from and looked intently at my collection of beloved toys. My hand sewn Velveteen Rabbit gifted to me by my sister Laura is precious. Holding it, I am warm and secure (see Figure 2) because it conjures up the kindness of my sister. Looking at my Velveteen Rabbit, I notice she is covered with tiny moth holes; the once-soft fabric is worn and in need of mending; much like I am feeling.

Figure 2: Tired and Worn

> *Laura (in an email and over the phone):* Are the moth holes in the fabric comparable to adverse events? Can you describe the trauma as having left invisible marks? How are the marks silencing your voice, and how are they linked to shame and vulnerability?

> *Janet (replying in an email)*: I often feel like the Velveteen Rabbit—an object-in-life, full of sawdust, worn, torn, and silenced. I understand my silence and the

resulting shame are familiar patterns, where I perceive my only option is to flee (van der Kolk, 2014). I recognize my pattern, and I continue to read. Every sentence leaves me wondering, am I ready for this journey? I want to be Real,[8] "it's a thing that happens to you" (Williams, 1992, p. 5). I know it takes time. Needing to pause, I put on my jacket, dogs at my side, and head out on the land (see Figure 3). "In the sacred still spaces of the bush I experience calm, because nature regularly provides alternative perspectives. The smells, sounds, and moss under my feet ground me, I am becoming." (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019, p. 14)

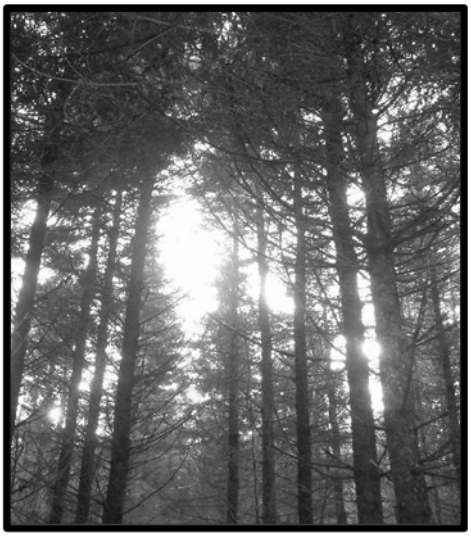

Figure 3: Wanting to Pause I walk along crashing streams and immerse myself in spiritual spaces. (Photography)

Later that week, and within the safety of my office, I wrote, "when shame arrives, it enshrouds me." Putting this down on paper, I am drained and relieved (van der Kolk, 2014). In a telephone conversation with Sandra, she reminded me that a shroud is a burial cloth used to wrap a body before it is placed in the ground and the prefix 'en' means "to confine, to restrict" (Ayto, 2006, para. 1). She described my word choice as haunting and disturbing. I push back by offering the following:

> the trees are my shroud, they comfort me. Walking beneath them is part of my "process and possibilities, in terms of a route" forward, through and onward (Greene, 1995, p. 75). When I am on the land, I do not experience the need to flee. It is when I am without the comforting shroud of Mother Nature, nested and grounded, that tensions surface and I must flee.

Almost Telling

Without words and in response, I sketched a charcoal image of me almost telling my safe adult; I am ready—at the mark—to talk aloud! My sketch is transferred from paper to blank canvas, it takes days. Through the process, I repeatedly ask myself, who I think I am and what precisely I am doing (Brown, 2010). In these moments, the pull

of silence is deafening. I remember I have broken the silence barrier. The self-deception (Crites, 1979) I clung to is now meaningless. I have shared my secrets. I can't put them back in the box.

Sandra and my sister do not leave me, blame me, nor did they critique my reactions. I understand that if I continue to use silence as a defence, it is my choice. I also understand that this choice represents an impediment to communicating truthfully and authentically. There are days, and there will be more, when I long for the option of silence. In these moments, I will remind myself that silence, once broken, cannot be returned to (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Almost Telling. (Oil on canvas)

I apply a thin layer of ecru and brown undercoat to the canvas. Then the colours and shapes slowly appear. Soft yellow hues emerge reminding me of home, family, safety, prayer, music, games, parents, love, and hugs. These are juxtaposed with haunting deep brown hues—pain, power-over, anger, sadness, isolation, dying, and wishing to die. I weep as the oil painting finds form and emerges. The walls surrounding the secrets, firm and impregnatable, are oozing. The oil paint odours seep through, and my memories are vivid. I am aware of my "conscious participation in the [aesthetic] work" (Greene, 1995, p. 125). It is complex, emotional, and moving; the act of creating shifts the moment (Pinar, 1975) and supports me in my efforts to avoid repeating old communication patterns.

Laura (writing and over the phone): The odour of the oil painting, what is this referencing?

Janet replies softly and tearfully: The odours are attached to my memories, diesel smells, gasoline, fuel, dirt, and body odours. My painting allows me to communicate without words. It illustrates the evocation of shame and my need to flee. Through this *currere* and the duoethnography process I am coming to understand the links between illustrations created to support healing and wellness and photographs taken in "power-over" situations, intending to do harm.

Photographs
In the man's right hand.
Held out, tauntingly, and then pulled back.
The man' chides and threatens.
"Don't you tell!
You'll get into trouble!"
Photographs only for 'the man'.

Hidden in the thick concrete wall,
Beyond my reach.
Daily, I hurry past them,
I know they are there.
Sometimes I pause and
creep over to the wall.
I am confused and silent.
I am angry; I harm others and myself.
Shame beckons; what if someone finds them?
I continue to walk near the wall,
Wondering if I will ever get them.
I disappear within the perceived safety of the voiceless wall.

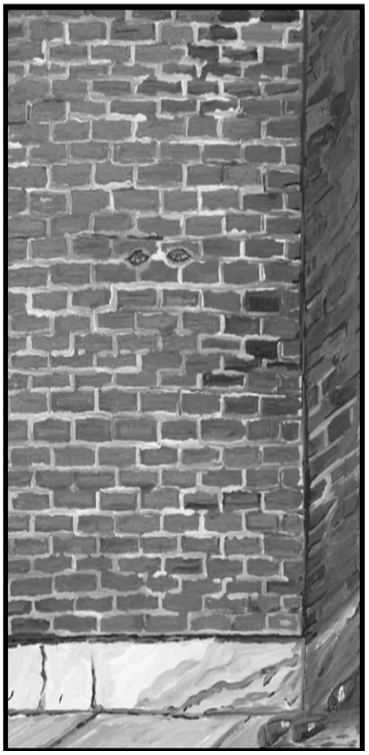

Figure 5: "Hidden Eyes" My experiences are shaped by the views available from my wall of safety. (Oil on canvas)

Janet with tears: Emotions suffocate, tears dry, and I do not smile (see Figure 5: Hidden Eyes). My seams burst like the worn fabric of the Velveteen Rabbit (Williams, 1992). I feel guilty for breathing.

I react yet I want to respond. I continue to read about trauma (van der Kolk, 2014). I am coming to understand courage and the building of shame resilience (Brown, 2007). Again, I return to The Velveteen Rabbit where Skin Horse asks about being authentic, does it hurt, he asks? The Skin Horse replies:

sometimes … When you are Real you don't mind being hurt. … It does not happen all at once … you become, it takes a long time, that is why it doesn't happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept, generally by the time you are Real most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real, you can't be … [silent], except to those who don't understand. (Williams, 1992, pp. 5, 8)

A Progressive Turn: A Breeze Comes Down the Mountains

Today, I experience hope with the rising of the sun because I know I am tentatively moving from reactions to thoughtful responses (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019). Pinar (2012) describes this turn as looking "toward what is not yet the case, what is not yet

present" (p. 46). This is possible in part because I walk in the shadow of the mountains and quietly "nest somewhere among the bracken" (Williams, 1992, p. 16). Within the sacred stillness of the bush, I experience peace. I pick lily of the valley and rich purple pansies from my dew-soaked gardens. They rest in fresh water beside me as I write and pray and know. As I practice courage (Brown, 2017), the tensions are less frequent and less complex (van der Kolk, 2014). I recognize the evocation of my shame response is not new. Over the years, it has become like a well-worn sweater. Now that I have named it (Brown, 2007), it requires purposeful attention and energy to respond in ways that allow the bits of my life to fit together narratively and coherently (Crites, 1979). Speaking about, writing down, and acknowledging that the threads woven into the fabric of my life are not all educative (Dewey, 1938) is empowering. Through *currere* and duoethnography:

> my own past will appear in altered ways and that my presently lived life—and I would like to say, teaching—will become more grounded, more pungent, and less susceptible to logical rationalization. … I realize that recollections of literary experiences cannot but be affected by critical and other cognitive judgements (my own and others). Still, such judgements can be bracketed out, put in abeyance while we reach for the prereflective experiences that art can make accessible if we attend. (Greene, 1995, pp. 77–78)

Furthermore, I "struggle toward some new integrations of my perception of being alive as a … woman with desires to commit myself to make things change and to live out that commitment" in my communication (Greene, 1995, p. 84). I tentatively and increasingly speak with more clarity and understand communications. My cover stories (Crites, 1979), through inquiry, became meaningful as they were viewed through the lens of my lived experiences (Norris & Greenlaw, 2012). I am increasingly wide-awake (Greene, 1995) and heed the importance of attending to self-transformation (Pinar, 2012).

Analytical Turn: Janet is Emerging

Sandra writes: Given Janet's proclivity to enter and barricade behind inaccessible walls, duoethnography provided a structure where she could emerge. Janet experienced the call to return as part of the research process and not as a relational responsibility (see Figure 6). This gave her space to exist, while providing room for her to speak.

Figure 6: Duoethnography Comes Alive. (Coloured pencil on paper)

I know the analytical turn to include "re-entering the present … listening carefully to one's own inner voice in the historical and natural world, one asks: what is the meaning of the present?" (Pinar, 2012, pp. 46–47). Increasingly I recognize the blessing of working in the regressive and progressive turns. I am moving within a conscious embodiment, listening to my inner voice, and finding my outer communicative voice; from speechlessness to coherent words (van der Kolk, 2014).

Furthermore, our duoethnography was "soul searching, soul wrenching, and rewarding, and it is not for the light of heart" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 11). I now recognize communication related shame when I am transported to childhood experiences and the temporality[9] of shame is evoked. When shame's breath prevails, alive, familiar, foreboding, I react in silence. However, engaging in this collaborative *currere* and duoethnography work is an act of extraordinary courage for all involved (Brown, 2010); it is my traction story[10] (Jack-Malik, 2012). It is foundational as I refine my communications. I am repairing my worn, moth-eaten Velveteen Rabbit, as I focus on building shame resilience (Brown, 2017) (see Figure 7). I know this is possible because of my willingness to engage in and stay with the dangerous and uncomfortable conversations (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). Moreover, I know I can continue forward because Pinar (2012) reminds me that, as I work toward the analytical, it requires "an intensified engagement with daily life, animated, paradoxically, by an ironic detachment from it" (p. 46).

Figure 7: A New Look. Lovely with new thread, colourful ribbons and bows. (Fabric and cloth)

And Brown (2017) reminds me:

> we must sometimes stand alone in our decisions and beliefs despite our fear of criticism and rejection … belonging so fully to yourself that you are willing to stand alone in a wilderness, an untamed, unpredictable place of solitude and searching. It is a place as dangerous as it is breathtaking, a place as sought after as it is feared. (p. 36)

I came to this place alongside a trusted sister and friend. Through the processes of *currere* and duoethnography (reading, thinking, reflection, creating art, embodiment, and conversations), I have come to appreciate that I either name shame and lean into resilience or I repeat the past. When I allow the people in my life to see my pain, I experience connection, communication is possible, and hope arises. I write:

> Hope hints at possible joy
> I know I possess the strength to carry on,
> I will not flee.
> I am here, uncomfortable,
> Surrounded by those who care, and courage filled,
> Present, with all my foibles and angst.

Finally, I have a moment when I understand Sandra's difficulty reading and experiencing the text as educative (Dewey, 1938). She tells me it is a space where she is afforded opportunities to shift how she labels and understands the abuse she endured. It also is a space where we can empathically wonder how our traumatic stories might be helpful to others. As well, wellness is imperative.

> Self-care is not an indulgence. It is an essential component of prevention of distress, burnout, and impairment. It should not be considered as something "extra" or "nice to do if you have time" but as an essential part of our professional identities (Barnett et al., 2005, as quoted in Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 71)

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Endnotes

[1] Trauma is a "threat we cannot control" (Brown, 2007, p. 89).

[2] Trigger Warning: A note to the reader. Janet's secrets involve adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Although they are not discussed here in great detail, it is not our attention to cause harm to the reader; therefore, we provide this trigger warning. Please safeguard your wellbeing as you decide to continue reading.

[3] *Currere* includes four moments: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. It provides a framework to understand the contribution "academic studies makes to one's understanding of life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated [overlap] in society, politics, and culture" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45).

[4] Jack-Malik and Kuhnke (2020) operationalize 'pulled in' as occurring when one experiences interactions resulting in feelings of belonging grounded in relational inclusion.

[5] We purposefully and carefully selected "is" and not "was." We did this because with every read and every edit of this section, we are transported, and we experience firsthand Dewey's (1938) continuity.

[6] Metanarrative, in duoethnography, is written from multiple points of view. The readers observe a 'back-and-forth' to grow understanding of the topic as socially, culturally,

emotionally and/or physically constructed—no one is dominant or the ultimate truth (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, pp. 15–16).

[7] Early familial curriculum making is the curriculum making that children engage in with members of their families and communities (Clandinin, 2013). In curriculum making, "we are interested in the storied experiences of children, teachers, and families in the curriculum making that happens as lives meet in classrooms, schools, homes and communities. Curriculum making in this way sets the research context and research puzzle" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24).

[8] The word Real in this *currere* is spelled with a capital 'R' as it is in *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams, 1992).

[9] The state of existing in and within time (Clandinin, 2013).

[10] A "traction story" is one that draws forward, creates momentum, joins other experiences all in efforts to shift a miseducative identity story (Jack-Malik, 2012).

Pandemic Trauma Dreams: An Experiment in Embodied Anxiety/Intimacy Towards a Relational Future

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> Self-critical and interpretive receptivity to what experience reveals is a form of listening: it is as if we are straining to hear what we're being told. Structured by certain receptivity, relationship—with others (including the dead and not yet born), with ourselves, with the biosphere in which we are embedded, and with what is beyond—may be functional, maybe even foreordained. It might be moral. (Pinar, 2019, p. 287)

Throughout my life I have moved in and out of intense introspection, receptivity to experience, and meaning making. These inward looking moments have often coincided with times of quiet. These have not, however, been the male, hermitical spaces of quiet of the Christian monastic model, drawn on by Grant and others Pinar (2019) cites. Rather, they have been mired in the intense intimacy, bodily fluids, and natural rhythms of biological cycles, pregnancy loss, and mothering.

I am at a point in my life where the natally mandated slowdowns have come and gone. My children are growing, and my husband continually takes on more of their care, freeing me to pursue career, scholarship, and community engagement. As I embarked on my PhD studies, I believed that my times of biologically determined quietude were behind me. Then, in March of 2020, COVID-19 hit Canada.

The arrival of the pandemic felt like anything but quietude. As an instructional designer with experience building online education, I was tasked with leading my faculty's "Business Continuity Plan," moving both academic and professional development courses online immediately. Those first few weeks did not allow for reflection or searching. But then we were at home. And we are still here. The unequivocal biological force of a virus has demanded from us ethical obedience through domestic quietude. We have been forced into the conditions of collective contemplation.

Like my previous experiences of biologically compelled quietude, the conditions that compel sheltering in place are not gentle ones. As in any convalescence, we are compelled to be at home because we are battling an ailment. In 2020, the ailments, both physical and spiritual, are rending the very foundation of our "normal." Faultlines are opening up, driven not just by the virus but by this year's horrendous examples of ongoing systemic racism and contentious elections full of populist divisiveness. We are being forced to contemplate the striking enactment of pervasive idolatrous worship of personal freedom (O'Donovan as cited in Pinar, 2019). Much of the rending momentum deepening these cracks is contention about concepts at the heart of curriculum—the nature and value of knowledge as well as the tensions between humanistic and economic ends. In both myself and others, I am witnessing instinctual responses to these challenging battles compelling us towards the reactions of anxiety and intimacy. In this article, I look to my past, present, and future as imagined through a 2020 *currere* process to explore the forces of anxiety and intimacy in the varied contexts of domestic, public, and technologically mitigated spaces, especially where those spaces touch upon issues related to curriculum. I will reflect on the potential fecundity of this time of forced contemplation and ask—what may the anxiety and intimacy of this pandemic-time birth?

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Fault Lines: Embodied Anxiety

> I sit with my dad in the cozy dining room of our small farmhouse. My dad is going over a list of words with me. They are reading words. My first reading test of grade one is coming up tomorrow. I don't remember the words now with the exception of the word *the*. Despite the warm, comforting context of my loving family home, I am in a state of panic. Intense distress. Tears fill my eyes. My chest is tight and breathing is shallow. My panic stems from something deeper than embarrassment. My anxiety, whatever it is that is overtaking me as I face this test, is intense and is manifesting itself physically. It has embodied itself as a blockage within me. I cannot pronounce the word *the*. I cannot do it. My mouth and throat, my vocal cords are rebelling—constricting—seemingly at the direction of the heavy knot of dread in the pit of my stomach. No matter how hard I try, I cannot choke out the word *the*.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Regressive Writing 2020 *Currere*

I begin my *currere* with embodied anxiety strangling me, choking me from the inside out. The traditional, instruct and test, format of my early elementary curriculum fed the forces of anxiety and self-undermining uncertainty within me.

> The present reveals a new relationship to this anxiety, achieved through formal education itself (in addition to therapy and meds). The past years of growing towards comfort with ambiguity, towards mindfulness and away from judgement of self and others are the years of my Master's studies. I deliberately spent these years studying the ontological basis for change—its complexity, uncontrollability, and the vital role of disruption in enacting it.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Analytic Writing 2020 *Currere*

The zen inspired mindful responsiveness to anxiety I have achieved in the present has generally served me well. I have not fully achieved detachment though by any means, nor do I really believe I want to, so my protection is half-hearted. It has not been able to withstand the constant buffeting of the unprecedented storms of anxiety that are the new meteorological normal in our shifting climate.

Morton (2018), in exploring humanity's conflicted responses to climate change, asserts that the genre of global warming information is "information dump mode" (p. xxii), where we cascade punishing piles of factoids, little bits of facts designed to elicit particular responses, onto ourselves and then admonish those who do not respond to these factoids "appropriately." He connects this mode of being with the trauma dreams of PTSD sufferers that seek, so Freud asserts, to position them before their trauma, giving them space to feel the anxiety of impending trauma rather than the raw fright of the trauma itself (Morton, 2018). Anxiety is a bubble meant to transmute trauma, Morton argues. It is exactly the opposite of what will allow us to live the trauma of the here and now and respond appropriately.

Anxiety in Domestic Space

> Foreseeing and planning are strangely overrated, as neurology is now telling us, and as phenomenology has been telling us. It has to do with how we overweight the idea of free will. (Morton, 2018, p. xxv)

The pandemic started in Canada with hoarding. In preparing for the impending emergency, people hoarded toilet paper and hand sanitizer, then it was groceries and puzzles, then baby chicks, gardening, and canning supplies. My kids delighted in figuring what was the new toilet paper.

My husband and I were both suddenly working from home, and our kids were home for five months, all of us learning in close quarters. In July, my sister and her husband's marriage, already strained, buckled under the weight of this compression. My sister and her children moved in with us, bringing the heart wrenching anxiety of a family navigating separation, divorce, and newfound sobriety. Five boys aged two to nine now roam the house in a herd.

My husband and I also felt the pressure of this "bubble" closing in on us—navigating being together all the time, the loss of community connection and support, and the pressures of accommodating new exuberant people in our house of introverts. We, both perfectionists in our own ways, bristled at the failures of the other so constantly on display. We navigated, with tears and blame, the move in a few short months from my husband working away doing shiftwork, seeing each other only hours a week, to being together constantly in a commune house full of children.

And we were not the only thing impeding on each other's private space. Work was suddenly in our home, and my work, focused on public policy, brought the panic and anxiety of the pandemic streaming in. One day I streamed my school's lecture on the medical ethics dilemmas posed by COVID 19—overflowing New York hospitals, who should get a ventilator, are the lives of the elderly worth less than the young, whose life is worth the most—while painting our family room.

Anxiety In/About Technological Space

In the first and only pre-quarantine emergency planning meeting in my school, one faculty member spoke out strongly against a move to online instruction. This was not a surprise coming from him; he had voiced concerns about the inferior quality and pedagogical inappropriateness of online instruction before. I was tasked with orientating him to the tools of online instruction, and as I did so, he warned me, "You'll see; they are going to use this to force all learning online." When the email came announcing the decision to continue with emergency remote instruction into the next school year he reached out—"See, I told you." While he was the lone outspoken voice in our faculty, he was not alone in his opinions. Scholars such as Kessler and Wall (2016) and Rose and Adams (2014) have decried technologically mediated learning as inferior and disconnected.

Pinar himself explores Grant's notions that technology writ large is taking us away from our true calling of attunement.

> Distracted by devices, we are now attuned to virtual—not historical or transcendent—reality. No longer supplicants on a spiritual mission too many have become, in Grant's terms, "clever ape[s]" fastened on finding "comfort and security through techniques." For Grant our "destiny" is to find ourselves "in the infinite." (Pinar, 2019, p. 289)

I don't know if technology, which is now mediating much more of life than even the short time ago when Pinar weighed in, is turning me into a clever ape or drawing me away from the infinite. But I do know that it feeds my anxiety. In moments of anxiety, I am drawn to my phone and social media, technologies designed to dole out and strategically withhold little doses of endorphins and dopamine. I have lived the anxious moments of these last nine months through screens. My twitter feed is alive with those

decrying the lack of public action as COVID-19 cases rise, asserting and debating our Government's neo-liberal agenda, and the dichotomy or false dichotomy of lives versus dollars. Every few days I watch Facebook live feeds of government press conferences updating us on the COVID latest. As I watch the contrast between the message delivered by politicians and the more urgent but constrained messages of top doctors, comments pop up in the discussion box and emojis float across the screen—hearts, little yellow crying faces, rage faces, people calling each other liars and idiots, swearing they will never get the vaccine. Even in my Facebook feed, where it is mostly family and friends, the anxiety inducing controversy doesn't end. Close family members post misinformation and conspiracy, not just about the pandemic but about unfolding social issues, taking my breath away and throwing me into confusion about how to respond. Should I, as Morton (2018) warns us against, blast them with facts, the true information, to shame them into knowing properly? If I do not will my silence be complicit in the very real violence and death that come from lack of caution in a pandemic and ongoing systemic racism in our social systems?

Anxiety in Public Space

The wave after wave of anxiety battering my defenses in this unprecedented storm comes primarily from the constant reminders, issue after issue, election after election, of division and ignorance in our midst. I fear this time we inhabit where "the only meaning of 'citizen' is as 'consumer'" and "without a world in which we are grounded existentially and to which we are committed politically, we can dissolve as individuals and disappear as citizens" (Pinar, 2012, p. 214). The reckoning is here for our overweighing of free will (Morton, 2018).

It has not just been the pandemic, the refusal to wear masks or stay home, the deaths linked to young people going out clubbing, the politicians stressing economy over life, or even Texas' Lieutenant Governor promoting grandparents sacrificing their lives at the altar of their grandchildren's future earnings. Racialized police brutality and the explicit support it receives, the violent terrorizing of Indigenous lobster fisherman in Nova Scotia, the incessant lies of Donald Trump, my provincial government ignoring and harassing a young activist bringing attention to the suicide epidemic amongst Indigenous kids—it all kept coming. And in my space, we lived through election after election highlighting division, a provincial election, the American election, a municipal election, one after the other, in a course of months.

At the centre of the division is ignorance, the devaluing of knowledge, the flourishing of an individualism so strong that whatever I believe is so. I find myself like Young (2008) asking, what went wrong with knowledge? Where is the balance Young identified, and that I cling to, between acknowledging the social basis of knowledge and still striving for objective actionable knowledge about the world? How can it be that so many in my province, my country, this world, are dismissing knowledge, science, facts? And when we let go of knowledge to cling to our rights and freedoms, where are we? I find myself getting fired up, self-righteous, anxious. Maybe Morton (2018) is right, and the deniers and I with my facts are all reacting against the "weirdness of our modern scientific age" (p. xxxvi). And who am I to say really? How can "I" assert myself as a "unitary context-free, cohesive self" (Pinar, 2009, p. 193) observing the effects of the oppressive, neo-liberal power flowing through the conduits of these anti-maskers and all-life-matterers leaving me conveniently outside of its flow. And so I turn to the autobiographical—constituting the "I," as Pinar (2009) suggests—looking to my past, present, and future within the context of the reciprocal relationship between my individual being and agency and the collective struggle of those around me.

Inhabiting the Faults: Embodied Intimacy

Riffing on Deleuze, Pinar (2009) suggests that we encounter ourselves in the other and the other in ourselves. Thomas (2018) echoes this, asserting that it is through intimate dialogue with the other, modelled after the Sufi path of dialogue, that we learn and grow. This intimate dialogue, a prayerful act that brings us into deep, close, knowing of the other, is contrasted with the Shariah of education, driven by mandates and measures (Thomas, 2018). The Sufi path of dialogue driven by intimate, reciprocal knowing of the other does not hold space for the splintered othering of critical theory that Pinar (2009) describes. This intimacy is a state both excluded and required by the locked down world we now inhabit.

Intimacy in Domestic Space

> That which is of central importance to me in the present is: *Family*—the closeness and intimacy of my life with my husband and two sons, the giving and joy that comes of "commune life," living the value of hospitality with extended family and friends. *Beauty*—a sense of home and comfort are forefront to me. I love continually building a beautiful, peaceful living space with my husband. I cherish times and spaces that can connect me to nature and its beauty.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Analytical Writing, 2020 *Currere*

> Being grounded in the private sphere—wherein one becomes attuned to the transcendent—enables citizens to engage others in the common or public realm. (Pinar, 2019, p. 272)

While my husband and I moved into the intimacy of close contact during the pandemic on a challenging path, it was a fecund one. The beauty of my job is that I work with exceptional, humble leaders who have answered the call to bring that which is dialogically opposed together to have impact—the practical and the ideological, us and them. As dedicatedly non-partisan public servants, they are people who put their feet to the ground to realize positive change, channelling the best in the changing ideologies of the varying parties in power. "Be a radical pragmatist," one of my colleagues told me. I can see in his life and those of other colleagues that they have been spending their careers forwarding the cause of peaceful and fruitful mediation-informed approaches to problems, being proactive and cooperative in forums where no one had been before. These are people who have found the middle ground explored by Pinar and Grant where the pursuit of good meets pragmatism (Pinar, 2019). And so, as I work with them to develop learning, as I get to know them, I learn. This learning—the mediation strategies they espouse for use in a variety of circumstances—have informed my husband and me in our pandemic intimacy. We have explicitly adopted them, challenged ourselves to use them, think differently, and grow.

It was not just us. In many ways the whole world turned towards domestic intimacy in the early days of the pandemic. We drew hearts on our windows and held our children close. We praised the new heroes of our era—nurturers and nurses. Many, myself included, found ourselves nurturing sourdough bread starters, mimicking the physical care we might offer a newborn as we fed and changed them, day in and day out, and used them to bake for our families. We turned towards the most elemental acts of intimacy—feeding each other and breaking bread together. In many ways life looked a lot more like the pre-technological era than it had in decades. Children learned at home with their parents; we gardened and built things by hand. In other ways, however, this was the most technologically determined time we have ever experienced.

Intimacy in Technological Space

> I am fascinated by the promise of technology; not naively, as I recognize and resist its ability to overtake our lives or merely reinforce our consumeristic culture. But rather, I am curious about where in the webs of technology's roles and impacts on our lives we can direct it towards enhancing our creativity and our connection to others.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Analytical Writing, 2020 *Currere*

The first course I had to move to an emergency remote format was a training course for Public Sector Board members on Governance. Many of the attendees were older, well established in their careers and fields and now giving of their time on public boards like those of schools, libraries, and social services organizations. Both the instructors and the students were nervous about the move online. But they quickly pulled together to do something they were uncertain they could do. Participants surprised themselves with their ability to learn new technologies and connect meaningfully through them. The course suddenly switched focus and facilitated deep discussions about the challenges of the pandemic for the public sector organizations that the participants were leading and how to address them. One evening a participant, a busy doctor in an area recently hit by COVID-19, participated while clearly overwhelmed by exhaustion; towards the end of the class she spoke, slowly and measuredly, about the challenges of responding to the pandemic and the importance of the work that they were all doing towards building strong public institutions; many of the participants and I wept.

And suddenly technology is all we have to foster intimacy with our extended families, our friend groups, our colleagues. It is through tech that we reach out. Not long into the lockdown, my boss's family connected via Zoom. But this gathering, unlike those before it, included those far flung cousins, still inhabiting their family's original home in Great Britain. For the holidays, I gathered not only with my husband's family and mine, but also with extended family and friends on different occasions, not limited as before by space and time.

Intimacy in Public Space

> My personal growth is connected, linked inexorably with the struggle that exists in our world right now away from division and ignorance, towards connection and wisdom. I struggle personally and through my words and actions against the political climate described by Smith (2011) that conflates progress with unending economic growth and situates learning only as a tool within capitalist supremacy. I struggle with my responsibility in a democratic society to challenge these narratives through political engagement.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Synthetical Writing, 2020 *Currere*

As I watched the political divisions of my world swirl ominously on my Twitter feed, I struggled to translate my frustration into something meaningful. Early on in the pandemic, my son and I attended a Black Lives Matter protest, masked and distanced. Later, I made the usual calls to my political representatives, eloquently exhorting their answering machines to rise to the challenges and work for the people. I donated money to organizations and activists, but politically I saw very little reason to hope. As I watched our provincial election campaign roll out, with its inevitable conclusion of the election of the parochial, conservative incumbent party, I struggled. Then I began to watch the campaign of one new opposition party candidate, a dynamic local business owner and school board trustee who had championed the rights of LGBTQ students. I watched on

Twitter, day after day, as she hit the sidewalks, door-knocking in her riding, heavy in the late stages of her first pregnancy. What I saw, strikingly absent from most of the public space I was inhabiting, was connection. Below pictures of her door-knocking in her "People Before Profits" campaign-hat, she shared stories of connecting with individuals in her riding across political divides. She would report, after busy days of campaigning, the many baby supplies and clothes she had been gifted with by loving people, even those who vowed they would never support her politically. She wrote eloquently about the need for a higher minimum wage and the way she supplied it to her workers, including my cousin, who she relied upon and valued. I was inspired. I did what I could to support her and her party.

I also saw strong connection-based leadership in Jacinda Ardent, as she led New Zealand through the pandemic, addressing kids and her worried nation over streaming video from her home in a well-worn sweatshirt after putting her kids to bed. These women were connecting their intimate domestic lives to public well-being. They were prioritising intimacy in the public space. A colleague circulated an article about Ardent for use in our training—it identified her approach as empathic leadership. Here was empathy, connection, intimacy offering hope in politics. This smacked up against a hopelessness within me, a possibly well-founded cynicism, fed by assertions like those of Pinar (2019) quoting Reimer of the "impossibility of politics and radical activity for social change" (p. 275). As the provincial election came and went with its uninspiring results, one high point buoyed me, the opposition MLA made good on her campaign slogan "Ready to Deliver," birthing both baby Hera and a legislative seat within a few days of each other.

Birthing a Relational Future

"'As an enactment of ethics,' Lipari tells us, 'listening, like quickening, brings a recognition of an unknown other to whom we are bound and about whom we feel care and concern'" (Pinar, 2019, p. 268). Quickening—the moment in which we recognize the unknown other, the life inside us, through their movement. I remember experiencing quickening with my second child Ollie. I was driving home from Easter celebrations at my parent's house. I was well over the constant exhaustion of the first trimester, but a six hour drive was still a challenge for my now heavy body. I suddenly felt my baby move. The movements were sure and energetic, like leaps or hops inside of me. My heart filled with a joy I had rarely experienced during this pregnancy. I had been told early on that something was wrong with this child's heart, that she may die before being born or soon after. It turned out these early movements were the only experience I had of Ollie alive and vigorous. After being told her heartbeat was gone, I went into the hospital to be induced. The pain of that delivery was much more severe than either of my other two. When the pain killers I was offered wore off, I was refused more to avoid my becoming an instant drug addict. As I birthed my child in a fog of intense grief, I started to hemorrhage; doctors and nurses crowded the room as my vitals dropped. I was eerily detached. As a doctor reached his large hand deep into my uterus, I watched my mom and husband huddled in the corner terrified. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," the doctor kept apologizing for the pain he was causing me. "It's OK," I replied, numb. Later that night, as I held my perfect tiny baby, counted her fingers and toes and stroked her hair, I could barely feel. The hum of deafening shock seemed to drown out all emotions. And it was the same way later in my dreams and flashbacks to that time—PTSD dreams of trauma that shadowed and obscured the true hurt of loss.

I'm not sure if it helps to see the anxiety on both sides of the pandemic fence as trauma dreams—a bubble of disconnection masquerading as engagement with pandemic

trauma through denial and resistance or self-congratulatory panic. I don't know if it helps, but it is convincing. The pregnancy after Ollie's death and birth was enveloped in acute anxiety so intense it kept me from feeling deeply. Even after my son Arthur was born, I did not bond with him immediately or strongly. It was only over months and really years, as I let go of the anxiety, that intimacy could flourish. It was only as I opened myself up to the other in vulnerability, opened up to loss and the pain I may find within it, that I could move forward.

> One of my most beautiful realizations in my journey of growth as a self-aware scholar is that my learning, my reading, the intense drive for intellectual knowledge absolutely central to my true self springs conversely from the strongest most fecund gifts of my nature and from the fear and brokenness within me. That is as it should be as "wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life" (Palmer, 2004, p. 5).
>
> I am presently at an exciting precipice in my academic journey moving into the scholarly world not only through personal learning but through relationship and teaching—through action. I do not know where I will live a few years from now or what I will do. But I have what I need to centre me. I have a place inside where I connect with me. I both understand intellectually and honour spiritually the relational, energetic force of emergence that will unfold for me in a way that no prescribed curriculum can foresee.
>
> - Mayoh-Bauche, Synthetical Writing, 2020 *Currere*

I believe that this time of pandemic induced reflection, anxiety, and intimacy will change our relational future on the large scale; that the faults that are being rendered will move us away from us or towards a more authentic wholeness that encompasses imperfection. I am hopeful it can act as Pinar (2019) describes as "social withdrawal for the sake of subjective reconstruction, registering in—maybe working through—mind and mood the tension between what this world demands and what might be beyond invites, then mobilizing that synthesis (should things congeal) for social reconstruction" (Pinar, 2019, p. 276). It is my hope that, through this pause, we are currently birthing a relational future of mutuality—of intimacy. I am not naïve. I do not think that this is necessarily so or that it will be easy. But birth is rarely easy. If we can push past the numbing bubble of anxiety into genuine engagement with the pain of traumas of this moment, if we can inhabit the faults, maybe, just maybe, the pains we feel now can be the fruitful pains of birthing a new, more-authentic curriculum of intimacy across divides.

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Sister Irene Has a Penis: *Currere* Leads to Freedom

By Helen McFeely
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"Sister Irene[1] has a penis." My mother uttered these strange words while she barred my exit from my childhood home. It was important that she inform me about a religious sister at our local church. I barely knew Sr. Irene. Sometimes I sullenly attended religious education, but most often, I complained enough that I was permitted to stay home. I did not like missing the poorly crafted cartoon *Super Friends* (Barbera & Hanna, 1973–1985) to go sit in a stuffy Catholic school classroom on Saturday mornings. My parents, having had enough of Catholic school themselves, or maybe because the public school was only two doors away from my house, did not enroll me in Queen of Peace school run by the Sisters of Notre Dame. As such, I had little connection to the religious sisters at Church.

I was thwarted at the front door. I needed to leave the house. I was ten. I always needed to leave. But, for some reason on this day, my mother insisted that I know about Sr. Irene's male genitalia. After the strange sentence was uttered, I felt the need to leave with greater urgency. Today people laugh when I say, in all seriousness, that I was completely unsupervised as a child. I was. I wandered alone at the school yard. I played hopscotch by myself. I visited friends at their homes for entire days.

My mother was still in front of the closed door. She grabbed at her crotch, despite wearing a skirt, to make sure that I understood exactly what she had said. Suddenly, I noticed my father's presence. He was able to translate the schizophrenic mutterings of my mother. They had met in a mental institution in 1965 and run away together. On their escape, they conceived me. No one thought their marriage would work, but the years they were together added up to 47 by the time of my mother's passing. They learned to live with each other. My father became accustomed to her bizarre ways. She was used to his equally strange ways. She seemed oblivious to his delusions as long as he was able to drive her to the store. They usually balanced each other out, even if the balance was achieved at the point of something akin to the moments before the Hindenburg exploded.

My mother was not going to let me pass until I acknowledged that I understood. I looked at my father with an explain-this-to-me-now look. My father said calmly, "I believe your mother is trying to say that she finds Sister Irene demonstrates many unfavorable characteristics, many of which reflect an inappropriate masculine quality."

"Ooooh," I said with one of those long O sounds that concludes in pursed lips. My eyes wandered back and forth between the two of them to see if this was going to be one of those "big moments" like the sudden explosion of a hydrogen fueled zeppelin. When the conflagration of mental illness occurs, when the tinder is lit, those who live with the mentally ill are called upon to do more, become bigger, and shoulder the burden of de-escalation. This episode was not going to become a big moment. My mother seemed satisfied. The tension noticeably left the air when my mother said something to bring the bizarre episode to a safe landing. She informed me,

"It is very important to get a certificate in this life; you can't go around without credentials." I took my leave.

Border Crossing

Anzaldúa explains the exquisite sensitivity she experienced in childhood with these words: "When I was really little, I felt like the external reality was too much. I had a

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very thin skin, and everything came in" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 103). As a young child, Anzaldúa struggled with early onset of hormones that made her look different on the outside from the other girls her age. Trying to navigate external judgments about her different physical appearance within the stifling atmosphere of secrecy, Anzaldúa's mother intensified the shame by binding her daughter tightly with a corset to hide her prematurely developing chest (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 39). Anzaldúa's defenses broke. The young girl internalized turmoil.

I too cultivated a "thin skin," but in contrast to Anzaldúa, I did this as a way to detect the moods of my mentally unhealthy family. I developed a hyper sense of vigilance to those around me. I wanted to smell the earliest whiffs of the fire that led to the mighty explosions of big moments. I needed to be ready, with strength that I did not possess, to handle the call of a big moment. External reality was too much.

Anzaldúa laments that one of the ways that she did not fit in with her family was based on her physical appearance of dark skin and Indio markings (Anzaldúa, 2009). I was set apart from my family by my perception of reality. Although I looked exactly like my parents, especially my father, I was not as sensitive to the injustice and unfairness found in this world as my parents. My mentally ill parents felt and outwardly wrestled with the wrongs in this life. Their experience of the world and its wrongs came in through their senses as though they were a snort of cocaine.

I was different from them in other ways too. When I perceived the world, I did not have a mind that fled to safety in mental scenes created from neurons misfiring and tamped down emotions that had nowhere to rise. My mind stayed with the ugly, the nonsense, and the crazy. I watched brilliant parents who could not navigate the wrongs of this world, the feelings of their bodies, and the thoughts of their minds all at the same time. They were fragmented people who lived in their bodies, and their bodies were in the same house with me. We were all the same color. Yet, I watched and lived with an emotional flak jacket and night vision goggles to keep tabs on where their minds travelled, in case the border into big moments was crossed.

In remembering my past, I realize that I understand the writing of Anzaldúa (2009; 2012) through a lens crusted with the stigmas associated with mental illness. While Anzaldúa's primary focus is bringing the suppressed culture of Americans who have their roots in Mexico into the spotlight, Anzaldúa also expresses a concern for uplifting those who fall outside the boundary of that which society deems acceptable. It is in the latter area where I strongly relate to her writing.

From my perspective, I recognize the border world she describes. "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe. … A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25). For me, I experienced the narrow strip that existed between escalating psychic unrest and knowing when to hide from the fury. The border's ledge was narrow and small and appeared abruptly. The ledge of big moments in in my childhood erupted as a call to become bigger, do more than what an ordinary child could bear. It was a call to shoulder the burden of de-escalation—a call to be vigilant in against the dangers of physical harm, but not my harm—more commonly, my mentally ill family harmed themselves. In a big moment, I needed to remain in the reality of the encounter, quell any natural desire to scream in disbelief at the absurdity. I needed to hold my true inclinations in limbo while using superhuman curiosity in order to discover the meaning of the explosion. I needed to address the fomenting concern of my dysregulated parent in an authentic way. With disingenuous engagement, the cause for peace was lost. It is easy to fall off the border's ledge and not bring the explosive moment to a satisfactory finale. The border's edge, and a fall from it, appears as fast as the zeppelin's demise.

Despite my growing up on Long Island, I can understand the importance of the mesquite in Anzaldúa's world. Anzaldúa (2009) describes the mesquite that is left alone to grow in the vast openness of the borderlands. Because of the lack of trees competing for land and sun, the mesquite possesses a freedom to grow and to take any shape it longs for.

> The Mesquite looks like an ancient ballet dancer doing a one-legged twirl, arms and head appealing to the sky. The trunk oozes a black gummy secretion from a lipless vagina mouth. (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 53)

In contrast to Anzaldúa, I had little space to grow. Not only did I grow up 30 miles from the border of New York City, my needs at home were marked by a cultivated silence and an avoidance of psychic explosions. Not wanting to be seen or noticed during one of those moments, I kept low to the ground and purposefully uninteresting. I became surprisingly comfortable in unpredictable situations. I learned to thrive in untended ground with minimal care or water. I am at home in the desert. I perk up in beauty when conditions grow harsh. Like the desert rose, I do not need space or water. I bloom in glory when the punishing sun strikes.

When I left my childhood home to attend the local public school, I crossed a border. My parents were often hospitalized, usually one at a time. I had to dress myself for school but did not know how to conform to the expectations around fashion at school. I knew I failed when my peers began the bullying. I was often ostracized because of my unkempt hair, hand warts, and ill-fitting clothes. My mien was not one of beauty.

Emotional Journey

The regressive stage in *currere* was painful for me. I have social wounds. I must remember that I am not alone in these feelings. Pinar expresses the continuing discomfort of societal shame in a lecture on identity. Pinar (2020) says, "Almost any provocation scrapes off the scar of my social wound. My vision is refracted through the pain of the old ongoing injury" (n.p.). However, Pinar (1975a) also tells us that *currere* is worth the effort; it sheds light on our thought processes. Pinar writes:

> We look, in Sartre's language, at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present. We have found that the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences, in complicated ways, the present; it forms the present. (Pinar, 1975a, p. 4)

Pinar recognizes the importance of revisiting the past because of the past's influence on today. Professional counselling takes the same view. I value the therapeutic practice of counselling in my private life. The past is present is integral to understanding the therapeutic process (Young & Allain, 1999). Pinar's academic permission to journey on the emotional roads of my past for intellectual integrity and to benefit my career in teaching is a startling new discovery.

After I process my initial uneasiness in revisiting my past for academic reasons, I eventually eased into the process of *currere*. When the emotional storm settled and my mind quieted, some of my favorite books from childhood floated easily and joyfully to the surface of my recollections.

The regressive journey of *currere* became easier for me when I included the comforting presence of my favorite books as companions. As the pleasant memories of time spent with certain books filled my thoughts, I used Maxine Greene's (1995)

example of connecting meaning through literature. Greene conveys the depth of her educational philosophy through the use of main characters from her favorite readings. For example, when Greene remembers one of her favorite poems, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," she uses the exact words from the poem as a way of addressing her thoughts on literacy to a new audience. Greene combines her personal history, her ideas on education, and literature to create a rich example of *currere.*

With whom did I spend the most important weekends in my late teens and early twenties? I remembered with fondness the summer of 1986, which I spent with *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Hugo, 1831/1985). Shorter relationships occurred in high school. My main crush was *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850/1994). During my first year of teaching, I had no time for meaningful or deep commitments other than teaching, but I stole a few moments to be with *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky, 1866/2001). I flippantly knew that I gravitated to psychological thrillers. Until Pinar (1975b) and Greene (1975), I was like Madame Bovary (Flaubert, 1856/2013), ready to jump to another psychological thriller rather to delve into my personal biography to understand why I enjoyed time spent in company with main characters who engaged in interior struggles while the rest of the world laughed at them.

My ponderings with literary *currere* showed me that I identify with characters who struggle with beautiful hearts that are honest and sincere. My protagonist is one who struggles and resists the condemnation and shame thrust at them by the outside world. My heroes exist in heroic vulgarity sustaining the nobility of their core while exterior propriety holds the scepter.

Pinar's process (1975a) revealed that I was secretly, with these intellectual and reading relationships, working through personal and societal shame. After following Pinar's (1975a) lead, I can say with him:

> But on the other level I see that my thoughts are like bubbles from the bottom of a pond, and I am on the surface; and they express, to use a psychological-analogue of Chomsky's concept, the deep structure of my being. (p. 6)

Progressive Stage

I have discovered a long and twisted story of shame, both personal and societal. Anzaldúa sheds light on the *currere* experience when she explains, "writing opens the door to the old images that haunt" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 198). With my personal history of living with the mentally ill, I know very well the interior struggles, the haunting, the vergüenza (Anzaldúa, 2009), and the unjust, limiting-nature of stigmas.

During my progressive stage, I centered on the idea of freedom and beginnings that arose from my regressive stage. The exercise of *currere* allows for a new beginning. We return to our beginnings in order to recreate their meaning in the present (Pinar, 1975b). Greene (1995) tells us that beginnings are the font of freedom: "But then I think of how much beginnings have to do with freedom, how much disruption has to do with consciousness and the awareness of possibility that has so much to do with teaching other human beings" (p. 109). Beginnings lead to freedom. Tackling our past and quieting its hidden, beating siren, leads to a disruption of the factors influencing our present. We are all moved by hidden motivators from our past that are present today. When we uncover the beginnings of these motivators and reveal them, a new freedom can emerge. The educational feminist author, Grumet (as cited by Pinar et al., 1995), calls noticing these sirens from the past noticing how we are "trapped in transference" (p. 378).

Crossing from the educational theory of Grumet to the psychologist's world, being trapped in transference is something a therapist indicates when they use the word "triggered" (Young & Allain, 1999). A person can be triggered when the memory of a past experience imbues and adds power to the current experience, possibly throwing off the balance of the event towards the past. Pinar's method of *currere* takes into account these hidden connections—the hidden kerosene tanks of energy that our past can supply to the present if we do not take the time to unpack the past.

This exercise of *currere*, although difficult, leads to a freeing disruption of the hidden messages from the past leading to a burgeoning of consciousness. Freire (1969/2008) reminds teachers that consciousness is an essential part of teaching others. To truly learn, we need beginnings (Pinar,1975b). I ended my progressive stage yearning to embrace freedom and consciousness in a new way.

Mental illness is not beautiful to those who look upon the effects it creates. Mental illness is difficult to understand, and its effects create a screen that veils the individual from others. I cried with Quasimodo, the deformed man from *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, when he expressed out loud his realization of what is accepted as beautiful.

> A profound sigh heaved his breast; he turned round; his heart was swollen with all the tears which he was swallowing; his convulsively-clenched fists struck against his head, and when he withdrew them there was a bunch of red hair in each hand…. "Damnation! That is what one should be like! 'Tis only necessary to be handsome on the outside!" (Hugo, 1850/1985, p. 316)

Hugo (1850/1985) describes the moment that Quasimodo understands that Esmerelda, the love of his life, will never be able to see past the ugly trappings in which Quasimodo's beautiful heart is enshrined. Quasimodo tells us that it only counts if you are beautiful on the outside. I connected to a character who knew that beauty runs profoundly deep. My childhood lived under the auspices of mental illness was not beautiful on the outside.

Currere leads me to notice today's society in relation to the belief system it embraces towards the mentally ill; not only does our society look upon the person who experiences mental illness as one with no beauty, our society is "afraid" of those who are dirty, unkempt, and struggle with voices in their heads (Borinstein, 1992; Dingfelder, 2009). *Currere* has pulled together on a cognitive level the similarities I experienced with Quasimodo.

Quasimodo cries out, "My misfortune is that I still resemble a man too much. I should like to be wholly a beast like that goat" (Hugo, 1850/1985, p. 342). The misshapen man, who the world sees as grotesque, has the interior of an angelic being. He cries out in frustration that, from miles away, he is judged and condemned as unworthy, and there is nothing that he can do to disprove the judgment and allow him the freedom to be.

Quasimodo's cry speaks to an in-between place. As the child of mentally ill parents, I know such an in-between place exists. Anzaldúa names the in-between place "Nepantla," a "Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 180). Quasimodo longs to be accepted by one group in his totality, even if that requires his moving to the caste of the animals. I longed to be accepted as a learner, someone who was not biologically or through nurture doomed to be an outcast in society, even if that meant silence and hiding the mental illness and its effects that surrounded me.

The In-Between World Created by Shame

My in between land, my *nepantla*, existed/exists entirely in the psyche. To contrast, Quasimodo's *nepantla* exists between two worlds defined by outward physical appearance. Anzaldúa explains that people who are considered outside of proper society are framed as mentally unhealthy, even if they do not have mental illness. With great conviction, Anzaldúa lets the rest of society know that "to be disoriented in space is the 'normal' way of being" for those whose identities stray from the 'acceptable' or that which is 'proper' (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 180). It is certainly *nepantla* to be considered insane merely because you are different. The one labelled is thrown into a crucible filled with shame.

Bradshaw (2005), the former Catholic priest who describes the hidden life of the inner child and the unshed tears of this child, tells us that, when human identity is not allowed to develop, toxic shame results. Anzaldúa speaks of shame on a broader, societal level when she describes "La negación sistemática de la cultura Mexicana-chicana en los Estados Unidos impide su desarrollo" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 176). Anzaldúa, without the help of Bradshaw, recognized that the systematic negation of the Mexican-Chicana culture impeded its development. Anzaldúa takes Bradshaw's definition of toxic shame and scales it to a systemic level.

During my school days, I did not acknowledge the existence of the "red letter" I wore (Hawthorne, 1850/1994). My letter was a C for "child of crazy people." Even though I identified fully with Hester Prynne and understood deeply her courage to wear the label to protect the man she loved, who was not as strong as she, I never reflected on my close understanding of her plight. Hawthorne (1850/1994) describes Hester's mind:

> Of native courage and activity, and for so long estranged, but outlawed, from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest. (p. 137)

Hester's mind, outlawed by New England society, existed in *nepantla.*

Just as Hester could not reveal the minister's deed, which resulted in her becoming labelled and outcast, I could not speak of the effects that my parents' mental illness had upon me. In addition to causing harm to me, revealing the secret would cause them harm. It was better to keep quiet. Consequently, when I went to school, I dropped the Scarlet Letter of identity as the conception of mentally ill parents at the threshold of my childhood home. Just as Quasimodo's disfigurement drew down society's harsh judgment from miles away, so too I would not be able to escape the stigma of society. Nor would I get a chance to explain that my parents possessed an internal goodness, honesty, and intellectual abilities that far surpassed those who sat in judgment. When I entered my high school, I left my markings at the door of my house. As long as I kept my secret and continued to dress and behave like everyone else, I was able to experience a day such as Hester Prynne did in the forest when she let her hair down, and for a brief moment felt:

> The stigma gone, Hester heaved a long, deep sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom! (Hawthorne, 1850/1994, p. 139)

Freire (1969/2008) posits that the human person is inherently reflective and consequently critical. "They apprehend the objective data of their realty … through

reflection—not by reflex, as do animals" (p. 3). The practice of teacher education has increasingly become aware of the importance of the use of reflection, especially critical reflection, and inquiry to develop highly effective teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019; Nieto, 2000; Stronge, 2007; Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). *Currere* is one way to begin the process of asking, questioning, and reflecting, which is essential to teacher quality. *Currere* can be a beginning that leads to freedom.

The freedom I experienced in school was conditional. I was free in school **if** I kept silent about my parents' struggles. To feel free in school despite familial differences, cultural differences, language differences, ability differences, gender differences, and the new differences to be discovered in the future would be true, societal progress. It would be the embodiment of one of the tenets of Dewey's Pedagogic Creed. "The only true education comes through the simulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself" (Dewey, 1897/2017, p. 33).

Conclusion

In high school, I would not have had the reflective ability to discern my identification with my heroine, Hester Prynne, nor to my hero, Quasimodo. Although the connection was hidden to me at the time, the identification with Hester caused me to think deeply about *The Scarlet Letter.* I enjoyed the book and read it with great interest. The connection afforded me the opportunity to engage in the literary style of Hawthorne. My vocabulary was enriched. Unbeknownst to me, my learning experienced a richness because of connection.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame ends with Quasimodo giving up the remaining years of his life in order to hold the dead body of Esmeralda, until he too becomes a skeleton in the same potters' grave. I thought I loved this book because of its soaring description of medieval architecture. Looking back, I see that I considered myself tethered to the fragile lives of my parents. I fully expected my schizophrenic, energetic mother to live to be 93 years old, as most of her relatives did. I expected to tie my life to hers and to expend myself in her (and my father's) care; keeping them safe from the effects of their illness, until they passed away. In acquiescence, in unspoken consent, I planned to sacrifice myself to keep them safe in life.

This is not what happened. My mother suddenly died in 2012. She fell out of a window and died. My universe changed in one day. I was no longer chained to and orbiting around the life of my mother. I was catapulted free into a new orbit. My entire life view shifted and changed. My father passed away in 2017. My loyalty to them, as I expressed in remaining silent, could end. The exercise of *currere*, although difficult, leads to a freeing disruption of the hidden messages from the past and leads to a burgeoning of consciousness. I feel a new sense of freedom.

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Endnotes

[1]The proper names in this regressive anecdote have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved.

PRE*CAR*I*OUS*NESS

the last four Augusts and three Januaries

The student explains to me
Matter-of-factly
With the cadence of someone
Who BELIEVES
    (And with the *satisfaction* of someone
    Who has *earned* his place)
Who feels he has *merit*
That equality is here
That *privilege* is a PAST concern
And that
    Because of affirmative action
    Because of the Fair Housing

That
Now we are all *equal*
    mentioning RACISM and SEXISM and CLASSISM and
    serves to divide us and create
    over-sensitivities
        (microAGGRESSIONs are made up & *institutions* can't DISCRIMINATE)

    And discussing EQUITY undermines our (his) *inherent worth* as HUMANs—

It's just August.
It's just August.
It's just August.

While we teeter here
All together
On the EDGE
    Of this *historic* MOMENT
With
    our PASTs
    our PRESENTs
    our FUTURE HOPEs

By Sarrah J. Grubb
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Best Practices in Language Instruction: For Whom Are They Best?

By Jennie Daniels
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Language teaching has the potential to be transformative. As part of a liberal arts education, many language professors believe the foreign language classroom is central to producing well-informed, thoughtful global citizens. Global meets local daily, as students move beyond their campuses and dorms to explore the world beyond and their place within it. Because I hope to elicit critical engagement with other cultures as a foundation for understanding our common humanity and acting in solidarity with them and since language is embedded in and shapes worldview, I integrate literature, film, and news media into my department's language curriculum. Still, I find that using authentic cultural materials sometimes has the opposite effect of my intention, and many non-Latinx students either exoticize what they perceive as Other or double down on their preexisting stereotypes about Hispanophone cultures. Spanish-speaking societies stand as fascinating—and in some students' minds comparatively backwards—novelties highlighted in the language classroom, despite my best attempts to counteract such myths. Language teaching (and language learning) has the potential to be transformative, but the lower-division language classroom presents challenges that are unique to the university experience. And the lower-division is where students with a language minor spend the majority of their program's coursework.

As the U.S. is regularly shaken by aggressions of white people toward people of color, I am uncomfortably, acutely aware of my role in my students' lives and education. The students I teach come from diverse backgrounds: approximately fifteen percent are international students, about half of my Spanish majors are Heritage Speakers of Spanish, and many in my classes are first-generation college students. As a white, non-Latinx Spanish professor, I find myself in the role of a bridge between cultures, and as the history of conquest and colonization reveals, the liaison often has enabled or reinforced oppression. As the only tenured member of my department, I have significant control over the curriculum. In my attempts to follow expert "best-practice" guidelines while building a program that encourages self-awareness in a global socio-historical context, I swim against the currents of the neoliberal paradigm that prioritizes transaction: students pay for a skill set we provide. However, I believe language faculty must question the underlying assumptions and priorities of our current best practices to ensure that language instructors are not simply acting as recolonizing agents promoting what bell hooks (1994) rightly calls a "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 26). The language curriculum should not reproduce stereotypes or exoticization of other cultures. Rather, it should encourage historical and social self-awareness and promote democratic, anticolonial forms of social life.

I have turned to the *currere* method to reframe for myself the language instructor's position as bridge, liaison, and cultural interpreter, and to consider how we might teach language as embedded in and shaping culture. William F. Pinar (1994) noted that one finds meaningfully coherent themes through a review of one's own biography. Furthermore, he stated, "The biographic past exists presently, complexly contributive to the biographic present" (Pinar, 1994, p. 22). As I sometimes stumble, sometimes climb along my own anti-racist journey, I remember how language learning has been and continues to be transformative in my own life and worldview. Additionally, this

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currere-inspired autobiographical excavation has contributed to my present imagining of a more progressive future. My goal, ultimately, is not only to avoid participating in oppression, but also to actively engage in deconstructing racism and removing barriers to cross-cultural communication in my classroom and, to the extent possible, in the courses taught within my department.

Growing up, I had limited interactions with people of other ethnicities. This led to an underdeveloped understanding of the experiences of people of color and the significance of BIPOC identities in the United States, which I did not realize until I left home to attend college. In my predominantly white, upper middle class, liberal-leaning community, friends did not self-segregate socially by ethnicity in the ways I have since watched my college students do at various institutions. Imposed limits on city growth in my hometown had led to relatively high housing prices, so Southern Oregon townships segregated us in a seemingly "natural" way: by socio-economic status. As a child, I was aware that two nearby towns housed Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant communities, but I had little direct contact with them. Based on snippets of adult conversations, I wrongly assumed that the people in those communities, all of them, worked in agriculture. To me, this produced vague images of low-income, brown, seasonal farm workers but did not cause me to reflect on my own whiteness. During my first year of college in San Diego, California, I also realized I was essentially colorblind in a way many of my peers, family, and nation were not. Hearing friends refer to another friend as Asian and my mom try to remember my black friend's name startled me into the recognition that they were, in fact, Asian and Black. During each conversation, I had to scroll mentally through a list of (mostly white) friends, visualizing each in turn, to figure out who was being talked about. "Colorblind" was considered a positive adjective in the late 1990s, but I mostly felt surprise mingled with a slight sense of horror after these conversations. How could I, I wondered, have failed to notice the visible physical attributes of my friends? How could I, an introspective, observant person, have overlooked a central aspect of their identity? Surely their ethnicity affected them daily, I thought, if people used it to identify them. Rather than celebrate my colorblindness, I began to pay closer attention to how people talked about race, ethnicity, and social class.

As I continue to use Pinar's method to reflect on my experiences, I wonder how I could have arrived in college proficient enough in Spanish to begin in upper-division literature and history courses (taught in Spanish), while at the same time having such a poorly developed consciousness of race and ethnicity. Looking back, I believe the lack of diversity in my schools and a language-centered curriculum contributed to my learning Spanish, a language strongly racially coded in the United States, without associating ethnicity and language. The public elementary schools in my hometown offered either Spanish or French, so I began learning Spanish in the second grade and continued, with the exception of seventh and eighth grade, through high school. While my memory may be faulty, I only remember learning language that was pertinent to my life (colors, numbers, animals, rooms of the house, etc.). I never had a native Spanish speaker as a teacher, and high school courses focused on accurate tense usage. Early on, my love of math, which I saw playing out in the patterns and creativity of language structures, motivated my love of languages.

Trips abroad during high school did little to challenge my understanding of language as transactional. However, spring break mission trips with my church to a Mexican orphanage did give me another reason to learn Spanish: speaking with people. Playing with the kids was fun and learning to mix cement was novel, but I was most interested in talking with residents my own age. In between trips, I frequently exchanged

letters with a Mexican friend, and my church leaders allowed me to attend school with her during our last year of high school. Language was a lens into my friend's life experiences and opportunities, so different from my own. Without a framework for understanding culture as anything beyond food, dress, and dance, and seeing that across the international border we ate and dressed similarly, I failed to understand language as anything more than a medium for conversation. Its connections to broader worldviews (i.e., cultures), the white savior complex that motivated my participation in these trips, and the problematic international economics of U.S.-Mexico border orphanages were beyond anything I could fathom at the time.

I have since learned that effective cross-cultural communication must take into account the trifecta of history, language, and ethnicity. Even more significantly, effective communication takes the relationship between interlocutors into account, including their historic power relations. Raymond Williams (1997) explained,

> The complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions—traditions, institutions, and formations—but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements. (p. 197)

Culture is not static, but instead shifts, responds to, and engages hegemonic forces. How we understand, or misunderstand, other cultures is directly related to our ability to engage with communities different than our own, whether on an individual basis or within and between societies. Language is one expression of culture and an equally dynamic component of communication. However, the neoliberal model of education yearns to equate communication and language and to reify them as entities independent from ideology.

My above analysis of how I arrived at college "colorblind" and what I would call "cultureblind" yet conversant in Spanish demonstrates a common misunderstanding about the inseparability of culture and communication and the divergence between communication and language. Failing to understand what culture was, I mistakenly assumed that my Mexican friends and I thought alike, reasoned the same way, and had similar assumptions about the world (to my peril, which played out in sometimes comical and sometimes uncomfortable ways). Several years ago, I heard a metaphorical phrase that has stuck with me and helps me to be more self-aware than I was then: "if I speak with an accent, I also think with an accent." In other words, if I hear or produce speech that sounds different than the speech of those around me, I should pay attention because the other speaker(s) and I likely understand and experience the world differently as well. Though language instructors, including myself, tend to discuss language and culture as mutually embedded, my experiences show otherwise: one may learn how to speak without learning how to communicate. Rather, culture and *communication* are mutually embedded, but communication can break down even when *language* is correctly expressed and mechanically understood. Even as faculty and organizations elevate the Communicative Method of language teaching, the structure of language learning means that teaching primarily in the target language and privileging student language production at the lower-division level may result more in transactional language than in real cross-cultural communicative competency.

Reflecting on classroom examples of the interconnectedness between culture (or worldview) and communication (beyond language) aids my thoughts on how to improve my instruction. After my undergraduate college experience, I spent a short stint in social work before earning an M.A. in Latin American Studies with a concentration

in Sociology and a Ph.D. in Literature and teaching beginning Spanish through upper-division courses at a small liberal arts college in the U.S. Mountain West. Since my specialty is Southern Cone post-dictatorship literature and film, my courses emphasize how cultural production reconstructs historical memory to give it new meanings or to reinforce past ideas and how discourse shapes inclusion and exclusion in the national identity. In seminar discussions, conducted in Spanish, I occasionally, but regularly, witness complete language breakdown as students attempt to make sense of their own worldviews in light of new ideas. One of the most memorable moments in which this occurred was late in the semester during a pre-tenure observation by a senior faculty member. The senior faculty member not only saw the student's outburst, but later emphasized the significance of such teaching moments, which has kept the moment at the forefront of my teaching memories. As students and I discussed how Latin American detective fiction reveals political and social institutions as complicit in producing crime and injustice, a high-achieving student grappled with what this means for economically and/or socially marginalized people. She jumped into the discussion in Spanish, stuttered for a moment, and then burst out in English, "I can't think of how to say this in English or Spanish!" She was struggling with concepts beyond her ability to express in either language. For her, as for a younger me, language had been a transaction, an equation. In that moment, language was insufficient as a medium for the expression of worldview (i.e., culture), and when the student attempted to explain the collision that she sensed between her own understanding of society and several authors' shared worldview, she needed a new "language" in both English and Spanish. Market- and self-oriented language-as-tool, though applicable in some settings, failed when the transformative capacity of culturally informed communication was necessary.

Moments in the classroom like that one make me proud, and I start to feel that I have achieved that lofty goal of excellent teaching. My students do regularly reach moments of higher-order thought beyond what language can express. But unfortunately, I have also heard graduating students who have experienced similar moments of self- and social awareness, that over time might have become transformative and potentially helped to produce a more inclusive, antiracist, globally conscious citizenry, express sentiments entirely to the contrary. They, like me, are living through a learning process, with strong social currents challenging incipient antiracism and anticolonialism. Deep learning does not take place in one class session or even in a whole course. True communication requires each person to recognize the equal humanity and inherent value of the other speaker, which is rarely fully achieved in a lifetime. Excellent teaching, then, for me, is that which points students to this path and encourages them to walk along it. This realization provokes my reflection on where our society is and where to go from here in the language curriculum.

Language is inherently social, fundamentally communal. The language classroom at best approximates the interactive aspects of intercultural communication and lays the foundation for a more truly democratic, cross-cultural solidarity. The conundrum of the language classroom is twofold: best teaching practices include teaching in the target language, and student learning expectations are to acquire the skill of written and spoken language. Regarding the latter, my students generally say they are interested in learning Spanish both to become stronger job applicants and to be able to communicate more effectively with Spanish speakers in the future. In pursuing the Spanish minor or major, many express the earnest desire to relate more authentically to people of other cultures through their language. This is a worthy goal, and I find it more motivating as a teacher than when students simply express the market-oriented objective. Still, I have come to realize that few students approach the language classroom to gain a broader

understanding of the world or their place in it. Rather, as with many of their courses, learning a new language is a tool for personal growth, use, and enjoyment: *I* need job skills that will make *me* more marketable, and/or languages will allow *me* to help other communities (undergirded by the belief that, as the college graduate, I will be the expert in my field and, therefore, well-positioned to define how this help is to be given and received). Simplified travel is an added bonus. An effective language curriculum must counterbalance this skills-oriented approach that centers the "I" and reestablish language as a living, breathing, communal essence.

The conception of education as a product that students (and their parents) can purchase contributes to the individualization of the potential social good acquired through language learning. Built into the twofold challenge of the language classroom is the underlying assumption that the goal of language instruction is linguistic proficiency. On the surface, this seems entirely reasonable, but ultimately it individualizes what is inherently communal. The neoliberal model of education encourages students to prioritize specific career paths, rather than their formation as an educated citizenry. Julie Wilson's (2018) *Neoliberalism* lays bare the shift in ideology that has reduced the neoliberal citizen to little more than the labor he or she performs, thus, necessitating a skills-based education and proficiency-oriented expectations for language programs. "Neoliberal individuals are selves who think of and relate to themselves as an investment, that is, as subjects who are constantly working to *appreciate* the self and its value over time" (p. 65, emphasis in original). According to this model, a Spanish minor student should graduate speaking and reading Spanish, ready to put those skills to use in the market for the creation of surplus value. However, the neoliberal model of education conflicts with a liberal arts education, which is grounded in enlightenment ideals that treat humans as agents in the development of history. The mission of the college in which I teach is to "[prepare] students to lead productive and fulfilling lives" (College of Idaho, 2021, n.p.), far beyond mere skill mastery or career training. Still, the hegemony of neoliberal thought means students, parents, administrators, and even faculty often understand "fulfilling lives" reductively, as the ability to work in a career they enjoy. For this reason, the longer I teach, the more I question for whom are the best teaching practices actually best? If, as Talbert (2019) rightly argued, "Education is, fundamentally, a project of enacting particular values in/through a given sociocultural context" (para. 3), what values do I enact in my language classroom when I follow current "best" teaching practices?

Best practices in language teaching encourage a "flipped" classroom model and teaching at least 90% of the time in the target language, which maximizes opportunities for students to increase proficiency (and, thus, necessarily minimizes opportunities for deeper intercultural understanding). The problem facing the language classroom is that an emphasis on language proficiency requires a trade-off between proficiency and early, in-depth cultural study that continues throughout the program. Though current best practices include an emphasis on culture, beginning students are linguistically incapable of meaningfully exploring cultural issues in the target language. It should not come as any surprise, then, that many students complete the minor program with reinforced stereotypes about communities that speak the target language, no matter how culturally sensitive the instructor and the curriculum may be.

Additionally, the outcomes and Can-Do statements of major organizations (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Interagency Language Roundtable) demonstrate novice and intermediate language production as heavily centered on the learner and his or her immediate environment, where advanced language users expand

their linguistic circle to the larger social or global community. These descriptions are not inaccurate, given the current best practice of teaching primarily in the target language. The first-year classroom in particular focuses on the students' own limited, first-person experiences and presents target language texts and videos within the restricted linguistic range of the students. Over my 15 years as a college Spanish instructor, I have regularly taught upper-division classes that delve deeply into socio-historical dynamics of power relations in Latin American societies and between the U.S. and Latin American countries. At the same time, at a small liberal arts college, I also teach lower-division language courses that emphasize the students' ability to communicate and understand in basic situations: college and family life (daily schedules, personal descriptions, location, preferences), travel (food, clothing, shopping), etc. I often attempt to patch the first- and second-year language curriculum with English-language homework, including thought-provoking material and antiracist linguistic studies, while lamenting the superficiality of elementary language learning that reinforces a self-focused approach. By filling in the gaps, I hope to encourage an understanding of the object of study as spoken by people of equal worth and similar subjective experiences, and to refute a simplistic understanding of other cultures. Conducting class in the target language, however, confounds the basic language instructor's ability to structure classroom time in such a way as to encourage transformative moments of self-awareness throughout the program, so important for developing an understanding of other people and communities.

Again, I return to my question of for whom this practice is best. It is certainly the most practical and expedient response to a transactional model of education. However, we often sacrifice in-depth socio-historical and cultural content early in the program to be able to discuss more advanced ideas in the target language in later upper-division courses. Through the early focus on basic language (and, therefore, very basic cultural elements), language minors, who vastly outnumber the majors, miss the majority of those transformative experiences that in-depth cultural exploration can instigate. Although I do believe students with a minor in a specific language should graduate with a certain degree of proficiency and practical use of that language, realistically, the transformative potential of learning to communicate across cultures (mine *with* yours and vice versa) begins in earnest in intermediate courses, often the highest courses of the Spanish minor, immediately prior to the students' graduation. By the time students are just beginning to be able to grapple linguistically with significant issues in the classroom, we send them off, degree in hand, to believe they have completed the transaction and are done. Complete. Competent.

As I reach this stage of my analytical reflection, I am obliged to conclude, at the risk of professional ostracism, that the "best practice" of teaching primarily in the target language primarily benefits those students who are already privileged within contemporary paradigms and reinforces the hegemony of the previously mentioned white supremacist neoliberal, transnational capitalism. An approach to language learning that centers the self and encourages a belief in communicative competence upon graduation is unlikely to increase the prominence and reach of Spanish-speaking voices in the U.S. and abroad. In fact, it runs the risk of producing generations of English-speaking foreign language learners who have an institutional stamp on their ability to speak for, about, and to (but often lacking the ability to speak *with*) people from other linguistic communities.

Acknowledging, then, how far I have to go as a language instructor, how can we allow the teaching of *communication* to strategically sweep our classrooms? I resist talk of "harnessing" its transformative power because learning is a force beyond the instructor's or the student's control. The easy way out would be to develop a new check list of best teaching practices and curricular suggestions, but this assumes, like our

current neoliberal educational model, that institutions can control and measure student progress and ensure certain skills can be mastered prior to graduation. However, I refuse, to the extent possible, to be or to teach my students to be interpreters for a neo-imperial project. Though we can check the boxes of linguistic transactions, antiracism is not a skill. Decolonization is not a one-and-done process. I might tally the medical or legal vocabulary my students can use appropriately in context, but it is difficult to measure mastery of listening to a person when their health or freedom is at stake, especially if doing so might cost me something. My reflection on my own transformation through learning, not language, but *cross-cultural communication* leads me to conclude first that we must identify our core values and ascertain where our values align with the values of anticolonialism and antiracism, as well as our institution's stated mission and our students' learning needs. Only afterward should we consider our classrooms and then with the mindset of deconstructing our underlying assumptions surrounding best practices and curriculum. We should ask ourselves for whom are these practices best? Do language learners and the native speakers with whom they will interact all benefit? And beyond benefits, what end do they serve (e.g., language learners' value in the workplace, equity between English speakers and speakers of other languages, the ability of U.S. Americans to conduct business abroad, etc.)? In what ways do those underlying assumptions promote and/or undermine my values? My institution's stated values? My students', community's, and society's needs?

A shift in thinking may require certain pedagogical trade-offs at the lower-division level between language acquisition and cultural study, which then would affect student language proficiency in upper-division courses. But, perhaps, even as students graduate, begin careers, and forget their verb tenses, the moments of cultural awareness would continue to spark transformative experiences and interactions. Perhaps their ability to communicate would improve, despite relatively smaller gains in language proficiency.

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Beyond Presence: The Importance of Being Seen

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As an educator, I believe that much more than content area learning takes place in a classroom. We build a community in which students learn to question, engage with others, explore new ideas, speak for themselves, consider their values, and connect with people and ideas that move them. I have always encouraged my students to be themselves and tried to build a community in which it is acceptable, even encouraged, to question the norm, to wonder *what if*, or to disagree. I want my students to advocate for themselves, to push themselves through uncomfortable thoughts, and to take intellectual risks. This is especially important to me as a teacher of English language learners because if they feel afraid or unwelcome and avoid these risks their engagement will be limited. Their voices will not be heard, and it will also deprive others of the opportunity to learn from them. As I do this, I realize that I too can struggle with these same notions when I am a newcomer to a group. Yet I persist. What has made building community a cornerstone of my pedagogy?

Pinar (2011) advocated for a search within the self, challenging us to examine our lived curriculum in order to gain insight or transformation. He calls this *currere*. According to Pinar (2011), *currere* "provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (p. 44). Utilizing *currere* has enabled me to deliberate on my own praxis.

Invisibility

Sophomore year. Sitting in homeroom, I slid my finger under the flap of the yellow envelope and dislodged my first quarter report card. Glaring at me from the page was a boldfaced letter **F** in World History. I felt the world stop. After a quick check to be certain that I had received the correct envelope—yes, my name was typed at the top of the report card—only the **F** remained visible. I felt as if I were drowning—the world went blurry and silent. My thoughts raced. *How could this be? I thought I was a good student ... I always sat quietly and respectfully, even as Mr. Kraft droned on about William the Conqueror. I completed my homework on time. I generally performed well on tests.* While the currents of my mind churned through possibilities, emotions swirled: shame, fear, confusion, self-doubt. I didn't know how to explain this to my parents. I didn't know what this meant for my future. My chest tightened, and I stifled a cry.

My parents were disappointed, and they questioned what had happened. When I had no answers, they demanded to see my notebook so we could work through the problems together. I stared at the still crisp corners of the red folder and began to pull papers from the pockets: B+ on a unit test, A's on weekly writing assignments, checkmarks indicating satisfactory homework completion. It didn't make sense. My parents said that I needed to take my notebook to my teacher and figure out what was missing. The tightness in my chest moved to a burning in my stomach. Confrontation is not in my nature. I didn't think it was my place to question a teacher; rather my duty was to follow directions and learn from him. However, if I were going to correct this problem, I needed to know what I was doing wrong.

The next day I stayed after class to talk with Mr. Kraft. He showed me my grades, scrawled across the pages in his black gradebook and pronounced my work

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"unsatisfactory." I mustered the courage to say that I thought I had done better. The work in my folder showed good grades, not the string of zeros in his book. He harrumphed and glared at me over the black rims of his glasses while I handed him my work. As he compared the contents of my folder to the work in his gradebook, his brow furrowed. "Where did you get this?" he scoffed. "We will talk more about this tomorrow." He took my folder and dismissed me. He accused me of cheating, of putting my name on someone else's work. It was devastating. My mother came to school the next day to meet with him. The guidance counselor got involved. To make a long story short, he didn't know my name. After nine weeks in his classroom, my quiet respectfulness had hidden me rather than led to acknowledgement. He had confused me with another student and recorded her grades in the row of the ledger marked "Jennifer."

At the time, I reacted with relief. The mistake was corrected, and I was assured that I was a "good student." This is now one of the only school memories from high school that sticks with me. As Pinar (2011) stated, "Always academic, curriculum is also subjective and social" (p. 43). I don't remember any content from Mr. Kraft's class, but what remains with me is how I felt—about school and about myself. Those few days invested in correcting a teacher's error were a critical moment in which I learned that it is important to be seen, heard, and known.

Vision

As a teacher who works primarily with international students, relationships and community are particularly important to me. My classroom is one of the first introductions my students have to American culture and the American university experience. I want their experience to be a positive one, one in which they feel validated, welcomed, and confident that they have made the correct decision. Without relationships, this cannot happen.

International students cope with many of the traditional first-year student concerns—homesickness, loneliness, anxiety about grades—but they experience it all in a new language and a new culture. This can be intimidating. In particular, the political climate has affected their sense of Otherness. In the past five years, they have faced so-called "Muslim bans" and chants of "Build the wall!" They have been subjected to consternation and suspicion resulting from political accusations of election interference and conspiracy theories about the origin of the coronavirus. Yet, they persist. It's hard to imagine the future in the midst of a global pandemic and strained political relationships between the U.S. and many of their home countries. However, for international students who continue their study abroad experiences, I envision them becoming an integral part of the campus culture.

We must create an inclusive campus community in which we honor difference while we collaborate to construct knowledge and build understanding. Although familiarity with the English language factors significantly in international students' experiences, relevance of study and a sense of belonging also affect their engagement and empowerment (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014). Classrooms and campuses must establish trust in order to nurture an inclusive environment where all students feel validated and, as Amy Lee (2017) wrote, "have better opportunities to learn in ways that reflect, utilize, and value who they are" (p. 16).

I envision a campus in which international students are recognized as assets to the community whose knowledge and experience are deemed integral to the educational experience. I imagine communities of diverse learners collaborating to build shared understanding and produce new knowledge through inquiry and critical reflection. It is not sufficient to integrate these students into the current structure of the university.

We should work to transform higher education in order to grant them full inclusion and the freedom to be themselves, thereby, progressing toward a truly internationalized education and global society. This is a lofty goal and not one that can be achieved quickly or individually, so I must consider how I can contribute to progress toward this ideal. I want culturally and linguistically diverse students to learn as well as share, to enrich our community with their knowledge and experiences, to build relationships across cultures and lead to improved understanding of humanity. By knowing, we will be less isolated. By communicating, we can understand and bridge differences.

Insight

As Dewey (1938/2015) wrote, "education is a development within, by, and for experience" (p. 28). What a person learns in any given situation helps one understand other experiences in a variety of ways. Each moment can inspire or restrict actions, reinforce or alter expectations, motivate or confuse decisions, and encourage or discourage engagement. My experience with Mr. Kraft contributed as much to my pedagogy as any of the teacher preparation courses I took in college.

As I revisit my 16-year-old self who had been accused of cheating by a history teacher who did not know her name, I remember the overwhelming emotions. At first, I felt confused because I assumed that the teacher was correct. I didn't understand how I had done so poorly when my past efforts in school had always been successful. It filled me with self-doubt. Because I trusted the institution more than I trusted myself, I was afraid to question my teacher. Upon reflection, I feel ashamed that I allowed the situation to cause me to doubt myself, and I feel angry that everyone (including myself) thought I must have been the one who made a mistake. Of course, teachers are fallible—just like all humans—but this was a significant error. To not know a student's name after nine weeks? To mis-record numerous grades by the wrong name? This moment gave me the resolve to ensure that my students would never feel so invisible or powerless.

Inclusion means more than being present in a space; it means contributing as a valued member. I work to combat the perceptions of students as "receivers" of knowledge. I want their learning to be personally meaningful and useful. I want my students to be active learners who take part in designing the curriculum, who have autonomy to design projects and choose supporting resources that are relevant to their goals and ambitions. As Lee (2017) explained, "an intercultural classroom must actively invite and productively engage multiple perspectives and ways of seeing" (p. 102). These are my intentions as I work toward my vision of an inclusive campus. Although my contributions may be small, they can be meaningful. To build an inclusive classroom, my focus is developing community: community in the classroom, imagined community, and communities of practice.

Classroom community depends on the establishment of trust and respect. I remember how it felt to be mischaracterized as a cheater because I was truly unknown, so I work diligently to build relationships with my students. I begin by learning each student's name and its correct pronunciation. I also seek opportunities to learn about their interests, backgrounds, hobbies, goals, and ideas, and I work to include those in the class activities. This contributes to a sense of belonging, and belonging is foundational to the human experience. Furthermore, for international students, a sense of belonging has been found to improve confidence and increase interaction and performance in the classroom (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014). I want students to feel comfortable asking questions, so I model curiosity, and when I do not know something, I admit it, and we seek the answers together. Students also need to build relationships with one another, so I incorporate group work into class activities. This environment, in which teachers and

students support each other and collaborate as contributors to knowledge construction, is central to my practice.

In the literature related to second language learning, one often reads about "imagined community" (Norton, 2013). This means that students are able to envision themselves actively engaging with others using the target language. Being able to see oneself this way contributes to their investment in language learning, and it can also be influential to their academic achievement. My international students often discuss making American friends as one of their primary goals, even before they define their professional aspirations. I seek ways to relate our classes to this goal by building intercultural relationships so that they can bridge from an imagined community to an achieved community. For several years, I have fostered intercultural collaborations by pairing my ESL classes with teacher education classes. These intercultural groups collaborate on several academic assignments together and then extend their relationships through cultural and social experiences such as international festivals, community dinners, bowling, and ropes challenge courses. These experiences provide opportunities to learn about different cultures and to build friendships by discovering similar interests. These relationships benefit everyone involved. The teacher education students often gain a better understanding of the challenges students face when studying in a new culture and language, and they feel better prepared to consider diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences in their lesson planning. The international students most often reflect on the collaborations as a way to build friendships with people they probably would not have otherwise met on campus. They enjoy learning about the culture, getting advice from their partners about campus life, and conversing about topics including academic classes, movies, music, sports, and even politics or religion. These activities expand communities across campus.

Another aspect of language learning is developing a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, as cited in Block, 2007, p. 865). Many international students are placed in English as a Second Language courses in order to help them develop language-specific skills. But, I think it is important to consider who their community of practice is. Is it only other language learners? Only the instructor? Increased interactions with varied audiences can help students further develop language skills and build confidence. Therefore, I have also sought to widen my students' community of practice. My students have written reviews of local restaurants that were distributed to the next cohort of students in their programs. They have published blogs documenting their first-year experiences. Most recently, I have invited faculty and students from other university divisions to hear student presentations of narratives about indelible moments in their lives. Sharing their stories and ideas increases the international students' visibility on campus and provides insight into their experiences for others in the university environment.

When students are invisible in the classroom, they feel powerless. In my history class, I let the teacher define me—or rather, erase me—through his actions. It negated my responsibility and agency. It is essential for each person to develop their talents in order to be active participants. It is my hope that my classroom community provides students with self-confidence to pursue their goals, to make their voices heard, and to contribute to the global society.

Perspective

Currere has provided me the opportunity to demystify my relationship with my students, my devotion to community in the classroom, and my belief that everyone has something to learn as well as something to teach. Through looking inward, I understand how these beliefs can be traced to a critical moment in my high school education. My

journey, although significantly different from those of my students, resonates like the ripples from a stone thrown into a pond. The past influences the present in complicated ways, as does the future. Remembering my own educational experiences helps me to be the teacher I wanted or needed in my school years in the hopes that I can meet those needs for my students.

Yet, as I look around the college campus, I realize how great the distance is between my vision and the current situation. Although the presence of international students is obvious, they often remain unknown, seen only as a monolithic group rather than being truly included in the campus community. Their voices are largely absent from student government, campus publications, and far too many organizations. This is a disservice to everyone. I must continue to question and reflect. How do my practices promote agency? In what ways is the dominant culture reinforced? In what ways are content, context, and students connected? How can we move toward an environment where everyone contributes?

This pushes me toward culturally relevant pedagogy, viewing my students' differences as assets rather than deficits and building on their strengths, thereby, creating a more inclusive curriculum with them. Through such practices, I will seek academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The intersection of these three realms is the focal point at which students are not only seen but included. It is actionable and participatory. What this necessitates is moving international students out of their silos and integrating them in curriculum and community life. For international students who have chosen to attend school in the U.S., the community aspect is particularly important to their learning experiences as they often have goals to work in international businesses and engage with a global society. One's education cannot be confined to the classroom.

The presence of international students on campus is not enough to create the internationalization of knowledge, skills, values, or practices. This process is restless and dynamic. We must keep advocating for inclusionary practices through which all students become known, building community and contributing powerful voices to the global society.

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The Last Child with a Bird's Nest: An Ecoliteracy *Currere*

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"A bird's nest!" he exclaimed. He was eight, and the word "bird" sounded far more like "boird." He often spoke slowly and carefully, self-conscious of his speech that the other "after school kids" would imitate to mock him. But in his excitement, he had forgotten to be careful.

I looked across the field where they were standing. Their jackets flapped around them even though I advised them earlier to zip them up due to the wind. But I barely noticed because I was fixated on where they were standing. The two second-grade boys had jumped the wooden fence into an area beside one of the buildings, where they knew they were not allowed. Standing in the shade, they leaned over with their brown and red heads touching, a rare moment for these two who were typically in continuous movement. I spied their reason for jumping the fence, a partially-deflated, faded soccer ball (that I could not believe still functioned for its intended purpose) beside their feet. Apparently, they had forgotten it in favor of something more compelling.

I saw the shocks of red and brown hair lower close to the wet, dark mulch. My body tensed, prepared to give a command that would undoubtedly involve some form of negative reprimand. The word "no" and its connotations were so easy for me to utter, far easier than "yes." I had to keep them in line, after all (Schiro, 2013).

"He found a bird's nest!" the redhead called to me with a thrilled gasp. Wide-eyed with a grin across his face, he gestured wildly at what his companion gingerly held in his palms. Sets of blue and brown eyes looked at me imploringly as four grubby hands palmed the perfectly-shaped, empty treasure. There were some dried leaves stuck to it, and they delicately pulled them off. All ten little fingers touched it softly, exploring the indented hole and tiny twigs that formed it. They looked as if they were learning something (Cross, 2011), but I did not stop to ask what.

"PUT THAT *DOWN*!" I shrieked, stepping towards them quickly. *I bet it's filthy* was the first recognizable thought that entered my mind. Germs. Other children were already looking over curiously from where they played. Soon, their hands would be on it too if I did not intervene.

They need to wash their hands immediately! What if they tell their parents I let them play with it?! My anxiety rose with every step I made towards them. *Why can't we just stay inside every day?! They would be so much easier to control!* (Louv, 2008).

The boys moved to put it behind their backs, but it was futile. They had exposed their treasure, and now others were coming to take it away—people who were bigger, more powerful, and seemed to love telling them no. Wistfully, the redhead gently set it down. Before I got all the way to them, they took a final, longing look at the nest, then ran off to a group of their peers.

Many people would agree that I did the right thing. I was an after school program leader in charge of over twenty children who were constantly getting into things outside when the weather permitted. My eyes had to be on all of them, my ears attuned to every noise, my mind aware of potential dangers. The boys were in an area they should not have been in, handling something that could carry disease. My job was to keep order. But there was a time before teaching when I thought and felt so differently.

Hash, P. (2021). The last child with a bird's nest: An ecoliteracy *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 70–72.

As a small child, I lived across from a little park with a creek. My mother would walk with me across the street and let me explore. I remember mud caked in the soles of my tiny shoes and rubbery grass perfect for sitting and losing my tiny cherished toys that I demanded to bring outside. Somehow, these details are far more vivid than anything I did indoors (Louv, 2008). I climbed the magnolia tree by my house so high that I could no longer see the top of my mom's blonde curly head. I don't remember her even telling me to come down. I do not remember learning math, but I remember how magnolia flowers feel to dissect. Once, there was a large stick balanced over the stream, and my mom held my hand as I tried to cross it, then pulled me back right before it broke.

On an especially eventful day, I dropped my favorite Cabbage Patch doll in the creek and watched its peach round head and green eyes bob in the water. I thought it would sink, but it didn't. Its soft body floated far quicker than expected away from me until my mom expertly fished it out with a stick by the hood of its blue coat. I still know that place in my mind, a type of literacy I found through touch and observation, creating a true "merger of landscape and mindscape" (Orr, 1992, p. 86).

I can still hear that stream when I think back on those moments, and I know that if I found a bird's nest when I was young, I could have palmed it with my tiny fingers, studied every side of it with exploratory eyes, and been met with a smile from my mom while I examined it as long as I wanted.

The absent bird that created the nest during my after school job made a memory that nested in my mind. The things that remain with us in education are often what we wish we had done differently, not our triumphs. The metaphorical bird, bright and cheerful, flies away, but the prickly twigs and dirt remain. Why didn't I let them explore? Why didn't I allow for embodied learning (Bowers, 2001)? Why did the scene of two little boys in my care holding something they found make my mind go to the binary of good vs. bad? Why didn't I embrace celebrating and exploring connections (Turner, 2015)? They were so young, so excited, so interested, and before I even looked at what they had found, I told them they needed to get rid of it. What if the bird's nest was the most interesting educational experience they'd had all day or even longer (Louv, 2008)? In some way, we all, as teachers, as organizations, as adults, are contributing to fewer children in the woods. What if that was the last time they ever held a bird's nest, and I caused it? This is not the educator I want to be. I want to "learn to see things differently" (Jucker, 2004, p. 22).

We were outside again the following week when I returned for my Wednesday afternoon supervision. Everything was orderly; everyone was playing in designated areas where I could see them. Scanning around, I saw a brown-haired boy sitting with his redheaded friend on a picnic bench. I should have been delighted that they were speaking at normal decibels, sitting in an approved area, and keeping their hands clean and their jackets zipped. But I also saw how bored they looked. Nothing seemed to be catching their vacant eyes with interest. They had just spent all day inside sitting in classrooms, and now that they had the chance to move around, they did not seem to care.

Slowly so that none of the students would see, I made my way over to the place in the fence where the boys jumped over the week before. My adult arms allowed me to retrieve last week's discarded treasure without climbing. Cradling the found object, I walked over to the boys.

"Look what I have," I said, holding it out to them. The nest was still mostly intact, with some blades of grass stuck to the sides now.

"The bird's nest!" The brown-haired boy said to his friend, with the word "bird" sounding like "boird" again. Both boys' smiles widened as I held it out to them.

"What do you think lived in this?" I asked as their eyes scanned the nest (McConnell et al., 2020).

"What kinds of birds live around here?" the redhead asked.

"Well, I don't know, but I can look it up," I offered.

"Can we touch it?" the brown-haired boy asked hesitantly.

"Sure," I answered, "But you have to wash your hands after." They nodded earnestly as their little fingers began to stroke the nest.

Though I was not their classroom teacher and only saw them once a week, my work with students always involves curriculum, and even small moments that focus on experience and exploration can help break down "the barriers between school and life" (McConnell et al., 2020, p. 66). This is the educator I hope to be.

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One Question – Two Answers: Confidence and My Education

By John A. Andelfinger
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As a practitioner of the *currere* method, I find myself often looking back on past events and wanting them to connect to my more recent experiences. I've caught myself forcing these connections a few times—searching for an elusive through-line bridging the past, the now, and the future. In contrast, there are other moments when I notice a direct, clear link that I would rather avoid. This piece is about one of the connections I accept but would prefer not exist.

I work as a college English professor, and I am working on my Ph.D. in English. However, I began my teaching career as a music teacher. My undergraduate degree is in music education, and I like to joke that when I passed English Composition II, I celebrated that I would never need to be in an English classroom again. Though hyperbolic, there is some truth in that recalled private celebration. I didn't really like English growing up. I was not an avid reader or writer, and I spent most of my time and energy exploring other interests. I was not like Cassidy (2019) who writes, "My expertise has always been school, and it's been grounded specifically in writing for many years, an obvious connection to my present (pre-service) and future as an ELA teacher" (p. 49). I was certainly not a strong writer or reader during my K-12 education, and frankly, I had little interest and confidence in my reading and writing skills.

Something changed during my junior year of college. I found myself interested in reading "the classics" for some reason I can't quite recall, though I wish I could. Something woke up that interest, and as a result, I willingly read a few novels and short stories for the first time in many years. That interest gained momentum, and I kept reading. As a result, literature became an increasingly significant part of my life during my junior and senior years.

I graduated in December of 2006. Winter is a difficult time of the year to find a teaching position, so I worked—as many education majors do—as a substitute teacher for the spring while searching for a full-time position. This let me visit the classrooms of different disciplines, and I began to wonder about the discipline I had selected. I had been playing music since elementary school, and I had invested a lot of time and energy in studying music. Yet in the back of my mind, there was an inkling that I *might have* been wrong, that English was the subject I was supposed to teach.

I decided to ask for advice and thought it would be wise to get some guidance from professionals.

First, because I was substituting from time-to-time in the school district in which I had grown up, I decided to ask one of my previous English teachers. I had been subbing in the district's schools often, so I had the wonderful opportunity to reconnect with several of my previous teachers. I approached this teacher and asked, "Hey, do you, have a minute? I could use some advice."

"Sure thing. What's up?"

"I've been thinking about going back to school and … becoming an English teacher. I love music, as you know, but I really like English, and I've been reading a lot. What do you think?"

"Well, I have to be honest. I don't think you have what it takes. Without studying English previously, I think you'd have a really hard time."

Andelfinger, J. A. (2021). One question - two answers: Confidence and my education. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 73–77.

I like to think that I hid my immense disappointment well, but I doubt I did. The response cut the core. I had known changing subjects would be hard and that I would almost certainly struggle, but I had not considered that I was incapable of studying English. At the time, I thought I had acknowledged and accepted my limitations. I was not great at math and had reaction time that made me pretty miserable at most sports, but I had been reading regularly for three years and genuinely enjoyed it.

"Got it. Thanks for the advice."

"Anytime."

At this point in the recollection, I need to pause. This could have been the end of it. I could have accepted this former teacher's advice and lived out my days as a music teacher. Maybe I'd read a few novels a year for the rest of my life while thoughts of teaching English faded. Afterall, according to one teacher, who had *taught me English*, I did not have what it takes.

But I am profoundly lucky, and I have an uncle who is an English professor. Somehow, I mustered the resilience repeat my question to him a few weeks later.

"Hey, do you, have a minute? I could use some advice."

"Sure thing. What's up?"

"I've been thinking about going back to school and … becoming an English teacher. I love music, as you know, but I really like English, and I've been reading a lot. What do you think?"

"Oh my God, yes! What are you thinking about studying? Literature? Writing?"

"Well, I was thinking about getting another bachelor's degree in English, so mostly literature I guess. I thought that maybe I could get certified to teach English. Then, I could teach music and English."

"You don't need another bachelor's Johnny. Just go for a master's. It'll be fun!"

"I could do that?"

"Yeah! And I think you'll have a blast. Grad school is so much fun."

I paused because the idea of English graduate school had not crossed my mind *quite* yet. I figured I would go back for a BA in English, and based on my former teacher's prediction, I would either fail out or—if I were successful—struggle immensely. How could I go to graduate school for English when I had only taken English general education courses?

"Look John, if you're worried about it, how about this. Have you read *Moby Dick*?"

"No."

"Here's my suggestion. Pick up a copy, read it, and then we'll talk about it. How does that sound? It's one of my favorite novels, and I think you'll like it."

So I did. I went out to Borders books and picked up a copy of *Moby Dick*.

The previous memories are bittersweet for me, but this pairing has continually shaped my pedagogy since that spring. Soon after those conversations, I was hired to teach elementary and middle school music and moved in with my aunt and uncle who lived near my new job—the same uncle mentioned earlier. For that entire first year of full-time teaching, I fell more and more in love with English, and my uncle and I discussed novels and stories often. At the end of the year, I accepted a position teaching music in Philadelphia, which put me close to several schools with English graduate programs. That spring, I enrolled in a master's program, and a few years later, I completed my master's. After graduating, I taught English at several colleges in the

Philadelphia area, and in 2016, I began working on my Ph.D. in English composition and applied linguistics. And just a few days before submitting this piece to the *Currere Exchange Journal* in January of 2021, I accepted my first full-time English professor job, which has me filled with joy, wonder, and excitement.

When I look back on my varied teaching experiences in music and English, which span kindergarten through college courses, I see one clear, unwavering goal that continually shapes my pedagogical decisions and teaching philosophy. I want my students to become more *confident* through their experiences in my classroom. When I taught music, I was most proud of my efforts when students shared a musical composition created in music technology courses or had the courage to perform a solo in a concert. As a writing teacher, I am continually awestruck at the ways in which students share their ideas, thoughts, opinions, and creative pieces in my classroom. These memories are some of the teaching moments I most cherish, and I work hard to cultivate spaces in which these moments can occur.

I used to think that I was a music teacher who taught writing, because music teachers are often quite concerned with student confidence. But in retrospect and through a lens of *currere*, I realize that I have always been trying to answer, for my students, the question I asked years ago—even if students were not asking it. I never want to be the teacher who leaves a student feeling like I did when I was a substitute teacher. Instead, I want my students to leave the classroom with a belief that they can move forward towards whatever goals they have or may someday have.

And on the rare occasion when a student does ask me about changing their major or pursuing a different career path, I think back to the answers I received during the spring of 2007, I think about where I am and where I might have been, and even though I avoid prescribing *Moby Dick*, I tell them that they can achieve their goals, that they can change their mind, and that they have what it takes.

Because I am currently working on my dissertation, which uses the *currere* method, I can't help but consider these two memorable conversations alongside several other important conversations linked to my own identity as a teacher, writer, reader, and person. Those memories are all connected. I think about Neri (2019) questioning film as a material form of regressive memory, who writes, "Were these events recorded because they were critical moments, or were they critical moments simply because they were recorded? The answer, I have come to realize over the years, lies somewhere in between" (p. 44). The dual answers to my question appear to be critical moments in my memory, but I wonder if I asked anyone else for advice. I probably did, but those two answers were committed to memory. And I have a rather difficult time imagining my life with only one of those memories being recorded.

If I only had my uncle's answer in my memory, I may have missed out on the great lesson that accompanied the blow to my confidence. I can't imagine my pedagogy without my preoccupation with confidence, and I think that focus is very much informed by the answer my former teacher provided me.

Had I only asked my teacher and lost the motivation to risk a second defeating response, my entire career and life would be different. Similar to Pinar's (1994) progressive phase, Bruner (2004) explains that "Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's

culture" (p. 694). It is impossible for me to meaningfully imagine what my life would be without studying English. When I consider some of the "possible lives" available without studying English—a subject I truly enjoy teaching and studying—I am not *entirely* unhappy. Currently, I still teach a little music as a private instrument instructor, and I think I could have been fairly content teaching music. I think English may have played a role in my life. Maybe I would be a dedicated member of a book club and enjoy meaningful discussions about novels with good friends, or maybe I would join a continuing education course to learn how to write stories or poems. Other imagined possibilities are far worse because of the great joy and purpose I feel teaching English and the wonderful friends I have made studying and teaching writing. Especially now, at the beginning of a new teaching position and chapter in my career, I cannot imagine doing anything else with my life.

Looking forward, though, I wonder when I'll shake it—that feeling that I do not have what it takes. I still carry that conversation from spring of 2007, and here I am, in 2021, thinking about a teacher's answer, picking it apart, trying to shake it. Cashdan and McCrory (2015) evoke the image of dragging a corpse to describe how familial histories might impact writer identity, and through my ongoing *currere* work, I wonder about how we might *drag* some of our own memories too. As much as I have learned about confidence due to my former teacher's response, it is not a memory I carry with joy. Instead, I carry it with a tinge of regret and self-doubt. In that way, I drag the memory, because it's heavy.

I'm also glad for that weight, because the burden of the memory is part of what makes it memorable. The memory's significance allows it to continually inform my teaching, and I am lucky to be able to hold it beside my uncle's answer too. I like to think that I am living up to my uncle's confidence in me as a person, teacher, and student, and his confidence is one of the things I try to pass on to my own students.

Baszile (2017) writes that, "The only access we have to advocating with/for others is through the self" (p. viii). With this in mind, I realize that continued examination of these answers is one of the ways I can most effectively become a better advocate for my students and combat some of the myriad societal barriers students experience during their education as well as pressures that linger after their in-class experiences end.

That examination forces me to wonder: What might happen to students who don't have someone like my uncle championing their newly discovered interests and goals? What might happen to students who timidly ask some version of "Am I good enough?" only to be met with a response that weakens their hope? Or what might happen to students without connections to multiple teachers and mentors to field these sorts of questions?

As educators, we could—at any moment—have a current or former student approach us for the same sort of advice I sought years ago, and as a result, we have opportunities to help students see their greatest potentials and pursue future endeavors with confidence. Our answers to students' questions about future plans matter immensely, and while we may not know if we are the only person they have asked for advice or if we are one of many people with whom they have shared their dreams, I know that it is an honor to be trusted with these questions and guarantee that our answers have profound consequences.

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Using Narratives to Write and Heal

By Jennifer Lynne Bird
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I love full circle moments. Therefore, it seems appropriate that I submit this article to the journal co-edited by Tom Poetter and Denise Baszile, who also served as two of the members of my doctoral dissertation committee at Miami University when this journey began for me. In the years since I wrote my dissertation focusing on the topic of using writing to help me heal after my mom's death, my writing-as-healing odyssey expanded to include using writing to help high school and college students, physical therapy patients, church congregation members, and readers of my writing who need hope during the current pandemic times.

Act I: Writing to Help Myself Heal

My journal saved my life. Of course, I feel gratitude for the other resources, such as family, friends, therapy, and medication, that helped me find light during the dark moments after my mom's sudden death. Nevertheless, the moments when I frequently processed my emotions occurred when my pen scribbled thoughts in my notebook or my fingers flew over the keyboard of my computer. My dissertation committee continued to give me the opportunity to explore this topic. As my dissertation chair, Tom Poetter supported my innovative idea; Denise Baszile gave me additional motivation by telling me to just write.

I became a participant observer in my own research study; interviewing other teachers at Miami University's Ohio Writing Project took me away from my own grief, while writing gave me the opportunity to deal with my feelings. Grief researcher Edelman (2020), who also experienced the death of her mother, articulates how I felt when she writes, "organizing disordered thoughts into a coherent, manageable account is what helps us make sense of a crisis and fit it into a larger system of personal meaning" (p. 142). I used writing to shape my narrative of loss and try to find meaning in it. It felt difficult because I didn't know at the time that sudden loss often doesn't fit into a coherent narrative. Edelman explains, "a sudden loss offers no opportunity for a logical progression of cause-and-effect relationships that lead to an inevitable conclusion" (p. 175). Essentially, I tried to find connections during the day of my mom's death where none existed and eventually realized that nothing I did or didn't do on that day made a difference in the outcome.

Despite my inability to discover connections in the narrative of my mom's life, I developed connections in my writing and research. I discovered the qualitative interpretive field of narrative inquiry and used it to explain how writing helped me during this difficult time in my life. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that "one of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher's own narrative experience, the researcher's autobiography" (p. 70). They elaborate that, when conducting a narrative inquiry, researchers "make themselves as aware as possible of the many, layered narratives at work in their inquiry space. They imagine narrative intersections, and they anticipate possible narrative threads emerging" (p. 70). I love narrative inquiry because when telling the stories of others, I also tell my own story. My story matters. My voice matters. I can immerse myself in the narrative threads emerging without becoming a detached researcher. The first person "I" in my "I am" statements means something.

Bird, J. L. (2021). Using narratives to write and heal. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 78–86.

I learned that writing from a place of pain caused me to have no energy to censor my writing voice, which became a good thing. Tom Romano, another Miami professor and member of my dissertation committee, introduced me to the concept of writing voice. Romano (2004) believes that "our voices are shaped by the places where we learned language—in our parents' arms, at our school desks, in the neighborhood, on playgrounds and streets" (p. 6). Building on Romano's observation, I believe that our voices also become shaped by our experiences. I wish I had never experienced the tragic and untimely death of someone I loved, but because I did, I want to use my experiences to help others.

I didn't realize at the time that not everyone turns their tragedies into life lessons to make a difference in the lives of other people. Duckworth (2016) calls this concept grit and states, "the hope that gritty people have has nothing to do with luck and everything to do with getting up again" (p. 169). Sometimes getting up in the morning seemed like an accomplishment, but my cat Lucy needed food, I needed food, and I actually looked forward to getting back to banging out words on my computer, especially in the middle of the night after I had already vented to friends, family, and my therapist. Remembering that time in my life, I wonder if I became too focused on making something good happen in my life after my mom's death. Lamott (1994) writes, "there is still something to be said for painting portraits of the people we have loved, for trying to express those moments that seem so inexpressibly beautiful, the ones that change us and deepen us" (p. 192). I wanted to write about my mom so that I didn't forget the little moments in our life together. Her death did not define her life story. The narrative of my dissertation intertwined my mom's story, my story, and the stories of my research participants, much like the tight braid of a rope I was clinging to in order to keep me from sinking into a dark depression. Revising my writing led me to revise my life. Fallon (2020) believes, "where we get unstuck in our writing, we get unstuck in our lives" (p. 34). I also didn't realize at the time how my research about writing-as-healing would lead to finding my purpose in life.

Act II: Writing to Help Patients

After I moved from Ohio to Florida and accepted a position teaching current and future teachers at Florida Atlantic University, my writing-as-healing exploration became pushed aside in favor of the practical issues of beginning my university career, teaching classes, and attending committee meetings. My failure to focus on self-care resulted in throwing heavy bags of books on my shoulders, injuring my neck, and going to physical therapy. My pain levels seemed to change based on the day and my activities, so I recorded my symptoms in my journal. After my mom's death, my dad and I found a yellow legal pad where she had listed her symptoms. My family will never know what would have happened if she had showed her notes to her doctor, but when confronted with my own medical issue, I decided to take the risk and share my journal with my physical therapist.

Writers take a risk when sharing their writing with other people. Cameron (1998) shares,

> the very vulnerability required to be open and creative is a vulnerability that puts our creativity at risk. For this reason, meticulous care must be taken to find "safe" readers and people who can be our "before, during, and after" friends to our work. (p. 181)

Writing, especially narrative writing, provides the reader with a glimpse into the writer's personal life. Safe readers can validate the writer's experience and provide encouragement. Vulnerability does not happen easily for me. Sociologist Brown (2017) explains, "the definition of vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. But vulnerability is not weakness: it is our most accurate measure of courage" (p. 154). I like Brown's definition that vulnerability represents courage. If I wanted to feel better, I needed to share my pain narrative with my physical therapist and trust him with my story.

Compassionate clinicians make a difference. My physical therapist, Dr. Eric Wanner, chose to read my journal, said he liked my idea, and used my notes to adjust his treatment plan to help me heal from my neck pain. Not only did he appreciate my pain narrative, he added interpretation of it as part of the contributing factors to my neck pain. On the last day of my physical therapy treatment, Eric wondered if my writing idea could help other patients. We decided to work together to design a research study. I consulted with Tom Romano on the writing theory I developed, and Eric contacted his former research professor, Dr. Claudia Jayne Brahler, at the University of Dayton for statistical advice. It seemed like more than a coincidence that the professor who helped guide the research lived near my hometown of Kettering, Ohio, so it became easy to meet with her on UD's campus to discuss data when I returned home to visit family.

Our research team discovered that physical therapy patients who wrote and demonstrated positivity in their writing showed greater healing gains on objective physical therapy measures such as the LEFS (Lower Extremity Function Scale), DASH (Disabilities of the Arm, Shoulder, and Hand), Modified Oswestry (for back pain) and NDI (Neck Disability Index) (Wanner, Bird, & Brahler, 2016). Our research contributed to the existing literature illustrating that writing can have physical health benefits in addition to emotional health benefits.

Psychologist Pennebaker conducted the original writing study that showed writing can lead to physical healing. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) explain, "most important, people who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to stressful or traumatic experiences had reliable improvements in health in the two to three months after writing" (p. 25). By transferring their thoughts from the mind to the page, people could process their thoughts and feelings and free their bodies and minds to heal. Medical doctor Rankin (2013) elaborates,

> the body relaxes. The doctor convinced your brain that all will be well, or at least that everything will be done to try to ensure that it will be. In such a relaxed state, the body can get busy doing what it does best—making efforts to heal itself. (p. 47)

Even though Rankin discusses talking to a doctor instead of writing, Pennebaker's research illustrates that writing provides the same benefits as talking to someone, especially if the writer doesn't have a supportive person to listen.

Our research study asked physical therapy patients to complete an original survey we designed (Wanner & Bird, 2013) by responding to numerical subjective and written subjective questions. The short answer writing prompts that comprised the written subjective questions captured the first impressions of each writer. If a writer spends too much time on a response, it becomes easy to overanalyze. Writer Goldberg (1986) elaborates,

> so when we write and begin with an empty page and a heart unsure, a famine of thoughts, a fear of no feeling—just begin from there, from that electricity. This

> kind of writing is uncontrolled, is not sure where the outcome is, and it begins in ignorance and darkness. But facing those things, writing from that place, will eventually break us and open us to the world as it is. Out of this tornado of fear will come a genuine writing voice. (p. 106)

Knowing the first impressions of the physical therapy patients gave our research team insights into each person's feelings about pain. The numerical subjective questions provided insight into both the goals the physical therapist set for each patient and the goals patients set for themselves. Medical doctor Tindle (2013) explains, "giving yourself credit for meeting a goal is more than just a superficial nod. It actually highlights the accomplishment as concrete evidence that you really can make changes" (p. 130). Patients who clearly articulated their goals became more likely to achieve their goals.

My interest in the medical field continued, and I decided to enroll in Duke University's Integrative Medicine Health Coach Program. My schedule became quite busy as I juggled taking classes while simultaneously teaching for FAU, but I felt like I lived my life's purpose during the process. The final part of my certification focused on an internship at Jupiter Medical Center in Florida; I loved working with orthopedic patients in the hospital and discussing their lives while giving them journals to write their thoughts. I earned not only certification through Duke's program, but also became a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach.

Health coaches focus on vision and values to encourage people to set and accomplish their goals. Williams (2019) asks the questions, "do you want to get to the end of your life and question whether you've really lived? Or worse, regret not going for your dreams?" (p. 12). Health coaches use open-ended questions and reflective listening to help people discover the path to their best lives. My specialization combined my writing knowledge with my health coaching knowledge. I encouraged hospital patients to use writing to tell their pain narratives and help themselves heal by both sharing their narratives with their medical team and setting goals for what life looked like when leaving the hospital.

Act III: Writing to Help with Spirituality

On my path of research and writing, I enjoyed witnessing the moments where everything fell into place. While intellectually I know this happens because of detailed knowledge, I believe spiritually plays a role. So I shouldn't have felt surprised when one of the ministers at my church approached me about the possibility of becoming part of the church's new Stephen Ministry Program. Stephen Ministers serve as lay caregivers who walk with members of the church's congregation on their spiritual journeys. I accepted the opportunity to train to become a Stephen Leader and co-teach future classes of Stephen Ministers. I noticed similarities between the skills required for a health coach and the skills required for a Stephen Minister.

Stephen Ministers use the same skills of open-ended questions and reflective listening that health coaches use, only Stephen Ministers incorporate prayers into their conversations with care receivers. As a Stephen Minister, I remind people through prayer that God stays with them during difficult times. Bessey (2019) shares

> I pray that you would remain open to participating in your own healing, even if it comes to you in ways that you resent and fear at first. Just because it's new to you doesn't mean God isn't already waiting there for you in the doctor's office, in the therapist's room, on the page, in the conversation, in the solitude. (p. 210)

Like health coaches, Stephen Ministers do not give advice, but instead walk with anyone who needs help or wants to create change in life. My writing knowledge became another resource for helping members of my church congregation. Lyons (2019) writes, "I snuck downstairs in the middle of the night to unload the burdens of my heart on my laptop. Writing was the only way I knew to process what God might be doing in my life" (p. 27). Writing provides an outlet for people who want to process their emotions between visits from a Stephen Minster.

I returned to the hospital as a volunteer to pray with people who needed comfort before or after surgery or while recovering from illness or injury. I sat in the chapel of my church after services in case anyone visited and needed prayer. I led workshops on journal writing at church. For anyone interested in journaling, I agree with Ashcroft and Olsen (2012) who suggest, "don't try to be profound on the pages of your journal; just be yourself. This is about you, your heart, your guts, your relationship with God. All you have to do is start writing" (p. 141). Once again, trust the first impression on the page without worrying about the content or appearance of the writing, because no one else has to read it. TerKeurst (2020) writes, "my journals weren't linear like spreadsheets or crystal clear like photographs. They were more like abstract art made up of words that probably wouldn't make sense to others" (pp. 98–99). When rereading my own journals, sometimes I can't even make sense of what I wrote a year ago, but I had, and will always have, a safe space to process ideas when I need it.

Act IV: Writing to Help High School and College Students

In the midst of the research with physical therapy patients, the same research team decided to see if writing showed similar benefits with the college students I taught. Student volunteers completed an anonymous survey about journal writing. While the research objectives did not focus on anxiety, we learned that a large number of college students in the group surveyed experienced anxiety. Our research team also discovered that students who demonstrated a positive attitude while writing experienced less anxiety (Bird & Wanner, 2015). This result dovetailed with the result of our physical therapy research study and illustrated additional possibilities for writing as healing.

During this time, I made the decision to return to teaching high school and became the Director of the Writing and Reading Center (WRC) and an English teacher at Oxbridge Academy in Florida. I enjoy training the student peer tutors who work in the WRC and continue to discuss the same skills of asking open-ended questions and practicing reflective listening with them that I learned as a health coach and Stephen Minister. When I am not working in the WRC, I teach English classes and immerse students in the world of writing and literature.

I encourage my students to critique the literature they read, research topics that interest them, and incorporate their narratives into their writing. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) believe that, "from the point of view of curriculum, the idea is that the curriculum a person has experienced is found in that person's overall past record of experiences in private life as well as in professional life" (p. 20). Narratives symbolize the place where each student's personal curriculum experiences intersect with the professional curriculum of the school. I love that teachers at my school have the freedom to contribute ideas to the curriculum, thus, shaping the collective narrative of the community and experiencing *currere* during our conversations.

In addition to studying works of literature from the past and telling their stories of the present moment, I want my students to know they possess the power to shape their future and the future of their communities. Beyer (1996) explains, "the belief that

significant educational and social change is possible has been fueled by a number of forces—both theoretical and practical" (p. 16). Even though almost 25 years passed since the writing of that statement, the sentiment about the possibility of change remains the same. Beane (1997) describes curriculum integration as, "the ideas that people have about themselves and their world—their perceptions, beliefs, values, and so on—are constructed out of their experiences" (p. 4). Past experiences can provide insight for how to help live in the present moment as well as set goals for the future. My favorite part of teaching involves encouraging students to write the next chapters in their stories so they can live lives that make them happy.

Since the beginning of my high school teaching career at Chaminade-Julienne High School in Ohio, I used journal writing in my classes. I remember writing in my own journals as a high school student and later rereading them to laugh at the things I once thought important, ponder a wise insight from my younger self, or remember a favorite memory. I wanted my students to have the same experience. I also know life as a teenager can feel stressful. Journals provide an outlet for writing about experiences and relieving stress. Dalebout (2016) explains writing in language teenagers understand as, "journaling is basically texting your feelings to the most nonjudgmental friend you could ever have" (p. 11). My students admit that sometimes they don't want to share their feelings with anyone, which is why writing helps them. Journaling also illustrates to teenagers that all writing does not have to look perfect. I can relate to struggling with perfectionism as a teenager (and sometimes as an adult) and witness my students facing the same struggle. Writer Lamott (1994) believes, "perfectionism means that you try desperately not to leave so much mess to clean up. But clutter and mess show us that life is being lived" (p. 28). Journals should not become a perfect work of writing because no one's life is perfect.

I decided to not read my students' writing in their journals, although I tell each class to ask for help from either me or the school psychologist if they write something that concerns them. Romano (1995) writes, "but we must be aware that we speak and write our rude truths in particular social settings. We have to be willing to face consequences our words might trigger" (p. 135). If writing the truth about life in a journal triggers intense feelings for students, I want them to know a community of compassionate people exists to support them. Several times during each school year, I conference with every student individually and discuss what they learned from writing. The majority of students tell me that writing helps relieve stress and anxiety. As this common theme consistently emerges, I encourage students to continue writing.

Every year at Oxbridge I teach *The Freedom Writers Diary*, the true story of California teacher Erin Gruwell and her students, named the Freedom Writers, who use writing as a form of social activism to create positive change. Gruwell (1999) writes of her students, "I realized that, in order for them to grow, they had to branch out and explore new ground" (p. 273). Journal writing helps students explore new ideas for themselves and, if they choose, a method for finding common ground with their classmates. While I don't require my students to share their writing with me or their classmates, I conduct a class discussion on the value of journal writing. When students choose to share with their classmates how writing helped them, it strengthens the class community. Romano (2008) elaborates, "in our classes students have opportunity to connect dramatically with the human experience of others. Students can come to know those others. They can come to know themselves" (p. 92). Realizing that their classmates share similar feelings helps students learn they do not have to feel alone because others have similar experiences. Brown (2018) explains, "people realize they're not alone. Sharing their stories together

normalizes shame, creates connection, and builds trust" (p. 135). Learning each other's narratives builds empathy in a safe space for learning. It applies to the teenagers I teach as well as to anyone who wants to build a stronger community for themselves and other people.

Act V: Writing to Create Change

As I write these words, the world struggles in the midst of a pandemic. Christmas arrives in a few days, as people try to find hope during a holiday season separated from loved ones either by distance or death. My school, like numerous others, transitioned to online learning, followed by returning to teaching in person with extra precautions including masks for teachers and students, Plexiglas surrounding desks, temperature checks upon arrival, and hand sanitizer stations. I wonder which parts of 2020 will appear in future history books.

While all this occurred, I found myself stopped in the hallway by former students telling me they still wrote in their journals. Current students told me writing in their journals served as a source of stress relief during the pandemic. Transferring thoughts from their minds to the page relieved the anxiety they experienced during an atypical school year and uncertain future. In response to student comments, I added more time in the curriculum for journal writing. I spent time reflecting on my teaching and agreed with psychologist Grant (2021) who argues, "I believe that good teachers introduce new thoughts, but great teachers introduce new ways of thinking" (p. 203). So I transformed literary analysis writing prompts by asking students to ponder how classic literary characters would respond to the current pandemic. I taught students my writing-as-healing research and reminded them how their journals could help them cope with stress while providing a personal record of events of life in this moment in time.

Even though a typical five act play concludes with a dramatic conclusion leading to a comedic or tragic ending, I realized the end of this writing as healing narrative remains unwritten. I intend for my writing-as-healing research and experiences to remain ongoing, as I learn new information and create new pathways to make a difference in the world.

When I wrote my doctoral dissertation, I never imagined how much my research and writing would help people. At the time, I only wanted to help myself. Romano (2004) believes that, "if the stakes are not significant, chances are that your writing won't be compelling, the voice won't be strong and urgent" (p. 25). I had the high stakes of needing to forge a new path and survive in a world without my mom. Only now can I look back and see that my writing did not serve as an end to earning my doctorate, but instead the beginning of my life's purpose. And this article does not represent an ending either; I intend for numerous additional chapters to unfold in this writing-as-healing narrative.

I hope my words find people who can benefit from them. Writer Gilbert (2015) recalls one of her readers and shares, "once my book entered her hands, after all, everything about it belonged to her, and never again to me" (p. 125). I have a slightly different perspective that my words will always belong to me, but other people can also interpret my narratives as they choose. I share the sentiment of Hatmaker (2020) who writes, "for me, the practice of putting pen to paper creates an alchemy hard to duplicate any other way" (p. 213). Doyle (2020) also uses the alchemy metaphor by describing, "life is alchemy, and emotions are the fire that turns me to gold" (p. 51). Writing transformed me. Writing transformed my students, physical therapy patients, and members of my church congregation in need of a prayer. I feel blessed to belong

to a supportive family and strong circle of friends who will listen to my story. Times exist, however, when I don't feel like talking to anyone. Then I pick up my journal or my computer and let the feelings flow through words. Hollis (2020) feels, "I believe it's possible to find meaning in anything; I believe how I deal with the hard parts of my past and how I manage them in the present is me taking back ownership" (p. 24). I can't change my mom's death; I can change my narrative and merge the story of loss with a story of using that loss to continue to make a difference.

I consistently revised and rewrote my narrative without knowing a psychological explanation existed for it. In the two months between turning in the original draft of this article in December 2020 and turning in the revision in February 2021, I continued to revise my writing, my teaching, and my life. Edelman (2020) explains, "finding a balance between acknowledging the gravity of a distressing event and creating a narrative that includes redemption scenes appears key toward achieving hope, sustenance, and positive long term adjustment after a trauma or loss" (p. 251). Writing helped me find hope and a light during the dark times of my life. I hope writing helps the readers of this article find hope and a light during the current dark times of the pandemic. Soon, the page will turn to a new story.

And my narrative continues.

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Is This the Only Story for Teaching: Working with Counter-Narratives with my Students

By Kevin D. Cordi
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Did my preservice classes in 1990 prepare me to teach school? Is there more to the story of teaching than what I was taught? Pinar (1975) asked, "What is the experience of being … a stranger in a land not one's own" (p. 399). I was prepared to be in the land of teaching, or at least, I thought this. I bought the books, listened to the lectures, and engaged in the activities. I should have been ready to teach. Was I prepared to be a high school teacher because I read the texts and listened to my professors? As Pinar (1975) wrote, "before we learn to teach in such a way … we must become students of ourselves, before we can truthfully say we understand teaching" (p. 412). This is why I return to my own pre-service teaching experiences. I want to dig deeper into how I learned about teaching. I want to step out of my familiar recognition of these experiences and make the "familiar unfamiliar" (Aoki, 2005, p. 146) so that I can comprehend and question the "taken-for-granteds" (p. 239) in teaching.

Preparing to Become a Teacher

As a young pre-service educator in college, I was like a sponge, soaking in everything. I labored to learn about educational history, methods of teaching, and preparation for content classes. I vividly remember taking a class called "School and Society." However, the school and the society were the same school and society that I grew up in—a white system that barely recognized schools and societies that were not white. As DeHart (2017) noted,

> We teachers have our narratives, too, whether or not we think of them as such. We carry personal myths about where we came from and how we got here. We may share internalized tales of feeling misunderstood and disenfranchised. We may perceive our school communities as allies or obstacles. There are realities, sure, but stories also have the power to create reality. (para. 3)

Was my pre-teaching training an authentic one? Was it one seen only with a white lens? I do remember attempts to step away from the white perspective. I read works such as Kozol's (1992) "Savage Inequalities" and had healthy discussions around the text. I remember my shock in reading about schools in Camden, New Jersey. Two high schools were literally divided by a railroad track. The school on one side of the track had a state-of-the-art chemistry lab; the one on other side used shot glasses for their lab because they could not afford the equipment. One school had freshly painted walls; in the other, teens ate paint chips from the ceiling. Although I grew up in a poor family, I did not know this kind of poor. This was not part of my narrative.

I wondered if my perspective could widen if I was able to talk with more people who didn't share my lens. Sure, I read a great deal about teaching, but did I hear from people living it? I stepped into my first classroom as a pre-service English literature teacher in my junior year of college. This was not a school in Ohio, where I was taking classes, but a multicultural school in Sheffield, England. I, along with three other pre-service teachers, had decided to spend our fall semester of 1988 overseas with a brand-new program.

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On the first day, the teacher said to me that he needed to go to the dentist and that I would need to take over the class for the day. I not only had to teach unsupervised for the whole day, but it was authentic teaching under fire. I taught an English class where the students read an American story by Angela Gibbs (1940/2021) called "The Test." In the story, an older white male would not pass a young African American woman on her driver's test because she was Black. My entire day consisted of addressing questions regarding whether or not all Americans were racist and why they act in a racist manner.

In England, I observed and taught for over 1000 hours and worked with students in every grade level and age and ability range. I was immersed in narratives from people doing the work. However, these stories were not only from teachers, but principals, guidance counselors, custodians, and of course, the students. From these voices, their stories, I learned about teaching.

This made me wonder how much of the narrative of teaching is accurate. How much of what I read and what I did I had simply accepted because it was the only thing told to me.

- I accepted that Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline plans were the sure-fire way to manage students.
- I understood that the role of teacher was to be separate from students at all times.
- Student stories were not as important as major literary works.

However, this "dominant narrative" was not an accurate one. Dominant or what some call "master" narrative is defined as a "pre-existent sociocultural form of representation" intended to "delineate and confine local interpretation strategies and agency constellations in individual subjects as well as social institutions" (Bamber, 2005, p. 288), and counter-narratives have been defined as "the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews, 2004, p. 1). Over time, after teaching, I learned that managing kids is not as productive as deeply listening to them and accepting that sometimes the system creates inequity that pushes a student to act out. I also learned that sometimes it is productive to be a *student* with my students and engage in inquiry-based learning together. And after serving as the first full time high school storytelling teacher in the country, I learned the value of student stories is as important, if not more so, than literary texts. Teaching is about relationships, and knowing my students leads to connections, community, and curriculum.

Moving my Students Beyond what they Know: Seeking Counter-Narratives

Fast forward to the year 2020, and I am in the middle of the pandemic and all of my teaching at Ohio University Lancaster is online. I am teaching a class called "Human Development and Learning." The pandemic has provided that pregnant pause to re-examine how I teach this class. I decide that I will concentrate on assumptions about teaching and learning and what my students can discover when they seek out and talk with someone who knows the subject.

I want them to engage in a process I call "story-ography" (Cordi, 2019). This is taking time for stories to emerge. I share that a journalist is looking for THE story and writes around it. In story-ography, a practice that I have taught and conducted for over 15 years, we take time for stories to happen. We wait them out, we engage in conversations, and when stories happen, we build upon them. We ask questions about the narratives, and we tell, listen, and respond to narratives not as an interviewer, but as a storyteller.

I design a "counter-narrative" assignment. I know the value when students investigate what they are most curious about because they can design authentic questions around their inquiry. This serves as effective places where stories can happen. In preparation, I have them present throughout the semester on myths of learning. For example, are there really left and right processes in the brain? Is multitasking possible? Are girls' faster learners than boys? We had a productive time talking about what separates real research from hype. One student replies that from this experience he will question everything from now on. After they write their thoughts on a subject, I ask them to conduct story-based interview, engaging in story-ography. After my students listen to podcasts, read articles about counter-narratives, and listen to Ted Talks such as "The Danger of the Single Story" (Adichie, 2009), they seek out people's stories.

One student, Rachel Dille, begins by questioning the narratives of standardized testing. She travels to a mainstream website that says standardized testing "helps ensure that every student, regardless of school district, receives a well-rounded, quality education" (SchoolMart, 2021, para. 2). However, after talking to three teachers, she discovers there is more to this story. The first educator who had only been teaching for two years stated that her "harder working perfectionist students" enjoy testing, but for others, it is very anxiety-inducing. Dille then talks with a special education teacher and discovers the inequity of testing for special needs students. The teacher shares that her students "are not in the class setting that the other students are, and they are not given the same teaching." She talks about how she concentrates on the needs of the students and not always the same content of the other teachers. She says her students don't understand the language of the testing, let alone the test itself. This allows Dille to see that the focus of educators is not always the same. She asks questions such as, "is the test fair," and wonders if the "School-Mart" narrative considers special needs students in their claim of ensuring quality education for "every student." The teacher shares:

> When I first started as a teacher, I thought my teaching had to be focused on getting them prepared for the test and that's it, and as I became more interested in teaching and better informed about how students react to this, I learned to change my ways.

Dille learns that the students should be the focus, not the test. She states that, with these story-based interviews, she too changed. "As a new teacher who is scared to ask questions, I think this assignment taught me asking questions is one of the most important things, and by asking questions, I am more informed about issues about teaching." Standardized testing is something that can be accepted as part of the educational system. It can be the accepted narrative. We need to provide future teachers a chance to listen to those who challenge mainstream, dominant definitions of standardized testing.

As we teach students about the power of narratives, we also need to help them seek places where they can find narratives that are authentic and compelling. They can be found by actually arranging time to meet the people, but students can also use narratives that are found on the web. As educators, we need to show students where to find the stories. Another student, Isabella Ebert, is limited to the people she can talk due to the pandemic, and she cannot access the people she originally intended. She works in a place where customers enter, and she decides to ask them about her subject, school uniforms. However, after hearing vague responses, she realizes she needs to look elsewhere. She turns to data-based websites that include narratives from first person accounts. She reads a story that reveals that African American young ladies are more subject to punishment because of dress codes. She wants to know more. She seeks out more stories. She dives deeper into issues of inequity.

Isabella says about her work, "This assignment taught me to look deeper into important policies and recognize if its beneficial or harmful to the school's climate. I learned that narratives have value, but they also must be questioned and researched." The importance of listening is what one student, Ashley Loy, learned from the assignment:

> As a future educator I will consider stories that I hear by keeping them in the back of my head … and generate my very own opinions and thoughts of the school instead of letting others stereotype the school for me.

It is not enough to learn about the issues of diversity and economic scarcity by reading a displaced text. Talking to others localizes the issues. It makes the issues and the stories around them real. I need to create spaces for students to talk to those who know about the issues and show how students' inquiry can be addressed in a local landscape.

One of my students makes me question my understanding of his issue. He, like me and the rest of the world, asks about the impact of digital teaching during the pandemic. I have read numerous accounts of how teachers feel it is unproductive, but as my student, Jake Smithers, discovers not every educator agrees. One teacher says, "students tend to be finishing assignments on time and (they) hear little complaining about too much or too little work from their student's parents." He said these teachers feel they can dedicate themselves to real planning and that students are not earning poor grades. He states that the teachers are able to "do unique things to connect with students, such as doing a scavenger hunt around the house to get to know classes' likes and dislikes."

This makes me reconsider my mindset about digital teaching. I had listened to the stories that say digital teaching has less value. I need to reclaim the narrative. As Smithers sates, "Narrative can be an important part of having a discussion. … With multiple perspectives, one can make a more well-versed opinion on a topic." I personally find value in digital teaching and need to listen to the stories of what my students and I are learning using digital tools.

My Counter-Narrative Understanding

I hoped that my students would find narratives that were counter to what they thought. As Lather (1991) stated, counter-narratives invite students to "ask questions about what (they) have not thought to think, about what is mostly invited in (their) discourses/practices, about what has been muted, repressed, unheard" (p. 156). As we teach, we need to question if we include our classes' voices such as the special education students' take on standardized testing. Are we listening to headlines and not the narratives of teachers who enjoy digital teaching? From this work, my students heard stories about students who are in schools that discriminate. From finding and listening to these stories, my students rethought these issues.

This semester I too have been re-seeing and re-thinking what I know. On any given day, a newspaper will speak of those who have served time in a correctional institution as if they were one collective. They place them in a nameless category and talk about high recidivism rates. The dominant narrative of the people is generalized. However, over the last two months, I have been teaching storytelling workshops with people who have recently been released. I have listened to these "restored citizens" and helped them tell their stories. These men and woman speak from a voice of inside, when they were serving time, and outside. However, each story is about empowerment or wishing to be empowered. One of the people I work with is currently in the *New York Times Magazine* for his singing, and another brings "restored citizens" together as artists and creates impressive galleries of their work. The others tell powerful and engaging narratives.

This is not to say the stories are not about defeat and struggle. I take a hard breath when I hear how much neglect has been inflicted those inside during the pandemic. There is no social distancing, and the stories of sickness are rampant. However, these stories are from live beings, each different and dynamic. The stories are not collective and nameless, but instead personal. I often do more listening than telling. I work with them on telling their stories in public formats because, as one person said, "no one else can tell their story like they can tell it." From this experience, I am reminded of how much clearer an issue is when one listens to those who have or are living in it. Students need to listen to authentic stories as part of their curriculum because, unlike the text, this connection is personal. The impact of this type of listening can resonate when they are in the classroom working with stories that don't mirror their own lives.

Implications for Teaching

In an on-line storytelling series, run by Storyteller Mary Alice Arthur, Canadian social organizer Vanessa Reid (Arthur et al., 2020) stated that we need to abandon thinking that leads us to conclude that the status quo or our narrow perspective is simply "how the world works." The world does not always work the way the textbook states. The text can paint a picture that is not accurate. It is not personal, localized, and at times can be outdated. Actual stories hit harder for my students. It is not enough to hear homelessness is a problem in schools. Instead, bring someone in or interview the person who works with homeless students to tell their stories. I vividly remember working in a fifth-grade classroom on a six-week story-drama involving the topic of homelessness. We knew a student who was homeless at the time. We explained what we were going to do, and I will never forget his response. He said, "It is about time I get to tell my story." People want to share their stories. We need to make spaces for it happen.

As professors, we need to do more than read the narratives; we need to find the narratives as we ask our students to seek them out. We need to be able to connect the world they read about with the world in which they are living. A Louisiana storyteller, J. J. Reneaux once said to me, "Some stories have to die so others can live" (personal communication, 1997). As educators, we need to find the stories that no longer have life. Some stories are not accurate, they need to fade. One way to do this is to offer counter-narratives from the people living the narratives. Aoki (as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005) asked: "What insights, what deeper seeing … does [the] story allow?" (p. 18). As an educator, I need to seek narratives that allow my students to revisit or change. Stories like standardized testing fit for every student, as do narratives that issues of classroom diversity and economics can be solved by formulas and that, when the pandemic passes, everyone will be okay.

We need to ask more of the people who can tell us the stories behind these incomplete or inaccurate narratives. After all, working with counter-narratives has the potential to transform thinking. In reviewing my experiences in teaching, I have realized that I have accepted too often the first narrative of what is said. In order to understand narratives around a concept or an idea, one must have both narratives and counter-narratives acting so one can see how they are at play.

But this is not simply conversation; it is more directed. Battey and Franke (2015) said working with counter-narratives does not consist of "talking in general"; instead, it is about "embedding stories in the practice of teaching" (p. 456) so that teachers can tell stories about "deficit thinking" and instead engage in communication that can change teaching practices (Miller et al., 2020, pp. 280–281). In this age of disinformation, let us talk to people who tell the authentic story that the textbook doesn't always tell. How this is done … now that is a different story, or should I say, stories?

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