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Editorial Staff

Cover design by Olu Oyedare

Perception

Staring into the funhouse mirror,
everything appears different.
I focus my attention on the reflection,
noticing certain angles.
Parts of the image appear
E
L
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G
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D
t h i n l y c o n n e c t e d
or even lost,
leaving a

hole

in the corpus.

Other parts become
more densely concentrated and
prominent in the profile.

Moving backward and forward,
I play with light and distance,
reframing
what I see.
I am engaged in the process
as my mind works to interpret this vision of
who I am.

Perception is altered by the refraction of light,
but I recognize myself.

Such is *currere*:
moving backward and forward
through time and space,
examining positionality, shifting perceptions,
reflecting, interpreting, analyzing, and illuminating,
until I step away,
a more complete vision,
wholly myself.

By Jennifer Flory Edwards
Miami University

Edwards, J. F. (2021). Perception. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 1.

It Takes Two

By Thomas S. Poetter
Miami University

"It Takes Two, Baby, It Takes Two Baby, Me and You"

Do you remember that well known song lyric made popular by Marvin Gaye and Kim Weston, topping out at #14 in 1967 on the Billboard Charts, "It Takes Two"? Did it stick to you like it did to me after hearing it many, many times from then until now? I heard it plenty in my youth, on the radio and record player, and when it pops up here and there in a commercial or on the radio today, I can't get it out of my head for days. Songs that keep reappearing in popular culture and media and become pervasive—crossing generational lines and other boundaries, like "It Takes Two" has for me and many others—have a nearly inexplicable "staying power."

The lyric from this pop song seems to be merely about young lovers. But it caused me recently to think more deeply about the profound relationality at the center of the art of becoming known and knowing that resides, for me, at the heart of teaching and perhaps at the center of loving in education as well. Here, in conjunction with my fledgling notions regarding teachers and teaching and the curriculum of knowing, I want to reframe some ideas about the knower and knowing and being known that have had "staying power" for me in my life of learning and teaching by sketching a fragment about a teacher who profoundly influenced me.

At root are my assumptions that teachers help us learn and know things as part of their work with us. Sometimes that learning and knowing comes from the process of pulling out what we may have already had an inkling about, when a teacher on the way with us took due care, providing activities and practice around the idea or concept or content to help us learn, and retain, and use, and adapt the knowledge at hand for our purposes in the world of endeavor. And sometimes teachers introduce us to entirely new things that we hadn't thought about or considered or even valued at the start of the learning and educative journey. We learn things that we didn't know were inside us already, or never germinated. And here and there in our lives, and this is much harder to sort through, we might learn valuable things that we retain and that guide us after experiencing duress/stress during the learning process, even when faced with nearly impossible choices and almost all negative outcomes and perhaps even while a possibly worsening relationship with a teacher takes shape. It may not all make sense to us immediately but over time may soak us with deeper understanding.

Following the general format of my previous pieces focusing on the notion of life processes as curriculum and the *currere* journey of charting that course in this journal over several years (Poetter, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020)—I frame a "regressive bit" (Poetter & Googins, 2015), or a short narrative take, about a teacher from my past who helped me to understand myself and life and the world and my journey through it. In the past, I have written extensively about my understanding of relationality in education in the classroom by focusing on my perceptions of students (Poetter, 2006, 2012), but here I want to spend time on an influential teacher who shaped me. Then I will try to interpret these bits, offering some analysis and maybe a dash of insight and hope for the future.

Mrs. Kemp

In the past, I have told stories about my elementary teachers and their profound influence on me in our small-town school with one class for each grade, K-6, Bunker

Poetter, T. S. (2021). It takes two. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 2–9.

Hill Elementary (Poetter, 1994, 2014, 2015). Over the years, people who have read my work have wanted to know how I could remember in such detail these stories from way back, some of the memories living in me for over 50 years now. I realize that this isn't always the norm. Some people I have spoken to with interest over the years about this phenomenon say that they can't remember anything about their school days, from classmates'/teachers' names to subject knowledge. Nothing. Zero. As Jackson (1968/1990) said so long ago, school can be boring, seemingly inconsequential, at least on the surface of things.

I have stated that I don't really know why I can remember so many of these things about school days and teachers, but they certainly don't rise to the detail of someone with hyperthymesia, or highly superior autobiographical memory (H-SAM) (Morales-Brown, 2020). I can't remember details from days long past unless there are significant links to experiences, emotions, connections made through significant and sometimes traumatic events that have stuck with me. It is the case, though, that my memories of my school days have remained vivid. I also realize that these memories are constantly reconfigured as I age, and as time passes, there is no doubt that they have become much less rigorously accurate and, I daresay, at least to a degree, fictionalized (Poetter, 2012).

Mrs. Kemp is one of the teachers I have known well and about whom I have a lot to say.

For starters, Mrs. Kemp lived in our neighborhood and was a friend to children. I knew her son and daughter well, though they were both at least 5 years older. No matter, her son and I constantly played sports and other games together in the neighborhood. So, I was in her home periodically and even accompanied her family on car trips to ballgames long before she was my classroom teacher. And I knew her from church, too, her husband and family prominent, longtime members of the congregation my dad pastored.

There are times in the course of a life in school for me when time froze; I can still picture and hear the moment as if it were merely a second ago. This happened a few times in Mrs. Kemp's fifth grade class at Bunker Hill School, in 1973-1974. One day in late fall, she called me up to her desk during a short, quiet period in class and said, "Tommy, you are going to be working with a small group of students who are advanced in math and language. And I'm sending you to the basement workroom to do these activities together." She handed me the single page with writing on it. "I'm expecting some leadership from you, helping the others get started, Tom. These exercises won't be easy. Bring the sheet back to me after I send for you."

And then she winked at me, a sort of other-assuring, "you got this" gesture that she performed periodically, with me and other students, too. I had my orders.

She then said out loud to all in her booming teacher voice, "Troy, Marie, Jack, Diane … Please follow Tommy down to the basement assembly room for a special learning exercise. Come back up when I send Mortie down for you, not a minute sooner."

No one really knew what to do when we got together; the exercise was like a group brain teaser. None of us had ever been called "advanced" before or had been knowingly separated from the rest of the class. But we had been working in groups in school even way back then for years already, so we weren't surprised.

When we got downstairs, Troy said, "Free time. I love it. Let's just mess around."

"No, Mrs. Kemp left me in charge, and we need to work on this and have an answer for her when Mortie comes down," I said.

Marie said, "I agree with Troy. What's the big deal? You can do the paper, Tommy."

Those two were lost as they began running around the room.

"How about you two?" I turned to Jack and Diane, the remaining three of us still seated at the big work table in that space. "Are you abandoning ship, too?"

Diane said, "What does the sheet say?" An opening. The three of us scooched closer together while Troy and Marie spent the next 30 minutes playing tag in the basement assembly room and banging on the music teacher's old piano (you couldn't hear anything upstairs that came out of that room because it was soundproofed for music classes). In the meantime, Diane and Jack and I tried to solve the puzzle.

When Mortie came down to get us, we trudged up the stairs; Troy and Marie had taxed themselves physically with free play for 30 minutes, and the remaining three of us felt spent mentally from trying to solve the unsolvable puzzle. We would have gotten a better answer with five brains on task, no doubt.

When we returned to the classroom, I handed the sheet to Mrs. Kemp, still at her desk, and took my seat. She set the paper aside very casually without even glancing at it and started in on a social studies lesson. She never said one word to me or any of us about the work we did or didn't do that day or at any other time. On occasion for the rest of the year, the five of us were dismissed from class to the basement for an advanced exercise, and the room never got more comfortable for Jack and Diane or me. But Troy and Marie had a blast!

By mid-Winter, my world had shifted dramatically. My dad suffered his first heart attack, which landed him in the local hospital for several days. We weren't allowed to visit him, so we waited for more info for three long days. At last we were allowed to see him on a late afternoon after school, and he came home the next day. Those three days were terrifying, along with all of the intervening days following that first heart attack. I never stopped worrying about him. My fear was that another heart attack would take him permanently from us. Of course, it did, just two years later.

One day at school a few weeks after dad came home from the hospital and was taking it easy while trying an exercise routine, cutting out smoking, and eating better (that was the treatment then, with routine surgery to fix the problem a few short years away), Mrs. Kemp called me up to her desk and said to me so only I could hear her, "Tommy, I know your dad is feeling better, but I was hoping to take you to lunch on Monday just to talk a little and take your mind off of all of it. We can go to Snack Time for burgers at lunch break. Okay?" And she smiled at me and nodded me back to my seat. She didn't wait for a reply accepting the invitation or not. I was going. I was around strong adults constantly during my young life, and I knew the difference between a question that required an answer and a question that was a directive.

I returned to my desk, and when the next Monday came, I accompanied Mrs. Kemp in her car to my favorite "fast food" restaurant, Snack Time, a super retro, first generation-style drive-in burger joint/diner that local families visited often and that also had the drive-up spaces for service, like the larger modern-day Sonic chain.

We sat inside at a table.

After we ordered, Mrs. Kemp said, "So how are you doing, Tommy, at home and all?"

I felt uncomfortable opening up to her, and I answered that question and all the rest of them during lunch in a very guarded, "this nut won't crack" kind of way.

"Well, okay, I guess. Dad is less busy, home more, not smoking," I responded haltingly.

I liked her a lot, but didn't have a sense of her as a parent, or as a counselor, or as a friend at that point. I wish I had more confidence in letting my real emotions out, maybe

that would have helped, but I just didn't have it in me. It wasn't her fault, and I have come to terms with the fact that it wasn't my fault, either. The distance I attempted to generate between us didn't keep her from knowing what I needed or how I was doing.

"Well, you know, anything you need, anytime, just let me know, and I'll help any way I can."

I believed her, but this was also what nearly everyone said to me at the funeral home two years later, and I know they didn't all mean it. I couldn't say in response to her question the truth that I felt needed to burst out of me but that couldn't escape in any communicative, legitimate, helpful way without me losing it, which I really didn't want to do in Snack Time with crinkle fries coming in a hot minute. I couldn't say out loud:

- that I was devastated;
- that my fears of losing my father to heart disease terrified me;
- that I was having a hard time sleeping;
- that I couldn't concentrate;
- that I felt guarded and afraid and upset every second;
- that the only time I could reasonably take out my aggression and fear came while playing sports and that if someone got in my way on the playground it was always hell to pay all around;
- that I felt no real joy at any turn, just simmering anger and despair and fear all balled up in an 11 year-old body taking shape quickly, a recipe for disaster that I knew even in that moment could wound me at any time, which it did on occasion over many years to come, mostly without relief.

On the way back to school in her car, just a short drive, we had a few light moments, with a conversation about what we each thought the Cincinnati Reds might do in 1974 along with the exciting fact that the Reds would be hosting the Atlanta Braves and Henry Aaron in April 1974 on opening day, with the chance that Hammerin' Hank could tie or surpass Babe Ruth's longstanding home run record during the school day. Aaron stood on career home run #713, and opening day in April was only a stone's throw away. One more home run to tie the Babe and two to surpass him, the most revered figure in American sports with the most prestigious, longstanding record.

"Tommy, I think I'll put the opening day game on the radio in class in April so we can listen to it live. Maybe Henry Aaron will tie or beat the record while we listen. What do you think?" She kept her eyes straight ahead driving while I looked over at her, taking her in.

"Yes, that would be great. Cool."

And we both smiled. And she added a wink on a quick glance to her right at me as we pulled up to the school.

Over the intervening months, our "advanced" group met a few more times, all with the same result and no feedback. None of our parents knew about the exercises, no one ever mentioned it either way, and the five of us students never discussed it outside of those awkward half hour periods we spent together in the basement working on puzzles or not, and Mrs. Kemp never gave us any feedback about it on any level. We got an exercise to work on and one sheet of paper to hand back to her. She dismissed us to work on our own recognizance. Then we went back to the class and the work at hand with the rest of the students as if nothing at all happened whatsoever.

But when opening day came that Thursday, April 4th, 1974, Mrs. Kemp put the game on the radio in the late mid-afternoon of the school day without a reminder from me, and as we worked quietly at our desks on math problems, we listened to the Reds play the beginning of the season's first game. And in the first inning, we heard the great Reds pitcher and future world series champion Jack Billingham serve up home run #714 in Hank's first at-bat of the season, a 3-run, record tying shot in the very first half inning of hall of fame broadcaster Marty Brenneman's storied announcing career. To this day after all that I have seen and witnessed on fields of play as a participant and fan, it was the most exciting moment I have ever felt in sports. Absolutely electric. And it was more than about baseball, as I already knew as I grew and followed the sport and as Mrs. Kemp reiterated to all of us on the lead up to turning the game on. One of the all-time greats in baseball, a Black man, would be surpassing in our lifetimes, maybe even on that day, the most revered white, male icon of sports in the U.S., ever.

When Mrs. Kemp saw me smiling in the back of the room near the window following the homerun—after the class exploded in cheers and was just beginning to settle down, feeling not the least bit upset that the Braves held a tenuous 3-0 lead over my beloved Reds (which the Reds would expunge in an 11 inning 7-6 win in the season's first game)—she winked at me.

Curriculum Analysis

I have thought about Mrs. Kemp and her role in my life over the years, how big an impact she had on me even though I have written about other teachers in ways that may seem more poignant, personal, and productive in terms of my educational journey, my learning, my knowing. But I intended for the fragment to reveal something deeper and to reveal how the circumstances of her role in my life loom more deeply and are more relational and more important than I ever thought, even over time and after a long passage of time, now in my present. And I hope to explore how her connection with me reveals a way of being in relation with students that I hope teachers/curricularists might consider as a disposition to consider in their own work.

My fifth-grade year was exceptional. Despite the seeming missed opportunities with the advanced group and my dad's failing health, I felt connected and safe with Mrs. Kemp. She had a certain flair, a control of the setting—a handle on the situation in each moment—that translated well to 11-year-olds in school. She had a booming voice, and a quick wit, and a kind heart. She could also turn on you in a heartbeat for misbehaving or taking anything a bit too far. We learned those limits from her and tried to stay out of her crosshairs all the while knowing that she meant well and that she was smart, a fine veteran teacher with years of know-how. In a word, we had respect for her that lasted through each day and now through a half century for me.

And I jumped too quickly then at the conclusion that the group activities I got to participate in were a waste of time way back when, and I wanted that to come through in my rendering, so I could set the record straight. It only took me 50 years to figure it out. To clarify, I grew up in an era when public school teachers—top notch in every way and committed to their schools, and students, and parents, like those in our small school in my hometown—trusted students to work on their own. The school was safe, not under attack at any point and never would be, so students could move about and exist and work and learn in unsupervised ways without the threat of a lawsuit, tragedy, and/or mayhem of any kind. Yes, the regular classroom time remained mostly traditional, with pedagogy occurring for the most part in a didactic way, but opportunities like the ones my fab five had to work on brain teasers came along for many, many students all the time. And we

were encouraged to be creative, expressive, and to try new things. Mrs. Kemp simply followed her instincts and plan and gave us work to do. And the learning ensued, perhaps not necessarily with the content of the experience on that one thin piece of paper, but in the content of our experience as we worked, or not, together. So, for instance, I learned that I couldn't make Troy and Marie do the accelerated work that wasn't even for extra credit! They were smart in their own right and entrenched in their positions about school. It made sense to Troy and Marie that, if they could, they would do what they wanted to do, not what the teacher wanted them to do, especially when they were out of the teacher's sightline. They knew that the rest of us wouldn't rat them out, and we never did. Besides, I'm convinced now more than ever that Mrs. Kemp already knew it anyway and left the situation in place over time no doubt as a challenge for the rest of us. What do you do when faced with tasks in the presence of an incomplete team? I'm still dealing with that question every day of my work and home life. We all are.

I also learned that I liked working with small groups of people on tasks. Even though the tasks were not "real world"-like that I can remember, they were fun and challenging and never boring. The time just flew for those 30 minutes, and I think I learned back then in those moments that working on tasks made time pass quickly and that I liked being busy and productive and in the "flow," and, truth be told, at least the designated leader in the space. The truth is that it was one of the ways that I was bonded with Mrs. Kemp, with her always asking me to provide "leadership" on the scene. Mrs. Kemp gave me that opportunity, and I appreciate it to this day, even though I never could get the whole team working on the tasks at hand together at any point. The rest of us did our best, and that no doubt translated to better relations and better outcomes throughout fifth grade together and beyond.

Over the years, of course, I've also thought about my lunch excursion to Snack Time with Mrs. Kemp after dad's first heart attack. I realize now, after thinking harder and harder about what happened, that the following clues stack up to something deeper going on. First, dad stayed home that morning, and he hardly ever did that, usually leaving for church at the same time or before we left for our walk to school nearly every day, a routine. Also, I walked home for lunch almost every day of our fifth-grade year, and when I told mom about the "invitation" from Mrs. Kemp, she wasn't surprised or thought it exceptional. It just started making sense to me after all this time that Mrs. Kemp probably had me out for lunch because mom had to go with dad to a doctor's appointment or procedure and didn't want to worry me and that they had probably set it up together, which adds something to the depth of my interpretation of the lunch with Mrs. Kemp.

Even though it was mostly an awkward situation for that hour, Mrs. Kemp treated me like her own child. And this should mean something. What I am trying to say is that she did her best. She tried. She kept the conversation going with me the entire lunch and in the car. I wasn't nervous, and we had a good time. She showed up and came through. That counts a lot. And I remember all of it probably because it was such an exceptional moment in my youth. I didn't routinely have lunch with my teachers. I rarely got to go to Snack Time for a burger and crinkle fries. And the conversation, now that I have had time to really think about it, was actually quite good, especially in terms of Mrs. Kemp's ability to just let me be, not force it, keep it casual even as she did her best to let me know that she knew and that she would help any way she could.

And along the way she figured out a way to connect with me by bringing up baseball and especially the upcoming season opener and the looming record-breaking home run for baseball and cultural icon Hank Aaron. I have been re-reading Buber's

(1990) *I-Thou,* thinking that he might help me interpret Mrs. Kemp's relational moves with me as a teacher, mostly in terms of her attempt to connect, to relate to me. It's common, though perhaps not pervasive *enough*, these days to talk about how important it is for teachers to connect with students in order to have any chance of reaching them. But most teachers I know who love their work and students view teaching as more about connecting with students, relating to them, than they view it as merely teaching content. The knowing in the classroom is of course almost always spinning around activities that are meant to teach the basic understanding of a subject, at all levels. And great teachers also love the content of the subjects they teach. But at root is a constant urge toward connecting, understanding, relating to students.

It may seem somewhat cliché now, but Mrs. Kemp no doubt subscribed to the adage, "I teach students, not subjects," long before it came into common discourse in teaching and teacher education (Moje, 1996). Teachers attend to teaching and learning the subjects, but they also attend to so much more. They view their students as human-beings, with lives and struggles and barriers and problems and hopes and dreams and possibilities. If that is a baseline understanding, then it suggests that the most basic, important, and critical part of becoming a teacher and teaching is committing to connecting with students, in ways that enhance learning of the subject but that also at the same time in ways that deepen the relationship between the teacher and learner with an understanding that the curriculum of being a human being supersedes learning multiplication tables or learning to read. School learning can come without a deeper human and relational knowing, but at root, relational knowing enhances and no doubt deepens all learning, in all contexts.

And so, Mrs. Kemp connected with me through baseball. Buber argues that being in relation with others, persons and things, can result from contemplation, as the world in particular is approached. Buber uses the example of the tree, which can be an object, but he argues that something else is possible, beyond the dissolution of the thing at hand to a mere other, an It:

> But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me. (Buber, 1996, p. 58)

To become I-You, in relation together, something exceptional happens: the thing comes into reciprocity with us, into relation, transcending our seeming distant connections in the world. And so it was with baseball—something wrapped in tradition, and rules, and language, and movement, and games played, with access to most children and adults to play it and watch it in multiple contexts, appreciating its nuances and mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual natures all at once. It becomes something more, especially as it serves to connect and reshape and transform us and others as we experience it together. The It becomes a bridge to I-You, to connecting to it, and connecting us.

And I would go so far as to say that Mrs. Kemp expressed a knowledge of me by expressing love, by trying, being there, searching for a connection, and connecting. She viewed me as more than a student in her classroom, an "It" to teach, more so as a person. When we take the knowing risks to love, to relate, to connect, especially in the larger framework and context of educational pursuits, we make a difference, perhaps even if the results of our attempts don't seem to manifest immediately. Contemplating love and its connections to relation, Buber (1996) clarifies:

> Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us. The "wicked" become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity. (p. 67)

And now I view my 5th grade year more clearly, looking back on it, as a deeply relational, educational year in my life, perhaps one that solidified my trust and belief in caring adults, that established my respect for people willing to connect with me even in the worst of times, and not flee. And I see more clearly than ever how crucial Mrs. Kemp was on that journey, providing a most loving, knowing, constant relationality. Knowing me, caring, being there, connecting, searching for ways to make evident her care and concern.

Teaching. Knowing.

This journey, this life, this education, at each turn, takes two, at least. Perhaps, too, at most. Here's to you Mrs. Kemp (1932-2012). Rest in peace, with a knowing wink through gladsome tears of gratitude for all that you taught me.

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Whence My Curriculum

By Ali Azhar
University of Toronto

> With narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the inventing of another work of synthesis—a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing—the as yet unsaid, the unwritten—springs up in language. (Ricœur, 2010, p. ix)

The *azaan* is mouthed by a nine-year-old; the body taut as the lungs, throat, thighs compress and release in calling a sea of other boys to prayer. Facing the pinkish-red hue of the age-old bricks—the structure my nano tells me was donated by her grandfathers—the *muezzin* is left there to follow the path of his mother's ancestral tree. Roots of princes in an era where the progeny struggles to hold on to a specter of the azure jewels adorned by the ancestral portraits—the boy is to live a dream that trickles through his grandmother's fist—a reverie from a hometown yet miles apart—her association with it ambivalent, bittersweet, for the weight that bent her spine as she labored through her new-found poverty. The memories don't help when there are three children to raise and a husband who gambles. But for each new-born—and yes, especially male-born—there is the possibility that tomorrow shall be like the yesteryears.

My grandmother had in one hand 100 Pakistani Rupees and in the other 50 to give to the nurse. A nurse rushed past, as she asked the sex of the new-born. Girl, she said. She got 50. Another passed, and she reiterated her question. A boy, she said. She got the 100. Nano, ironically, was out the whole 150.

In this paper, I *fictionally* recreate aspects of my past and weave them with my journey as a curriculum scholar. Fiction and empirical research, writes McDermott (2015) are forced contrast sets—they are better thought of as shedding light on each other. The ancient literary concept of mimesis or representation adumbrates the relationship between the two genres (Ricœur, 2010). I am not as interested in *what happened*, rather what I should make of these disjointed memories in relation to my scholarship.

It makes good sense here to bring forth my privilege. To resist imposed categories, Desai (2012) asks us to examine our own subject positions, power, privilege, and supremacy, for the articulation of difference by sub-altern groups cannot remain beyond critique (p. 161). To start with the story of my grandmother is an attempt both of rematriation of my own biography (Tuck, 2011) and an acknowledgement of the primary person in my upbringing through whose stories I trace my roots.

And why go back to the nine-year old? Do you, Ali, have unfinished business with religion? But, aye, if knowledge, for me, is to be salvaged from the lives of my ancestors—peeled off from meanings imposed to meanings inherent—then, divinity I cannot ignore. For mysteries reside in interaction—everyday accounts of a pathway made for another; an elevator button pressed so another can pass through; children rocking their hands next to their ears, eyes fixed on their teacher, their hands miming the soundwave as they feel their eardrums. If the miracle of learning and teaching is to be described—then why not start with divinity. O, but do we want to start with that

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much-maligned… Look deeper in your history. Can you fairly say you were born when you were?

To engage historicity, as recommended by Freire and Ramos (2009), Desai (2012), and Kanu and Glor (2006), I'd have to go to an earlier time. But since religion has always been a major part of organizing my own and my ancestor's worldviews, an autobiographical account of the curriculum that bends me into shape would have to critically engage it. Theology, argues Desai (2012), has had a fundamental role in the descriptive statement, in the organization of knowledge systems, and in classifications of irrationality and otherness. My primary research interest in social interaction analysis, a methodology based on the visual order, engages the same contradictions between people and their environments at the same time as it foregrounds embodied ways of knowing (Freire, 1998, as cited in Darder, 2017).

But there are stories nano told—some make me proud; others make for tales suppressed and whispered—of distances travelled, lives rebuilt under the scorching summer months, *daal* sifted and basking in the middays of spring, sanity and insanity, life and death, pride and humility. They flow like the stream of my unconscious pen, for how else can a story be told? Meandering through hushed silences, broken sighs, humor told in rhyme—the silent laughter that shakes the world as it did my nano's body. How old is a body—if someone asks me, says I, earnestly, 'tis made of mud, of earth—and to it shall it return—dare I say, little do I know.

What is the ethical import of this meandering? Whose lands am I traversing—and what languages and epistemologies tied to them do I need to honor? Which ones, indeed, am I invited to articulate and partake in?

I sit, unwell, troubled at a funeral in a village evergreen—never mind, why go there? Doesn't affect my analysis, my praxis, my quest for science. Be not morose—laugh, on your rocking chair as Rabelais did—Buvons! Humor gives one the space to relate differently to the political.

Monsieur Rabelais—aah, but we gather here today at an interesting gesture. You are your grandmother you say? Never mind that your hand, when thumped on a child's chest, relieves not the body from its fever. But here, you appropriate what you read? Aye—for much respite gives fantasy—lay here your research question in words three: *What be the ethical import of fantasy displaced?* Wading through the realms of materiality and spirituality, are we? Never mind; you'll be fine; thought is not yours nor is the scene yet unbuilt. It is a wounded spirit that aims to traverse thee. Ricœur (2010), in his rumination on time, calls for intentionally making alive the pain of the past—the *distentio animi* or the distended soul, as we anticipate the future.

A story: The ancestor walked out of a Mughal's court, broken—nay shattered, for the *firmaan* he there heard: the Sikh Guru's sons—of nine and twelve or the regimes thereof—were to be buried alive in walls. He walked out—yet the act was done. Before you cry out for the injustice, theft, and poverty that colonialism wreaked—remember that on violence, too, they have not the monopoly. But the point of the story? This is a reflection on history made present and unmade so a future there may be. Back to the story of the ancestor who walked out of the court. Eight generations passed, and blood-boiled in the land of the five rivers, not one town unfree from violence unspeakable. A border newly laid was made in history. Millions displaced and trains of heads decapitated made way—east to west—why linger here? Manto, the court jester, wrote thus of a Bishan Singh, a resident of a mental asylum, lying on the border looking for his hometown of

Toba Tek Singh. On the left of his body lay Pakistan, and on its right lay India—the little piece of earth he lay on, he thought unarmed—and thus, he called it Toba Tek Singh. Into all this hullabaloo, the land of the ancestor-walked-out, his state, eight-generations later, was filled with peace. No bodies marred, no feuds settled, a little dint of humanity. Love goes a long way. Love lives, breathes, and leaves its aroma on history.

Teaching, for Freire (2018, as quoted in Darder, 2017), is an act of love, which is "an act of courage, not fear, a commitment to others and the cause of liberation" (p. 80). But what would it mean for love to be rescued from world-making and reproducing agency into the transformative potential of world-changing agency (Berlant, 2008)? How can we incorporate feminist critiques of love as tied to maintenance of social hierarchies in favor of love as an imaginary for emancipatory ways of being? Like the ancestor who walked out of the Mughal's court, it has to be tied to a deep sense of action guided by justice.

Where else shall we travel to? A little recent place—a twenty-eight year old has been gifted a book—a sentimental journey—by a professor he admires. The student, young in age and younger in wisdom sets himself the task of writing out the book, word-for-word—for words can live and breathe, embodied when spoken out loud or given material shape when transcribed on to paper. A more apt explanation: it is how his mother taught him first to write and to memorise. Write thrice—and pay attention to rounding the belly of the a's and the b's. Midway through, the letters on the page start to breathe. A slight wind—is it not the spirit Ariel—lifts the edge of the leaf. It is traced as it arrives at the nape of an even younger student sat nearby—and the man could see goosebumps slowly taking shape; the olfactory sense takes on its own temporality as a slight rain begins to pitter patter.

Freire asks us to rethink the dichotomy between the human being and the world. Through our engagement with texts, we are asked to be with consciousness, to live the words as beings alive, rather than merely things we need to possess (Freire & Ramos, 2009), to articulate a point where "knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by knowledge at the level of the logos" (p. 170).

The man shifts seats and studiously continues to copy out the words, making sure to retain the eighteenth-century spelling:

> The bird in his cage pursued me into my room; I sat down close to my table and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination. (Sterne, 1768/2005, p. 70)

Desai (2012) critiques the anthropocentricism of western knowledge systems (p. 155). I follow the words Sterne wrote to build a fragment of captivity for a bird. It is Paris, and a starling, his feet and beak tied, is carried down a path that heretofore bore the signs of a non-descript veterinary. But nay! There it rests in front of a congress of birds repeating the words: in Paris, we follow the law. A mirthless laughter. Head-bowed—the chest drooped. An elevator takes the bird to its scene of confinement. Reminiscent of a film where all the jailors are hawks and the captives are sparrows or hoopoes. There are six of these cages aligned—a gap and six more that await inhabitancy. There lies the anticipated residence of the flamingos. Water to keep the senses. No tears. You will look back, little bird, to this moment to see how you held up. And how could you be not-strong? Your

fellow traveller is a baby-parrot, barely out of years of suckling. His music soft and acquiescing. O cruel world! How do you come to terms with this underbelly of yours? Is it this way by design? What language paints it this way? For emancipation to occur, what are the possible futures awaiting us, and how can we imagine better ways of being and knowing that are not predicated on oppression and hierarchy (Kanu & Glor, 2006). Sentimentality is decried. But have emotions no place in social change, and whence is it subordinated to reason? Why is it that the oppressed are "treated as individual cases" and as "welfare recipients" to be pitied rather than as a cause to engender a transformation of the very structure that oppresses them (Freire & Ramos, 2009, p. 167)?

Bon—a pleasant time then? Much does this history gloss over. You have left us feeling heavy hearted. The nine-year old then dropped by the parents into a new home. A trunk—silver—has seven white *shalwar kameez*, six pairs of khaki shorts, six white short sleeve shirts, and four blue *shalwar kameez* to sleep in. The boy sits at the edge of a bed, the lower of the bunk. How to come to terms with this situation? At home you were the eldest with two younger sisters; here the boys, taller and broader, make you feel scared. A boy sits opposite. Don't worry—says he. Make friends with me, for I am the gangster here. What a laugh. Thus starts 13 years of life in an all-boys school. Gangsterism and fear apart, the school was vast: primly kept grass, fireflies, football sized bats, and moths that sleep on the body at night, dew, fog, and a caressing sun—depending on the time of the year, but here we are keeping it happy—the thrice-repeating-in-writing drill of the mother allows the boy float through the lessons. Yes—he writes letters for friends and sends them to their homes:

> I like it here very much. We wake up at seven, do our physical training, go to lessons, rest in the afternoon, do our homework, head to evening games, homework again, television, then sleep, repeat. Making lots of friends, write soon: Love, Omar.

Tears, fights, joys, moral conundrums, fears, happiness on the football field aside, levity does underline the schooling of the younger-adult version of this fictional character. These are but some of the fragments with which I paint my "*tabula rasa*" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 114).

Things to unlearn: Gender and class privilege; the British modeled boarding school for the elite—dressed in blazers, ties, and turbans—uniformity. Things to keep and grow: social relations as contexts for learning.

However, as Kanu and Glor (2006) suggest, we are not born into our social roles; rather, my evolution as a curriculum scholar and an amateur intellectual depends on "contingent social circumstances and my free choice" (p. 104). Which of these parts of myself do I need to shed to engage in a necessary disequilibrium? Is it the canonical list of authors who have defined curriculum studies that I carry with and mark, that I have to shed, or is it my proposed research project of constructing the genesis of present-day interaction in schools through the times of Sterne and Rabelais? How do I model my dissertation so that it is not centered on Greco-Roman epistemologies, but so to give voice to my own history and those of othered and marginalised knowledges and worldviews?

To develop a critical consciousness that makes me reconnect my personal history with my dissertation project and agentive action (Kanu & Glor, 2006), if books are to be my teacher—to narrativize what I learn and juxtapose contrarian viewpoints, to infuse

them with life, and to avoid what Freire terms narration sickness and give life to the words that go in my dissertation and action (Freire & Ramos, 2009)—what is the canon of texts that I give pride of place to? My current stance is to take chance as my guiding method and passion in my journey and induce polyvocality within the curricular texts of social interaction in my quest to infuse the ordinary with the extraordinary (p. 117). However, here, I think not of chance as a throw of dice. Philosophers such as Derrida (2015) and Rancière (1991) describe it as a coincidence of encounters and context that is elementary to the project of intellectual emancipation. For Sterne (1768/2005), time and chance are intricately linked:

> What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within this little span of life by him who interests his heart in everything … what time and chance are perpetually holding out to him as he journeyeth on his way. (p. 28)

Pinar (2012) recommends *currere* for young scholars to study how their autobiographies play out in their academic pursuits "in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (p. 35). In this paper, my meandering has asked me to critically understand my privilege and the ethical import of my footsteps, to feel my way through this journey, understand the sentiments that arise, and articulate "the contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of possible futures" (p. 36), indeed, to question what it means to inhabit time. Who do I author this present with—dead, alive, or imagined? The narrative brought in my ancestral stories, dead authors, spirits, friends, and guides. For I may be the author of this autobiography, but it is always crafted with others. Vinciane Despret (2017) in her work on how people keep those who have passed away alive in their lives recommends *following the signs*. But what is a sign? She writes:

> A sign is always the product of a connection, of an active liaison between being and things … a sign is a product of a conspiration of events … a sign is translated as an active vitality between the living and the dead. (p. 137)

And thus, sitting on a winter day in Toronto beside a skating ring, I follow the signs and pen the following multilingual poem on time and chance to describe the scenery. For me, it carries with it the past and germs of the future authored with others:

> Time is the best Christmas. It is the to and fro of knees sliding—waving, the skates scratch, erase, wobble, *jouisse*, hop hop. Time is where the limiting idea, the hum drum of the machine breathing, panting, sonorising, blinking, raging—aah but the blading and the fall. Time is the ineluctable modality of the ol-facto-audio-*vide*. Hop hop *dharum*.
>
> Time is the bleep bleep and the yellow warning jacket, no—time is the charred chair underneath—dead, cold, mahi mahi.
>
> *Le temps, c'est le delectable modalite* of the servant, the brimming heart, and the Channukah ashplant. It is the little tree dropped straw on the *toobi* dropped rustleaf on the charred snow on the packet of cigarettes. *Le temps* is the deepening of experience whether it arrives from within or without. *C'est Petit Croix*'s reclining *dos* on the moist dark brown on the sinking mud that welcomes her *cuisses* as they do your boots—but the warmed, swarmed, socked feel within. Time is the tragedy on the plaque, the sonorous Zachosculpture—the pump, pump, pump. Time is the

violated body, the encapsulated charm of her smile. It is the purse, the fire intermingling with her *zulf*. O Zulfi, Zulfi, *legenbehen*—what you can fairly lay your hands upon, what Jesus riding on his mule could safely lay his chest on. Time is the featly drawn chirurgeon.

क ख ग ग
ملق نوچمھ اد دورمن نزب رس
مدق نہ شتآ رد ہلا لیلخ نوچ
behead nimrod with your pen
step into the fire friend (Attar)
Interially, radially, sonorising, hierarchizing
In the beginning there was the Word
The *firaash – firaash -e- mustaqeem*
the *samaa*
Sabh-e-samaa

And below was the stream flowing with fruital spouses; and the snobbish *malaika*; *tasbeeh-rab-hamd-naat-subhaan*, the moonlight, we returned from and are humbly assorting our flesh. The sunlight caresses, ensnares, *baooda* or *fauqah*. Is this hierarchizing enough—head prostrate chanting, invoking, *pros notre theon—al malaikatu*. Hierarchy is in the nine *huroof*, in the resting of a foot perpendicular behind the burgundied shoed resting life. Hierarchising is the friend, the lover, the committed, the mother—*amor mundi, amor matris*. Time is the soft, warm *padre*. Has Aa-dam walked enough for today? *Kishmish, badaam, pista* … kick, stabilize—*alors*, up, up and *quoi*?
Interially, radially, delecting the failure of measuring and the *reussi* of falling, falling for you.

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Because I am a Woman

By Ramata Diallo
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"I cannot let you go to a foreign country because you are a girl."
"Stop your studies because you are a girl."

"I want to further my studies."

"What, are you a man?"
"Please stop studying and find a husband. There is a time for women to get married."

I heard these expressions throughout my life from my family, friends, and society because I am an African woman. "Woman" has been and still is a synonym of motherhood and wifehood, sweetness and obedience, but it has never been a synonym of power, strength, and success. I am a woman. Because I am a woman, I am told that I should be patient, docile, and obedient to my husband, family, and society. Because I am a woman, I can neither be smart nor be financially independent nor professionally successful. Because I am a woman, I do not have the right to an education and a career. Because I am a woman, I cannot be treated with respect without being married. Because I am a woman, if I cheat, I am a prostitute. Because I am a woman, if I slap my husband, I am a bad wife. My only role is to cook, do household chores, take care of my family, and be obedient to all the rules set by my family and society. I am writing this article to share my experience as a *woman*, an *African woman* in our modern society, showcasing the difficulty of social and cultural burdens as well as affirming that education is one of the solutions to gender equality in today's world. It is also to show that we (*all women* no matter our *race, skin color, nationality, ethnicity, social class, religion, or education*) should always strive and show sheer determination to achieve all of our dreams despite social pressures, patriarchy, sexism, gender roles, racism, and xenophobia.

Social Norms: The Gender Trap

Caught between modernity and tradition, Séguéla, the City of Diamonds, is a town on the western Ivory Coast. The compound known as Fuladu is located in and area called Quartier Residential. Fuladu is a big, modern villa with three large rooms. Behind, there is a one story shelter, the garage, and a small courtyard where women do laundry on Sundays. Once you enter the compound, the first thing you see is the veranda, three big mango trees, and a well. In this Fuladu lives a Muslim family. The father is polygamous and has three wives. He studied the *Quran* and did not go to school. Being a trader, he is the breadwinner of the family and the only decision-maker. His second wife dropped out of school in the second grade. She has loving parents, but they do not believe that girls' education is vital. She is a housewife; she is happy doing the cooking, laundry, and other household chores, and she never challenges her husband's decisions.

I was born in Séguéla into this Fulani family, and I started school at the age of four. I do not remember everything that happened during primary school. The only images that come to my memory now are ones of me standing in the schoolyard, seeing girls with short hair, and being surprised to see that girls were obliged to cut their hair like boys. I had long, beautiful hair like most Fulani women, and I loved my hair. But I did

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not care about cutting my hair as long as I could go to school. I was pleased to go to school, like my brothers. The further I progressed in school, the fewer girls there were in the classroom. When I was in third grade, there were just three girls in a classroom of 20 boys. I continued to go to school until the fourth grade. Due to the civil war in Ivory Coast, we went to my parents' home country of Mali. My parents enrolled me in a public school. Again, in my classroom, I noticed that there were few girls. My female classmates were always quiet in classrooms, and the teacher rarely heard their voices. In this large classroom, the teacher knew the names of only the pupils who were active and had excellent grades. Most of the time, those best pupils were boys. Noticing that, I decided to speak up and not remain silent, to assert myself, because I wanted to have the same opportunities as boys in my class, and I did not want to be invisible.

At home, I was a silent girl who complied with all the roles, rules, and norms in my family. I grew up seeing my mom cooking without any complaint. I have never seen my father even close to a kitchen, let alone cooking. It was normal for me. I thought that being a good woman meant being someone who knew how to cook and aspired to marriage. As a young girl, when my mom was going to the market, I was eager to accompany her. I always went to my father and said, "Dad, give me money to buy some food to cook." My dad happily gave me money. I even had some small kitchen tools that I used, and I was happy about that because, in my mind, that was what a good woman was supposed to do.

At 13 years old, unlike my brothers, I already knew how to cook and did all the household chores in my family. Every morning around 5:30 am, I got up, still sleepy, and I started cleaning the floor. As soon as I finished, I took a bath. Then, I went to school. During lunch or dinner time, I served food to my brothers. On Saturdays, I did laundry with my other sisters. On weekends, I learned how to cook, because it is seen as one of the virtues of a good woman. On the other hand, my brothers got up at 6:30 am to take a bath and go to school. When they came back home, they had their lunch. On Saturdays, they hung out with their friends or did other things they enjoyed. I never considered this to be an issue when I was young, mostly because I didn't realize it was unfair.

At school, it was the same story. Leadership was for boys; cleaning and cooking was for girls. From fifth to 12th grade, I cleaned the classroom, either by force or simply because I felt it was my role. I guess school staff considered that was what I was best at, but they never wondered if I wanted to ring the bell or be a class leader. So, I ended up never doing those things during my primary and secondary school tenure.

Moreover, I grew up hearing comments like, "men are more athletic than women," and "men are great at math, and women are great at art and languages." Indeed, studies have proven that children as young as age 10 have internalized these beliefs (Blum et al., 2017). Eslen-Ziya and Koc (2016) found that children "internalize this myth that girls are vulnerable and boys are strong and independent" and "associate men with hard work, toughness, endurance, determinedness, success, and power" (p. 802). On the other hand, they associate "women with passivity, weakness, cowardice, and inadequacy" (Bayar et al., 2017, p. 2). I grew up into these norms, always striving to become a more ladylike girl, a proper and ideal woman. I can even confess that, as a child, I was convinced that no matter how intelligent, talented, and independent I was as a woman, I needed a husband to be fulfilled in life and to be a complete and perfect woman. This little girl who grew up with all those gender norms, perceptions, and roles in her family is still inside me, even though I am aware that women are just as capable as men.

Those beliefs and questionings have always been on my mind in this patriarchal society where obedience, silence, and respect are paramount. Thus, during my childhood and until now, I showed respect to my parents by being obedient. This obedience meant turning down internships or trainings that I won through hard work because my dad thought it was inappropriate for a girl to come home at 6pm.

In 10th grade, I decided to choose language and literature as a field of study because I was passionate about languages. Moreover, I believe I had internalized all the beliefs of my brothers who said language and literature are fields for girls and science is for boys, and they laughed at me. I felt I was in a field where I belonged. In the society where I live, almost everybody thinks that men are more successful in math and chemistry, whereas girls are more successful in the humanities. Plante et al. (2019) noted that the belief that languages are a feminine domain is widespread among students and teachers. People in my culture also think that "boys need careers and girls need husbands." Thus, when you are top of your class as a girl, your male classmates start doubting your abilities and insinuating that you are having an affair with the teacher. Even in business, a successful woman is seen as a person who sleeps her way to the top. I have personally experienced and have witnessed a lot of cases where the woman's effort and value have not been recognized simply because she is a woman.

Back in 12th grade, I succeeded in getting a baccalaureate with a distinction. I could have had a scholarship to study in Morocco or Algeria, but dad shut me down with his common dogmatic response, "*No, you are a girl*. You need to stay close to your family." So, I never said a word and abandoned this thought. So, I went to a public university and studied English for four years. After four years, I decided to participate in a contest for ENsup, a teacher training school. It was very competitive, and I was the only woman accepted in the English department. When I came back home, I announced the news to my dad. I was so happy, but he was skeptical and offered not a single word of congratulation or encouragement. I felt sad and disappointed by his attitude. He just wanted me to get a job after college and get married. He was stunned by this news because it would mean two more years before these events would happen. As a result, I would be less marriageable by being more highly educated than most men in my country.

These two years in ENsup were challenging. It had its ups and downs. I had many health issues, and my relationship with my father was not ideal. It was tough sometimes, as I gave up many opportunities that could have been very useful and opened new doors for me for the sole reason that I was a woman and I needed to abide by my father's rules and social norms. Surprisingly, when I told my dad that I had been named valedictorian of my program, which meant that I would participate in "Camp d'Excellence," a camp for the best students in Mali, and I would meet Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, the President of the Republic at that time before the coup of August 2020, he was thrilled. His fears and doubts about my life vanished as he realized that I could be as successful as men. He enlarged the picture of me with the President and put it in the living room. Whenever his friends or other people came, he showed the picture and said proudly, "This is my daughter Ramata; she is with the President of the Republic." This accomplishment gave me social and economic capital in my family, at school, and in society. I went from being an invisible girl to an empowered woman who is a role model for many young women.

When I decided to further my studies, my family and many friends were dubious and looked at me strangely. Their eyes were saying, "It is time to get married. Are you a

man?" I have not been disheartened by those comments. I decided to further my studies because it was the door of freedom, the door of hope, the door of independence, and the door that would help me achieve all my dreams in this world. I did not want to be the girls I saw in my classrooms, silent and not active. I want my voice to be heard, so I always say what I think, and I don't beat around the bush. At home, I zipped my mouth, controlled my emotions, and conformed to the traditional roles and norms of a good woman for the sake of respect and obedience, but also as a way to challenge patriarchy. It must seem contradictory to use silence, a tool of patriarchal oppression, as a tool for resistance against patriarchy. As Parpart (2019) said, "silence can provide room for agency in the face of threats as it enables 'victims' to choose between acceptable speech and the unsayable" (p. 320). I chose silence at home and in society as a strategic choice to protect myself from the patriarchal script and social pressure.

Still, I continued to assert myself and speak up at school and in my classrooms. For instance, I became a class monitor, and I was the only woman who became a class monitor in my school. Men were not happy about that in my classroom because "I am *just* a woman, and a woman cannot *lead*." After a few months, they started to call me an iron lady. Even some of my teachers called me that. I'm not too fond of this nickname. I do not know why it is that if a woman is successful, people start to call her that. It indeed means strong woman, but it also means ruthless and mannish because leadership is associated with manliness. As an educated woman, I have been subject to this stereotype and many more, such as tomboy, less marriageable, and the like. I am a highly educated and financially independent woman, but I am still not respected on the sole basis of my gender. I am considered westernized and not "African enough" because I am considered as someone who has forgotten the values of an African woman. That's being an educated woman: a double burden, a continuous dilemma between marriage and education, marriage and work, independence and obedience, and between silence and speaking up.

Trapped by their Gender: The Story of Three Sisters

These continuous gender dilemmas and questions are unresolved in Mali, and they continue to be at the heart of Malian women's lives. From the moment I was born, gender norms were part of my life. What I can do or cannot do, what I can aspire to and not aspire to, what I can say or not to say, what roles and duties I should perform or should not perform, what I should wear or not wear, what job I should do or not do, what kind of games I should like and play or not like and play, what color I should like or not like, how I should behave and not behave, how I should walk and not walk, who I should marry or not marry, have all been prescribed since my birth. But, as I witnessed my brothers' privileges compared to those of my sisters and myself, I wondered how free a girl could ever be if she had no say in her life. Almost all my sisters in my family have been forced to stop their studies and marry a man they did not love.

My elder sister was brilliant at school and, unlike many girls, was studying a scientific field in high school. All the life she envisioned for herself, like finishing her studies, having a fulfilling career, and, perhaps, marriage later on vanished overnight. "Bebe, come here," my father said one day. I thought my sister did something wrong because when my father asked you to come, you had done something bad. My sister came, and my father said, "Sit down here next to me. I decided to marry you." Dumbfounded, she did not say anything and started to cry. She knew she had no choice, so she accepted her fate. However, that's not the saddest part. Her husband's friends started to say, "Do not let her continue her studies; otherwise, she will betray you. She will no longer be

obedient because educated women are not good women." A few months later, my father and her future husband also told her, "You will no longer go to school." She became a "*proper* woman"—respectful and obedient to her husband and parents, not highly educated or just enough to please her husband, a woman who gives birth, accepts her fate, and complies with all the roles ascribed to her gender. Now, she has four children—three boys and one girl. She seems happy; however, she struggles, as she does not want her daughter to fall into the same trap as hers.

Deep inside, I was asking myself who was next. Then came the turn of my younger sister. One morning, she came to greet my father, "*Djanwali, ba*," meaning "Good morning, dad." My father replied to her nicely in Fulani and said, "I found you a husband. It is your cousin." At that time, she was just 15 years old. She walked out of the living room and began to cry. Unlike my elder sister, she continued her studies. She got married to our cousin, and she acted as if everything was fine. Her husband was in Congo, working there as a tradesman. So, after the marriage, he went back there without her. She remained in our home and continued her studies. One day, she left the house at night when we were sleeping and never came back home. She sent us a message saying that she did not love our cousin and would never love him. She did not have any choice except this one. This decision created a lot of tension between my sister and my parents. It took years of silence, quarrels, and pressures to finally come to a more reasonable end. My cousin married another woman, and after some time, my sister was able to divorce without the consent of my parents and her husband. Now, she has a bachelor's degree in marketing and communication.

My heart ached. I wondered why I was a girl, why girls endured so many hurdles, why girls always had to give up their dreams, why girls could not have higher diplomas, and why girls did not even have a say on the man they should marry. I felt trapped by my gender. I wanted to be a man so that I could enjoy the same privileges my brothers have. I yearned for it at certain times. From a young age, I knew I had to work hard, be resilient, and do well at school if I did not want to be trapped and be subject to this gender fate. I was full of anger about being a woman, and to ease that anger, I created big dreams for myself and my future through hard work. I was silent and respected all the norms at home. At school, I was brilliant. I did household chores before and after school. I balanced my school life and my life at home. Then, my turn came.

Unlike my sisters, my father asked me if I would be willing to marry, and I said yes, under the condition that I would further my studies and work after. My future husband and his family accepted this condition. I was happy to continue my studies. After two months of engagement, the relationship broke up because my fiancé did not want me to study or even work after my studies. Surprisingly, it was my father who broke up the engagement because no matter how strict he was, he was fair, and it was what we had agreed. I was happy and full of relief. My sisters and I experienced patriarchy and all its shackles at home, in classrooms, and all over society. However, it will be unfair to blame my family, especially my father, as if they are wrong, as it is the social order or even the world order that is inherently patriarchal. I deeply love my father and my family because they taught me to help people in need anytime I can, to be resilient and honest, to never lie, and to always live up to my responsibilities. If I did not go through all of those challenges, I would not be who I am today, and I would not achieve what I have done today.

My resilience and my achievements have been possible through silence, negotiation, and compromise. With all the gender norms and patriarchal shackles, women are falling behind in education, as exemplified by my sisters. On most occasions, silence has

worked for me. Silence is golden and helped me to tame patriarchy and all the gender norms. In this sense, Motsemme (2004) argues that "silence within a violent every day can also become a site for reconstituting 'new' meanings and can become a tool of enablement for those oppressed" (p. 917). I also used negotiation to overcome the impediments placed on my life and worked slowly to deal with the norm in this tough patriarchal society. It is all about knowing "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines" (Nnaemeka, 2004, p. 378).

The Way Forward for a Better World

Because I am a woman, I am deeply convinced that good quality and equitable education is an equalizer to tackle gender disparities in wages, poverty, health, and political power. The more educated women are, the more power and control they have over their lives, the healthier their children are, and the more financially independent they will be (UNESCO, 2013). Driven by this strong belief, my goal is to become a qualified and inspiring role model to help other young girls enjoy their right to education. Therefore, I am planning to earn a PhD in educational policy or in curriculum instruction and design to bring changes in my country's educational policies and enact educational practices that will help parents, teachers, and stakeholders learn about the value of women and girls' education.

Because I am a woman, I believe that teachers play an essential role in shaping gendered bodies; they must question their own biases and how that permeates their teaching methods and everyday instructional practices. I believe that teachers can dismantle all those beliefs in classrooms and textbooks. It is no secret that women are underrepresented and portrayed in stereotypical roles in textbooks. Therefore, it is imperative to promote gender equity in classrooms in terms of interaction, materials, and activities.

Because I am a woman, I also believe that more female teachers must be hired in high schools and universities. This will have greater ripple effects by creating a virtuous circle for more girls to be educated and advance their profession. By the same token, it will contribute to the economy, close the gender gap in education, as well as advance gender equality in Mali. Based on Makama's (2013) recommendations and my own suggestions, to promote gender equality in Mali, the country must:

- remove any sexist and patriarchal practices in schools and promote and invest in non-discriminatory teaching materials,
- challenge cultural and discriminatory gender norms and practices that subordinate girls, such as son preference,
- provide role models to girls and raise their awareness about their rights,
- encourage and foster girls' schooling by bringing together religious and traditional leaders to champion that cause,
- sensitize parents, especially parents of girls, to let their girls learn their lessons when they come home instead of forcing them to do the household chores,
- ensure that schools develop feminist critical pedagogies that critically examine the social and cultural sides of gender inequality and empower girls via policies, curricula, and teaching practices,
- address the particular barriers that keep girls out of school or learning, such as long walking distances and social and cultural practices, and
- ensure relevant and fair curricula and promote positive gender roles in teacher training programs.

Because I am a woman, this article may seem idealistic, but it is not. It is true that it seeks to inspire all the women who are in the grip of patriarchy and gender norms to strive and give them hope—critical hope to take action because:

> Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring, 'My hope is enough!' No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. (Freire, 1992, p. 8)

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Square Peg in a Round Hole: Unveiling Rural Student Challenges in Trinidad and Tobago through *Currere*

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Intense, meaningful reflection provides an avenue for educators to examine their actions. The *currere* process facilitates reflective practices as it encourages educators to contemplate experiences that may have consciously or unconsciously impacted their beliefs and practices. Through the *currere* process, practitioners impartially reflect on guiding influences that embody who they are and whom they hope to become. Pinar (1994)—a foundational contributor—emphasized the importance of conceptualizing the relationships between past, present, and future. Pinar suggested achieving such understanding by deeply analyzing "what has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience" (p. 20). Through regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical processes, educators can unveil crucial underlying principles that guide their professional ideologies.

I employed the *currere* process in my educational practice to unleash assumptions and influences that have covertly and overtly influenced my academic and professional career. Through a rigorous synthesis of my past, present, and future, I examine the ways my academic experiences influenced my understanding of life, which has guided my professional pathways. In this paper, I begin with an overview of pertinent elements of Trinidad and Tobago's education system. This overview is followed by a regressive approach (Pinar, 1994) that entwines rural philosophies (De Lisle et al., 2012; Rajack-Talley, 2016; Schafft, 2016) with my narrative account of my experiences as a rural student attending one of Trinidad and Tobago's prestigious secondary schools located in an urban area. I next employ progressive and analytical approaches to explore my current experiences and whom I hope to become as an educator. Finally, employing a synthetical approach, I assess my profound purpose by considering who I am. By relying on Pinar's four approaches—regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical—I ask, "How does rurality appear as a theme in my academic and professional life?"

Trinidad and Tobago's Secondary School System & Rural Challenges

Trinidad and Tobago remain dependent on an archaic colonialist system of high-stakes examination and student segregation that was first established in 1879 (De Lisle et al., 2012). The country's public secondary school system consists of 32% denominational schools run by religious bodies and 68% government schools (MOE, 2020). Denominational schools traditionally have been labeled prestigious. They achieve high academic learning standards and attract wealthy and high-achieving students (De Lisle et al., 2010). At the end of compulsory primary education, all students must take the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), which assesses competence in mathematics, language arts, and composition. The marks attained are used for sorting students into secondary schools. Parents provide a list of four secondary school choices. Schools at the top of the lists are usually prestigious, in high demand, and located in urban areas. Providing this list does not guarantee a child's placement into their chosen schools. Students who are not placed in schools of their choice are usually placed in an institution within their geographic catchment area.

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The Concordat of 1960—a legislative agreement between denominational boards and the government—gives religious school boards the choice of 20% of the students enrolled in their secondary schools. Each religious board chooses these students based on the individual board's criteria. This process implies that factors such as wealth, social status, and religious beliefs can influence which students attend prestigious schools. Furthermore, many rural students with average or low performances on the SEA examination are placed in schools within or close to their communities, resulting in rural schools lacking high academically performing students, while rural communities' high academically performing students are placed in urban schools.

Globally, rurality is often associated with tranquility and low crime (Perreault, 2019; Pylarz & Bowden, 2019). This situation is the same in Trinidad and Tobago, where serious crime occurrences are substantially more frequent in urban areas than rural (OSAC, 2019). The levels of safety and security within rural communities often persuade rural community members to sacrifice potential opportunities in urban centers to remain in their communities. Rural students encounter similar challenges as they grapple with a desire to remain within their community's safety against the desire to venture to urban centers for better academic and career opportunities. As Trinidad and Tobago's high performing schools are mostly located in urban hubs (UNICEF, 2017), rural students desiring academic advancement must endure the long daily commute to urban areas or abandon the safety and comfort of their homes and relocate to urban regions.

Trinidad and Tobago's decision-makers often overlook the country's rural communities' developmental needs. Over the years, numerous cries from the country's rural residents have emphasized varying deprivation levels that rural communities endure (Paul, 2018; *Trinidad & Tobago Guardian*, 2012; *Trinidad Express* Editorial Staff, 2018). Poor roads, inadequate essential services, such as safe and available water and electricity, and lack of public social services are among the significant challenges rural community members consistently undergo. There is, thus, a national disregard for rural development that places many communities at a deficit (De Lisle et al., 2012; Rajack-Talley, 2016; UNICEF, 2017). Poverty is another factor that often places rural residents at educational disadvantage. Trinidad and Tobago's poverty rates are significantly higher in rural areas than urban ones (De Lisle et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2017). There exists a link between poverty and low academic performance, whereby, parents experiencing poverty cannot adequately provide the necessary finances for school supplies, meals, and travel (De Lisle, 2019). Poverty, and its effects, may provide one explanation for the drastically lower educational attainment among students in Trinidad and Tobago's rural areas (Central Statistical Office, 2020; De Lisle, 2019; UNICEF 2017).

My *Currere* Journey's Inception

The memory that stimulated my quest to embark on a *currere* journey began on an unforgettable day in June 2018. On that day, I stood proudly before colleagues and students at my school, graciously accepting a commemorative token that signified the community's immense appreciation for my dedication as a teacher at their only primary school. Community members and organizations touted me as one of their school's best teachers based on my continual success in guiding the community's children toward attaining high scores on the SEA examination. That particular year, five of my class's twelve students gained scores high enough to secure placement into four of the few prestigious secondary schools in the city, some 42 kilometers away. Although not rare for

urban primary schools, this was a remarkable feat for my small rural school. Throughout the school's history, students have rarely attained scores that enabled them to attend any of the city schools that attract highly academic and affluent children. The community perceived the five students' performances as validation of my success as an educator and a representation of their school's and community's growth and development.

Adding to my already boosted ego was the knowledge that, for the first time, I had assisted students in qualifying for entry into one of the country's most prestigious schools—my alma mater. Suddenly the realization struck me, "They will be attending my alma mater." Two vivid, conflicting memories overpowered my thoughts. My first memory brought back pride and joy—similar to that felt by my students. At 11 years old, I stood in front of my school's assembly as my principal shouted with exuberance the name of a school in which I had been placed. The school was unknown to my friends and me, but the word *college* was enough to evoke a chorus of cheers and praises. Such school-placement seemed unachievable to any student at my school. I was the first student in my school's and community's history to gain entry into a prestigious school.

Two years later, in a starkly juxtaposed memory, I again was in front of my school's assembly. This time, instead of approximately 80 pairs of eyes, over 500 pairs of eyes stared at me. My principal stood with three girls to her right and me to her left. Unlike me, the girls to my principal's right were all beaming with pride. I vividly recall feeling willing to sacrifice anything in the world to be one of them as anxiety and disgrace replaced the pride that had illuminated my eyes two years earlier. I attended a school that had a standard of excellent academic performance to uphold. Underperforming was unacceptable and signified inherent laziness, negligence, and apathy and was, thus, deserving punishment and humiliation. Unlike my schoolmates to the principal's right, who achieved over 90%, I achieved under 30% and was subjected to the consequent humiliation of standing to my principal's left. I grappled with internal conflicts such as relief that my parents, friends, and community members would not learn of this event, as no other schoolmate resided in my community and telephones were not present in my community's households. I felt disconcerted that the school I was once elated to attend had morphed into an institution I hated. Above all, I blamed myself for my inability to rise above the numerous circumstances that led to my underperformance.

As my consciousness returned to 2018, I acknowledged that many of the challenges I faced when I was a rural student attending a secondary school in the city still existed. This epiphany led to deep reflection on my role as an educator and my effectiveness in improving students' opportunities and preparing them for circumstances that may challenge their academic success. Furthermore, I pondered my role as an educator and those of my own past educators. How similar and dissimilar were our practices? What advice can I offer educators whose emphasis on high stakes examinations and high accountability may mar their ability to recognize the challenges students within their classroom face daily? Thus, I began my *currere* process through in-depth, honest, constant introspection of my biographical journey.

Regressive: An Examination of my Past Experiences

Performing exceptionally well in primary school and being placed in a prestigious school in the city meant leaving the safety of my mother's home and my community to live with a father I hardly knew but who lived within walking distance of my new school. The alternative was a costly commute along over 30 kilometers of winding, partially dangerous cliff terrain to and from school. The move to my father's home in the city was

guided by an ambitious hope of attaining a more conducive learning environment than my rural environment could offer. The urban environment of drugs, crime, and abuse, albeit strange to me, seemed almost normal to my new city family and friends. My new lifestyle required safety precautions, such as remembering to lock the front door behind me whenever I entered the house, not venturing too far away from home, and always being conscious of my surroundings. My chaotic unfamiliar lifestyle did little to improve my academic performance. Steadily, the girl whose academic performance once placed her at the top of the class began to decline. For the first time in my life, I found myself at the bottom of my class's academic ladder. Then unexpectedly, nearing the end of my first year at my school, to everyone's surprise, including my teacher's, I gained full scores in an activity, surpassing everyone in the class and revealing my hidden potential. Maybe it was an effort to dispel the notion of me cheating or maybe it was intuition that directed my teacher to summon me to her office to chat about my home and experience at school. Not understanding its significance, I innocently repeated a word I often heard friends and neighbors use to describe a member of my household. I impassively told my teacher, "He is a *piper*" (a local term meaning drug addicts with a high dependence on illegal drugs, such as cocaine and methamphetamine). My teacher's smile diminished, I was allowed to return to my class, and that weekend my mum informed me that I would be moving back to her home.

I dispelled any teacher's expectation that returning to my community would improve my performance as my grades continued to decline. Relocation meant enduring the foreseeable challenges that my mother hoped to elude by sending me to my father's residence. Nonetheless, my teachers perceived my continued low grades as a threat to my school's sterling reputation and a ratification of my indolence.

Though happy to return to my community, I was not prepared for the many challenges of attending an urban school while living in a rural community. I woke at 5:00 am each day to catch a public bus that would take me to school, and that same bus would bring me back by 7:00 pm. Poor community roads meant placing a piece of cloth in the back of the bus shed, among other pieces belonging to other residents, to remove the mud off my shoes, thus, concealing the reality of my less than satisfactory community conditions from my urban counterparts. During my second year at school, inclement weather caused a massive landslip that marooned our community from the rest of the country. For two months, I would wake at 4:00 am to walk, alongside other residents, six kilometers to the landslip point. On reaching the landslip, I would remove my shoes, tread cautiously across the dangerous pile of mud and stone, rinse my feet in a nearby spring, replace my shoes, and enter the public bus that would be waiting to take commuters to their city destinations for work, school, or to access necessary services that are only available in the city. I would then repeat the process for my return journey home. My sheer exhaustion at the end of the day, along with my candlelit study area, frequently limited me to merely completing, or many times partially completing, homework with no opportunity for pursuing additional studies.

My lifestyle was vastly different from many of my classmates. Our matching uniforms were unsuccessful in concealing the disparities among students' social statuses. The affluent popular students understandably bonded in friendship and overshadowed their few impoverished classmates. Students' high-end means of transportation, popular expensive bookbags and stationery, and their ability daily to purchase lunch and snacks from the school's cafeteria were jarring and unwelcome reminders that I was a square peg desperately trying to fit into a round hole. My mother's meager earnings as our

community's seamstress could barely sustain the yearly school expenses, but this was a sacrifice she was willing to make to ensure I attended my elite school. The exhaustive list of necessary school supplies that came at the end of the school year, and lengthened with every new term, was presented to parents with the unequivocal expectation of prompt purchasing. My mother's inability to attend to the endless demands for additional school supplies often fueled my contempt toward my school and my family's economic situation. I despised the constant class projects that required purchasing items. In many cases, the decision to settle for a failing grade for non-submission seemed like a reasonable alternative to the humiliation of presenting unappealing work created from scrap resources while my classmates produced beautiful projects written on expensive stationery or built with newly purchased resources.

My mother's tasty bake (a flat-bread, roasted in an iron pot or tawa), though happily displayed and relished in the company of my rural community friends, was something I was reluctant to display among my classmates who were accustomed to oven-baked bread. I ate out of my bookbag, concealing my frugal meal packed into my baby brother's formula tin. The covert yet continuously building annoyance toward my mother for her inability to provide me with lunch money overshadowed any real understanding of her financial hardships. A progressive longing to attend a less prestigious city school, similar to those attended by other students from my community, fueled hatred and regret that my academic ability led me to my institution. Other students in my community attended schools comprising students from less affluent families and whose SEA grades were not sufficient to access the more sought-after schools. At these institutions, teachers were aware of the various social challenges their students faced, and as such, realistically gauged their expectations regarding students' performances in tandem with students' lifestyles, aspirations, and needs. Unlike me, my friends who attended these schools seemed happy. Regrettably, my educators did not consider my rurality, my route to school, or my background as obstacles which, like the landslip that prevented commuters from reaching their desired destinations, prevented a smooth transition along my academic journey. Instead, educators perceived my failing grades as representing a need for direct intervention in the form of punishment and ultimately a spot to my principal's left.

Progressive: That Which I Intend to Become

As I look beyond today into a future five years from the present, I envision little change to the system that places some secondary schools above others. Times have changed since my days as a secondary student. Now, essential services such as water and electricity are more frequently accessible to rural communities, although not equitably distributed. Rural citizens' quality of life has improved, but the poverty levels remain higher in rural areas than urban.

Five years from today, I will have attained a PhD and be, yet again, the first in my community to achieve such level of academic performance. I envision myself as an educator enacting change and as a representation of rural advocacy. I will reach out to rural parents and students, preparing them for the challenges ahead as I use my resilience as an example that, to the optimistic eye, obstacles can be steppingstones. I will encourage other rural educators to do the same by stimulating self-esteem among students and molding them to believe in themselves and their abilities to overcome inevitable rural challenges. Most importantly, I will promote collaborative activism among educators and communities to identify systemic practices that disadvantage rural education and, by so doing, advocate for positive transformation of such practices.

Freire (2002) emphasized the importance of disadvantaged people educating persons in dominant positions about unjust practices and revealing inequitable systems that disadvantage and marginalize. Freire also stressed the importance of persons in dominant positions understanding and accepting accountability for their actions and the ways their practices marginalize others. I envision myself returning to my alma mater and similar prestigious schools to share my student-experiences with teachers and use these experiences as a means of revealing concealed realistic challenges that their students encounter daily. Thus, I will be speaking from a student's perspective about issues that still exist in the education system today. I will highlight systems that stimulate practices that isolate and suppress students' performances, thereby, promoting the need for the country's education systems to address social challenges, which will, in turn, improve all schools' performances. Through my advocacy, I will promote equitable opportunities for rural students by working to ensure that rural secondary schools will be adequately equipped with the necessary infrastructure and human capital to promote meaningful place-based education for all students, thus, making rural schools attractive to students of all academic levels and social statuses.

I will continue to embark on research that addresses rural deprivation and educational disadvantage through my university academic position. The *currere* process will be one of the main approaches guiding my various research, thus, inviting rural and urban educators to embark on *currere* journeys to stimulate deep emotional reflection and meaningful change to praxis, ideologies, and professional growth. As such, I will continue to be an advocate for rural development. Through my scholarly practices, I will raise awareness and clamor for improved educational opportunities for rural areas so that the long journey to urban hubs for education will become a thing of the past. Then, rural communities will be exposed to high-quality education synonymous with their urban schools, thus, allowing rural schools to become beacons of rural development.

Analytical: The Present Me

I write this paper some 4,017 kilometers from my homeland. A quest for academic success has once again pushed me to unfamiliar territory. As I pursue my doctoral studies in New Brunswick, Canada, I find myself, yet again, a square peg trying to fit into a round hole—Black woman and outsider who is caught in an unfamiliar place but opting to undergo any formidable challenges as a necessary sacrifice for professional development. Today, I draw from the intrinsic strength that has propelled me throughout my life and has gotten me through five years of secondary school and 11+ years of post-secondary education. The obstacles that I long ago instinctively turned into steppingstones now serve as building blocks of my resilience as the community that supported me all my life continues to regard me as a representation of community success.

Today, I continue my doctoral studies exploring rural education in Trinidad and Tobago guided by an inclination to challenge policies and practices that disadvantage rural students. I guide my research toward exploring the perceptions of educators, students, and community members. Exploring perceptions was a purposeful well-thought-out decision as, like Freire (2002), I believe stories must be told from the vantage points of those affected by them. Throughout this and future research, I intend to unveil practices that overtly and covertly marginalize and disadvantage some groups of people while providing others with privilege.

Though no longer in a primary school classroom setting, I continue to educate via various mediums. My role as a budding university educator allows me the opportunity

to influence and mold university students' lives. Freire (2002) and hooks (1994) encouraged educators to become learners, to be willing to switch roles with students and learn from their students as much as they would like their students to learn from them. Each student is unique with their own distinct narrative. I am an educator of current and future educators. My crucial job is to invigorate my student-teachers' understanding of the complexities and diversities that exist within classrooms and the need for educational opportunities that cater to each difference so that students can thrive in an inclusive environment and be cognizant of their lived experiences.

Finally, I have moved from a rural community in Trinidad and Tobago to New Brunswick, one of Canada's most rural provinces. I remain in a different but similar rurality. In this province, I continuously learn of synonymous challenges to those my rural home community experiences. Consequently, my advocacy goes beyond my homeland but also includes my new home. I sit at a unique vantage point to identify rural challenges and, thus, tailor my suggestions and intervention strategies to meet the needs of rural communities located in Canada and Trinidad and Tobago.

Synthetical: Who Am I?

Trinidad and Tobago has a long way to go before its governing bodies are willing to acknowledge their practices that often marginalize and disadvantage citizens in various levels throughout the country's systems, let alone take proactive action toward alleviating such practices. High stakes examination and segregation will continue to dominate the country's education system in the foreseeable future and will remain a driving force that pressures educators to sacrifice attention to crucial student differences for the sake of achieving high test scores. My seemingly dystopic premonitions are not intended to stimulate fear or a sense of hopelessness, but to provide realistic depictions of life as I see and comprehend it. Accepting reality as it manifests is my first step to self-awareness. By explicitly recognizing the injustices in our system, I am countering oppressors' desire to maintain the status quo. I believe that life's circumstances are not definite, and the challenges that rural community members encounter are not products of their destinies. Instead, transformation can actualize through collective action whereby rural voices work together to rebuke the status quo and demand better situations for themselves. I am willing to stand against the norm instilled by inequitable systems.

I am a rural community member who has experienced firsthand the barrage of challenges that rural students and community members undergo. Nonetheless, I am an example that people can overcome challenges and that rural students can achieve academic accomplishments that may seem unattainable. At the same time, I am also a living casualty of a system that has dominated and marginalized rural students, thus, etching lasting scars in what should have been a great educational experience.

Conclusion

I began my *currere* process by reliving a 2018 experience of receiving an award for my ability to guide rural students toward attaining high scores in a high-stakes examination, thus, enabling them to attend urban schools. I wonder which was of more importance to students, parents, and community: students attaining high examination scores or students attending schools in the city. I often hear community members and fellow educators compare neighboring schools' performances by counting the percentage of students placed into city schools—ignoring the fact that some non-prestigious schools are also located in the city—rather than the percentage of students attaining over a determined score. I grapple with internal conflicts as pride in assisting my students in

attaining high performance struggles against despair that I actively set my students along a difficult path that may potentially result in varying forms of distress. Over the years, I mastered the art of guiding students to understand exactly what is needed to do well in an exam. However, I did not adequately consider preparing them for the realities that they may face as they enter a new lifestyle completely different from what they are exposed to in their current classroom. I wonder if my former students are enduring similar challenges as those I had.

There is now a secondary school located in my home community, yet the institution remains less desirable as city schools continue to attract high performing students. Consequently, the community school is left with medium and low academically performing students. Occasionally, students previously placed in urban schools may transfer to their community school after a couple years, citing inadequate transportation, high expenses, and late and early hours as some of the justifications for relocating. However, transferred students often come from lower performing city schools, while students attending prestigious schools prefer to endure the hardships over sacrificing their opportunities for better education and subsequent employment.

Employing *currere* processes allowed me to synthesize my past schooling experiences in Trinidad and Tobago to understand my current experiences of rurality in New Brunswick, Canada—an emotionally fulfilling undertaking. Through the in-depth examination of my inner thoughts, I uncovered emotions that have been hidden for numerous years and identified connections between my past experiences and present practices. The *currere* process has brought me to a place of self-realization, where my actions and ideologies are no longer perceived as happenstance but are understood as innately grounded in my experiences. Furthermore, through the *currere* process, I can chart my future by understanding who I am and clearly envisioning whom I intend to become, thus, creating a pathway from which to follow. As the years go by, I intend to maintain reflective practices through *currere* and will, therefore, continually reexamine my evolving past and present while charting new futures.

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Superfluidity

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A Natural Step into Currere

In the past, I have unknowingly written using the *currere* steps of regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical writing (Pinar, 2004, 2012) by reflectively questioning, examining, critiquing, and narrating: 1) my own educational and academic life experiences (McDonald, 2016, 2021b; McDonald et al., 2020); 2) how those experiences influenced my progress as an academic and identity as an educator (McDonald, 1998, 2020b, 2016, 2021a; McDonald et al., 2016); 3) in what ways the emergence of insights impacted my pedagogical effectiveness (Edwards Bubb et al., 2011; McDonald, 2007, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013b, 2019; McDonald & Kahn, 2014); and 4) the holistic sense-making and reflective process utilized to authenticate my becoming of "self" in the field of education (McDonald, 2013a, 2018, 2020a).

My Meandering Path

I am an abstract/random type of thinker who rarely follows sequential steps, so the *currere* process is a little messier for me in that some steps serve as unconnected, individual writing pieces and other steps intersect or meld together in my narratives. However, all steps perform as platforms from which informative educational stories are launched. As a writer, I tend to use spirited metaphors, fiction, and other aesthetic illustrations in shared stories as expressive mediums to optimize critical perspectives or novel ideas. On that note, a few years back, I created a poetic process dubbed *Superfluidity*, which employs specific technical standards and conceptual guidelines. Each poetic line is a stand-alone value statement or identity claim (individual or collective). However, connections between the lines are dependent upon the ending syllable *sound* serving as the beginning sound for the next line. Ideally, the word or phrase that begins the poem is also the word or phrase that ends the poem. Basically, the poem design (i.e., italicized syllables and flowing line format) is an intentional visual manipulation to reinforce overlapping and relational thoughts, which graphically and dramatically demonstrate movement and intersections of experiences. Playing with and manipulating word syllables is the creative fun part!

Journey of Artistic Discovery

As a poetic process, *Superfluidity* emerged through an inductive attempt to connect my string of thoughts on an overarching theme beyond the conceptual relationship. While reading my scripted expressions out loud and rearranging segments, the beginning and ending syllables leapt out as possible connectors in overlaps of *sound* within the words and phrases. Through subtle phrase manipulation, the syllable-connection edified my collective collage (of thoughts *and* text). The whimsical beauty in this method is—there is no right or wrong, just endless personalized possibilities. Additionally, the visual created through deliberate spacing and italicized syllables generates a vortex image, which seamlessly captures the lyrical flow-of-thought intent. I experienced emotionally moving excitement in the novelty of this purposefully flowing writing process and an intimate satisfaction in the end result. Branding this imaginative writing experience *Superfluidity* simultaneously portrays both the process and product as fluid and lively.

McDonald, D. M. (2021). Superfluidity. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 33–37.

A Poetic Tale of Professional Bonds

As a member of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) called the Faculty Academy (FA), I have been honored with nearly two decades of shared scholarly experiences and rewarding academic connections with exemplary colleagues. Comprised of Teacher Educators across five universities in the Houston area, FA members meet multiple times each semester to conduct critical discussions and collectively support professional development as scholars. Our union has historically served as an informal support system for members acquiring promotion and tenure as well as navigating their experiences as academics. Through this PLC, FA members have been exceptionally productive in generating over 27 group presentations at national and international educational conferences, two books (36 book chapters) (Craig et al., 2020; McDonald, 2018), one book in progress, and two refereed journal articles (McDonald et al., 2016; McDonald & Kahn, 2014). Themes of these presentations and publications all align with our educational experiences as learners, educators, and academics.

In preparation for one of our conference presentations, I was inspired to write a *Superfluidity* poem that described FA discussions and interactions shared over the years regarding our academic PLC journey taken together. Read as an introduction to the conference presentation, the poem encapsulated FA members' shared encounters, which nourished and enhanced our collegial unions and communal connections over the years. True to the nature of the *Superfluidity* process, session attendees shared responses to the poem, which spawned additional overlaps and connections with their own experiences in academia. In the poem, "Whorl of Inspiration" (shared on the following page), the *currere* process is revealed through regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical thoughts (i.e., words or phrases) as well as the focused content of FA members' educational experiences.

Whorl of Inspiration

Inspira*tion*

Shun the nor*mal*

*Mal*content with mediocri*ty*

*Tea*cher exempl*ar*

Are we making a real differ*ence*?

*Ense*mble of ener*gy*

*Je*er at fearing fail*ure*

You're making it hap*pen*

*Pen*sive and playful prog*ress*

*Res*urrecting connections our de*cree*

*Cre*ating ideas to make kn*own*

Own learning extraordi*naire*

*Nar*y a dull mo*ment*

*Ment*oring each oth*er*

*Ur*gent administrators are contra*ry*

*Re*lationships quite compl*ex*

*Ex*periences that bind and *tie*

*Ti*me to envision and beg*in*

*In*spiration

Final Comment for Starting the Poetry Process

Inspiration generates action. I hope readers are encouraged to try the *Superfluidity* method for meaningfully voicing their own educational encounters or as a pedagogical strategy for use in one's practice. Perhaps a poem prompt can challenge and rouse participation. For those whose interest is piqued, play with the process by adding to and continuing the following poem beginning:

Curre*re*

Ray of sunsh*ine*

*Ein*stein's theory of relativ*ity* . . .

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The Healing Turtle and *Currere*

By Marissa Maldonado
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The human experience is to expect great things to result from said existence, and the composition of my internalized standards have only outlined their value in my life since I was put on the doorstep of spirituality as a young Native American girl, beginning to grasp the idea of gratitude and purpose. My growth is more of a quadratic function: exponents of my variable experience taking me through the minima and maxima of lessons to be learned. My own vocabulary is an indicator of my manipulation of mathematics in expressing the matrix of philosophies that I am meant to publish—and more importantly expose—to those who cross my path. Academia appeared to be a productive conjunction of my curiosities; a college campus has opportunities awaiting just past a meeting with a passionate administrator, the most fitting organization, or the organic conversations produced in a lecture hall. I slowly write my narrative by connecting my heritage to the abundant possibilities that exist within the mind and the ability to lead learners to their own sense of confidence between subject and self.

Sundance

A stern, patient voice pointed directly at me, asking if I knew how to sage myself. At merely seven years old, I did not know how and was shown by my Grandpa Nelson as we stood in the center of the Prayer Lodge. He motioned to me, repeating his gestures, as I slowly wafted the smoke towards myself. Sage has always had a sweet sensation and, from that moment on, an association with my identity. Soon after, I was gifted my name: Healing Turtle. My young and naive mind made the connection with healing to some grand assumption that I would become a doctor of sorts. Not too far off, as I have come into maturity, I have realized I was put on this land to heal in different ways—spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, relationally.

My father was named White Buffalo. Our names are signs that we are unique and valued symbols in our culture, and with that, comes responsibility. The Arapahoe myth of creation began with a world only made up of water stretching in all directions (Trenholm, 1970). An Arapahoe man floated along in loneliness with only the Creator to accompany him. In the Creator's intention to flourish life on Earth, various animals were ordered to dive to the depths of the waters and to bring back dry land. None could accomplish this task but the turtle, and from then on, Arapahoe people and other beings could set forth. The turtle's gradual contribution to the foundation of life is what makes the animal sacred. I see these aspects in myself, and I value the knowledge that my Grandpa Nelson trusted me enough to grant me this journey.

A major contribution to my sense of self in my spirituality was through the Northern Arapahoe Tribe's Sun Dance Ceremony on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming; the ancestral roots of this ceremony "recognized the lifegiving rays of the sun in their prayers" as the Arapahoe prayed to the Man-Above (Trenholm, 1970, p. 11). This practice is also recognized as our tribe's New Year. As a child, I watched on as men danced and women fasted in the Prayer Lodge for three days and nights in the sweltering July heat. We would wake at dawn to the sound of drums and watch as the dancers greeted the sunrise. On the final evening, the dancers and fasters completed their ceremony, honoring the sunset with the rest of the tribe, and as it set over the horizon, everybody began to cheer.

Maldonado, M. (2021). The Healing Turtle and *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 38–43.

It was an honor for a family to fast and pray in the Lodge, but once committed to the ceremony, their word must be kept. Sun Dance brought weight to my thoughts because I realized what commitment and loyalty I must have in my devotion to and respect for my culture. Prayer is my own inner monologue of intentions, and the more I desired to listen without ego to my ancestors, the less I strayed from my path and that of the conscious freeway I had access to within myself. I imagine a pure light—a satisfaction with purpose, a justification of servitude, and an acceptance with the pursuit of knowledge. Every year that I have come back to the sacred grounds of my reservation, I feel an energy to collect my thoughts and leave behind all that does not serve me.

An Introduction to STEM

I always thought I would grow up to be an author or artist. I won writing awards throughout all of my secondary education and inserted myself into creative spaces constantly. I understood the initiative to succeed within liberal arts, but that intent required structure—one that I would have to develop myself. Alternatively, technology had been a constant factor in my upbringing. Since I could remember, I had my own desktop computer. A root memory I have was playing with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint in order to make my own graphic designs. Around middle school, I discovered front-end web development by browsing niche blogs online. With my artistic background, I found joy in the structure of digital art and web design. I would exchange my webpage coding abilities with other users for promotion of my own blog, but I never considered it to be a career path until a decade later, despite my constant desire for creative freedom.

As I prepared for applying to college during my senior year of high school, I recall this deeply intrinsic feeling that I would regret passing up the opportunity. At 17 years old, I only had so much individuation under my belt, but I knew that some unique knowledge would cross my path and give me the privilege to explain myself more gracefully. I did not trust my own voice or vision enough at that age to pursue English or graphic design, so I decided that an associate degree in computer science would give me the tools to keep creativity in my life with a safety net. It felt functional and freeing at the same time.

Thus, my passion for arithmetic began with an inadvertent mathematics degree while enrolled in the computer science program of a quaint community college. I was advised in the fall of 2017. They printed out my schedule for the next three academic years; I would have to take 35 credits of strictly mathematics and grow my skills from Intro to College Algebra to Ordinary Differential Equations. I had failed a math class in high school and had only picked myself up by the bootstraps in my senior year. Despite not having any innate familiarity with my abilities in the subject, when I was presented with the requirements set out before me, I immediately flipped the switch and accepted learning as a lifestyle.

For all three years of attendance at my community college, I tutored part-time. It began with tutoring English as I simultaneously built my mathematical understanding. As the semesters progressed, I was able to add more advanced math courses to my tutoring ability. That job resulted in me being surrounded by experienced peers at the end of their own Associate of Science degrees, and they had an impeccable learning style that I could not have found elsewhere. My sponge-like curiosity was guided by their commitment to discipline. During sophomore year, I became involved in Student Senate, and by my final year, I was elected Student Body Treasurer in addition to acquiring a double-internship in the Information Technology Department as a web developer and graphic designer.

Throughout all of the connections I had made through tutoring, academic service, and involvement with various departments, Healing Turtle kept coming back to me. The complexity of my schedule did not phase me because every moment of work was a moment of interaction with the collective consciousness that was my community.

Being Native American and having the privilege of pursuing higher education as a female in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) made me realize that I cannot sit idly by and take advantage of all that I have learned in my academic experience. With being a novice in academia while earning my associate degree, I wanted to adamantly pursue opportunity within the rural and tight-knit community at the College of Southern Idaho. I began an outline of how I could fill my time with what I loved while utilizing creativity in an approach to my career path.

The initial plan to pursue computer science had always been rooted in my intuitive understanding of technology and design. I diligently broke down these topics as much as possible—down to the foundational components of how and why I should pursue such creations in the first place. In the present moment, I now realize this was my slowly expanding passion for logic and reason, yet I still recalled my spiritual intentions with being diligent in how I invest my time. Before joining the Information Technology Department, I was told by peers that they would never hire me without experience. This sparked the enigmatic reality of what it means to do something you love: you have to trust yourself enough to ask first.

While preparing for my pursuit of becoming a web developer with the college, I built my own website showcasing my resume, personal articles on philosophy and learning, informational videos on YouTube, and a web design portfolio. This all revolved around 15 credits of school a semester, after which I gained my esteemed internship and began coding for student accessibility on the college's website. This opportunity gave me a glimpse into the technology industry and insight into how my integration with academic organizations can reach out to many people. I found passion in coding beyond the means of production for marketing and consumerism. It was about helping others with possible disabilities in accessing college processes. I felt a deep connection to the transaction of ideas happening in a college environment but knew that my computer science degree and that career path were beginning to isolate me from my spiritual intentions related to my work and that change was on the horizon.

As I experience the pleasure of learning, developing my ideas, and collaborating with a passionate academic community, I remind myself of my roots. The Healing Turtle cannot exist in an ivory tower. I could not harbor my wisdom and must accept that I was existentially required to connect with others. This is why I could not continue to code behind a dimly lit computer monitor any longer and had to find a more realistic framework in which to translate my philosophy.

Logic and Spirituality

As I transitioned into a strong bachelor's degree program in mathematics and grew to love the work I was doing, it exposed me to all of the possible ideological structures offered in solving a problem. It became a blueprint in how I reformatted my perspective on communication, interaction, and engagement with the community. I became involved in research related to group theory over the summer of 2021, and it humbled me in the sense that all of this intimidating jargon that exists in mathematics is just a language to be learned. We are simply training our minds to simplify the world into elements that either do or do not exist in a group.

Regardless of whether math tends to be the outcast of preferred academic subjects, I see it as another opportunity in evolving the student experience such that they will not feel they lost years to studying it. I accepted mathematics as a means to an end when I enrolled in college. I did the work because I trusted my curriculum and how it would benefit my abilities as a developer. In those 35 credits of commitment to mathematics, I also discovered that there is influence in standing in front of a crowd, explaining the objectivity of the world to them, as have the many mathematicians and logicians before us. I had found my happiness between subject and self. It is not likely that I, nor my future students, will be required to compute a triple integral or recall an intricate theorem at whim in our daily lives, but the intellectual process endured, as each layer of the computed equation will live on in our assessment of the world.

"For all their precious and undeniable powers, human logic and mathematical proofs do not seem to cast an equally brilliant light on every corner of the cosmos" (Suzuki & Knudtson, 1992, p. 79). When I found this quote in a book focused on Native American heritage and wisdom, it became problematic to the philosophy I had identified with for years. Merging logic and spirituality will always require continual metacognitive effort. The irony of the challenge and these colliding ideologies continue to drive my work.

In my advocacy for diversity in academia, I find that my own engagement in it as a Native American educator is necessary due to my spiritual drive to conquer mathematical understanding beyond the means of capitalist productivity. I was once a disengaged student in adolescence who found no reasoning behind the curriculum I was forced to study. It never felt natural or relevant to my life. Earning my Associates of Science in Computer Science and Mathematics exposed me to unique subjects beyond the core curriculum standards of algebra. Topics containing logic, such as discrete mathematics, could be a valuable integrated alternative in secondary education mathematics curricula. This topic's ability to have more dialogue in explaining logical processes and forms of categorization has the advantage of connecting to personal, real-world applications. I strive to disengage the fear that various students have for mathematics through engaging learning practices and active discussion relative to the material.

Let us consider an explicit example of this philosophy in action. I spoke with a student earning hours towards their journeyman license as a plumber. They felt that, although they constantly navigated these plumbing systems within bare frames of newly developed houses, there was no challenge. I wanted to focus on how they had to perform tasks within given restrictions (related to their trade). They found joy in discovering the most productive way to build a plumbing system. This aligns similarly to exploring logic in mathematics: how can we simplify this problem as much as possible, and how can it make our lives easier in the process? As the student continued on with their daily work and came home to reflect on the problems they faced, they studied different approaches outside of what was required of them for schooling. It became quickly obvious to their employer that this employee was actively applying themselves to their commitments. Their growing curiosity and work ethic inspired their peers.

Logic lives in all problems, but if the proof is never pursued, there never exists a better outcome. As I plant these seeds in those who cross my path, they can share their growth with others, and the cycle continues. This is the Healing Turtle.

Discipline in Purpose

There is a coarse grit required in chiseling out the idea of self. Knowledge allows students to find a representation of such through objects, symbolism, and application,

but what stunts this chance for growth is the implication of what has become a more industrialized school system. At a panoramic level, we live in a society grounded in capitalism and the ideation of building the lives that we work for—and to have work that one enjoys is a privilege in itself. That brings me to this notion: if we know we must work and if this is simply action in repetition, then there is no path other than to exploit knowledge and cognitive ability to its finest threads in unraveling how one genuinely perceives their existence. Speaking as Healing Turtle, I hope for my students to leave the classroom with the ability to have confidence in their voices as learners. Transferring this skill to students is another act of my intent as Healing Turtle, in that I can build a classroom environment where learners feel safe to explore their ideas without oppressive, and rather procedural, practices rooted in strictly formative assessment.

The challenge exists in having this philosophy function within the lens of a school system. With my growing passion in curriculum development, the path we set up for students is merely a roadmap of the concepts they will encounter. Considering the background of my undergraduate degree, I feel that interdisciplinary studies between STEM and liberal arts is a valuable collaboration. Although I have loved my experience in pure mathematics, I have never once been asked to write, speak, or reflect on how I felt about the material until I was being funded for research. Such is expected of an objective subject, but how much unique perspective is lost in translation to students? I made myself look inwards on the material regardless, but what about the students who were not asked to? Reflection of self is a form of academic discipline.

Beyond secondary education, andragogy is neglected at a university level. I struggled to come to terms with that education because I so deeply pursued further connection with pure mathematics. I had a similar experience with my time in computer science. The curriculum I studied lacked *currere* (Pinar, 1975), and therefore, I struggled to connect to the computer programs I developed. As teachers, we have the opportunity to plant seeds of knowledge in our lessons that challenge students to see how the structure of academia can work to the benefit of their unique perspectives of the world. Students deserve to understand the accumulation of their work, whether it be through portfolios, idea maps, or personal projects relating their own interests in the subject being taught.

This brings me to my philosophy in discipline; where my goal is to explore the cognitive breadth of ideas coming into fruition, the most genuine world I could contribute to is one where I am constantly learning and reflecting. All the information a student could need has the possibility to be directly in front of them, sparking those small but valuable connections between self and interaction with the world, but the teacher must be aware of their own intrinsic philosophy on learning in order to properly set up students for success. This pursuit is possible for any path: creatives, mathematicians, authors, and all of the silver linings between the arts and sciences.

To be so enamored with the mantra of infinite knowledge has resulted in backlash from small corners of society in my education. I was told that a jack of all trades is a master of none, and I questioned if all of my simultaneous pursuits in computer science, design, mathematics, and education were possible. I had to look inwards and to wonder if my attempt at connecting these ideas truly mattered, yet this is what sparked my passion even further. I truly believe that by the time I had received such criticism, I was already wound up too tightly into my curiosities, and this is because I had the autonomy to know that I deserved freedom of choice.

This is something all students will have to debate within themselves often: what information and normalcy is worth letting go of? The “raw material of reasoning”

(Descartes, 1960, p. 18) is what remains when one goes through the cathartic process of releasing that which does not serve one's purpose, thus, allowing virtue to overcome vice. Where does vice exist in an academic system? It exists in our own doubts of self. Students lack the foundation of identity in why they pursue a topic in the first place. If they do badly on an exam, what will convince a student that their ideas are still worthwhile beyond GPA?

This fantasization of a constant influx of knowledge, although fulfilling, creates an equal and opposite reaction in the sense that where one is committed to what may be rational findings, there is the possibility that one's commitment to the idea was not conceived distinctly in the first place (Descartes, 1960). As I complete my Bachelor's of Science in Mathematics and prepare for graduate school, I must constantly check in with myself and where I am with the content so that I do not risk the fear of blinking, earning a doctorate degree, and still being completely disconnected from my work.

Analysis can detach a learner from the world. As Wittgenstein (1922) explained it: the combination of some amount of elements creates a picture that represents a thought, and this complex series of combinations will either be true or false. These cognitive blueprints are just a few paths that can be taken in finding one's voice, and they offer the ability to gain the skill of questioning one's reality. Healing Turtle exists in the realm of mathematics by means of validating the connection between subject and self. We have given students the tools to study arithmetic, to analyze prose, to become fluent in worldly matters, but they must also be given the tools to study the self.

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Roofs, Nesting Instincts, and Student Evaluations of Teaching During a Pandemic

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Currere is a four step research methodology that "seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of one's life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated in society, politics, and culture" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45). As an educator, I have come to appreciate and frame issues within the generous arms of the *currere* method, thereby, coming to understand the four moments "as a sensibility … precious to educators committed to their—and their students'—ongoing self-formation through academic studies" (p. 45).

The virtues of this autobiographical/biographical inquiry method are several. It supports my desire to explore "what … [has] been and what will be my educational experience[s]? (Baszile, 2017, p. vii). Moreover, it scaffolds my wonderings: "how have and how will these experiences shape who I have been and who I hope to be?" (p. vii). I also lean into Greene (1995), because she reminds me aesthetic education is "integral to the development of persons—to their cognitive, perceptual, emotional and imaginative development. We see it as part of the human effort (so often forgotten today) to seek a greater coherence in the world" (p. 7). As well, it is my hope that my use of imagination and my subsequent creation of art will allow readers to experience the potential of entering and exiting moments of tension (Clandinin, 2013) while embraced by creation, art, and colour, resulting in "vibrancy and vitality" (Greene, 2001, p. 13) of self, potentially introducing "new [educative] ways of seeing, hearing, feeling and moving" (p. 7).

This inquiry reports on how an educator in a tenure-track position in the midst of a global pandemic navigated the four moments of currere: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, 2012) while modifying and delivering courses to teach online (synchronously and asynchronously). The modification in part included efforts to teach students about the value of submitting course feedback and evaluations. The inquiry is framed within the *currere* method (Pinar, 2012) and the aesthetic education so richly developed by Greene (1995, 2001). As well, I leaned into Dewey's (1938) "principle of continuity of experience … that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35).

Regressive: Cycles of Impostership and In-Between Spaces

From April to August (2020), early into the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, I engaged in online training activities with my university's Centre for Teaching and Learning. I participated in virtual, roundtable discussions, explored how to use online platforms, and attended virtual workshops focused on effective online pedagogies. I focused on successful navigation of the skills and knowledge needed to teach class and laboratory activities virtually. It was also during this time that I agreed to participate in the piloting of a new, online student evaluation process. I was interested in participating because I was able to add feedback questions for students, and I was told I would receive student evaluations in a timely manner; previously, this had not always been the case. Knowing that I would, in the end, need to attend to student evaluations of my teaching,

Kuhnke, J. L., & Jack-Malik, S. (2021). Roofs, nesting instincts, and student evaluations of teaching during a pandemic. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 44–52.

as I prepared to teach online, I reflected on a number of teaching memories, which resulted in some tension (Clandinin, 2013).

Over the course of my education and teaching career, I regularly experienced feelings of impostership. I learned to teach while growing up in a rural, faith-based, working-class farming community, where there were frequently opportunities to teach younger children. With encouragement from my parents, I came to know myself as a first-generation college and university graduate (Brookfield, 2015). When I returned home, I experienced critical comments for wanting to study; they came not from trusted family members, but from those who did not appear comfortable with my questioning of community-held norms regarding education (Brookfield, 2015).

When I began formal teaching, I primarily taught nursing and interdisciplinary health care professionals face-to-face in small, acute care hospitals and in home care and long-term care settings. I enjoyed the collegiality, laughter, and relational aspects that sometimes resulted when coming alongside learners (Clandinin, 2013). Yet, during these years, feelings of being inferior, unworthy, and being an imposter would arise, including sensing I was less knowledgeable than the nurses I was supporting. Mid-career, I remember feelings of impostership when I returned to complete master (Aird, 2017) and later doctoral studies (Chakraverty, 2020).

In the last two years, I have come to know exploring student feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow professionally (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2020); however, knowing something and experiencing it are two different things, hence the tensions. I was also concerned for and wanted to support peers who tend to focus only on students' negative comments and miss the rich, salient learning opportunities from which to grow (Brookfield, 2015). Having engaged in previous *currere* explorations where I was able to read student evaluations and learn from them, I wanted to support peers who strive to do likewise.

I have taught in the post-secondary environment for nine years, and I am aware feelings of being an imposter can surface and prevail; for me this was especially true when learning to teach online and during a pandemic. Brookfield (2015) reminds educators that "we wear an external mask of control, but beneath it we know that really we are frail figures, struggling to not appear totally incompetent to those around us" (p. 58). This was especially relevant as I did not choose to teach online. I prefer face-to-face classroom and laboratory activities. I work to actively demonstrate patient assessment skills and to embed discussions with theories of compassion, while building trust filled relationships with and between learners.

Brookfield's (2015) reflection offered me hope when he discussed educators who admit to struggling when trying to make sense of teaching related challenges, often publicly, and who subsequently experience professional growth. Being in a tenure-track position, I acknowledged I felt internal tension around student evaluations of my teaching (Berg & Seeber, 2016). I also wondered how student feedback would differ when teaching online. I wondered how creating my online presence and recording my voice aloud would influence evaluations. These two requirements of online teaching were not in my comfort zone.

Progression: My Vision Forward

The *currere* moments (Pinar, 2012) framed my projection of self into the future. Specifically, I envisioned a place, time, and "in-between space" (Moore, 2013, p. 2) where I could explore the dominant narrative that student evaluations hold "weight"

(Peters, 2019, para, 1) and may influence my tenure-track. Moore (2013) describes the "in-between space" as a place and time where "identity formation is uncomfortable at best and can be agonizing at worst, [knowing] challenging situations have great power to shape individuals" (Moore, 2013, p. 2). For me, this envisioned space included the calming voices of the university educational developers who with regularity answered my questions about voice-over-lectures, pre-readings, skill videos, development of secure forums, and chat rooms. As well, I actively planned to apply three recommendations (Brookfield, 2015) to build my self-confidence while teaching online as part of my teaching plan. The following describes how that plan and the three recommendations were operationalized over the duration of the course.

First, I shared a PowerPoint presentation I had created to introduce myself to learners. It included my artwork (Greene, 1995), research studies, service activities, and my growing understanding of being an educator. A key statement from Brookfield (2015) was embedded: "The image of a fully formed, omniscient teacher trained to respond immediately and appropriately to any and all eventualities is indeed part of the veil of illusion" (p. 267). This statement was included to reflect my own vulnerability. I also included autobiographical details, including struggles from formal schooling. I spoke of repeating a nursing, math calculation course, as it was taught in metric, not imperial, measures. I described working full-time in intensive care and as an educator while studying. I reported asking for assignment extensions, utilizing the writing center supports, and having an anxiety attack prior to defending my doctoral work. I concluded my introduction with Brookfield's (2015) words, "starting the first class of a course with this disclosure is repeatedly described by students as a very effective way of keeping their anxieties in check" (p. 200). I was hopeful, therefore, that Brookfield's words would be reflected in my online evaluations because students had experienced my honesty and ongoing desire to learn from them.

Next, I shared that I was not an expert in all nursing concepts; we would learn and discuss concepts together. I explained how I often moved text-based paragraphs into images and tables or created concept maps to make sense of relationships and the complexity of nursing. As well, I purposefully opened each class with a case study example to scaffold previous reading and frame it within clinical practice.

Finally, I reminded students that timely, honest, and constructive feedback would benefit me and next year's learners. I committed to embedding their suggestions and improvements into future classes. To support ongoing development of my teaching self-confidence, I shared the following cycle. I described how their feedback would be utilized, valued, and respected (Brookfield, 2015). I explained that upon coming to the post-secondary environment I was not always sure what to do with student feedback and that this cycle, when applied, helped me to grow in my role as an educator (Vanderbilt University, 2015), while improving the course for students. I invited them to contribute to this working model (See Figure 1).

Analysis: Student Evaluations Arrive

As I create this *currere* (text, artwork, and reflections), we are months into the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2021). With regularity, during "COVID-times," I have and continue to journal, create art, and photograph my hikes into the bush, reflecting on my work as a university professor. This brings comfort as I learn to teach and research differently, albeit somewhat painfully. I have been wondering about the notion of nesting instincts (Anderson & Rutherford, 2013) and the benefits

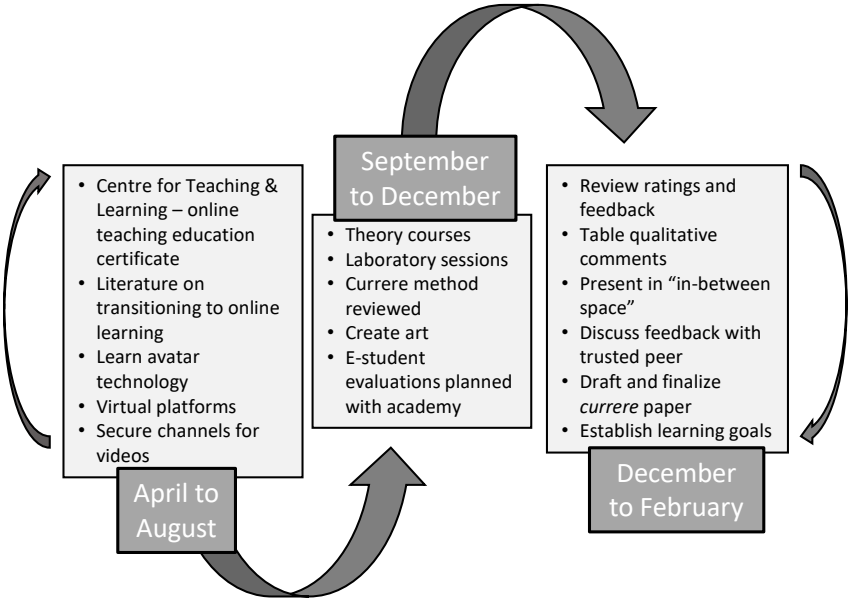

Figure 1: Feedback Cycle Working Model

they can provide during a pandemic, teaching online, and while experiencing many COVID related challenges. Being at home, tucked safely in my office, with the gardens and bush at my doorstep, I regularly experience the benefits of nesting. At the same time, I wonder how to create an in-between space (Moore, 2013) where I can quietly read (uninterrupted), reflect, and attend to students feedback in ways that sustain my protective nest while contributing to myself, my peers, and students.

My Nesting Story and the Creation of an In-between Space

Today I sat on top of our garage roof applying asphalt shingles. Secured by a roof strap, I felt relatively safe though cold winds whipped around me and my husband passed roofing materials to me. I was in my glory—hammering and adjusting shingles to create the ridge cap. Two crows hovered, noisily, bantering loudly; I was within their space. As I rested between nailing, I gazed into two tall, dying larch trees gently embraced by younger fir trees. It was as though the older trees were comforted and nested securely amongst younger, more energetic trees who seemed to offer some protection as winter gusts pressed forward. I wondered if this was the same comfort and protection I was seeking before receiving "the email" with students' feedback to my online courses. (*Journal*, November 2020) (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: Rooftops and Nesting

Later in the week, I electronically received a link to student evaluations. As part of the pilot project, I was able to include four additional individualized questions. My questions focused on students' perceptions of my effectiveness to teach theory and laboratory sessions using virtual platforms, avatar technology, videos, discussion forums, voice-over-lectures, and readings (synchronously and asynchronously). Because teaching completely online was new to me, I read with curiosity the ratings and comments. As well, I was aware, as Brookfield (2015) states, of my propensity to remember students' negative comments. For example, some did not enjoy the patient case examples I had so carefully prepared, while others were frustrated with internet challenges or finding themselves in the wrong online classroom. I internally acknowledged the comments and then moved on to intentionally focus on comments from which I could "learn something new and difficult" (p. 269) and not default to feelings of being the imposter online educator, because as Brookfield notes, there will always be negative comments.

Synthesis: My Nesting Instincts are Sustaining

Receiving feedback from leaders, peers, and patients is embedded in a nursing career. Utilizing feedback, with collegial discussion, has aided in developing yearly goals and opportunities to nudge forward my "way of being" as a nurse educator and researcher (Schon, 1983, p. 137). What was new to me, once I moved into the academy, was knowing that student feedback about me as a nursing professor in a tenure-track role could influence "high-stakes personnel decisions" about my ongoing career (Flaherty, 2018, para, 4). In recent years, efforts have been and continue to be made within the academy to frame and weigh students' feedback with some temperance; however, concerns remain (Farr, 2018; Grey, 2018; Peters, 2019).

In preparation for reading student evaluative ratings and qualitative comments, I nested and curled up in my favorite reading chair. Blue-heeler dogs at my feet and a cup of coffee ready, I covered the chair arms with books and articles to be read. I began by rereading and reflecting on related literature. Specifically, I re-read Brookfield's (2015) kind reminders that student comments are part of an academic's world. He wrote that even the best professors receive negative feedback as the university environment and "learning is often highly emotional, involving great threats to students' self-esteem, particularly if they are required to explore new and difficult knowledge and skill domains" (p. 271). I think about students who are being pushed to learn, and at the end of the course, we ask them to be objective about a professor's effectiveness. We ask this of them at the precise moment when their learning is also asking them to let go of pre-course certainties and embrace new ideas, skills, and sometimes new identities, all of which can result in evaluations that are "expressed in emotional terms" (p. 272).

While pondering these ideas, my nesting instinct is embodied and strong; it draws me to hike deep into the bush as early winter winds around me. I utilized my camera to find and photograph emptied bird nests; they appeared exposed as the protective maple and birch leaves had fallen to the quiet, moss-covered earth. The nests also seemed vulnerable, at risk, unprotected from raw, early winter snows. Student comments journeyed alongside me, just as the small, delicate nests floated and seemingly hovered on fine threads above my head (See Figure 3). I considered Brookfield (2015) who reminds me to keep a broad perspective and to accept that "risk is endemic to skillful teaching" (p. 271).

Figure 3: Look Up

Look up, look up, they call.
I too am vulnerable.
I need the shelter of leaves to protect my young.
The canopy shields from ravens and eagles, large.
My young and I have gone south.
We will be back in the spring
When a new teaching season will start.

In Summary

In this *currere*, the four moments allowed for educative pauses where I reflected with the goal of gaining insight into how student evaluations and my responses to them are threaded through my past, present, and into my future (Dewey, 1938). Pinar (2012) further states:

> without the lived, that is, subjectively structured temporality the method of *currere* encourages, … we are consigned to the social surface, to the never-ending present, and what we see is what we get. When we listen to the past we become attuned to the future. From the past we can understand the present, which we can reconstruct. Subjective and social reconstruction is our professional obligation as educators. (p. 236)

Making methodical use of *currere*—carefully attending to each temporal moment and utilizing Moore's (2013) notion of in-between spaces—I quietly reflected through time

(Dewey, 1938) and experiences such that I was able to use "self-knowledge to make conscious, informed decisions about [my] … practice as an educator" (Moore, 2013, p. 4). Specifically, I attended to student feedback that I concluded was useful as part of my ongoing efforts to improve my teaching and learning practices. I also worked to read and release potentially harmful commentary; it was my deliberate intention to keep "things in a state of congenial, rather than disruptive, tension" (Brookfield, 2015, p. 274). It was my experience that this was more possible when I was tucked safely within my nest, engaged with this *currere* and the related literature.

Embracing the *currere* method framed a journey of exploring student feedback in an academic setting (Pinar, 2012). In the regressive moment, we see how the joy of teaching was embedded in early experiences as a youth and young adult. Slowing down, carving out time, I experienced gratitude for the connections I made to past educative beginnings lived out in quiet, farming communities, to ideas about my future as an educator. Through the progressive moment, it was possible to envision purposefully using student feedback (Brookfield, 2015). The model (Figure 1) when shared with students, created an in-between space for both students and myself. This was the case because they understood I valued and intended to utilize their feedback. Moreover, the model created a structure for me when reading less than constructive comments. This was followed by the analytical moment where I utilized the safe and nesting space to hear and learn from comments that could be used to make changes in upcoming courses. It allowed for a drawing inward of comments that could be realistically utilized and embedded in courses (Vanderbilt University, 2015). Finally, following Moores' (2013) lead and moving into the synthetical moment allowed space to write specific teaching goals for the next term when I will teach these courses again. As well, I took time to intentionally grow through the process of developing this *currere*. This was not an easy process. It included "complicated conversations, informed by a self-reflexive, interdisciplinary erudition" (Pinar, 2012, p. 183) with my research partner. Intentionally and purposefully anchoring student feedback in the *currere* method and embracing an "in-between space" afforded me time to become "wide-awake" (Greene, 1977) to the possibility that student evaluations can be educative to my ongoing desire to improve my craft (Brookfield, 2015).

Figure 4: Feeling Vulnerable and Learning

As I hike, leaves have fallen from fruit trees and empty nests become visible. Once filled with young, hidden by lush foliage and safe from predators, they are now filled with snow (See Figure 4). The songbirds have gone for the winter; the chickadees, juncos, and cedar-waxwings wait and feed on frozen apples not harvested.

My final note is to recommend educators create a nest, embrace the *currere* method (Moore, 2013), and encourage themselves and their peers to frame students' feedback in a constructive manner (Brookfield, 2015). In so doing, you may support a peer along their tenure-track journey (Berg & Seeber, 2016). It is essential to come alongside (Clandinin, 2013) peers, to contribute to and encourage educators who may be daunted by student feedback (Brookfield, 2015).

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The Making of a Writing Instructor: A *Currere* Regression in Four Fragments

By Kelly Waldrop
The Publish House

Scene: A Typical Suburban High School Classroom

In the last few minutes of the last class meeting of my freshman high school honors English class, I sat looking at the grade sheet that the teacher had handed me detailing my final course grade. My heart sank as I looked at the bottom line: 94.4 (A-). In my academically competitive high school, a 95 was an A and was the score that was needed to be automatically placed into the track for senior year AP English, a goal I had been shooting for since I learned that the entire year would be spent on Shakespeare, a personal favorite (I know. I am a nerd. At 14, Shakespeare was a favorite. Nothing to see here. Move along.).

When the class ended, I shuffled in my seat, taking time putting away my things as the rest of the students left the room. My teacher (whose name I don't recall but who I remember as looking like a mashup of Dolores Umbridge and Betsy DeVos) stood ordering papers and books on her already-tidy desk and did not look up when I approached, though I sensed that she knew I was there.

"Yes," she said, still not looking up from the surface of the desk.

"Um," I began, trying to figure out how to start, "Well, my grade is one tenth of a point away from getting me into the AP track, and since not making it now will shut me out entirely, I was hoping there might be something I could do to get that extra tenth of a point."

"No," she said, finally looking up and making eye contact.

"No?" I asked, a little surprised at getting a one word answer.

"The fact is," she went on, "that you are not AP English material."

Scene: A Typical State University Classroom

In the last few minutes of the last class meeting of the first week of my freshman English composition class, the instructor (whose name I don't recall but who I remember as looking like a mashup of Kristen Bell and Ellen DeGeneres) had just handed back my Harbrace Folder, in which was the graded copy of my first college essay and upon which was a post-it note reading, "See me after class." My heart sank, and I opened the folder with trepidation. At the top of the first page, written in large, swooping letters were the words, "Excellent Work, A+."

Confused, I sat looking at the folder as the rest of the class filed out into the hall. I quickly gathered my things and went to where the instructor was shoving her books and papers into a ratty backpack. Sensing my presence, she looked up into my eyes and smiled.

"I guess you are wondering what I want," she said. "I just wanted to know what such a good writer was doing in my class. Did your school not have an AP English program?"

I explained my situation to her, and she nodded and said, "I was afraid of that. Well, if I am the first to tell you, and I fear I may be, you are a really good writer. I mean, you could make a living at this someday if that interested you."

Waldrop, K. (2021). The making of a writing instructor: A *currere* regression in four fragments. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 53–54.

Scene: A Typical State University Faculty Club

In the first few minutes of the a "meet and greet" cocktail hour event for new English Department graduate students, I found myself standing shoulder to shoulder with two other students who, like I, had received honors fellowships that would pay for our Master of English in Literature and Composition programs, along with a generous stipend for living expenses. The rest of our cohort was scheduled join in another hour, but the first event of the night was meant to be an honor just for the three of us. Nervously, we fetched drinks from the bar and began chatting among ourselves, sharing stories of how we had ended up there together. I had just finished telling them that this school was actually my undergrad alma mater and that I had come back specifically to work with the medieval literature professor when faculty members started to drift in, approach the bar, and eventually head casually in our direction.

As the evening progressed and the honors-fellowship hour was coming to a close, a professor (whose name I don't recall, but who I remember looking like a mashup of Jared Kushner and the teacher from Ferris Bueller) approached me with a smile on his face and his hand extended to shake mine.

"Welcome to the Department," he said. "My name is [insert entirely forgettable name here], and I'm the Director of Undergraduate Studies."

"Hi, Professor [Whatsits], I'm Kelly Waldrop, and we have actually met before."

Slapping his thigh in an actual, corny, gosh-shucks manner, he replied, "I knew you looked familiar. How do I know you?"

"I got my B.A. here, and during my senior year, Dr. Howes was teaching an honors seminar on Chaucer. Space was limited in the seminar, and you had ruled that seats in the class would be determined by G.P.A. Since I had spent the first two and a half years of my college career as an Engineering student, I knew that my 3.6 G.P.A. wasn't likely to make the cut, so I came to your office to appeal to you for a spot, given that my G.P.A. after changing my major to English was a 4.0."

He looked at me with a sort of blankness that confirmed he had no recollection of this at all, and with a tell-me-more eagerness in his voice, he asked, "What happened? Did I let you in the class?"

I looked him straight in the eye and said with a slight half-smile, "Nope."

At first, his face fell slightly, but then he brightened as if remembering where we were and said, "Well, it doesn't seem to have hurt you any."

Scene: Another Typical State University Classroom

In the first few minutes of the first class meeting of Teaching English Composition, the first course in my master's program, as soon as the class came to order, the teacher asked, "How many of you took freshman composition in your bachelors programs?" Of the twenty students in the classroom, I was the only one who raised a hand. Giving me a surprised look, the teacher (whose name I don't recall but who I remember as looking like a mashup of every female professor I have ever had) said, "Well, you just ruined my next line. In all of my years teaching this course, I have never had anyone raise their hand to that question, and I explain what a deficit it is to be tasked with teaching a course that you have never taken. Would you be willing to put together a short presentation for the class on your student experience in freshman composition and what you feel you learned from the class?"

Moviehouse Poems

By Mark O'Hara
Stephen T. Badin High School

Labyrinth

Perplexity, not relief,
is the vindication of film.
Our first time in the moldy movie
palace, we catch anticipation's
crackle: live silence
of the soundtrack before music
washes over us and recedes
under the title. Our tendons strain
and hands close like claws
around our knees, shaking
with the dynamic tension of curiosity,
our need to see things go
the way we want.
After a thousand viewings
we still trip over our ignorant
feet in the dark of the multiplex,
eyes adjusting slowly
in the same way the heart, squeezed
by secrecy, opens
to what's playing in the world.
We find again how a film
can clip our expectations
and send us wandering
through its passages arranged
in blind walls and cavernous
echo chambers, and we are confused
until the path becomes the exit
and we cannot see
how we failed to understand.

Moviehouse Neuroses

A woman shuddered and failed
to muffle her scream each time
the darkness laid its hands on her.

O'Hara, M. (2021). Moviehouse poems. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 55–59.

A man, a lawyer in town,
sneaked into the condemned balcony
and all during *Jaws* used
the blowpipe of his pen
to shoot unpopped kernels
at the necks below him.

Another man
wouldn't let you leave
the auditorium during crucial
scenes. His wife evicted children
from the first row
where she sat through every
matinee. Once she sued the theater,
claiming *Sensurround* was driving her crazy.

Paul Feemus the usher
threw them all out in his quest
for a better viewing public.

Paul Feemus Juggles

In 1971, during an intermission,
crowd gathering on the threadbare
rug before the glass box
of popcorn, Paul Feemus
juggled whole boxes of candy,
sending up Good and Plenty, Goobers,
a Chunky, the moviegoers' jaws
falling in fascination as they tried to read
the blurred penmanship the objects left
upon the air, watching until the arcs
and plunges grew erratic and collapsed,
and the usher drew a Coke
and changed a twenty.

Paul Feemus Loses Vision

The day a trio of kids
sneaked into an R-rated film
Paul Feemus went on the skids.
He'd been at the helm

taking tickets, and he'd let them in.
Worse, he couldn't call
his manager: the humiliation!
He'd catch them next time, was all.

His character's tragic flaw
lay in not being awake:
the brats clogged every stall
in the restroom during his break.

The little meatheads, he would grind
into paste every kid their age!
He ran outside and, blinded,
hurled curses in a rage.

Legends

Long ago Paul Feemus
left the theater like some famous monster
creeping off to nurse
his wounds. The younger ushers
still wonder about his departure,
their whispers growing so urgent
not even the fluted lights dimming
for a feature command a hush.
He beat up some kids he caught
vandalizing the bathroom.
What? He caught the principal
in here with a cheerleader
and blabbed about it. They chucked
him out of school and ushering both.
I heard his old man owned this place,
and he fired Paul for patting
down customers for smuggled candy.

Last movie's running
when they file in the projection room.
I was there, I say, during a storm
you could hear over the Dolby.
It was a Kurt Russell, after he
turned too old for Disney, and you
would never expect a woman
sprinting down the aisle followed
by a guy who grabbed her in front
of the screen. *You move*

she gets hurt the guy's body
told Paul, who was close.
I ran for the lights and put
them on too fast, they burned
like phosphorus flares,
and we saw Paul
wrap his arms around an empty chair,
muscles popping like rocks
under his skin as the metal screamed
and Paul pressed the seat over
his head, the velvet shining
like old wine, and the guy
let the crying woman go.

Wait a minute. The youngest one
stands and steps close.
Next you're going to tell me
Paul threw the chair
and killed the guy.

Paul Feemus Trains a New Usher

The theater's the thing
is what you can't forget.
Show people their seats and smile,
sure, but keep order and you're set.

Manager will never put you on trial
for keeping the place clean as well.
Here's the plunger, broom—you'll learn
to use them tonight, sure as hell.

If you came to watch movies, return
the vest and flashlight now. I don't care
if Raquel and Sophia are on the screen
together, all bouncy and bare:

you're here to sling sodas, not dream.
Why am *I* leaving? Movies are dead
to me. Just like cooks can't eat
in restaurants. It's all in my head

you say? May your sneakered feet
wander these aisles for ten years
before your shift is over. I'm also departing
because I saw something the manager fears

will cost *his* job. He's starting
to look for reasons to let me go,
all for blowing the whistle on a cheerleader
and her principal in the back row.

No, I'm not the kind of creature
to give notice. I'll just cut myself free.
Won't show up for work one day, forever,
what my daddy did to me.

Opening Act

The dancers enter
the old moviehouse
one builds a fire
in the projection booth
the drumbeat rises as the lights dim
the men wear masks
the women breastplates
of hammered metal
they dance slowly
down the aisles
as two elders
before the screen
begin to juggle
tossing each other
the blunted knives of history