Table of Contents

Volume 6 Issue 2 December 2022

Editorial Staff

Who's Cheating Whom? Academic Dishonesty as a Vehicle for Deep Learning

By Michael Todd Edwards
Miami University

I

I was a senior at Middvale High School.[1] In less than two weeks I would graduate and—as far as I knew—say goodbye (and fuck off!) to the midwestern, rustbelt town I had called home for as long as I could remember. For four long years, I had dutifully completed every class assignment placed in front of me—pages of formulas and factoring exercises, numerous spelling and vocabulary quizzes, and an endless array of readings highlighting names and dates of significant historical events. Taken individually, assignments such as these were laughably superficial. For instance, although I had spent at least two years studying American history, I knew virtually nothing about the United States after World War II. Watergate? *Nope.* Vietnam? *Never.* The New Jim Crow? *No way!* The War on Drugs? *Get real already!* Any details that might cast America in an unflattering light were conveniently omitted from our class texts and conversations. Yet taken as a whole, the curriculum was surprisingly demanding—not so much in terms of its rigor or capacity to challenge problematic beliefs—but rather in keeping students busy, distracted, and compliant.

School was not a place for debate or dialog about important issues of the day or for considering alternatives to the status quo. It was certainly not a place to solve *real* problems students might confront after graduation.

It was in this context that I found myself in 1987—a high school senior in a midwestern steel town. The heartland. Ohio—land of the free and home of the blissfully ignorant (the more things change, the more they stay the same). *Oh my God! How do I get out of this place?* With two weeks left, my mind was focused on little more than escape from this world, doing what I could to avoid class altogether.

II

I spent a lot of time in the Middvale High School library, studying for exams in my final weeks. The library was an excellent place to take a break from classes (and classmates). Sprawled on a beanbag chair in a secluded corner, I stretched my legs while leafing through the latest issue of *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*. As I flipped through the magazine's pages, dreaming about my future as a famous rock star, a mop of steely blue caught my eyes. Peeking over the top of my reading material, I watched Miss Shupe, my senior English teacher, hobble into the library copy room. Her presence reminded me of the bullying and finger-pointing we had endured. My mind drifted to an incident earlier in the year between Miss Shupe and my classmate, Ellie Faukner.

"Miss Faukner? Excuse me, Miss Faukner?"

"Yes."

"What have we here, Miss Faukner?"

"My homework?"

An immediate hush fell over the classroom. Twenty-five high school seniors sat in complete silence as Miss Shupe snatched my classmate's homework and held it up for all to see, pressing arthritis-curved fingers to pursed lips.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. It appears that Miss Faukner is having some difficulty with our troublesome words list, isn't she?"

Edwards, M. T. (2022). Who's cheating whom: Academic dishonesty as a vehicle for deep learning. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 1–6.

No one said a word. Jocks. Stoners. Class clowns. Nerds. None of them dared to interrupt a Miss Shupe tirade.

"I said, Miss Faukner is having some trouble, ISN'T SHE??"

I closed my eyes wearily as a handful of students responded in unison.

"Yes, Miss Shupe."

"Maybe Miss Faukner needs some additional encouragement to do the kind of work that she needs to do to be successful. Don't you think?"

In neatly spaced rows, we all watched as Miss Shupe eviscerated our friend. The blue-haired one sauntered to the front of our classroom, reached into the glass canister on her desk, and took out a small dog treat.

"Ms. Faukner, maybe this bone will serve as a reminder to you to take your homework more seriously. I do not take kindly to lazy dogs like you!"

With that, Miss Shupe walked towards Ellie, dog treat in hand, and pushed the bone against the teen girl's clenched lips. Tears streamed down my friend's face as she endured the icy one's humiliation in silence.

Miss Shupe was cold, vicious, and—at times—brilliant. No one could recite a poem like the blue-haired one. Her reading of *Macbeth* remains one of the most memorable and powerful moments of my formal education. Although Miss Shupe was a living legend among the many generations of students she had taught at Middvale High School, only glimpses of her former brilliance remained when I enrolled in her senior English class. While I loved many of our class readings—from Shakespearean sonnets and Greek legends to the works of the great Romantic poets—Miss Shupe's behavior was terrifyingly erratic, irrational, and increasingly violent. And although she passed away more than two decades ago, my relationship with her has continued to evolve. In much the same way that my understanding of memorable pieces of writing has evolved through time, my thoughts about Miss Shupe have changed as I've grown from a teenager into a teacher and parent. When I was 18, Miss Shupe represented everything I resented about school. Back then, her lessons for me had little to do with Keats, Wordsworth, or Lord Byron and much more to do with the dangers of unquestioned teacher authority, student conformity, and hubris.

Although I kept my mouth shut in her class, I didn't respect her as a teacher. She was an obstacle to be overcome rather than someone to learn from or understand. However, as I've experienced the struggles of aging firsthand, Miss Shupe's lessons remind me of the hazards of growing old and the tremendous responsibility that teachers are entrusted with in the development and care of students. *Words matter, and actions matter even more.*

III

I slumped in my beanbag chair, hiding my face from Miss Shupe's line of sight. I certainly didn't want her to recognize me, much less come over and talk to me about my preparation for tomorrow's big essay exam or graduation plans (a favorite topic of hers). With my head buried in an Eddie Van Halen expose, I listened intently for signs of Miss Shupe's departure. After what seemed like hours, I overheard the head librarian greet Miss Shupe by the front desk.

"Have a good day, Beth. Good luck with all of your end-of-the-quarter grading."

"Yes, I will certainly be working diligently these next few days, Miss Slatter. Thanks much."

With that friendly exchange, the coast was clear. I headed to the copier with a handful of dimes to photocopy the Eddie Van Halen article for a friend. As I got closer to the

machine, I noticed that Miss Shupe had left a piece of paper facedown on the glass. Turning the sheet over, I was astounded by what I saw. Honestly, I could not believe my eyes.

Oh.

My.

GOD!!!

There, as plain as day, was Shupe's final exam. "Maybe she really is losing it," I thought to myself. "How else could she have forgotten her original?" My heart raced as I looked around, snatched the exam off the copier, folded it neatly, and placed it in my bookbag for further analysis later in the evening. "Hot damn! I'm going to ace this one!" As the ring of the 8th period bell signaled the end of the school day, I lowered my head, avoided eye-contact with everyone in the library, and headed for home—eager to craft responses to Miss Shupe's essay questions.

IV

I ran upstairs to my bedroom, tossed my bookbag on my waterbed (note: this was the 1980s), and carefully unfolded the final exam. Scrutinizing the sheet, I was pleased by what I read—namely, a lone writing prompt inviting my classmates and me to delve into the characteristics of tragic heroes. Miss Shupe's question was genuinely intriguing.

> Recall that a tragic hero is a literary character who makes a judgment error that inevitably leads to his own destruction. In no more than 2000 words, explore a tragic hero from the present. Discuss how your hero satisfies Aristotle's definition of tragic hero. Provide detailed evidence in support of your claims.

With the prompt in front of me, I sat down at my desk and began to jot down characteristics. Miss Shupe had discussed these so frequently that they were literally seared into my brain: (1) *Hamarta*, a flaw or error of judgment; (2) *Peripeteia*, a reversal of fortune brought about because of the hero's error in judgment; (3) *Anagnorisis*, the discovery or recognition that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions; and (4) *Hubris*, excessive pride (Lucas, 1968). As I considered each of these qualities, I mulled over names in my mental Rolodex, trying to think of someone, *anyone*, to write about. While I could list many examples of people who satisfied one or two qualities of tragic heroes, it was difficult to come up with a subject who met *all* (or even *most*) of the requirements. Anxiously, I paced around the house, waiting for inspiration. I tidied my room, brushed my teeth, and emptied the dishwasher. While brewing a pot of Maxwell House, I considered present-day heroes.

Pete Rose? He was a favorite athlete and hometown hero. As the manager of the Cincinnati Reds, Rose bet on baseball and was banished from the game. That was certainly an example of *hamarta*. However, a tragic hero must be intelligent enough to learn from personal mistakes. Intelligent? Pete Rose? *Are you kidding?* Learn from his mistakes? *No way!* Charlie Hustle never acknowledged the error of his ways or expressed any remorse for his bad decisions. Thus, Pete Rose struck out as the subject for my essay.

Eddie Van Halen? He was a favorite musician and entertainer. Eddie's *hubris* alienated his lead singer, David Lee Roth, and broke up the greatest rock and roll act of my generation (namely, Van Halen!). Certainly THAT was a tragedy of epic proportions—particularly among 12th graders at Middvale High School. However, a tragic hero must also be imperfect. This helps the audience see themselves in the

character and feel empathy. *Imperfect? Eddie Van Halen? No way!* For many of us, EVH was the epitome of perfection. His signature song, "Eruption," revolutionized guitar playing for an entire generation of headbangers. Moreover, Eddie was as popular as ever after the break-up. Sammy Hagar, an exceptionally good singer and skilled frontman, replaced Roth—taking Van Halen to even greater heights of success. Hence, Eddie was not the tragic hero I needed.

For a good 45 minutes, I wracked my brain, trying to think of *someone* in my life who had a tragic flaw. *Mom? Dad? Uncle Wendell? Aunt Velma? Mamaw? Cousin Andy?* Sure, all of these people were flawed—they were *family*, after all! Unfortunately, none of them had met their demise as the result of a tragic flaw. The same was true of my closest school friends—Jeff, Scott, Gus, Sean, Rick, Jennifer, Tony. None had dealt with tragedy or loss like Macbeth or Willie Loman or Cleopatra or any of the myriad other characters we had read about in Shupe's class.

"Shit! What am I going to do?"

Suddenly, without warning (and after a second cup of joe), the subject of my paper came into focus. *AH HA!* There was absolutely NO DOUBT who I HAD to write about. This was going to be *good*. I could feel it in my bones.

V

For the next several hours, I wrote like a man possessed. With a sharpened number two pencil and a stack of blank blue books (the preferred medium for recording in-class writing back before word processors and cell phones), I made my case for *Miss Shupe as tragic hero*.

Hamartia? *Check.* Hubris? *Check?* But what about anagnorisis and peripeteia? I decided to write about anger as Miss Shupe's "fatal" flaw. While at one time she was regarded as one of the best teachers in the history of Middvale High, her propensity to single out weak students and bully them mercilessly contributed to her fall as an educator. My heart raced as I scribbled my arguments across multiple blue books. Although I was initially hesitant to write such a critical analysis about Miss Shupe—particularly in a paper that she might read (!!!)—as I delved deeper into my subject, a flood of pent-up emotion rushed over me. Tears welled in my eyes as I channeled a year's worth of anger, frustration, and resentment into my response. Writing never felt *this good* before. *Liberating. Cathartic. Empowering.* Go to hell, Miss Shupe!

VI

Exam day. There was a buzz of anticipation in the air as I entered Miss Shupe's classroom. Voices of anxiety, insecurity, and TERROR filled my ears.

"Are you ready for the exam?"

"What did you study? This was IMPOSSIBLE to prepare for."

"Ellie Faulkner took the exam second period. She said it was a BEAST!"

"Oh my GOD, this is going to SUCK."

"Did you bring lots of sharpened pencils?"

"What can she possibly ask? We only have 2 hours. There's no way I'm going to finish this in time."

If my classmates only knew what I had in my backpack, they wouldn't believe it!

As Miss Shupe quieted class, going over general guidelines for the exam (e.g., no talking, open notes, blue books), I unzipped my bag and glanced at my copy of *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*. Eddie's grin seemed to widen as I placed my completed essay underneath the blank blue books that Miss Shupe had distributed. As my heart

did its best to exit my chest, no one seemed to notice my actions. They were too busy worrying about the exam to pay too much attention to me.

At this point, the *real fun* began (not!). I hadn't considered that I wouldn't have much to do since I had already completed my responses. *What was I going to do for the next two hours?* I needed to provide Miss Shupe and others with the illusion that I was working on the exam. I needed something to write. Ultimately, I decided to write my girlfriend an amorous missive. It was a *perfect* plan. I could look busy, *and* I could score some points with Jennifer. With two hours, I'd have no problem writing the most epic love letter of all time!

My plan proceeded without a hitch for the first 30 minutes. I immersed myself in writing, composing flirtatious poems and limericks, dirty jokes, humorous drawings, and romantic top-ten lists with reckless abandon. I was so preoccupied with my work that I overlooked Miss Shupe as she approached my desk from behind. She spoke to me in a low whisper as she placed her hand firmly on my left shoulder.

"Mister Edwards, I presume!"

Oh my fucking God!

"Miss Shupe! How are you today?"

"Just fine, Mister Edwards. Just fine. So what are you working on at the moment?"

Oh my fucking God! She's caught me. I'm busted. Fuck! Fuck! FUCK!

"Well, at the moment, I'm deciding who to write about. I've narrowed it down to two or three people, and I'm weighing the pros and cons of each."

"That sounds good, Todd. You're a talented writer."

"Thanks, Miss Shupe."

"I know we've had our differences in the past. I won't mention your little performance at homecoming again."

"I know. I know. That was stupid."

"We all make mistakes. You're one of my best students. Like I've said many times, I forgive you."

Damn, Miss Shupe. Don't say such nice things! Don't you know what I've written about you? Of course, you don't. Uggh.

"Thank you, Miss Shupe."

And with that, Miss Shupe walked away, a blue book of scribbles on full display on my desktop. *Thank God she didn't notice. Oh my GOD. She's crazy, and I'm an asshole!*

I don't know if Miss Shupe ever read my thesis about her tragic downfall. I never saw my blue book writings after I placed them on her desk and left senior English class for the last time. The blue-haired one never gave me any feedback—not even a "good job!" or "interesting arguments!" On the other hand, I'm happy to note that my love letter to Jennifer WAS well-received (we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in 2020).

VII

Although I graduated from high school nearly 35 years ago, my experiences in Miss Shupe's class continue to inform my work. As a teacher educator, my principal role is to prepare future teachers to engage and inspire young people. Although I work primarily with pre-service mathematics teachers (many of whom are reluctant writers)—I make a point to engage *all* of my students in writing, regardless of their chosen major. *All* teachers need to recognize the power of writing as a vehicle for deep learning and a tool for self-expression.

Although my interactions with Miss Shupe were overwhelmingly negative, she taught me many things—most notably, the importance of providing students with opportunities to write about issues that matter to them (Romano, 2015). Although Miss Shupe rarely, if ever, provided me with options to select my writing prompts, her "take home" final exam set the stage for some of the most engaging writing of my high school career—precisely because I was able to explore tragic heroes in a way that was meaningful to me. By connecting course content with issues of great personal concern—bullying, compliance, and conformity—I was able to make the topic my own. As a result, I learned quite a bit about myself, Miss Shupe, and Greek tragedy—all in one fell swoop.

Another takeaway from Shupe's class involves academic dishonesty and testing culture. Until I wrote this *currere* reflection, I was convinced that I had cheated on Miss Shupe's final exam. Now, I'm not so sure. Although my actions afforded me the luxury of writing at home—a benefit that my classmates were not provided—I didn't spend more time writing than anyone else. Moreover, Miss Shupe allowed us to use notes on the exam. I didn't use any outside resources while crafting my response. As such, any advantage I had over my peers was essentially negligible. As I've reflected on my Shupe final exam experience, the incident has encouraged me to reconsider student assessment. As a high school math teacher, and more recently as a teacher educator, I've shied away from timed, in-class exams—opting instead for take-home tests and writing assignments.

Lastly, although Miss Shupe's behavior was reprehensible, my judgment of her conduct has softened over the years. My opinion is tempered by recent experiences with cognitive decline and aging. In the 1980s, the word *dementia* was alien to me. Several years after I graduated, Miss Shupe was placed on medical leave after she threw a pair of scissors at one of her students. Hers was the first case of Alzheimer's that I had ever known. After talking to a number of her former students, it became apparent how cruel the disease was for her. The malady transformed a gifted teacher and a pillar of the Middvale community into a classroom bully—one who inspired little more than fear in her final days. Miss Shupe's exit from the classroom wasn't celebrated with accolades from former students or a halftime speech; instead, she was greeted with a police escort for her final exit from the high school. Indeed, she did not deserve this fate.

Ultimately, Miss Shupe's story is a cautionary tale about aging and a disease that afflicts more than 6 million Americans—a number that is projected to more than double by 2050 (Alzheimer's Association, 2020). In this sense, Miss Shupe's tragic flaw wasn't her anger, it was her *genetics*, something entirely out of her control. As such, her story has taught me the dangers of judging too quickly. More often than not, others' stories—those of our students, colleagues, friends, and family—are hidden from view. Behavior that seems irrational at first glance, may—in fact—have a rational explanation, but only if we take the time to listen, learn, and judge less.

References

Alzheimer's Association. (2020). *Alzheimer's and dementia: Facts and figures*. https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures

Lucas, D. W. (1968). *Aristotle, Poetics: Introduction, commentary, and appendices*. Clarendon Press.

Romano, T. (2015). *Write what matters: For yourself, for others.* Zigzag Publishing.

Endnotes

[1] A pseudonym. All names and locations have been changed to protect the anonymity of my teachers and classmates.

Using *Currere* to Process Being on a Profession's Endangered Species List: A Black Male Educator's Journey and Pursuit of Well-Being

By Paul Collins
Florida A&M University

Extinction? Really? Will there be a day in the future where Black males will not be found teaching in America's public school classrooms? At face value, these questions can appear preposterous at best. But why? What makes the idea of there being no Black male teachers seem incomprehensible when, in 2019, they made up only 2% of public school teachers (Chillag, 2019). I have known about this 2% statistic for some time.

Actually, approximately 25 years ago, I completed an assignment while working on a master's degree in education. While attending graduate school part-time, I entered the educational profession. As a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed elementary school teacher, I was in my first or second year of service. I knew from personal experience and had heard many times that there were so few Black males in education. That was also a significant selling point that persuaded me to select elementary education as a college major. Nevertheless, as a new elementary education teacher, I was beginning to know and feel the implications of being one of the few Black males in my profession. This deeply triggered my curiosity, spurring my selecting to study the topic of just how many Black male educators there in our profession for a research class. I gathered data for my home state of Florida provided by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE).

Remember, this was a time in the mid-1990s when email did not rule the day. My elementary school classroom was equipped with one computer that relied on extremely slow dial-up to connect to this thing called the internet. Lesson plans were handwritten, and I did not have a personal computer of my own. Typed documents were produced by word processing machines at best, if you were innovative and had made the transition away from the typewriter. I share that brief historical context only to highlight that I remember calling the FDOE and having to speak with someone about how to best access the data that I needed on Black male educators in Florida. I can also remember driving to the FDOE building to collect those documents and their interest in my pursuit. Night after night, I combed through those documents and organized the narrative on my yellow notepad, which ultimately led to the final word-processed assignment for submission. As I unraveled those data, the picture of just how few Black males were in Florida's public schools came into sobering focus. I had the numbers.

In addition to the assignment's narrative submission, I had to prepare a presentation of the research and findings on my selected topic. And that's what I did. On the evening of the presentations, I was prepared. Armed with ordered and numbered transparency slides, I would lay one after the other onto the transparency projector machine that ultimately projected onto the pull-down classroom screen. Projecting and presenting in this manner comprised the standard, high-tech, and cutting-edge university procedure. This class was really blown away by the sheer paucity of educators in general and Black male educators in specific that were a part of our state's public educational system. This project was thought-provoking and generated quite a bit of conversation. I was even asked to present what I had found to another class one evening, where other faculty from the department joined as well. Although a high mark for the assignment and the course is what came of that experience, I would be remiss in not stating that I must have been on

Collins, P. (2022). Using *currere* to process being on a profession's endangered species list: A Black male educator's journey and pursuit of well-being. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 7–17.

to something. That something was what I was then feeling, as a fledgling teacher-leader just entering the education profession—the feeling of always being the only one (or the only one or two) in any given professional meeting, team planning, and all of the various spaces that I was navigating in carrying out the work of a beginning teacher.

In a broader historical context, the implications of racial desegregation orders and the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision help to further contextualize the current plight of Black male educators. Following the Brown decision, 38,000 Black educators and school leaders in southern states found themselves jobless with no official language of Black teacher retention in any legislation or desegregation guidelines (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Oakley et al., 2009; Orfield, 1969; Tillman, 2004). From the 1970s through the 1980s, the Black educator workforce was further reduced as experimentation with desegregation orders and newly occurring teacher certification measures were enacted (Tillman, 2004). Although not specific to Black male educators, this context speaks to what has been a historical consequence of federal desegregation litigation.

The following is my use of *currere* to deeply examine some of the social forces that have shaped me and critical aspects of my more than twenty years in the educational field (the regressive), thinking about the future (the progressive), and the quest for well-being as a Black male educator—who has also been known as one of the 2% (the analytical and synthetical) (Pinar, 1975, 2004, 2019).

Currere

The autobiographical approach of *currere* to curricularizing has been a useful tool of meaning-making in the field of curriculum studies for quite some time. As an introduction to and definition of the method, Pinar (2019) states, "The Latin infinitive of curriculum—*currere*—I invoked in 1975 to emphasize the lived experience of curriculum, embodied potentially educational experience that is structured by the past while focused on the future" (p. 50). To study such experience, he devised a method in four moments, or phases.

In further unpacking the method of *currere*, in the first-regressive phase, one returns to the past or to aspects of it: for instance, one's school experience, the experience of an influential teacher or text, or one's ongoing relationship with an academic discipline. In the second—the progressive moment—one imagines their future in a personal, social, and political way. The third—the analytic moment—one studies these texts and the experiences they engender to understand better what before might have been obscured by one being emersed in the present moment. In the fourth—synthetic phase—one pulls oneself together so as to act anew in the private and public worlds one inhabits. This subjective coherence becomes plausible as a new site from which one can again reinitiate the *currere* cycle (Pinar, 2019).

Does who I am matter in my production of knowledge? Is it important to know who the writer is as a person? Should the scholar erase themselves from their iterations? We must resist the ivory tower's urge situated in a politic of traditional academic work being totally about the erasure of the author/scholar. I, along with other scholars in the curriculum field, continue to interrogate the questions of whether my life history matters in the understanding of my academic writings. It remains risky to write about oneself in our shared academic world (Morris, 2019). The very topic of this manuscript speaks directly to how who I am shapes and has shaped my work in the educational field. By relying upon *currere*'s four channels of inquiry—regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic, I am equipped with a method of processing a career path where endangerment has remained a constant for more than two decades.

Regressive - Small Town Schooling & You Do Well With Kids

On a cold February winter's morning, while sitting in a chair positioned to face the back window of my upstairs bedroom, I engaged in a low-key and peaceful start to another Sunday morning. The view from this southerly-facing bedroom window was pleasant as our Georgia home sat immediately in front of a beautiful, wooded area that changed colors with the seasons. Since relocating from Florida, my wife, two daughters, and I enjoyed our approximately decade's stay in Georgia. I found the view very settling and even had a deck added to the home, which my wife jokingly called my backyard man cave. My days as a school leader were long, and the time that I could steal away to the deck in solitude was essential to my sanity. On cold wintery days of Black History Month, I would have to find the solace of my man cave from an upstairs bedroom window view.

It was the start of 2019, and I was finding much pleasure in reading former First Lady Obama's (2018) recently released book, Becoming Michelle Obama. I had read both of former President Obama's books years prior as he ran for president. Much of my inspiration to use the autobiographical method of *currere* for curriculum meaning-making was inspired by reading other people's autobiographical sketches. Autobiographical storytelling has always been of great interest to me. As a young boy, I could sit and listen to elders in my family and community retell aspects of their past for hours. This was also the case for me as a young schoolboy. I thought it somewhat therapeutic to grapple with my own "becoming." Although having contemplated such for years, I am now on a path of writing a *currere*-oriented narrative focusing on what Poetter (2020) refers to as a focus on the curriculum fragments or small bits of memories that continue to influence think/acting and personal/professional life binaries. This, in many ways, is very representative of the initial stages of writing my own story of becoming that did not leave out the historical rareness of what is now twenty-plus years of professional experience as a Black male educator.

Just the day before, while sitting at my oldest daughter's basketball game, I received a text from a childhood friend with the following link noting that my hometown had been rated as one of the worst cities to live in based on a recently released report. Although the report listed the 50 worst cities, from a broader viewpoint, that would be one of the 50 worst out of a total of 19,354 U.S. cities.

My daughter was on her middle school cheerleading team. She took her charge seriously, and there had been much stomping, chanting, and clapping in our home over the past few months. Her disposition was dampened when I showed her that piece of information about her father's hometown. Although not stated, I knew that she didn't find it great to have the place where her grandparents and most of her aunts, uncles, and cousins still resided be viewed in the "worst city to live" light.

My childhood friend who sent the link to me had been one of the groomsmen in my wedding, and now in our fourth decade of life, we'd managed to stay in touch, albeit not frequently enough over the years. We both loved our hometown. We were proud of our upbringing and respectful of those who poured tirelessly into the shaping and molding of strong Black men in a small, economically impoverished agricultural town surrounded by fields of mostly sugarcane and other harvested produce that extended as far as the eye could see and into the horizon. If you drove a few miles to our small town's northwest perimeter to the top of the Herbert Hoover Dike, you could view the waters of Lake Okeechobee, which also extended off into the horizon for as far as the eye could see. I have eaten much sugarcane, vegetables, and wild-caught rabbits from those fields,

as well as fish, frog legs, and gator tail from that lake. It tastes just like chicken was a common refrain to any who could not relate to the cuisine of our rural agricultural town by the largest lake in the state.

As a child, I never felt to be lacking in anything. I was surrounded by the best kind of love that family and community could provide. The naivete and innocence of a fun-filled childhood that can be maintained when living in circumstances of economic impoverishment were powerfully buttressed by an incubator of family/community love. This rendered my early childhood and teenage years leading to my departure for university life rather joyful.

Nevertheless, I remember the attempted shaming inflicted on my hometown during the 1980s and the early stages of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "The AIDS Capital of the Country" was the headline that we'd have to endure during a time in our country's history when the science was unclear as to how transmission really occurred. Unprotected sexual promiscuity and the gay community were being stigmatized relentlessly by those looking to blame. And there was my beloved hometown with a population of less than twenty thousand being noted as having the highest rate of AIDS cases per capita in the country. I can vividly remember when some felt it a badge of shame to have to acknowledge that you were from there.

Some in our community would even shy away from telling others met in their travels, or while off at college, or simply shopping at the nearest mall more than an hour's drive away that they indeed lived there. Others took pride in the resiliency of being from my small rural hometown. Although I understood the temptation, I was never one for shying away from where I came from and in light of the AIDS stigmatizing years of the 80s and 90s. I, amongst many others, never found it an embarrassment to call where we were reared home sweet home. I knew the love of family and community that existed there. I knew that many had gone on to do great things with their lives academically and athletically. I always remained proud to let it be known wherever I had the fortune to travel, but I also have, over time, broadened my experiential horizons and learned that calling from whence I came humble beginnings to be truly putting it mildly. I use *currere* to revisit Black male teachers in my formative years.

What is to follow is a series of four selected "fragments" or story-bits that delve deeply into my childhood educational experiences with the intent of using *currere* to present a deeper discussion on my lived experience and meaning-making as an educator (Poetter, 2017). The question of why note and highlight these particular fragments can be answered by the spoiler alert of my revealing at the outset that the individuals central to this writing's fragments were all Black male educators during my childhood. In light of my attempts to better understand my own current career path in education accompanied by my Black male-ness, I found these four men's impact on my life to represent strong lenses by which my journey with *currere* can continue to unfold. More poignant and telling in speaking to the relevancy of the forthcoming fragments is the fact that three of the four men represent the only Black men who worked at my school during my elementary years. I am hopeful that re-visiting my experiences with these particular Black male educators will be revelatory in the progressive, analytic, and synthetic phases of my *currere* journey.

Regressive Fragment #1: Mr. Persons[1]

Mr. Persons held a rare distinction now that I can reflect on his context. He was a Black male elementary school counselor in our small rural southern town. In the 1970s,

small towns like mine were still struggling to make sense of the desegregation laws enacted in our country about two decades earlier. What I now know is that two private schools (one religious-based and the other not) sprang up when school desegregation reached the town in the late 60s and early 70s. My school was the city elementary school where many Whites in our city would send their children up until 5th grade, which was the dividing point of elementary and junior high school. Instead of going to the city's only public junior high school that all elementary schools fed into, many White parents enrolled my elementary classmates and childhood schoolhouse friends in one of the two private schools to continue their education from 6 – 12th grade. What I know now is that our elementary school was desegregated primarily through Black students, like me, who were zoned for attendance and living in a rural agricultural housing project.

Mr. Persons was the school counselor at the elementary school where the many Whites would allow their children to attend up until the 5th grade. From my youthful vantage point, Mr. Persons was a tall and slender man. He wore black-rimmed glasses and a straight tie, and his office frequently offered refuge to many students. I recall his office usually having multiple students completing classwork or engaging in some enrichment activity due to being sent out of class by their teacher for misbehavior or some other infraction that was one too many for a teacher's tolerance level. Although the school did have a White male assistant principal with a booming voice who many times dealt with discipline swiftly through the use of multiple swats to the buttocks with a paddle, I recall the general sentiment of the Black students from The Project being, "take your discipline referral to Mr. Persons." Mr. Persons did not use a paddle and often served as a buffer between the teachers and us Black students. Most teachers were White females, and although our town was small and rural, they lived what appeared to be worlds apart from the African-American students being bused from the agricultural project housing development. Mr. Persons knew our parents and would sometimes visit students' homes.

In reflectively analyzing Mr. Persons' impact on me as a young elementary school-aged boy, there are several notable revelations. I can only recall Mr. Persons' demeanor as being peace-loving. Actually, I cannot recall ever witnessing Mr. Persons in any way other than going about his business calmly. When given a discipline referral, students were supposed to exit the classroom and take the form to the assistant principal's office. I am left to wonder what undergirded Mr. Persons' motives where providing safe haven in our 1970s schooling context became his judgement call. I am forced to reckon with the notion of Mr. Persons and the idea of a safe haven. Although it would be hard to conclude that none of the discipline referrals received from teachers were fully justified, there appears to have been another level of discretion applied to student contexts by Mr. Persons. Although written about some years beyond the 1970s, the research on the disparity in numbers of teacher discipline referrals as being higher for Black boys than any other group of students has been a reality (Kunjufu, 1995).

It is impossible for me to state whether Mr. Persons actively provided a sense of safe haven due to knowledge of the research related to discipline referrals or if as a Black man he anecdotally sensed that something was wrong and buffered the Black children as best he could. Perhaps, his home visits to speak with our parents in The Project was his way of addressing those more justifiable disciplinary referrals where he may have felt that the remedy was not a strong paddling from the assistant principal but from our parents getting a clearer context so that they could then address the misbehavior through his home visits.

Regressive Fragment #2: Mr. Bass

"Each you lunch Tyree … go ahead … eat your lunch Tyree," were the words said by Mr. Bass as he stirred Tyree's broccoli into his nicely placed red block of Jello on his lunch tray. Tyree, a fourth-grade Black boy with strong bullying tendencies who already had some developing muscle definition, looked at the newly created broccoli and Jello mixture on his plate and smiled an awkward smile of embarrassment as Mr. Bass made a mockery of him. We all sat at the long cafeteria table with seats attached that could fold up for janitorial mopping and watched the spectacle. One could imagine that Tyree would have preferred to eat his Jello. Maybe not the broccoli, perhaps, but definitely not the broccoli and red Jello casserole created by Mr. Bass. Tyree must have been bullying someone that day, and Mr. Bass would do things like that to Tyree to balance the scales of justice by enacting some act of humiliation on the bully. Like so many other Black students in my elementary school, Tyree departed school before the year ended and returned after the next year had started due to his family's need to go to the northern states and serve as migrant field laborers. It was known as "Going up the road." My parents did this as well in their youth, but they were able to survive economically without the migrant trips north around the time I started elementary school. I recall always wanting to "Go up the road" as a youth but never got the opportunity. I was absolutely oblivious to the oppressive and destitute life circumstances that migrant field laborers endured. I just wanted to exit school early before the year ended.

Mr. Bass, our school's paraprofessional who worked with students identified as having physical and mental exceptionalities, amongst other roles, would bully the bullies on our campus. As grotesque as something of this nature might sound, this was in the 1970s, and there appeared to be no repercussions for the actions of a Mr. Bass, one of only three Black men who worked at my elementary school when he balanced the scales of justice by bullying a bully on behalf of the bully's victim. Mr. Bass was a champion in the eyes of many of us young impressionable Black boys. He was who you alerted when a school bully was targeting you. Mr. Bass had no tolerance for it.

He was also key in school bus fire drills as the front half of the bus entered the bus's front door and the back half got to exit the emergency back door to the bus and jump into the strong arms of Mr. Bass there waiting to catch each student. Mr. Bass was a role model and even could be seen walking the school hallways with a student with bully tendencies, such as Tyree, talking positively and encouraging them as vital, yet economically impoverished, Black men were known for doing in the rural project housing development where we lived. Mr. Bass seemingly knew all of our parents as he had grown up with them in our small town.

My reflective analysis of Mr. Bass on me as a young Black boy is revelatory. At that time, I was a young and impressionable elementary-aged child. Adult choices in addressing bullies appear to have been something much different than what I would experience more than twenty years later upon my becoming a Black male educator. Bullying the bully on behalf of the bully's victim was not proper protocol when I entered the education profession in the mid-1990s. Was his choice of actions harmful or helpful? Perhaps his actions were both harmful and helpful. For some reason, I am not inclined to be overly judgmental of Mr. Bass in my analysis of that aspect of his work. He was somewhat of a hero to us kids and was well-thought-of by parents. I do not think this justification for his treatment of young elementary students with bullying tendencies. It is worth noting that I know Tyree to have gone on to be a high school honors student and a college graduate.

Regressive Fragment #3: Mr. G.

Mr. G. was the third of three Black males at my rural southern elementary school. Like Mr. Persons and Mr. Bass, Mr. G was also not a classroom teacher. Mr. G. was a school paraprofessional who worked primarily with the physical education teacher. Having recently graduated from high school, he was the youngest of the three African-American males of my time in elementary school. He told us that the G was short for G.Q. I did not know what the abbreviation stood for, but I did know that he was always complimented for how he dressed. I can vividly remember Mr. G. having us raise our shirt collars on cooler days. Mr. G. was larger than life to me. He had an inspirational persona. On the days Mr. G. would get to be with our class during P.E., I was starstruck looking up to this tall Black man both literally and inspirationally. Mr. G. lived in the same housing project as we did. I recall Mr. G. departing our elementary school about mid-year to take another job elsewhere during my elementary school days.

In reflectively analyzing Mr. G.'s impact on my growth and development, he became a symbol of the possibilities of what could be achieved even if you lived in a public housing project. Even though actually living a life of poverty, Mr. G. was fashionable, wore a big smile most times, and gave an aura of self-assuredness. I liked his swag! If Mr. G. could do it, then so could I.

On the other hand, there is the notion of inconsistency that comes with Black males in education that enter the profession. Mr. G. came, he made a positive impact, and just like that he was gone. This raises the question of Black male stability as the few who are working at the primary level are so often called up to administrative roles or exit the profession altogether. Perhaps the low pay and isolation are ultimately too much.

Regressive Fragment #4: Mr. Huntington

Mr. Huntington was my little league baseball coach and ultimately one of my middle school teachers. Mr. Huntington was highly instrumental in my life's trajectory. He would collect all of us boys from the project community that he had recruited to his baseball team in his station wagon to take us to a neighboring city to play baseball due to our city not having a league. Mr. Huntington planted the seed that ultimately led to my developing the skills worthy of playing baseball on the collegiate level.

Mr. Huntington was also the Black man who would allow me to guest coach the team when I returned home from college. He was instrumental in coordinating city summer camp programs, and I would work for him during summers away from college. Mr. Huntington one day pulled me to the side and told me that I worked well with children. He noted the activities that I would plan and implement to make the day more exciting for our summer campers. I was completing my second year of undergraduate studies and had changed my major at least five times over the prior two years. The closest that I could come to having a career goal at that time was to play either major league baseball or professional football. Outside of that aspiration, I would tell people that I wanted to study something in business. What? I did not know. The notion came from my fantasizing about having an office in a tall building that overlooked big cities. I had no idea what was going on in those tall buildings, but I thought that a business degree could get me an office with a beautiful city view. The prioritization of professional athletics as being first as a career goal was common among the boys of my community. Historically, it has been noted as a problematic aspirational phenomenon for rural town dwellers in general and Black boys more specifically (Carspecken, 1996; Kunjufu, 1995). Mr. Huntington's counsel was needed at a time when I was not excited about college for

the academic degree but more so for the potential that came from college athletics. His pointing out something that I was good at is what ultimately led me to select elementary education as my major. His words were quite persuasive.

In reflectively analyzing Mr. Huntington, I believe his impact on the trajectory of my life to have been the most powerful of these four figures in my formative years. I became a believer in my ability to excel at baseball because he insisted that I play baseball—not softball. Slow-pitch softball was a major community sporting event that I had grown up watching my father play. Crowds gathered to watch softball games. My city didn't have a baseball league. During those days, the requisite balls, bats, and gloves needed for slow-pitch softball were less expensive than the equipment needed to play baseball. Baseball essentials such as catcher's equipment, helmets, umpire safety gear, etc., were more costly and more difficult to come by when living under economically impoverished conditions. I loved playing catch and playing with my dad's teammate's children at the softball games. Eventually, I was big enough to play on city softball teams. Mr. Huntington would challenge the notion based on his theory that swinging at slow-pitch softballs, with their inherent arc, would cause major damage to my baseball swing. Baseballs come hard and fast! He would tell me that baseball has a major league—not softball. I listened sometimes, but other times the community ritual of softball games would win me over. I was pretty good at softball, and all of my friends played. Mr. Huntington established a baseball team and would round us all up in his station wagon to take us about 15 miles to compete in one of the neighboring cities.

Because of his influence, I now believe Mr. Huntington through reflective analysis had an extremely powerful impact on my "becoming" (Obama, 2018). This man told me that I had potential to excel at baseball, and I was ultimately able to compete at the college level. He also told me at a key moment in my college years that I have good patience and worked well with young children. I went on to major in elementary education and have worked in the field for more than 210 years. The impact may not be quantifiable, but I would be hesitant in reflective analysis to conclude that those experiences were not impactful on some of my major life decisions.

The Progressive: Forecasting

After more than 20 years of being a two percenter, I am imagining the "what ifs." I am disenchanted with the direction in which my profession is headed, seeing no change in the numbers of Black males joining the few of us answering the noble call to service, and wondering what if. As I look out to the next ten years, I would like to be optimistic. I would like to report that the forecast shows the number of Black male teachers increasing. But, there appear to be no signs of empirical evidence to support my optimism.

I do believe that Black storytelling through the use of *currere* can assist in thwarting Black male educator extinction. Perhaps more work in this area of scholarly production can be a force in pushing the momentum of increased Black male teachers positively toward increased numbers. We must continue to fight this good fight. As Baszile (2015a) notes regarding the addition of voices, in her work of critical race/feminist *currere*, "the others who are invited into the conversation represent the voice/s that have been absent, ignored, misconstrued, distorted, repressed in the curriculum/s that shapes our lives—the curricula of schooling and media, in particular" (p. 120).

I was bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and filled with the passion that I thought adequate to change the world. My work in this progressive phase of imagining the future is a challenge for me, but I remain optimistic, although grounded in the reality of my own

lived experience as a Black male educator. In the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to imagine that the nation's educational system will experience a renaissance of new possibilities inherent in our forced pivot to experimentation with online forms of educational delivery modes. I am not interested in returning to pre-COVID-19 American schooling as usual practices. This kind of imagining feels good to a two-percenter. It is helpful nourishment for my well-being. Ten years from now, I envision being well into my third decade in the educational profession advocating for our schools to be institutions of progressive change. I would like to envision fledgling Black male teachers not being the only one or one of two faculty members in any given faculty meeting.

The Analytical: Being Mindful of the Present

As a general statement on the state of American public schooling, the current teacher workforce does not reflect our nation's demographics. With Black males comprising approximately 2% of our country's teacher workforce, school leaders have been discussing the implications of this issue (Chillag, 2019). The questions remain regarding the statistic mentioned above. Will the percentage of Black male teachers increase? Will the percentage of Black male teachers simply remain the same? Or, will the percentage of Black male teachers decrease? There are no guarantees.

I write this manuscript as a university faculty member. In this present moment, an analysis must be brought to bear on the conundrum of the Black male exodus from the classroom through promotion to administrative roles or their matriculation to terminal degrees to work in other areas of education. As was noted in my regressive moments, the males of my elementary school experience were not classroom teachers. Through the use of *currere*, it becomes clearer that, with such limited numbers of Black male classroom teachers, even promotion to administrative roles or other spheres of the educational arena challenges the chances of increased Black male teacher numbers. This raises further questions about just what it will take to highly incentivize the classroom teaching position such that opportunities for promotion are not so readily acceptable.

Synthetical: I Am

In this exploration, the use of the method of *currere* has allowed for educative pauses where I reflected with the goal of gaining insight into the endangerments of this Black male educator in our profession threaded through my past, present, and into my future (Dewey, 1938; Kuhnke, et al., 2021). I am a Black male educator who has experienced firsthand the multitude of joys and accompanying challenges that Black male teachers have to navigate in our profession. I am also a survivor and an example of not exiting the profession after running into the reality of my endangered-ness and choosing to remain in the classroom for about half of my more than 20 years career. I chose to remain a classroom teacher for almost a decade, even after having attained a terminal degree. I would like to believe that somehow, through the use of *currere*, others will be inspired to add to the two percenters club and move us farther away from the brink of extinction.

Even though I also realize that memories are not exact, experience reconfigurations can occur as time passes and become fictionalized, at least to a degree (Poetter, 2012). Even so, we live in troubled times in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest tearing at the fabric of attempts of social just democratic life. These troubled times demand voices from the numerical margins of our profession. Bringing the counterstorytelling as a dimension of Critical Race Theorizing (CRT) to the conversation, Baszile (2015b) helps to highlight the importance of the need for more voices from the numerical margins stating:

> Knowledge, of course, is never neutral, which means it is always a story of some kind, produced by a situated knower. Given the storied nature of knowledge, it seems implausible to me to suggest that stories do not matter or they are somehow less significant in knowledge production and meaning making than those things we call facts, data, and evidence. These things, in fact, cannot survive without being couched in some kind of narrative. In academia, for instance, we refer to our narratives as paradigms. CRT, in this respect, is no more or less about storytelling than any other paradigm. What it is, however, is far more transparent about its politics of counterstorytelling. In this vein, it does not pretend to be neutral, objective, or apolitical. It embraces the realization that knowledge comes from thinking and feeling bodies, from bodies that are raced, gendered, and sexualized among other subjectivities, from bodies that are located in hierarchical relations and places of difference. (p. 239)

Change can be initiated through storytelling, and *currere* is about the theorization of storytelling (Morris, 2019). This exercise is not simply theorized storytelling for academic romanticism. On the contrary, *currere* is a tool for critically positive individual and social change so desperately needed in our field.

References

Baszile, D. (2015a). Critical race feminist *currere*. In M. F. He, B. D. Schultz, & W. H. Schubert (Eds.), *SAGE guide to curriculum in education* (pp. 119–126). SAGE.

Baszile, D. (2015b). Rhetorical revolution: Critical race counterstorytelling and the abolition of white democracy. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 239–249 https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557830

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us483

Carspecken, P. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide.* Routledge.

Chillag, A. (2019, October 7). Black men make up only 2% of teachers in the US. A group named "Call Me MISTER" wants to change that. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/05/us/iyw-black-men-teacher-shortage-solution-trnd/index.html

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Free Press.

Fultz M. (2004). The displacement of black educators post-Brown: an overview and analysis. *History of Education Quarterly*, *44*(1), 1–27.

Hudson, M., & Holmes B. (1994). Missing teachers, impaired communities: The unanticipated consequences of Brown v. Board of Education on the African American teaching force at the precollegiate level. *Journal of Negro Education*, *63*(3), 388–93.

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.

Kunjufu, J. (1995). *Countering the conspiracy to destroy Black boys*. African American Images.

Morris, M. (2019). *Currere* or the erasure of the author: Does it really matter who the scholar is? *Currere Exchange Journal*, *3*(1), 5–17. https://cej.lib.miamioh.edu/index.php/CEJ/article/view/10

Oakley, D., Stowell, J., & Logan, J. R. (2009). The impact of desegregation on black teachers in the metropolis, 1970-2000. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *39*(9), 1576–1598. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870902780997

Obama, M. (2018). *Becoming* (Large print edition.). Random House Large Print.

Orfield, G. (1969). *The reconstruction of southern education: The schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.* Wiley.

Pinar, W. F. (1975). *Currere*: Toward reconceptualization. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.) *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists* (pp. 396–414). McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* (1st ed). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pinar, W. F. (2019) *Currere.* In J. Wearing, M. Ingersoll, C. DeLuca, B. Bolden, H. Ogden, & T. M. Christou. (Eds.), *Key concepts in curriculum studies: Perspectives on the fundamentals*. (pp. 50–59). Taylor & Francis Group.

Poetter, T. S. (2012). *Teaching again: A professor's tale of returning to a 9th grade classroom.* Information Age Publishing.

Poetter, T. S. (2017). Curriculum fragments: Theorizing while practicing an educational life and building a *currere* oriented representation of an educational "I." *Currere Exchange Journal*, *1*(2), 1–11. https://www.*currere*exchange.com/uploads/9/5/8/7/9587563/1poettercejv1i2.pdf

Poetter, T. S. (2020). The thicket. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(1), 1–15. https://cej.lib.miamioh.edu/index.php/CEJ/article/view/128

Tillman L. C. (2004). (Un)intended consequences? The impact of the Brown v. Board of Education decision on the employment status of black educators. *Education and Urban Society*, *36*(3), 280–303.

Endnotes

[1] All names used in this work are pseudonyms.

Currere, Psychic Speech, and Teacher Education

By Wanying Wang
The University of British Columbia

The task of teachers, according to Doll (2017), is to teach how to read psychic speech. Expressed symbolically, psychic speech can be illuminated through myth, literary text, and dreams pointing to psychic reality. Psychic speech is, thus, recurring patterns of symbols and themes that help us make sense of our teaching, articulated through myth, literary text, dream, and one's daily experience, hidden in the unconscious (Doll, 2017; Semetsky & Delpech-Ramey,2013). Informed by the work of Doll (2017) and the ideas of Jungian psychologists, using the method of *currere* and co-mingling my past experiences and current thought, I illustrate how I endeavor to read "psychic speech," of my students and myself, which makes possible a fresh, startling, poetic, reframed vision and understanding of teaching and opens up teaching practice for renewal.

My "Archetypal" Story

It was the first year I had worked as a university instructor. The university I worked for was a national key university in Beijing, China, with more than 12000 undergraduates and 4000 graduate students. I taught two courses—Civic Education and Fundamental Knowledge of Chinese Law—that were required of first- and second-year undergraduates throughout the country.

As a young instructor, I was conducting an educational innovation—teaching the course on Chinese Law in English—in response to the call of both the university and the Ministry of Education in China. At the time, the Ministry of Education in China (as cited in Wang, 2013) had launched educational innovations at the university level, aiming to "cultivate talents" with "competitive capacities" that can "meet the demand of social construction" (p. 4) and calling for teachers' participation by various means—bilingual teaching being one of them. I responded to the call as a university instructor. However, it was obviously a challenge both for me and my students.

For this innovative course, besides legal knowledge, an immense knowledge of English was demanded. To address the language gap, I prepared a list of new words that would appear in each teaching session with an aim to assist students' leaning. Generally, for each weekly teaching session (two hours), around 50 new words were needed. However, this language requirement appeared to be a big burden for my students. The workload caused by this course, for them, seemed too heavy. Moreover, law itself was hard to understand; I had made it even more complex by teaching it in English. For me, it was also challenging. I spent a lot of time preparing for the course (making PowerPoints with Chinese and English explanations; searching American case law to illustrate some key points with a comparative perspective; screening content knowledge because bilingual teaching would not allow the same amount of content to be delivered as in other classes taught only in Chinese). It was too much work. I felt exhausted. Did I do it for the good of students, to expand their understanding of law and improve their English for the future global challenge? I believed so.

However, some students came to me saying that they could not follow very well if they had not prepared as advised—memorizing the words I provided before each class—though some students were so excited with my new way of teaching. Wasn't this course supposed to be a course of "joy" or "relaxation" without heavy homework? How could it require extra workload before and after class? Public required courses in Chinese universities have long been deemed as "necessary" to graduate with a certificate but not

Wang, W. (2022). *Currere*, psychic speech, and teacher education. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 18–26.

"useful" after graduation. Students were not supposed to spend much time on them. My innovative attempt was, apparently, contradictory with what had been prevalent. Some students were, then, resisting this bilingual teaching. They complained to me: there is too much workload for the course! I have no time to prepare! Students' complaints made me nervous, and I even worked harder.

The course entailed teaching a weekly two-hour session to two separate groups—with approximately 150 students in each group—using the same content. One student, Xiao Jin, came to my attention when he showed up regularly in both groups. He was the only one who attended twice per week and came up to me after my first teaching session ended. "Professor Wang, your teaching is great! I can learn law and English at the same time!" He said he was amazed by my teaching. From then on, he attended my class twice each week, even though the content was the same. He was a second-year undergraduate in the department of Chemical Engineering. It was rare that students attended the same class twice taught by the same teacher, and I knew that he was burdened with various assignments of different subjects, especially for student in the department of Chemical Engineering. His continuous attendance made me feel confident in the significance of my new way of teaching and the efficacy of my teaching. Was it because his positive, supportive response reassured me as to my sense of efficacy and sense of worth as a teacher? How could a student spend so much time attending a course if this course was not well-taught? The sense I made of his behavior heightened my sense of worth as a good teacher. Meanwhile, his presence seemed to affect other students positively, which could be observed from their attitudes about his showing up again and again in my teaching sessions. I carried on with my teaching—the only one who taught bilingually among teachers who taught public required courses in the university.

Xiao Jin was composed but was always highly attentive in my teaching sessions. Later on, I got to know that he was from a small village, located in Hebei province in North China. He shared with me:

> There was no school in my village, and I had to walk two hours to the center school every day and of course two hours back. In winter the hilly road was dangerous and bumpy, or it was not a road, just a winding path through a mountain. Once I accidentally fell into a hole and fainted. I lay there for hours till I woke up. I crawled out of the hole.

I might have read or heard similar stories from novels, or a friend's friend. However, it was special when I heard it from one of my students. With what I heard, I was completely shocked and moved. The brutal reality, the hardship. I looked into his eyes and saw a shining spot. He failed in the first year for college entrance examination but succeeded the second year and entered the university where I worked. He was happy with the result.

The university had two campuses—one in the center of the city and the other in a district 20 miles away from the city (mainly for the first- and second-year undergraduates). The university provided a shuttle bus every day for professors and staff. But occasionally, I drove by myself. It was not very convenient for students to go to the city center because they had to take a bus by themselves. As we got more familiar, I once drove Xiao Jin to the city center after he missed the shuttle.

On the journey, I asked him what he wanted to do after graduation. He replied that initially it was his wish to do a master's degree. But now he would find a job making money after graduation. He told me that he was the only boy in the family and that his parents relied on him. I continued the conversation by asking why he had chosen to

go to university. He answered quite assertively that it was to find a good job and have a better life. I asked whether there was anything else and enquired about his dreams. He informed me that he and his family could not afford to dream and that he should be practical. Then he added that what every student wanted in this era was to find a good job. But he did feel that he had learned much from attending my class: English and law. It was reasonable, not different from what I expected to hear. He was gladly looking out of the car window while talking with me. I glimpsed at him, praising him for his performance in the course.

I continued by asking him if he was interested in law and told him that some law scholars were making new attempts using classical Chinese poems to illustrate the concept of property ownership in law. I also encouraged him to express himself no matter how strange or naïve he might feel his opinion. He listened to me attentively.

Each time Xiao Jin spoke during my teaching sessions, I smiled at him. Once, I divided students into groups to conduct a moot court activity, and each group could choose any case they wanted to try. Students were assigned as judge, lawyer, journalist, and so on. I still remember that his group was the third group to present at the moot court. When he expressed his opinion as a "lawyer," he cited the story of *Wusong* beating the tiger. *Wusong* was a figure during the *Song* Dynasty famous for beating to death a tiger that had attacked him while he was walking through a forest. He is a well-known, national hero in Chinese history, a Chinese Superman. Xiao Jin commented that *Wusong*'s behavior was a violation of Environmental Protection Law, since the tiger is a national protected animal today in China according to Chinese Law. What a paradoxical image—that a highly respected national hero committed a crime! What a subtle mixture of the past and present's perspective! When other students in the class heard this comment, they all laughed loudly and applauded excitedly. The burst of laughter continued for minutes.

I further invited students to discuss Xiao Jin's perspective, which triggered a hot debate in the class thereafter: Can we kill a tiger when we are being attacked by a tiger in a forest? Under what condition could it happen without committing a crime? What is the difference between encountering a tiger in the wild and in the zoo? Who defines crime? What is the nature of a crime? How do different periods or eras give meaning to legal regulations? This discussion became more and more deep, intensive, and prolonged than expected. What a teachable moment! What a moment of encounter! Everyone was engaged and immersed entirely in this "complicated conversation," discussing and questioning, including myself. I forgot that I was a teacher, and evidently, my student forgot I was teacher too. In the wrap-up, I thought highly of his speech: Xiao Jin has a great potential to be a lawyer.

It has been many years since then, but the scene still remains vivid in my mind. This experience made me realize the importance of engaging students in class discussion through creating "pedagogical unfolding" or allowing "pedagogical unfolding" to occur and flow in accordance with emerging teaching situations, which gave me a fresh, renewed perspective on teaching. However, this teaching was totally out of expectation, never planned in advance. It was not outcome based. For those students who deemed the course "not useful," this experience, as I had observed, rendered them an "unimagined possibility" contradictory to the prescribed, practical, utilitarian goal.

I call this story "archetypal," which, among so many teaching stories of mine, remains typical and special. Being typical means that it coincides with what has threaded through my teaching experience: teacher/student relationship and their mutual understanding. Being specials represents that it emphasizes how I first reacted to students' psychic speech: unspoken words from their hearts. In this paper students' psychic speech

is, thus, equal to what archetypal images convey. Psychic speech is interchangeable with "archetypal image or theme." In the following, informed by the work of Doll (2017) and the ideas of Jungian psychologists, using the method of *currere* and co-mingling my past experiences and current thought, I illustrate how I endeavor to read the "psychic speech" of my students and myself.

Psychic Speech and the Unconsciousness

Doll (2017) associates psychic speech with the unconscious. Carl Jung (1959/2014) distinguishes between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconsciousness refers to lost memories, painful ideas that are repressed or denied, and subliminal perceptions that are not strong enough to reach consciousness; whereas the collective unconscious refers to a collection of experience accessible to all humans through history, which underlies the personal unconscious—the psychological outline and process of archetype (Stein, 2006). Archetypes are, for Jung, typical modes of expression arising from this collective layer, and they are fundamental psychic patterns common to all humans into which personal experiences are structured, the inherited part of the human psyche. Jung observes that certain symbols have appeared again and again throughout history in mythology, religion, fairy tales, alchemical texts, and so on. For Jung, the unconscious exists not as a thing but as "a living foreign entity within us which can respond to the figures familiar in folk tales and wisdom writings" (Doll, 2017, p. 34). Then one question arises: how can one access one's unconsciousness?

The archetypal images, which exist in myth, folk tales, and literature as discussed previously, act as symbolic transformers capable of making themselves (the unconscious content) manifest at the level of conscious awareness (Semetsky & Delpech-Ramey, 2013). In her journey of *currere*, Doll (2017) describes how myth and literature can allow her to see "this archetypal pattern," affirming their educational significance. Doll (2017) argues that literature and myth help find in images and metaphors "the basic givens of psychic life" (p. xvi). Hence, "feelings thought to be central get routed," "peripheral imaginings begin to take root," and "one learns about living, about mistakes, and about being coerced by cultural demands" (p. 48). The feeling, imagination, and knowledge point us to "the reality that lies underneath words" (p. 139), a psychic reality. Thus, for Doll, one is able through literature "to grasp more coherently the world" (p. 48) in which feeling, thinking, and imagining; rational and non-rational; systematic and non-systematic; multiple modes of thought and feeling are co-mingling. To understand this psychic reality is to approach interiority, "which is within all things" (Doll, 2017). Approaching this interiority and "tapping" the coursing within animate our inner world and render our grasp of the unfolding selfhood. To make it explicit, "The work of the curriculum theorist," Doll (2017) posits, is to "tap this intense current within, that which courses through the inner person, that which electrifies or gives life to a person's energy source" (p. 49). This is to approach the core of oneself, the innermost part of a person. It is to see archetypally.

For Doll (2017), literature, fiction, and myth are archetypal and help find the thread of life in the inner side of things—the thread "made available to consciousness through dreams, associations, and imaginative thought" (Casemore, 2019, p. 1); seeing archetypally is, thus, educationally significant. Teachers are to read "psychic speech" rooted in "archetypes," uncovering the unconscious at the personal and collective level. However, archetypal patterns may also exist in one's daily embodied experience, as argued by Semetsky and Delpech-Ramey (2013). When triggered or inspired by our experience, we begin to learn from our experience, realizing "the embeddedness" in our particular experience—the archetypal nature.

Both Doll and Jung seem to contend that it is through the integration of the unconscious that we might be able to make sense of our experience of archetypal nature, orienting us to the primitive, most inner self. As argued by Semetsky and Delpech-Ramey (2012), the better our understanding of the reality of the archetypes, the more we can "participate in this reality progressively realizing the archetypes' eternity and timelessness" (p. 70). I argue that the method of *currere* offers such "an archetypal story," revealing the unconscious dimension of experience, the primitive self. In the following, using my *currere* guided story either as "literary text" or "archetypal experience," I will further espouse my teaching story to illustrate how I integrate my conscious and unconscious, bringing what is latent to the surface.

Reading Psychic Speech and *Currere*

The method of *currere* (Pinar, 2004) affords me access my past teaching experience, my experience with my students. In this recalling and retelling, I re-encountered my students. In order to get to the heart of an idea, theory, model, or experience, it is necessary to penetrate its archetypal infrastructure, to look into its formative process in the workings, although this core can never be fully perceived or comprehended (Brooke, 2015). *Currere* offers to grasp the core of an experience, as Wang (2020) argues, through potentially meaningful "contingencies," more readily for openness and reflection. This heart or core is the psychic speech delivered. Therefore, what "psychic speech," will I read from my story?

First, Xiao Jin, for me, seems to correspond to the hero archetype in Jungian psychology. To be noted, there might exist multiple archetypes in one person, and Xiao Jin might also possess the characteristics of other archetypes, such as caregiver or helper. The hero archetype represents the process of overcoming obstacles to achieve specific goals. In myths, the hero's objective is often to find a treasure, to save a princess, or to return with the elixir of life. At the beginning of the journey, the hero crosses a threshold into a dangerous forest, desert, or jungle. This symbolizes the hero's acceptance of the challenge to leave childish things behind and to overcome those difficulties, during which both personal and transpersonal growth are achieved (Campbell, 1949).

As a student from a rural area in China, Xiao Jin bore a strong sense of duty to his family, associating his future with his family, conceiving taking care of his family as his life goal, a destined task. His effort became crystalized as he attended every class very carefully and participated in class discussion actively. The unflinching determination and the strong will he possessed to improve his family's situation and the immense efforts he had invested in hard conditions makes him an archetypal hero. Now when I look back, I begin to see and understand the hidden intention as mentioned above (associating his family with his future) that he was not conscious of at that time. He constantly overcame extraordinary obstacles in his ordinary life, and even his presence in the course I taught again gives me confidence. As a teacher, I participated in, or bore witness to, this educational process.

Second, the teacher/student relationship between me and Xiao Jin may be archetypal too. Mayes (2005) argues that educational processes are themselves archetypal. He posits that "the teacher" and "the student" are archetypal figures. For him, the teacher/student relationship is "an archetypal event— just as bride, groom, and marriage are an archetypal situation or just as doctor, patient, and healing or parent, child, and family (p. 34). The interaction between teacher and student is entwined deeply into "the fabric of what it means to be a human being" (p. 34). The teacher who understands the teacher-student archetype, who is most "in touch with the archetypal nature of his or her very

psyche" (p. 34), and who is able to read their own or their student's psychic speech, is a teacher who is able to influence students (Mayes, 2005).

The archetypes of the Wise Old Man and the Wise Old Woman, which are at the very top of Jung's list of the most historically prominent archetypes, seem to be educationally significant (Mayes, 2005). The Wise Old Man and Woman appear in many myths, religions, and dreams and are always related to a young hero or heroine who is engaged in a dangerous journey in order to accomplish a great but difficult task (Mayes, 2005). These Wise Ones who offer guidance and directions are teachers, as pointed out by Mayes (2005). My effort to understand and guide Xiao Jin and the ride I provided for him may symbolize that, as a teacher, I was able to direct the seeker and anticipated that he might one day overcome obstacles and transcend what was given to him. The Wise Old Man or Woman often speak in riddles to inspire their young students to intellectual and moral growth (Mayes, 2005). Xiao Jin, for me, represents a variation of archetypal hero, giving form to an archetypal hero. "Within each archetypal theme there are variations," as argued by Brooke (2015); "there are no fixed boundaries between themes" (p. 142). Thus, the archetypes, for Jung, may be defined as the sources of those typical patterns of action, reaction, and experience that portray and differentiate human beings.

Third, from this story, we might be able to perceive the collective shadow burdening me and my students—an archetype that reflects the negative side of collective culture. Recalling my first innovative attempt, it seemed that I was not very well prepared, practically and theoretically. I purchased different textbooks and wrote very detailed teaching plans. I carefully went through each step of the imagined teaching before I actually taught. I believed that I had done what I could for this new attempt. However, I was not conscious of, or sensitive enough to, the various possible obstacles I would encounter while teaching the course. For example, was it enough that I prepared a list of new English words for students before each teaching session? How was I supposed to view and make sense of this innovation attempt—besides understanding it as new knowledge to be delivered to students? Confronted with difficulties, how could I identify a "negotiated space" where students and teacher could dwell together? How might the teachers' view of curriculum have impact on the way they engage students in learning? I was eager to achieve the "pronounced" or "practical result" of my innovative pedagogy, driven by a force—a hidden, continuous one—to achieve an outcome, a fixed, prescribed, utilitarian one. Other meaningful values seemed to be hidden from me. In this sense, I was similar to my students who regarded public required courses as something "not useful." Also, Xiao Jin had "traveled a long way" in order to find a good job upon graduation. There is nothing wrong in finding a good job. However, is there something more to life than finding a good job? What can a university provide for students? Is the mission of a university to prepare students for all of life, beyond the immediate application of learning, to provide an enduring foundation of basic general knowledge on which they can build? (Hirsch, 1988, cited in Wang, 2013).

Following Jung, Hillman (1975) explained his method of psychologizing as a method of "seeing" or "seeing through," which can teach us how to look at "the frames of our consciousness, the cages in which we sit and the iron bars that form the grids and defenses of our perception" (p. 127). Seeing through emphasizes the need for examining our ideas themselves in terms of archetypes and noticing the psyche "speaking imaginably" (p. 127). This new self-awareness, Burnett (2014) argues, can grant us the freedom and courage to see the traces of our hidden fears, failures, and longings. For the method of psychologizing, Hillman (1975) states,

> It suspects an interior, not evident intention; it searches for a hidden clockwork, a ghost in the machine, an etymological root, something more than meets the eye; or it sees with another eye. It goes on whenever we move to a deeper level. (p. 135)

With this method, I, then, begin to recognize the collective shadow burdening me, and my students. I discern the Other within and among us, a culture's collective shadow—the flip-side of its conscious values (Odajnyk, 1976). Jung (1953) writes,

> If people can be educated to see the shadow side of their nature clearly, it may be hoped that they will also learn to understand and love their fellow men better. A little less hypocrisy and a little more self-knowledge can only have good results in respect for our neighbor; for we are all too prone to transfer to our fellows the injustices and violence we inflict upon our own natures. (p. 26)

As argued by Mayes (2005), nations, families, communities, political parties, and ethnic groups have "collective shadows that are the underside of their conscious, normative values" (p. 39). Left unexamined and unintegrated, these shadows function negatively. As discussed above, the collective shadow—the utilitarianism—seemed to exist among myself and my students though it had different manifestations in different people. It was embedded in collective unconsciousness, articulated though their effects in the conscious—the pursuit for a visible result only, for the practical. As Cheng (2013) posits, utilitarianism prevails in Chinese higher education, where professors and students consider visible, measurable results only. It can be argued that this utilitarianism may be related to the tradition of Confucianism, which has exerted a much stronger impact than the other religious or philosophical systems of East Asia. It is a pragmatic and present-oriented philosophy. As Max Weber (as cited in Nakamura, 1964) argues,

> Confucianism is extremely rationalistic since it is bereft of any form of metaphysics and in the sense that it lacks traces of nearly any religious basis … . At the same time, it is more realistic than any other system in the sense that it lacks and excludes all measures which are not utilitarian. (p. 16)

This philosophy seems to be more useful in helping people solve current problems, but it may not be appropriate to conclude that Confucianism is utilitarian. It may contain such an element though other aspects, such as humanism, need to be attended to too (Wang, 2013). It is only after one comes to realize this impact of utilitarianism, and begins to reconsider it, that one may engage in a subjective reconstruction.

I engage myself in "teacher reflectivity" (Bullough, 1991). In this process, the teacher reflects and evaluates himself/herself and his/her practice. Do I have "unresolved issues or prejudices that are standing in the way" (Mayes, 2005) during my teaching? Was I sensitive enough to my students' reactions and responses regarding my teaching although I did achieve my goal to teach bilingually and engage students with new perspectives? Did I attend to the outcome only without paying sufficient attention to students' responses and comments, especially some negative ones? The teacher should be concerned about his/her own psychic condition, so that he/she can discern the reason that has caused the trouble in his/her teaching (Jung, 1954). What was the driving force that made me pursue this "ambitious" goal? Was I supposed to slow down, to reflect on and engage in inner dialogue with my "shadow"? Without knowing my psychic condition, I might not be able to understand the paradoxical situation where myself and

my students dwelt. The teacher who is able to read their own and their students' psychic speech is more able to be an influential teacher (Mayes, 2005).

Through recalling and retelling my experience with my students, I seem to achieve "the psyche of wholeness and balance" through its own movement—allowing my unconscious at the personal and collective level to surface and manifest, by contrast with the only focus on conscious thought. Reading the psychic speech of myself and my students seems to manifest the unconsciousness and make the unconscious conscious, achieving integration eventually. The method of *currere* allows me to see and understand myself and my students more deeply, maybe the most inner part of myself. *Currere* offers, as posited by Doll (2017), to recover interiority, to tap the coursing within, and to help us find the thread of life inside ourselves (p. 96). Through seeing Xiao Jin and other students, I see myself, more of Xiao Jin, and the world. I am reading psychic speech of my student and myself.

There is a classical Chinese poem from the *Wei and Jin* Dynasty, "Green grasses standing by the riverside, they are, continuously and heartfully, missing the way stretching out to the far." They can never meet regardless of how the riverside green grass may miss the way ahead. There might be somewhere in our heart that we can never arrive. Can I understand myself and my student, eventually?

Summary

Informed by Doll (2017)'s work and the ideas of Jungian psychologists, using the method of *currere*, and co-mingling my past experiences and current thought, I elucidate my exploration of reading psychic speech, including my students and myself.The method of *currere* allows me to retell my teaching story, my teaching experience with my students, manifesting the previously unnoticed, the invisible aspect of my teaching experience, something unconscious at both the personal and collective level, during which I have come to understand the psychic reality of my students, the archetypal nature of the teacher/student relationship, and the collective shadow burdening me and my students—the psychic speech of myself and my student—thereby, engaging in self reconstruction and transformation in recurring cycles as a teacher. Psychic reality is textured with psychic speech arising from archetype and one's archetypal experience. Its consistency lies in its unconscious coming to conscious, enacted through the method of *currere*. Reading psychic speech makes possible a fresh, startling, poetic, reframed vision and understanding of teaching and opens up teaching practice for renewal.

References

Brooke, R. (2015). *Jung and phenomenology*. Routledge.

Bullough, R., Jr. (1991). Exploring personal teaching metaphors in preservice teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *42*(1), 43–51.

Burnett, I. (2014). *The violence of innocence: a critical archetypal inquiry into the American psyche*. http://www.opusarchives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Burnett-NMIIFinalReport.pdf

Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces.* Princeton University Press.

Casemore, B. (2019). Following the thread of life in Mary Aswell Doll's *The mythopoetics of currere*. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, *13*(2), 1–14.

Cheng, K. (2013). Preface. In W. Wang, *The Yuanpei Program in Peking University-A case study of curriculum innovation* (pp. vii–ix). Springer.

Doll, M. (2017). *The mythopoetics of currere: Memories, dreams, and literary texts as teaching avenues to self-study*. Routledge.

Hillman, J. (1975). *Revisioning psychology*. HarperPerennial.

Jung, C. (1953). *Collected works* (vol. 7, R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. (1954). *Collected works* (vol. 17. R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. (2014). Archetypes and the collective unconscious. (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung: Complete digital edition* (Vol. 9, n.p.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1959)

Mayes, C. (2005). Ten pillars of a Jungian approach to education. *ENCOUNTER: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, *18*(2), 30–41.

Nakamura, H. (1964). *Ways of thinking of Eastern peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan.* East-West Center Press.

Odajnyk, V. (1976). *Jung and politics: The political and social ideas of C. G. Jung*. Harper & Row.

Pinar, W. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* (1st ed.). Routledge

Semetsky, I., & Delpech-Ramey, J. (2012). Jung's psychology and Deleuze's philosophy: The unconscious in learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *44*(1), 69–81. DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00670.x

Stein, M. (2006). *Principle of individuation: Toward the development of human consciousness*. Chiron Publications.

Wang, W. (2013). *The Yuanpei Program in Peking University-A case study of curriculum innovation*. Springer.

Wang, W. (2020). *Chinese currere, subjective reconstruction and attunement—When calls my heart*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Finding Marya: The Road East

By Karl Martin
Independent Scholar

The story began ten years ago when my father shared a memory of a woman he met at Brown University. He was a Navy midshipman, she a Latin and Greek scholar. They were in love, often meeting at the Carrie Tower. Famous for its inscription *Love is Strong as Death*, it served as a representation of their love and commitment to one another. This was during World War II, and one night my father's ship unexpectedly deployed. When he returned, Marya was gone. While searching for her at a servicemen's dance, he met my Mother. They married in 1947, and I was born in 1951. After my father died, I remembered her name and saw her for the first time in an archived newspaper photo.

Barlowski and Cash Head Herald-Record

NEW EDITORS

MARYA BARLOWSKI

KEVIN CASH

Editor-in-Chief Is Active in School Affairs; Cash V-12 Man

Korey, Greenstein Assume New Posts

Mishel and Boole to Hand Down Positions Monday at Meeting

At a meeting of the complete staff of the Herald-Record to be held in the Commons Room at 3 o'clock on Monday, Editor-in-Chief Audrey Mishel will turn over her position to Marya Barlowski of semester VII. Kevin Cash will in turn take over the Brown editorship vacated by Bob Boole. Judy Korey of semester VI is the new Managing Editor and Eleanor Greenstein, who will be in semester VIII when she returns in the fall, will be News Editor. Lois Mountain and Jackie Berger, both of semester V, will remain as Desk Editors; they will be joined in Nov-

Brown Herald-Record, 1944, p. 1

A good photograph provides valuable information and a near-spiritual insight, a record of the very light that touched a face. Dr. Ralph Harley, my photography professor from 1984, looked upon old photographic images with reverence. "He made us study, really *study*, portraits and still-life black and white photos. He suggested that a photograph was the closest one could be to those departed persons, a chemical image of the light reflected from an individual's face" (Martin, 2018, p. 89). Liberated from newspaper halftone, the original Leica "glossies" of Marya must have been stunning. The image and personality of Kevin Cash couldn't have differed more. Enlisting in World War II and having the good fortune to earn an Ivy League degree, he became a feature writer, perennially fired due to incidents at work and rehired "by virtue of his devilish Irish charm and earnestly professed reformation" (Freedman, 2007, p. 266). Marya was professional, driven by her intellectual facility, a strong work ethic, and formative experiences in the Classical High newsroom.

Martin, K. (2022). Finding Marya: The road east. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 27–42.

Marya and Kevin, Brown University newsroom

Classical High embodies the curriculum roots of this narrative, with a recipe for success that has made it a superlative institution. The school was established in downtown Providence in 1843, celebrating its centennial two years after Marya graduated. It wasn't named "Classical" in a superficial way. The motto is the final line in Latin from Alfred Lord Tennyson's Ulysses: *Certare Petere Reperire Neque Cedere* (To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield). This maxim has also become mine, and what follows is the continuation of my research process, a doubled *currere* of Marya and me.

Beginnings

The germ of an idea emerged as I was teaching a Middle Child Inquiry class while we dissected the rubrics of the edTPA, a rigorous standardized assessment. It was exactly as boring as it sounds, and a respite from state-sanctioned accountability was needed. Attempting to frame the edTPA as teaching artistry, I suggested that the students provide a personal connection to their educational experiences facilitated by the autobiographical component of *currere*: "There is no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves" (Pinar et al., 2006, p. 515). I participated also and considered making Marya's story and mine into a *currere* case study. That was my epiphany. I would write a "doubled" biographical and autobiographical *currere* examination. It would delve into the loss of a potential past and, hopefully, lead to the promise of educational futures. This would require a research trip to find artifacts, writing, and eyewitness accounts. Exiting Merrill Hall as September sun dappled the Ionic columns, I decided to leave the following morning.

Merrill Hall, Kent State University
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

I did have concerns. A narrative about the journey should yield *something*. Why was I going, and what did I hope to find? What would I do if I didn't find it, and how would I even know? A *Peanuts* cartoon from February 14, 1972, shows Snoopy setting out on a journey to interview an author and write her biography. When asked how he'll know what to look for, he replies, "I'll know it when I see it." Like Charles Schultz's canine hero, informed intuition would suffice.

It was the beginning of a *currere* journey, an autobiographical case study. I had a unique subject, and the story I wanted to read wasn't on any shelf. It was up to me to write it, and I needed to visit our shared hometown. This required engaging in conversations with the past. Petra Hendry writes: "To assume that we can go it alone, without the stories and wisdom of those who came before us, is to sever human relations. We are our relationships" (Hendry, 2011, p. 209). I was reactivating a life, hoping to weave both biography and autobiography into the mix. In doing so, it became a dissertation.

Going East

I left the next morning, a beautiful September day. Pursuing Marya in Rhode Island was essential to finding biographical materials, and Providence was the epicenter of the research. The love of being *in* the writing and adventure of the trip were a bonus. John Dewey (1934) used the writing of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to address this phenomenon:

> What Coleridge said of the reader of poetry is true in its way of all who are happily absorbed in their activities of mind and body: "The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, not by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution, but by the pleasurable activity of the journey itself" (p. 5).

I was riding the time winds, moving in the present but anticipating the past around every curve. For anyone who has taken a "road trip," this is clearly understood. On the highway, the driver enters an altered state: "In freeway driving, we deal with visual information, keeping track of relational, spatial changes, sensing complicated configurations of traffic. Many people find that they also do a lot of creative thinking, often losing track of time" (Edwards, 2012, p. 4). Over distance, the left brain shuts down, not content with hours of boredom. Not so the right. The arrangement of cows

on a distant hill, the fragrance of the season, hex signs on an Amish barn—perfectly enjoyable for the right hemisphere. Decisions occur while the brain free associates. I had become part of the narrative, the research already begun.

Route 80, Eastern Pennsylvania
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

My wife Michelle—a psychologist—called when I reached Scranton, Pennsylvania. She suggested that I look for a "sign." The journey thus far had been unremarkable, devoid of "signs." One minute later, a truck passed me, message printed on the rear doors, "Be kind; be careful; be yourself," clearly revealed, all doubts erased.

Interstate 84, Eastern Pennsylvania
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

I was reminded of the writing of William Pinar: "The student of educational experience accepts that at any given moment she or he is located in history and culture, always in a singularly meaningful way, a situation to be expressed autobiographically (if indirectly) through the curriculum" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45). What better counsel than the phrase emblazoned on the back of that semi? It was a reminder to practice ethics while remaining true to my vision:

> The modes may include dialogue in the spoken and written and visual to affect their aims to adhere to the principles of respect, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice in a way that is mutually beneficial to the participant and the researcher. (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012, p. 64)

The journey so consecrated, my goal was to arrive before sunset in Weekapaug, Rhode Island. I did, and it was inspiring.

Weekapaug, Rhode Island
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

I slept alongside anglers and surfers—in a parking area adjacent to Weekapaug's Fenway Beach. The surf woke me up, and I plunged into the water.

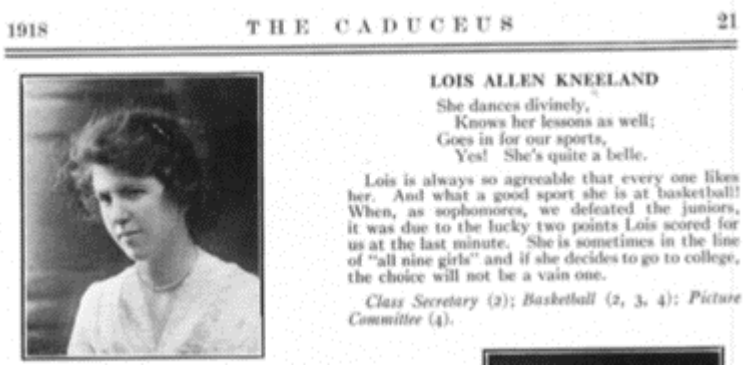
Fenway Beach, Weekapaug, Rhode Island
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

I was to be at Classical High by nine and arrived early. A public school that still requires an entrance exam, the old building was demolished in 1967. Replaced by one of *Brutalist* design built on what used to be Pond Street, the remodel provided for expanded sports facilities on campus. The new school has its share of detractors, but the superlative education remains. As in the past, a majority of the students are first-generation children of immigrants.

I was met by Robert Palazzo, Dean of Students and Athletic Director, who enthusiastically greeted approaching students with a booming voice that resonated through the halls. We concluded our tour at the library after looking at trophies and historical accolades. It was reminiscent of Robin Williams showing his students similar displays in the film *Dead Poets Society*. Classical has a *history*, a tradition of excellence.

I could feel an origamilike binding of my story, her story, and other stories into the *fold*. A philosophical concept forwarded by Gilles Deleuze (1992), the entire universe is described as a continuous process of folding and unfolding, including the unfolding of the human soul. He refers to this capacity to unfold as potential and asserts that these smaller folds that exist within the larger fold of the universe are continually unfolding. I was *part* of the story, and that's about as into the fold as you can get. When interviewers have asked David McCullough if he was working on a book, he noted that they were using the wrong preposition: "I'm *in* the book, *in* the subject, *in* the time and the place" (McCullough, 1999, para. 22).

A superlative teacher and historian, librarian Jonathan Ryder generously provided access to historic newspapers, documents, and even the coffee maker. I quietly entered the library where he was teaching a class about the graphic novel genre and phenomenon, his students engaged and motivated. I was motivated also, ready to immerse myself in a life. I first explored my own roots and connection to the school through my wonderful maternal grandmother, Lois Kneeland. I found her in a 1918 yearbook, the *Caduceus*.



1918 THE CADUCEUS 21

LOIS ALLEN KNEELAND

She dances divinely,
Knows her lessons as well;
Goes in for our sports,
Yes! She's quite a belle.

Lois is always so agreeable that every one likes her. And what a good sport she is at basketball! When, as sophomores, we defeated the juniors, it was due to the lucky two points Lois scored for us at the last minute. She is sometimes in the line of "all nine girls" and if she decides to go to college, the choice will not be a vain one.

Class Secretary (2); *Basketball* (2, 3, 4); *Picture Committee* (4).

Classical High School, 1918
Photo courtesy of Providence Public Schools

Grandma graduated from Classical High and Rhode Island State College, later becoming an excellent classroom teacher. When I was nine years old, she took me past the original building on Pond Street. Pointing out the distinctive yellow brick, she said "That's my old high school. They have an excellent curriculum there" (L. K. Patterson, personal communication, June 25, 1960). Yes, she actually said that, later explaining

what "curriculum" meant over bowls of steaming Won Ton soup at a Chinese restaurant. Grandma was both scholar and pioneer in women's sports. Part of the orientation team at Classical High School, she gave tours to incoming freshman, even serving up hamburgers with large slices of onion and "Cokes" at beachside picnics. She started college during the influenza pandemic, inauspiciously concurrent with the release of Franklin Bobbitt's (1918) *The Curriculum*. It was unfortunate that Bobbitt based his theories upon the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor. Taylor was an engineer known for his methods to improve industry efficiency through scientific management. This inspired—in part—the work of Ralph Tyler (1949), who published *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Known as the *Tyler* Rationale, it was based upon the results of his *Eight-Year Study*, completed when Marya graduated from Classical High in 1941. The *Rationale* was an easy path to management that affected *all* curriculum workers: "It is only half a step, then, to the work of Franklin Bobbitt (1918, 1924) and Werrett Charters (1923); one hop from there to Ralph Tyler (1949); and one more hop to the underpinnings of *No Child Left Behind*" (Jardine, 2014, p. 79). It was time to leave Grandma and hop a generation down the line to the late 1930s. Marya was the story, and she would be found there.

The Classical High library is on a lower level, air conditioning nonexistent in the storeroom. Audio-visual equipment and accoutrements of the janitorial profession blocked my path to old newspapers and yearbooks. Published six times per year, *The Classical Review* newspaper was stored flat in large boxes. I waded into each one, beginning with 1938. Wonderful things emerged from old newsprint. Photographs are valuable inquiry tools that provide readers with visual information and the author's internal perspectives, and an image of class officers captured my attention.

These Officers Head June Graduating Class

Left to right—AGATHA BYRNE, Chairman of Social Committee; MARGARET AJOOTIAN, Vice President; LOUIS HOFMANN, President; CATHERINE QUINN, Secretary and Treasurer.

Photo by R. Webster

Webster, 1941, p. 1
Photo courtesy of Providence Public Schools

Staring at that yellowed photograph of the different clothes and vanished persons, I felt I could have walked out from behind the camera and spoken with them. That piece of history was once real, and I wondered about the young woman with a radiant smile.

Margaret Ajootian Layshock is the daughter of Armenian immigrants, and with some effort I located her. Residing now in California, she talked about the culture of women's sports, scholarship, and leadership at Classical. Finding someone who *knew* Marya was remarkable enough, but Margaret sat next to her in class and threw her inbound passes during basketball games. Both were student leaders and athletes. Margaret wondered aloud how many hours Marya spent "on the books" and recalled that, "if a teacher asked a question, Marya *always* knew the answer" (M. Layshock, personal communication, September 2, 2016).

An image of Marya at a podium was discovered, my hero representing the Classical High debate club as she spoke at the New England Model Congress competition.

Classical High Debate Club, Marya Barlowski standing
Classical High School, 1941, p. 32
Photo courtesy of Providence Public Schools

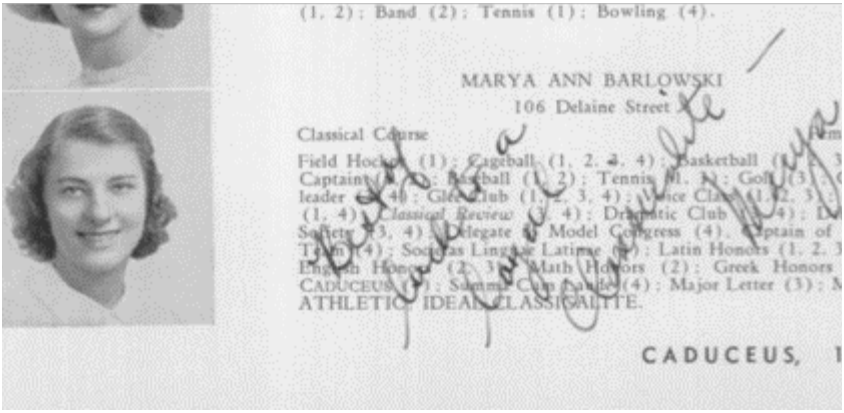
According to Pinar, incorporating the public world requires the use of allegory, "evident in the new curriculum metaphor of allegory which means to 'speak publicly at an assembly'" (Doll, 2017, p. 173). Here was a photographic concretization of that principle, incorporating human subjects broadened into the public world. Exploring new fields of oratory were the first Classical women ever included in the *Rhode Island Model Congress* competition:

> The Debating Society, the Dramatic Society, and the Classical Review are three of the extra-curricular organizations which, although not directly affiliated with the English Department, demonstrate the practical value of classroom instruction in the language at the annual Rhode Island High School Model Congress, which was held at Rhode Island State College. (Classical High School, 1941, p. 18)

Seated behind Marya and waiting her turn was a very determined-looking young woman. I wondered how her life unfolded and if she might contribute to the narrative. Her name is Margaret Dorgan, now a Carmelite nun living in Maine. The Classical valedictorian in 1944, she has lectured internationally, with expertise in the command of prayer, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and mystical experience. I had found a scholar who overlapped with Marya at Classical and benefitted from the same education. I shared her lecture, "Your Personal History as a Narrative of Hope: An Examination Incorporating

Empathy and Personal History," with William Pinar, noting that I thought it might dovetail a bit with the method of *currere*. I found an endorsement: "Love the photos, Karl, and the formal prose, as well as the yellowed paper. The past is so much more powerful than this paltry (if nightmarish) present. Dovetail indeed!" (W. F. Pinar, personal communication, March 3, 2016). Sister Margaret and I have stayed in touch, but Marya is the story. I worked further into the archives, finding something that gave the experience of seeing a few pieces of the puzzle fit together.

Signed in Marya's own hand, a 1941 yearbook confirmed leadership, athleticism, and scholarship. I became disoriented, and I don't mean in a figurative sense. I literally felt dazed as I contemplated the significance and mystery of this artifact.

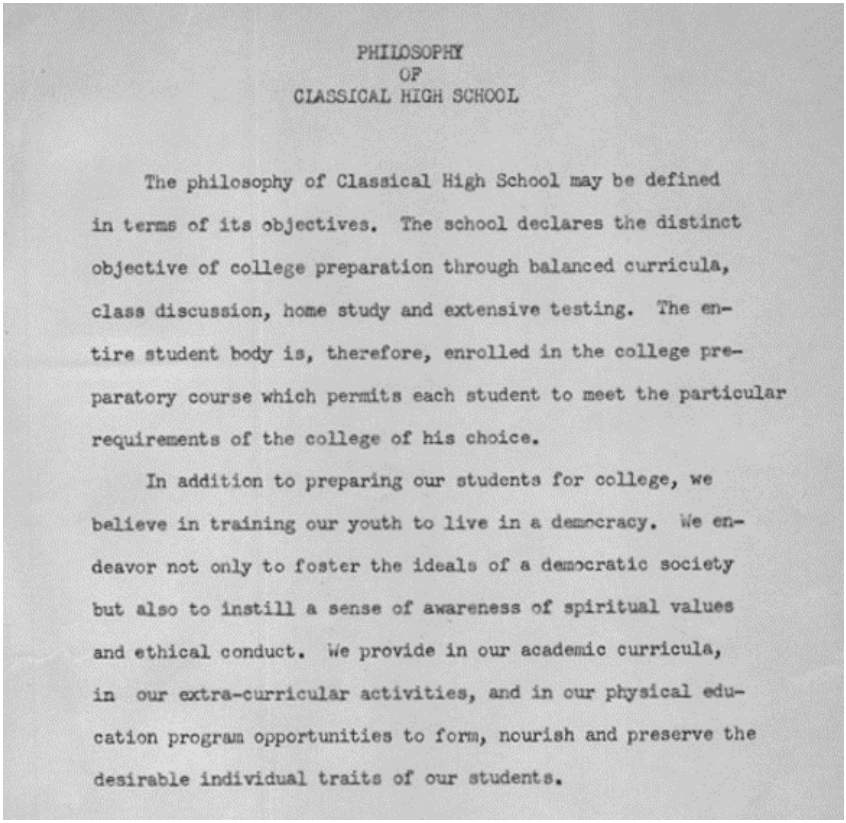


Marya Senior Photograph
Classical High School, 1941, p. 56

Was there ever such beauty and economy of script, a haiku so focused? Not to me. I read it in one breath, a sense of enlightenment following. Relaxed, curvilinear, and expressive, this example seems open to the world and other people. The *Classical Review* school newspaper used the Latin phrase "*Verba Volant Scripta Manent*" as a motto, so Marya knew the enduring value of the written word. Translated as "Spoken words fly away, written words remain," it inspires me to share her story *and* mine in writing. Imagine the real moment in time. The yearbook was owned by underclassman Elizabeth Murray. As valedictorian, a signing from Marya would have been highly-prized. It's easy to picture the busy halls of Classical, perhaps in the choir or Latin room: smiles exchanged, a brief conversation, signing her senior photo with a *Parker 51* fountain pen, and both going on with the rest of their lives. *Best of luck to a loyal Classicalite* embodies school loyalty, not as oath, but as voluntary fealty to a grand academic institution. But what made it so? I scanned the image and kept digging.

Classical Philosophy

A yellowed, fragile, typewritten document was sandwiched between two Classical newspapers. Crafted through collaborative discourse, the ethical dimension to education and the means to deliver it is obvious. Assessment outcomes and vocational training are nowhere to be found.



PHILOSOPHY
OF
CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL

The philosophy of Classical High School may be defined in terms of its objectives. The school declares the distinct objective of college preparation through balanced curricula, class discussion, home study and extensive testing. The entire student body is, therefore, enrolled in the college preparatory course which permits each student to meet the particular requirements of the college of his choice.

In addition to preparing our students for college, we believe in training our youth to live in a democracy. We endeavor not only to foster the ideals of a democratic society but also to instill a sense of awareness of spiritual values and ethical conduct. We provide in our academic curricula, in our extra-curricular activities, and in our physical education program opportunities to form, nourish and preserve the desirable individual traits of our students.

Photo courtesy of Providence Public Schools

Why sweep away the cobwebs? The curriculum field is positively influenced by history. Classical stood upon John Dewey's vision of helping students become lifelong learners, achieving their potential, and contributing to society:

> Rather than rote memorization, teaching to tests, or preparing individuals for specific slots in life, Dewey claimed that the proper role of education was to prepare individuals to be innovative, experimental, lifelong-learners skilled in working with others and consensus-building. His educational goal was promoting democracy—not as a narrow political activity—but as a way of life where everyone is fully enfranchised and provided the opportunity to flourish. (F. X. Ryan, personal communication, 2014)

Dr. Ryan believes the dual reference to building democratic values and individual abilities is unmistakably "Deweyan." Likely crafted in 1936 at the height of his influence, his voice is clearly evident in the Classical High philosophy. Not penned by a political pundit or major educational figure, it was a living document representing a melding of traditional and progressive "not as in influencing the course of events but as artifacts

of a period from which one might be able to reconstruct what was actually happening in the teaching of school subjects" (Kliebard, 2004, p. xviii).

Marya's education at Classical informs pre-Tylerian education as a continuing "complicated conversation," and I wondered if the warmth of her story would draw readers into the distance of the theory. In addition, the narrative might offer some amount of peace to the reader. "The classical model emphasizes that learning feeds the soul and edifies the person rather than producing employees to work an assembly line. The goal of a classical education is to instill wisdom and virtue in people" (Bortins, 2010, p. 5).

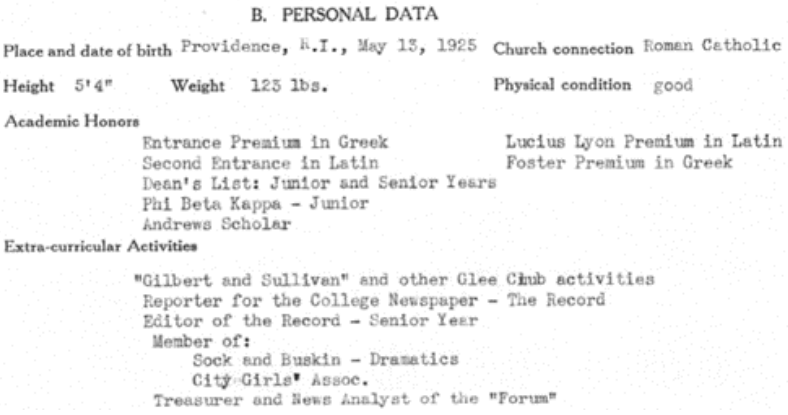
Peter Hlebowitsh eloquently summed it up:

> It is classical indeed, in the sense that it is rooted in a working belief in the power of the subject matter to intellectualize and civilize, but it's progressive too, in as much as its advocates argue that it offers us common knowledge and values that inform a common discourse dedicated to bringing about some working understanding and appreciation of both what we hold in common and what we do not. You could find Dewey making this argument and you could find E. D. Hirsch making it too. (P. Hlebowitsh, personal communication, December 12, 2014)

While searching for Marya at Classical High, I found John Dewey, alive and well.

Pembroke College at Brown University

Marya chose further study at Brown University. Offering a well-conceived education, Brown emphasized the liberal arts and sciences, mathematics, geography and the arts, providing a foundation of knowledge and skills and encouraging critical thinking. The three-mile trip by trolley from her home in Olneyville required a counter-weighted streetcar for the final climb to Brown University. A historical national landmark, College Hill is aptly-named, a 118 foot climb. At the summit are the Carrie Tower and John Hay Library, where I met with archivist Gail Lynch. Photographs, transcripts, and other artifacts came to light, most not seen for 70 years.



B. PERSONAL DATA

Place and date of birth Providence, R.I., May 13, 1925 Church connection Roman Catholic

Height 5'4" Weight 123 lbs. Physical condition good

Academic Honors

Entrance Premium in Greek
Second Entrance in Latin
Dean's List: Junior and Senior Years
Phi Beta Kappa - Junior
Andrews Scholar
Lucius Lyon Premium in Latin
Foster Premium in Greek

Extra-curricular Activities

"Gilbert and Sullivan" and other Glee Club activities
Reporter for the College Newspaper - The Record
Editor of the Record - Senior Year
Member of:
Sock and Buskin - Dramatics
City Girls' Assoc.
Treasurer and News Analyst of the "Forum"

The *Elisha Benjamin Andrews* scholars stride crisply from Pembroke Hall, 1943. Marya is front and center. The awardees were described as the campus "Brighties." Photos courtesy of Brown University

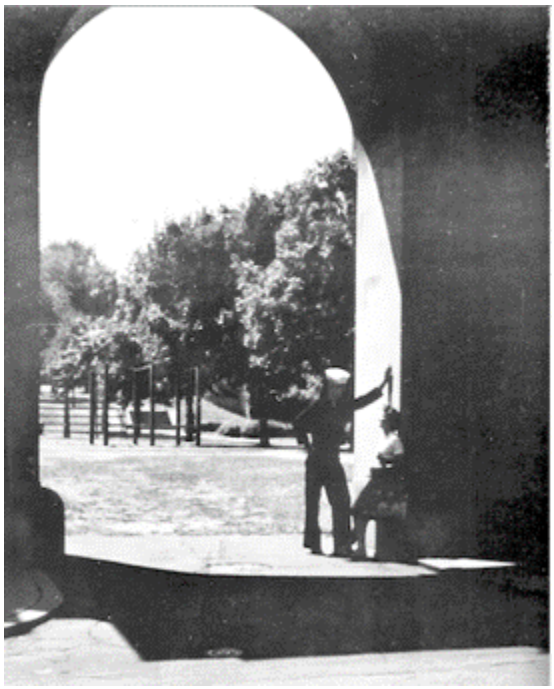
Enjoying the sunny day, we celebrated with coffee and muffins at Faunce House. Overlooking the Brown University Quadrangle, a nearby inscription in Latin describes the university mission: "*Vivat, Floreat, Crescat, Brunonia*." Translated as "May it live, may it grow, may it flourish," George Washington once stood nearby. He didn't sleep there, but after the smallest state finally ratified *The Constitution*, a visit to "Rhode Island in 1790 included a stroll on the College Green with Brown's first president, James Manning" (Baum, 2011, para. 1).

Gayle Lynch and Karl Martin at Faunce House
Photo courtesy of Karl W. Martin

It's valuable to read someone's own writing, and there are numerous examples from Marya's tenure at Brown from the school newspaper. She was a freshman during the attack on Pearl Harbor, spending the rest of her undergraduate experience during wartime. Despite the trend towards vocational studies and accelerated graduation, as editor of the newspaper she endorsed a liberal education over utilitarian studies. A school newspaper article written by Marya and titled, "Double Duty College," begins:

> College students in war time have a double duty—the peacetime aim of training themselves to become citizens of the world, and the wartime necessity of helping the war effort in any way possible. The path towards this goal has been cleared for incoming students at Pembroke College.

At that time, hundreds of military personnel were taking classes at Brown. Among these soldiers and sailors was my father, a Navy midshipman from Kingston, New York. A university photo from 1943 shows him in uniform talking with Marya, appearing to be turning on the charm. He occasionally met her at the Brown University newsroom, marveling at her facility for skillful, engaging writing.



William Martin and Marya Barlowski, Soldiers and Sailors Arch, 1943
Photo courtesy of Brown University Archives

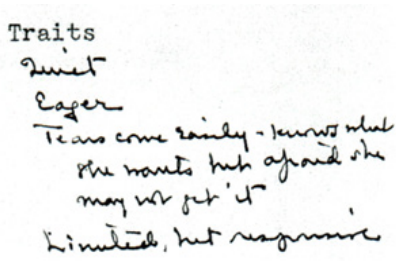
Marya's educational experiences were invested in subject mastery, not test-taking mastery. The decline in funding the arts and humanities and trend towards a narrower view of education occurred after her formal education. Her teachers and professors believed in a democratic liberal education, using a calibrated curriculum with challenging texts and materials.

Perhaps the narrative *will* invite others into productive conversations, acknowledging and adding to a new rationale that moves from the particular and the historical towards what Pinar (2011) calls "larger circles" of influence. My inquiry honors both a beautiful, unfinished life and a re-energized field. Pinar's (2012) inclusion of "allegory" in his multiple "curriculum-as-*currere*" explications incorporates the past into the present: "Historical facts are primary, but it is their capacity to invoke our imagination that marks them as allegorical. Their meanings are not confined to the past; they leak into our experience of the present" (Pinar, 2015, p. 28).

Marya died young, at age 49, so others of her generation survived her. This worked to my advantage, resulting in interviews with colleagues, friends, and family. It's become a lifelong study project, a springboard for a productive line of inquiry. Her story gives a "face" to the journey, which may resonate with others as they explore their own vocational calling. A colleague believes this is an "intriguing tale" and is interested in seeing what there is to learn from Marya: "She came from a very unique place and received the type of education that may also be said to be all but forgotten in today's era of hyper-accountability and standardization" (J. Blanken-Webb, personal communication, November 7, 2016). Perhaps a reader will see Marya's story as a message of hope.

It was a productive three days at Classical and Brown. I needed to reward myself with a day at the beach and return home. There would be more research and subsequently more road trips to libraries and archives. If an archive exists, you must get there, and materials are often scattered about geographically. Valuable artifacts are often uncatalogued, forgotten, and relegated to boxes in the basement. The researcher must find them. Moreover, descriptions of special collections and archives are often inadequate. In traveling to sources, researchers don't know until they arrive if it will be valuable or not. Librarian Judith Nixon describes the work of scholars in libraries and archives as "panning for gold," identifying a behavior called "chaining" where one idea and inquiry may lead to another. Scouring through archival material can be tedious, but sifting out flakes of gold is exhilarating. Important connections may occur while doing unrelated work, but it's not all solitary. It's better not to "go it alone," since ideas emerge from networking: "Research was described … as an evolving or growing process, with the key component being an inspiring question to pursue, usually originating from a conversation" (Nixon, 2010, p. 232). I came to start writing about Marya after remembering a conversation with my father. It was never my intention, but curiosity compelled me to begin researching her. I didn't begin with an agenda. My dream is that more important letters will turn up or that a symphony she may have written will surface.

No one who met Marya ever forgot the intelligence and depth of character behind her blue eyes. She was an introverted scholar who *willed* herself to be outgoing, assuming leadership and taking on responsibilities. This belied a great sadness, a melancholy. She is an elusive subject, but she was once *real*, and there is so much more to write.


Traits
Quiet
Eager
Tears come easily - knows what she wants but afraid she may not get it
Kindred, but responsive

Interviewer notes, Brown University, 1944

As to how this journey affected me, I occasionally wonder if it's a healthy pursuit. The search for Marya engrosses and absorbs the whole of me. This curiosity—the need to know—becomes a consuming, driving obsession. Biographer Stacy Schiff (2017) describes this well: "Properly speaking, the impulse to bury yourself in someone else's life is not normal. The first time, there is perhaps an excuse. Afterward, you could be expected to know better" (para. 8). There it is. I've happily become a biographer and also shared my research process.

I invite the reader to take a research road trip and enjoy great adventure. Set the cruise control, be open to inspiration, free-associate and enjoy the ride. Everything is truly ahead of you. In remembering Tom Petty's song, *Runnin' Down a Dream*, it's easy to identify with the protagonist as he drives down the great American highway—with the radio on. It's a rock 'n roll paraphrase of Jack Kerouac's (1957/2008) *On the Road:* "Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me, as is ever so on the road" (p. 183).

References

Aluwihare-Samaranayake, D. (2012). Ethics in qualitative research: A view of the participants' and researchers' world from a critical standpoint. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *11*(2), 64–81.

Baum, D. (2011). Washington's day on College Hill. *News from Brown*. https://news.brown.edu/articles/2011/02/president

Bobbitt, F. (1918). *The curriculum*. Riverside Press.

Bortins, L. A. (2010). *The core: Teaching your child the foundations of classical education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Brown Herald-Record. (1944, September). Barlowsky and Cash head *Herald-Record*. *Brown Herald-Record*, *1*(9), 1.

Classical High School. (1941). *Caduceus*. The Oxford Press.

Deleuze, G. (1992). *The fold: Leibniz and the baroque.* The University of Minnesota Press.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience.* Capricorn Books.

Doll, M. A., Ed. (2017). *The reconceptualization of curriculum studies: A Festschrift in honor of William F. Pinar.* Routledge.

Edwards, B. (1979). *Drawing of the right side of the brain.* Penguin Books.

Freedman, J. O. (2007). *Finding the words: The education of James O. Freedman*. Princeton University Press.

Hendry, P. (2011). *Engendering curriculum history*. Routledge.

Jardine, D. (2014). Story-time lessons from a dog named fideles. *Counterpoints*, *452*, 57–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42982357

Kerouac, J. (2008). *On the road*. Penguin. (Original work published 1957)

Kliebard, H. M. (2004) *The struggle for the American curriculum: 1893-1958.* Routledge Falmer.

Martin, K. (2018). Finding Marya: The beginnings of a doubled *currere* narrative. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *2* (1), 81–92.

McCullough, D. (1999). David McCullough: The art of biography No. 2 [Interview]. *The Paris Review*, *152*(Fall 1999). https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/894/the-art-of-biography-no-2-david-mccullough

Nixon, J. M. (2010). How scholars work: Panning for gold in libraries. *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, *49*(3), 231–233. https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/3547/3833

Pinar, W. F. (2011, October 5–8) *Allegories of the present: Curriculum development in a culture of narcissism and presentism* [Paper presentation]. First International Congress on Curriculum and Instruction, Eskişehir, Turkey. https://blogs.ubc.ca/pinarnetwork/2014/11/08/allegories-of-the-present-curriculum-development-in-a-culture-of-narcissism-and-presentism/

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Pinar, W. F., Reynolds, W., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P. (2006). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses*. Peter Lang.

Pinar, W. F. (2015). *Educational experience as lived: Knowledge, history, alterity.* Routledge.

Schiff, S. (2017). Stacy Schiff: The art of biography No. 6 [Interview]. *The Paris* Review, *223*(Winter 2017). https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/7089/the-art-of-biography-no-6-stacy-schiff

Tyler, R. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction.* Chicago University Press.

Webster, R. (1941, May 29). *These officers heading graduating class* [Photograph]. *The Classical Review*, *5*, 1.

Centering Black Excellence: Critical Race *Currere*

By Aaron Sardinha
University of Ottawa

As we entered the year 2022, our attention began to shift. Instagram, once saturated with Black squares, now hosted winter pictures, holiday photos, and glee. Not to say I was entirely free from this; my last few posts were exactly that. I think back to the year we put behind us and remember the activism, the protests, and vitriol. The shift in our public discourse away from the persistent and ongoing threat of anti-Black racism is far from indicative of our need to remain silent. Last year, for example, in Windsor, Ontario (La Grassa, 2021), Barrie, Ontario (Krause, 2021, November 12), and Toronto (Jabakhanji, 2021), instances of Anti-Black racism continued to resurface and remain, in many cases, insufficiently addressed. With the new year on the horizon, I couldn't help feeling like we'd driven through 2021 woefully unprepared for any collective resolution. In the United States, there was even a push to remove any semblance of Critical Race Theory in K-12, as well as college, classrooms (Knowles, 2021). I now feel a very real, tangible fear at the imminent threat of losing the little space in between the curricular cracks (Schultz, 2017) I have left to advocate for my existence.

So, I am here, writing, perhaps as a response to this fear of the existence of my Black body in a pedagogically white space. I take a *currerian* journey in relation to my lived experiences with co-designing and teaching the Sankofa Centre of Black Excellence curriculum. In traversing this journey, I draw on critical race theory (CRT) and William Pinar's (1975, 2004) *currere* methodology to dissect and (re)interpret the autobiographical racialized self, to situate "*I"* and ask about the possibilities of *currere's* role in antiracism education. At times, I draw upon poetry I create or have created during my *currerian* journey. Like other *currere* scholars (Daspit, 2021; Woodford, 2021), I do this to analyze and synthesize my autobiographical academic experience in its many existing forms. In doing so, I highlight the importance of Critical Race *Currere* concerning curriculum studies and a Canadian education system. At times, my steps through Pinar's (1975, 2004) *currere* may seem obvious and explicit. At other times I move across these steps more subtly to evoke a closeness to my own experience and lean away from any dominating epistemological structural inhibitions.

Currere

Dauphenee's (2010) study has looked at how a writer, though seeking to describe one's own experience, is bound by the academic lens and all of its expectations. Baszile (2015) refers to this as "epistemological dimensions of domination" (p. 3). *Currere* offers further possibilities in that it asks the researcher to remain mindful of our point of view in relation to all external expectations and look at it, loosen ourselves from it, detach from it, and bracket it (Pinar, 1975).

The symbolism behind the course that has inspired this piece, The Sankofa Centre of Excellence, and the eponymous creature are best reflected in *currere*'s ideological wrestling of time. Like Pinar's articulation of *currere* as an allegory of the present, the Sankofa bird represents returning to the past and to the present as one reimagines the future. San (return) Ko (Go) Fa (Look, seek, and take), from the Akan, Ghanian language translates literally to "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind" (Carter G. Woodson Center, 2021). Similarly, Pinar's (2004) *currere* understands time as that

Sardinha, A. (2022). Centering Black excellence: Critical race *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(2), 43–50.

which can bridge connections among those who practice it and the potential of one's pedagogy. Pinar (2004) notes "It is the past that can dislodge us from submersion in the present, and its articulation can serve as an allegory-of-the-present. No longer a flat line between what is no more and can never be" (p. 27). In my currerian praxis, I remember, and I look back, like the Sankofa bird, and seek wisdom from that which can reimagine my and my students' futures as Black excellence.

Critical Race/Feminist *Currere*

The challenge for myself is that the *currerian* conversations generated around the pursuit of self-understanding take place primarily around "ideas, concepts, and texts that emerge almost exclusively from the male psyche, from the white psyche, from the white male psyche" (Baszile, 2015, p. 2). In 2015, Baszile published "Critical Race/Feminist *Currere*," which posited the need to center the voices of women of colour, in academic domains. These voices, Baszile (2015) notes, are those that "have been absent, ignored, misconstrued, distorted, repressed in the curriculums that shape our lives, the curricula of schooling and media, in particular" (p. 2). I ask, what is my lived experience as a Canadian Black educator creating a course for/with/by Black students? How do their/our stories and experiences coalesce, harmonize at the intersection of excellence? What moments in their lives, in their/our schooling, have been silenced and pushed aside systemically? "What racializing laws, rules, and norms [are] woven into the social system?" (Henry & Tator, 2000, p. 373). bell hooks (1994/2014) notes in *Teaching to Transgress* that, to (re)enact antiracism in schools, we must begin with the student's lived experience. hooks notes, "Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community" (p. 8). Simply put, Critical Race *Currere* invites a dialogue between two theoretical schools of thought and practice: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Curriculum Studies. By bringing these fields together, one hopes that we can bring race, knowledge, and power back into conversation with the self and our lived experiences (Baszile, 2015). There is a poem that comes to mind, written by a local Prince Edward Island artist and activist King Kxndi on the importance of honouring Black and Indigenous women across the globe. They write:

> For we make life. For we started life.
> Therefore we understand life.
> Black womxn are your foremothers,
> Indigenous womxn carry the world's Indigenous wisdom we so desperately need to get us into the next world.
> The path to saving the Mothership, Earth, including protecting the Oceans, Whales, and Forests. It equally includes protecting Black, Indigenous Womxn of Colour Globally (Kxndi, 2021, p. 1)

Okello (2019), has looked at the ways Black men ethically engage with afro-feminism(s) through auto/ethnography. She notes that, although the primary concern of feminism is not to "rescue" Black heterosexual cis-gendered men, "men's ethical participation in and with Black feminisms can assist in creating the alternative ways of being that Black feminisms call for and may facilitate communal healing projects in and beyond educative spaces" (Okello, 2019, p. 343). Though I don't identify as heterosexual and my cis-ness remains interrogated, I ask about the possibilities for

Black feminism to continue to facilitate my engagement with *currere* and ultimately my pedagogy. I write, as I teach, to actively dismantle and decolonize my thinking through the process of *currere* and question how my autobiographical pursuits can/must include making space for not only antiracism but feminism.

Regressive: Nowhere to Hide, Yet Still Unseen

"Good morning Aaron," another teacher walks by me in the staff room as I return to the present. I wear only dress clothes here. I've tightened my hair back in an imperceptibly curly bun, sure to have flattened out any stray curls from my temples—the likes of which I would have called endearing any other day—now they are exposing, inconspicuously Black. I lean on what Downey (2018) refers to as my White Seeming Privilege in an effort to "fit in." I smile behind my medical mask and head to my class. I can still feel the gel in my hair 13 years later.

At home, my scalp aches from the day, and so I untie my hair—free from any perception. I open my laptop to continue to work on the papers I've been assigned for my curriculum studies course. Every time I write, I think of George, and I think of the recent protests after the murder of Abdirahman Abdi in Ottawa, Ontario. I think of the uprising of anti-Black racism, and I struggle to find the words. As I think back to this day, I'm reminded of James Baldwin (1963) and his letter to his nephew: "Dear James, I have written this letter five times, and I have torn it up five times" (p. 3). Baszile (2010) cites similar struggles in her writing:

> I had not figured it out yet, my trouble with getting it out in a way that moves beyond the basic requirement of being informative, contributing something thoughtful to the field. After an hour or so, the word that I have erased several times now comes out again, it refuses—it seems—to go away, to be silenced. The word is *I*. (p. 486)

Sankofa Centre of Excellence

The Sankofa Centre of Excellence, also referred to as the Sankofa Summer English Course, was initially proposed as a Black Graduation Mentorship program in 2019 after a $157 million investment from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Nine school boards across Ontario were chosen for this pilot program to provide mechanisms of culturally responsive support for Black youth in Canadian schools. Led and supported by members of the school board's teaching and administrative team, the Sankofa Centre prides itself on its focus on well-being and learning for Black youth in Ottawa (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2022). "The Sankofa Centre of Excellence was created to 'address issues and concerns that impact the graduation rates of Black students in the district' and provide culturally responsive ways to align the individual experiences of Black youth" in these schools with the planned curriculum while combating micro and macro ways racisms may manifest in education (Ng-A-Fook & Curie, 2021, p. 19).

In the Sankofa Centre of Excellence, we as educators and curriculum designers found ways to return to the question of "who am I?" and "how has my understanding of Black Excellence changed or evolved?" to center the curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1993) amongst the curriculum-as-planned. How might this centre work to facilitate CRT's counter-narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)? How might these voices fill in or take spaces amongst the incomplete narratives (Cordi, 2021) and honour the lived experiences CRT seeks to accompany? In Sankofa, space is held that allows room for our students' lived experiences but does so with all necessary considerations—namely a curriculum that reflects our collective needs.

Progressive: I Can't Hear Your Racism, I'm Busy Retexturing Landscapes

"Mr. S, how do you confront microaggressions?" one of my students asked me one day about a week into our month-long course. I was assigned to a group of 13 bright students, all of whom identified as Black and who had all expressed eagerness at engaging in conversations about their lived experiences as racialized youth. For many, having their curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1993) welcomed into the curriculum-as-planned was novel. I had spent so long doing what Brian D. Schultz (2017) refers to as "Teaching in the Cracks," finding opportunities to work in between the mandated, racializing curriculum that such an explicitly forward question had taken me aback (Coble, 2020, Stanley, 2000). It had dawned on me in the vacuous moments of silence after I was asked that question that I had spent so long away from what Maxwell and Roofe (2020) refer to as the "Heart of the Protest" that any semblance of an enacted curriculum as lived would require more than a simple answer. "When curriculum is understood as being constructed narratively through the construction and reconstruction of experience, what is valued are the stories lived and told by teachers and students of what is important, meaningful, relevant, and problematic for them" (Maxwell & Roofe, 2020, p. 28). I opened up the conversation to the class, inviting responses the likes of which only further silenced me. Here, among the "retextured landscapes, populated by a multiplicity of curricula," I am reminded of the curriculum-as-lived and how it transforms teacher to learner and creates space for the faces of "faceless people" (Aoki, 1993, p. 258).

At this progressive point in the currerian journey, I think more of identity and the deconstruction of the terminology of it all. I think of Aoki's (1993) reconsiderations of identity as presence, this notion that identity—in our case Blackness—is a static, present identity. It is the other side of the binary, the other side of the rigged coin—unequal probabilities fated against this flip. We are aware in the Sankofa class that our identities are in production "in the throes of being constituted as we live in places of difference" (Aoki, 1993, p. 260). For Dumas (2016), it is a shared set of "histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships" (pp. 12–13). For James (2019), it is breaking out of the perceived constructs of Blackness, taking a deep and unguarded sigh at not being perceived as present identities, as "disrupters, trouble-makers, lawbreakers" (p. 384). In the Sankofa class, we have deep and meaningful conversations about what it means to be Black in a world that at one time denies the existence of Blackness and in the same breath shackles us to it. We no longer need to hold our breath at the prevailing white utterances of colour-Blindness (Hampton, 2010). Rather, we know "no amount of intellectual gymnastics and skirting around issues can evade or deny the powerful social and political currency of race" (Dei, 2000, p. 14). We know that ignoring our struggles is not a way to leave room for excellence.

Currere in Sankofa Center of Excellence

We travel through time in this curriculum. The Sankofa Summer English course contains five units. In Unit 1: The Power of Your Pen, we look at what Black Excellence means to us as Canadians of African descent. It asks us to consider the challenges and adversities faced by Black Canadians, such as Marie Joseph Angelique, Harriet Tubman, Mary Ann Shad, and Carrie Best. We are introduced to the concept of resilience in relation to our ancestors and the path they have carved for us. Regressive, remember "we return to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 21). In Unit 2: The Power of Your Voice, we learn about Dudley Laws, Keosha Love, d'bi

Young, ProofRock ShadowRunner, and other Canadian activists, spoken word artists, and artists who have used their voices to imagine possibilities for the future. Students are given the opportunity to write a speech while thinking about the future they want to create. Progressive, "we look the other way. We look, in Sartre's language, at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 24). In Unit 3: Short Stories Resistance and Triumph and the 4th Unit: Brother - Novel Studies, we begin to look at Black Resistance through stories. In this unit, we begin to analyze how stories and their structures allow us to understand our present, our past, and our future by reading African folklore, Jamaica Kincaid, David Chariandy, and Lawrence Hill. In these units, we analyze how plot and story act as a collective imagination while bracketing our past, situating our present, and declaring our future. Finally, in Unit 5: Media Studies, we learn about the tools to bring our learning together and synthesize. In this unit, we work with a production company to answer the question, "What does Black Excellence Mean To Me?" "to underline the biological concreteness of being. Who is that? In your voice, what is the meaning of the present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 26)?

Synthetical

When I was 9 years old, I asked my Trinidadian Granny a question she thought was in jest, and just in an instant, she insisted I ingest my worry and ask her my query.
I pulled out the chair and looked up at her hair. Black curls, like mine, spun me in time, I would stare in the mirror and question my skin.

I sat beside her and asked, "Granny are we Black?"
The Sardinha smile is our strongest trait see,
And in that moment
I realized that we, and the entire family smile from our eyes like blinding sun's on the sea
Unlike our ancestors our smiles are free.
So we smile like it's our currency.

She laughed just like so,
and pulled me close
Maybe the answer was so
obvious to her,
But I wasn't sure
see
I could count nights from before
Where I'd stare at the floor
And I beg for skin covered clarity
"Half Black - Half white"
So binary like red/white wine is very sweet for some but unpalatable to many.
This racial ambiguity begs to ponder some too blind to nuance for wonder.

Though bi-racial, I am singly racialized. Though mixed, I am whole. Though half, I am no longer fragmented. Like Fanon's (1952) Black consciousness, my Blackness claims "absolute density, full of itself" (p. 114), "I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am." (p. 115). I look around my class and see my students of the Sankofa summer course in their fullness, their absolute Blackness. I rid myself of the

racializing language of "academia's dominant epistemological paradigm" (Baszile, 2010, p, 488), the "lure of Western epistemology" (Aoki, 1993, p. 256), striating our curricular landscapes and the language upon which we traverse its elitism and exclusions (Baszile, 2010; Stanley, 2000). Our ontological pursuit is, in itself, not onto us. Terms that divide me, which subjugate and categorize our skin, these are not our words (Karklis & Badger, 2015), not our language of otherness (Ibrahim, 2017). This is an onto-epistemological dilemma of the Black body and mind. All I see are smiles in this class, gratitude at a curriculum that reflects their lived experience (Aoki, 1993). We read Viola Desmond and Desmond Cole, learn of Mary Ann Shad and Dudley Laws, we think about Black Excellence in its many forms, in our media, in our queerness, in our art, poetry, and dance, and most importantly we circle back to two questions presented to us. First, Pinar's (1975) question asks, "What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?" (p. 20). And, Baszile (2015) asks, "Who am I?" (p. 119). We are aware of its difficulty: speaking and thinking beyond and outside of the language domination (Baszile, 2015). Yet as Adams and Buffington-Adams (2020) call for in "On/Beyond *Currere*," this transformative and collaborative process must continue to hold the mirror up, "no matter how painful the experience or how bitter the knowledge" (p. 68). We talk about our pasts, we ponder its meaning, we think about our future, and we come together. We synthesize to imagine the possibilities of our excellence.

Conclusion

It's September 2022, and during this year I made the conscious decision to leave the school board behind. Explicit and implicit acts of racial violence exist in every corner of every school I visit, as if mandated in the curriculum. I work at a non-profit now on the east coast of Canada. Here, I work with the Black community to create Black curriculum and programming. I'm happy. I spent so much of my life wanting to be a teacher, not knowing that being an educator is what would bring me safety, comfort, and resilience.

If, as Pinar (2004) points out, curriculum theory is concerned with the educational significance of "school subjects for self and society in the ever-changing historical moment" (p. 16) and other curriculum theorists are right in noting that curriculum is a critical social/political/historical project) then how might curriculum theory benefit from a commitment to intersecting CRT with our present reality? How might teachers within these schools benefit from such reflection? Such onto-epistemological intersections have been acknowledged elsewhere (Downey, 2018). Yet, as it stands, more research is needed at the life-writing crossroads of these intersections. If, as Downey (2018) notes, our diffused agencies can renew *currere*'s potential for social and political change, then let us listen to the changing and ever-present voices of advocates, teachers, and educators across the globe asking for that change. Though Sankofa gazes back to gain wisdom from the past, we learn and continue onward, flying forward as we "aim towards freedom" (Pinar, 1975, p. 22).

References

Adams, S. R., & Buffington-Adams, J. (2020). On/beyond *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 63–70.

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

Baldwin, J. (1963). *The fire next time*. Penguin Books.

Baszile, D. T. (2010). In Ellisonian eyes, what is curriculum theory? In E. Malewski (Ed.), *Curriculum studies handbook: The next moment* (pp. 483–495). Routledge.

Baszile, D. T. (2015). Critical race/feminist *currere*. In M. Schultz (Ed.), *The SAGE Guide to Curriculum in Education* (pp. 119–126). SAGE.

Carter G. Woodson Center. (2022). *The power of Sankofa: Know history*. Berea College. https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa/#:~:text=Sankofa%20is%20an%20African%20word,risk%20of%20being%20left%20behind.%E2%80%9D

Coble, C. C. (2020). A call for queering adult classrooms. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 83–87.

Cordi, K. (2021). Is this the only story for teaching: Working with counter-narratives with my students. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 87–92.

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

Dauphinee, E. (2010). The ethics of autoethnography. *Review of International Studies*, *36*, 799–818. 10.1017/S0260210510000690

Dei, G. J. S. (2000). Mapping the terrain: Power, knowledge and anti-racism education. In M. Aguiar, A. M. Calliste, & G. J. S. Dei (Eds.), *Power, knowledge and anti-racism education: A critical reader* (pp. 11–22). Fernwood.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). NYU Press.

Downey, A. (2018). Speaking in circle: Lived experiences of white-seeming privilege. *Antistatsis*, *8*(1), 1–11.

Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Education policy and discourse. *Theory into Practice*, *55*(1), 11–19. DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2016.1116852

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Grove Weidenfeld.

Hampton, R. (2010). Black learners in Canada. *Race & Class*, *52*(1), 103–110.

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Racism in the Canadian university: Demanding social justice, inclusion, and equity*. University of Toronto Press.

hooks, b. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Taylor & Francis. (Original work published 1994)

Ibrahim, A. (2017). Don't call me Black! Rhizomatic analysis of Blackness, immigration, and the politics of race without guarantees. *Educational Studies*, *53*(5), 511–521. doi: 10.1080/00131946.2017.1303496

Jabakhanji, S. (2021, November 13). Parents, students gather for anti-Black racism rally outside Toronto school. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/parkdale-student-rally-anti-black-racism-1.6248231

James, C. E. (2019). Adapting, disrupting, and resisting: How middle school Black males position themselves in response to racialization in school. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* [*Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*], *44*(4), 373–398.

Karklis, L., & Badger, E. (2015). Every term the Census has used to describe America's racial and ethnic groups since 1790. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/11/04/every-term-the-census-has-used-to-describe-americas-racial-groups-since-1790/

Knowles, H. (2021, May 29). Critical race theory ban leads Oklahoma college to cancel class that taught 'white privilege.' *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/05/29/oklahoma-critical-race-theory-ban/

Kraus, K. (2021, November 12). Rally held at Meridian Place in Barrie against racism in schools. *CTV News*. https://barrie.ctvnews.ca/rally-held-at-meridian-place-in-barrie-against-racism-in-schools-1.5664478

Kxndi, K. (2021, May 30). Why I celebrate Black, indigenous, womxn of colour today and every day. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-womxns-day-kendi-tarichia-1.6036449

La Grassa, J. (2021, August 6). School board pledges anti-Black racism audit after widespread allegations of systemic racism. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/anti-black-racism-public-school-board-audit-1.6130107

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

Ng-A-Fook, N., Currie, M., & Drake, A. S. (2021). Is CRRP enough: Addressing antiracism(s) in teacher education. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, *14*(2), 1–28.

Okello, W. K. (2019, October 17). Toward an ethical Black men's feminism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *33*(3), 343–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1676482

Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. (2022). *Sankofa Center*. https://www.ocdsb.ca/cms/One.aspx?portalId=55478&pageId=36452083

Pinar, W. F. (1975, April). The method of "*currere*" [Paper presentation]. Annual meeting American Research Association, Washington D.C. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED104766.pdf.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis.

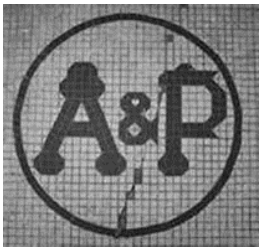
Schultz. (2017). *Teaching in the cracks: openings and opportunities for student-centered, action-focused curriculum*. Teachers College Press.

Stanley, T. J. (2000). Why I killed Canadian history: Conditions for an anti-racist history in Canada. *Social History and Postmodern and Postcolonial Theory*, *33*(65), 79–103.

Woodford, E. D. (2021). The fragmented journey of becoming/being a teacher: A poetic *currere* on teacher wellness. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *5*(1), 66–69.

Shop Steward: An Auto/biography

By Dennis Parsons
State University of New York Oswego



My father was a company man, having worked 44 years as a grocery clerk for the same store. Those were the days when one could swear an allegiance to a brand, clock working hours that would fill decades and have grievances, whereby, both parties—employer and employee—might be able to achieve some kind of mutual understanding. He would punch out at 5pm but, rather than head for home, drove in the opposite direction, to the Cadman Plaza Post Office, where he would "throw mail" for an additional four or five hours of work. He'd leave the house before 8:00 in the morning and rarely return before 11pm.

For most of his 44 years at the A&P, my father was head of the dairy department. Though he would often proudly reminisce about working for a time as a butcher, as far as I can surmise, that kind of work could never be his calling. Meat cutters, a tight-knit, knife-wielding clan, only seldom presented themselves from within the confines of their frozen metal hole. For my father, having come from a long line of women and of men who prefer to be alone while in the company of others, perhaps working dairy was more suitable. Though he did have his customers, and the occasional part-time kid, the dairy section was tucked into the back corner of the store. While he was out there on the shopfloor, in the main, the work allowed him to keep to himself.

At around the age of 8, as the youngest of five siblings, I finally got my turn to go to work with him on the four or so Christmas Eves that followed. Uprooted as a family to the frontier of Staten Island, we'd return to Brooklyn on those frigid December mornings, over the Verrazano Bridge, taking the Ft. Hamilton Pkwy exit to my father's A&P.

Out in the world's classroom, beyond school and home, my father was my first teacher. Donning the crimson apron, twice folded over at the waist, I would help my father load the milk, stack the cheese, cradle the eggs into the case, rotating each of the soon-to-be out-of-date items to the front. (To this day, I reach to the back of the case when I shop; disappointed when I discover the clerk had not practiced this unspoken rule). My father showed me how to stock the waxy milk cartons in such a way as to ensure that every two on the bottom row together formed a platform for the second row, each gallon or half-gallon sliding into place between the rooftops of the two ridges. He trusted me with ink stamping the cheese, even after mistakes were made. Much of the day, I was left on my own; my father would disappear for lengthy visits to the inner sanctum of the meat room for a nip of holiday cheer. Part of the dairy's charge back then was to take in the bottle returns. Refunds varied by size, which was more arithmetic than this eight-year-old could get his head around. So, when he was off somewhere, anxiety took his place. Hoping at least customers would have all the same sized bottles, I resorted to guessing.

In these moments of panic, my father would appear by my side and, with a wave of his hand, arrive at the correct amount. Customers were always kind about my mistakes, his pride reflecting in their eyes. Towards the end of the day, Joe O'Brien, the store manager, would come around and press a very small manila envelope, folded over with

Parsons, D. (2022). Shop steward: An auto/biography. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 51–59.

my name written across the top, a five-dollar bill tucked inside, the deal sealed with a firm handshake over a job well done.

My on-the-job errors involved the exchange of real money as I negotiated the power differences of age and experience. A more vibrant, situated school math curriculum might have helped prevent the trauma that I internalized. During waking hours, at least, I was raised by nuns—the Filippini order while we lived in Brooklyn; Presentation Sisters of Staten Island after the move. We'd be packed in at around 60 pupils. The hours were marked by the saving and cleansing of our souls, with little room for Pythagoras or Copernicus. High school classes were smaller, and the staff was a mix of lay faculty and Christian Brothers, but the math curriculum for which I was unprepared was not much of an improvement. An otherwise fine teacher—in that I was finally learning—would end nearly every Geometry or Trig class with the warning that we had better brace ourselves for the next day's lesson. As a tactic of subjugation, the strategy worked. Were there only as much drama in the subject itself. We were on edge, but not on the edge of our seats. Despite doing well in these classes, the lasting lesson was self-doubt and an irrational fear of numbers.

But in those early crisp December Brooklyn days, my father was sharing with me the secrets of his trade. In the dairy, we were also responsible for coffee. Even though a box cutter could always be found amidst a tangle of keys and change in his front pants pocket, he taught me how to pry open the boxes with my bare hands so as not to slice open the aromatic treasure. He showed me how to refold the corners of any sized box, alternating one flap under, one flap over, to form a secure lid. I watched him as he would break down the box, first with a quick punch to the bottom, breaking the seal, then reaching one hand into the seam and pulling at the cardboard, transforming a cube into a flat horizontal plane. We'd tie up the work bakery style, creating quadrants outlined with string—looping across and around the back, and then transporting accumulated efforts by hand truck into the backroom.

I found joy in stacking the coffee in tight uniform rows, the red bags of Eight O'clock, yellows of Red Circle, the Bokar blacks, alternating directions every few rows, inserting, as he showed me, a sheet of plywood to fortify the great square mass. But the job I truly loved most was grinding the coffee: the clicking sound of the silver arm of the ominous machine, technologically magical, reaching way over my head and emptying the bag, the sounds of beans tinkling into the funnel, the hum of the motor, its soft idle when the task was complete. I loved the punctuating task of tapping the spout to coax the very last of the grounds from its mouth. From his guiding hands and through my initial fumbles and repeated practice, eventually, I learned how to refold the flap and press the tabs into place and felt a great sense of accomplishment with handing the freshly ground bag to the waiting customer. Academic work just isn't geared for that kind of complete and immediate satisfaction; often our charges are long gone before its effects can be felt. Yet still I find myself plugging away at my desk, the hours passed in solitude and isolation, as I look for patterns, a sense of internal order in the perceived chaos among the outcroppings of student prose. Were it even possible to stand back and admire the efforts, and effects, of my daily and nightly toil, our subjects would already be long gone, scaling mountains of their own making.

In the spring of my high school sophomore year, after a summer selling Fuller Brushes door-to-door, fumbling with numbers and sales tax on people's stoops, I got my first real part-time job at the A&P. My father brought me down to the store at the end of New Dorp Lane. He shared his company affiliation with the store manager as he introduced himself, then me. Moments later, I was punching a timeclock, anticipating

the same work as my father, reminiscing about the moments that transpired between him and my eight-year-old self.

My initiation was 18 months of mopping aisle spills and cleaning toilets. I suffered the humiliation of my peers, who undoubtedly took their cues from the boss. More than their dismissive glances, smirks, I found my invisibility unbearable. None of them had to endure such trials or at least not for such a long period of banishment. Spending hours on end in the men's toilet, suffering from cuts from the tiny pieces broken glass that worked its way into my skin, inhaling full-strength bleach in closed quarters, I was always on the verge quitting, rehearsing my resignation speech to the bathroom mirror and to my 16-year-old self. I wouldn't have been able to face my dad, failing at what he taught me, and demeaning his work. Still paid in cash, what was inside those small manila envelopes now seemed tainted. When I finally stood up for myself and confronted my boss, it was clear to both of us that I waited far too long for my moment. It seemed that with each spill that I was commanded to clean up, I felt shame, for myself and for my father.

I held on for five years, through the second half of high school and my initial attempts at college, switching over to the night crew and out of the public eye. I traveled to Fordham University's midtown campus by day. Ultimately, it wasn't my renewed commitment towards a college degree, or a muse like Updike's (1996) "Queenie," but the call of the open road, a summer long cross-country road trip, that finally put the A&P in my past, or so I thought.

By then I was a 22-year-old who had given up on the idea of Fordham. After long nights of stocking, sweeping, and mopping, and still not earning enough tuition money, I had run out of reasons for dragging myself over towards the island's north shore, to the ferry to the uptown 1 train to Columbus Circle. I surrendered to sleep rather than endure the indignity of being an underprepared and overall complete foreigner to college life. I slept for days, weeks, months, and then I tried once more. Although the road had called out to me soon into my second attempt, this time at Hunter College, I vowed to return that fall. With a semester of corralling a few B's and rounding up the occasional stray A, I was beginning to feel like I might be at least somewhat suited for life on the academic plain.

The fullness before work. / The amazed understanding after.
"Work"—Raymond Carver

My father clocked 34 years in just that one small store over on Fort Hamilton Parkway. On warm days he would eat his lunch, legs stretched out towards the driver's side on the bench seat of the family car, a white, fender-dented, 63 Biscayne, the only time I ever saw him as a willing passenger. On a random Saturday afternoon, weather permitting, we, my mother with my five- or six-year-old self in tow, would surprise him with a visit. As we turned the corner, we'd spot him with his legs stretched across the bench seat, spying through the great expanse of windshield *The Daily News* suspended in front of him, forming the "v" of a black and white paper bird between his outstretched arms. In his red interior curbside office, surrounded by hot steel, he read books he borrowed from the local Fort Hamilton Public Library branch. I am sure he had to field questions and complaints or invasive salutations from customers who spotted him in his failed attempts at a mid-day sanctuary. In the cold months of winter, and without any

exchange of money—my father, the handsome charmer, and the woman in the ticket booth, a store customer—spent his hour in the movie theater just a few feet from the store. He probably saw the first half of every matinee screened at the Fortway, late 40s to late 70s. Which perhaps explains why the only screening we ever attended as a family was *The Longest Day,* which to a five-year-old sitting through a three hour film about WWII's D-Day was quite appropriately titled. It only just occurred to me now as I write this that perhaps he was trying to show us what he could not bring himself to share with his own words, his experiences as a WWII veteran.

At some point, half of my siblings worked part-time at the A&P. I was the only child who followed my father's and my maternal grandfather's footsteps to go work for the Post Office. But from those cold early winter mornings driving to work with him and the dark nights returning, I learned the joy and the weariness and the endless tedium of work. From my father I also learned the shop floor motto, a common discursive practice even with my own job throughout high school and part of college: hustle to get everything done so we all could have some time to relax a bit at the end of a shift. To the like-minded cynic, this axiom was merely a managerial ploy to increase productivity, pulled off brilliantly because such occasions, though rare, did occur. But it was in those most quiet moments that I was most proud of my father. When the sweeping and the mopping was all done, a fraternity of young Brooklyn boys, almost as white as their shirts, aprons cast off, metal price stampers protruding from the back pockets of ink-stained Wranglers, would lean against silent mops and brooms or perch along the milk case ledge, drawn, as nearly everyone was, to my father. These moments, spent in the afterglow of work, the body having expressed so much energy, the final release of being done for the day combined with the expansive possibility of Saturday night.

Oh, you can't scare me, I'm sticking to the union, I'm sticking to the union…
"The union maid," —Woody Guthrie

Sometimes talk, when it occurred at all, might turn a bit more hushed, company talk, as they looked to my father for more work-related advice. Too, there were other more pressing events when, midday, a worker would come back to our section and ask to speak with him, and he would take them aside, carefully listen, nod before saying anything. I learned through this embodied language of nods and gestures that matters were serious. Someone's work was in jeopardy. I knew that soon he would be going off to speak with management, to handle a grievance or deliver a defense on their behalf. That side of the negotiation I never got to witness.

I was, however, certain that my father had good rapport with the manager. Despite the tangible separation between worker and boss, exchanges between the two were nearly always warm and friendly. Every Friday night he would come home with an egg box filled with newly expired bread, cake, and dairy. And every so often, a brown paper sack full of errant coffee grounds that collected through a screen to a drawer beneath the machine. He would leave the box up front for the manager to check, before loading it into the folded down backseat of the family wagon. Many years later, his boss called my mother from Florida to express kind words upon hearing the news of my father's passing.

Local management treated him well; he reciprocated, supported by and advocating for a union that empowered its workforce. When contract negotiations failed, the union

recommended that the rank and file go ahead with a strike for better pay and benefits. This I must have actually seen, because I have a vivid memory of him on the picket line, sitting in a fold-up aluminum lawn chair, green and white strapping, his face drawing shade from a ridiculous straw carnival hat.

"I delivered more junk mail than the junkyard would hold."
"Ain't hurtin' nobody," –John Prine

Our pockets must have had holes in them after just six weeks on our cross-country trip. With apologies to Kerouac by way of singer-songwriter John Hiatt (2011), once you reach California, there's "nothing to do but turn around"—turn around and come home. After my brief sojourn west, I kept my promise to myself and resumed my studies at Hunter that fall. Though fairly soon, I would be distracted by the jingling of mailbox keys: a siren song of steady income and security. Despite steady college progress, an inner voice of working-class doubt told me that I had better sit for the US Postal Service exam, an insurance policy taken out against my loosely woven aspirations of upward mobility. I got the call soon after. When it came, I was hardly making any money pumping gas and checking oil at the local *Gaseteria*, once again back on the nightshift. Only this time, I was trying and mostly succeeding at getting myself to college by day. A phone to my father assured me that this would be the right decision. I started at 19K, quite a few grand more than the going entry-level rate on Wall St. My employers assured me that I would be working nights; the decision for me would not be so life altering. I could finish out the term, maybe slow down a bit on the number of future classes. They put me on days. Spring semester was torpedoed right out of the water, raining down as a mountain of mail, mostly junk mail.

One might say that, by that point, I had managed a compromise, a truce of sorts. I was determined not to allow even a small body of water to divert me from a degree. After a five-year hiatus, I had returned to college for my third undergraduate attempt, this time enrolling in night classes, this time settling on The College of Staten Island. The professors were highly ranked and well paid, but the company of peers I had to keep, at the time at least, tarnished the college's reputation. Attending college with the same batch of students from high school is like kissing one's cousin, not in a creepy way, just not all that exciting. While other college bound students escaped the Island, their families taking on second mortgages and considerable debt, gambling on the promise of their children's upward mobility, a NYC CUNY tuition, once free but even then, only a paltry sum, was the equivalent of entering into a very low stakes poker game. I was at least 10 years older than nearly everyone else. We were just a clump of working-class lads and lasses, many passively resisting or overtly lashing out, subconsciously determined to fight our way out of, but in ways that land us right back into, working class "shop floor" jobs (Willis, 1977).

Living in a thinly walled 60s-era duplex, I am certain that I alienated my adjoining neighbors, firing up the painfully slow and screaming banshee of a dot-matrix printer well after midnight and until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. In a few short hours I would be dragging myself to work, always, on principle, a few minutes late. Once there, amidst the din of sexist jokes and racist language, I would sort and tear down my route and soon be carrying the heavily laden mailbag over the hills and up the countless steps of Staten Island, alone in the company of others, then on to that evening's class. In Mike

Leonard's documentary about him, the late singer-songwriter John Prine relates how he composed several of his early classic songs between bites of his ham sandwich, while escaping the weather inside one of those army green utility mailboxes (Kogan, 2016). Hardly as romantic and barely significant, I would compose sentences and sometimes full paragraphs of term papers in my head while looping the neighborhood, returning to the mail truck, and quickly writing down my thoughts, freeing up my head up for the next few lines as I continued on my route, a working class peripatetic. Often drenched to the bone, and/or stuck with overtime, I took to changing into street clothes in the mail jeep, refusing ever to show up for class in a postal uniform.

Over the two years that it took to complete my final year of undergraduate school and catapulted my way through a master's program, I had become the student I despised in high school, the one I resented and was intimidated by in my first two prior attempts at college, asking more questions than were necessary, receiving A's, mostly, and mostly because even the thought of a lower grade had me convinced that I was dive bombing my way towards another college belly flop. Balancing academic life with a physically strenuous and psychologically stressful job was an ongoing challenge I never felt capable of meeting. Successes did little to assuage feelings of being an outsider and an imposter.

So deep are the entangled roots of working class that both of my parents voiced their shock and concern nine years into my Postal career—although indirectly through my siblings—when I finally mustered up the courage to dig myself out from all those circulars and mail order catalogues and quit. How could I possibly leave a "good civil service job" to pursue an academic career? I am reminded of Borkowski (2004) with whom I once shared a collective office space with fellow adjuncts while teaching at The College of Staten Island. Already three chapters into the completion of his dissertation, he was sent a notice from his well-intentioned, certainly Italian, and definitely from Brooklyn, mother. Affixed to clippings from *The Chief*, a weekly newspaper that provided information on all NYC government civil service job applications and deadlines, was a handwritten note that read, "It's not too late to take the civil service test!" O, the tribal pull of social class!

I started a PhD program before my father's steady decline, quite some time after I had symbolically balled up and tossed my A&P apron and soon after I turned in my US mailbox keys for the very last time. In so doing, I had crossed a great divide. I traded in my blue collar for a black robe. Right up to the end, my father was determined in his thinking that only physical labor was real work. Of course, he was right, at least in matters of intensity. Although many might also agree that the world we inhabit, a world of conjuring words from computers, is physically demanding, even backbreaking. Without hesitation, I am sure I was not his sole audience. It seemed that he was also defending the path that he took or that was chosen for him, to himself.

My father got as far as sophomore year in high school. He started out in a small privately owned grocery store, counter service, stocking shelves, bicycle deliveries. On his daily runs, those who could hardly spare a bit of change, he once told me, always tipped. Others never parted with their expendable income. When the storeowner became gravely ill, bedridden for months, at 16, the same age that I was when he was figuratively dragging me by the ear to my first job, he was already working full time, entirely on his own, keeping the man's business running. Some sixty years later, that not even a word of thanks came, still bothered him.

Working along the academic border, Mike Rose (2003) shows the high-level thinking that occurs in what might appear as the basic and banal work of the hands. With the example of a cabinetmaker who measures, walks over to his worktable, pauses,

looks back at the site of installation, thinks some more, Rose illustrates the complex transformations and higher order of thought required from a carpenter, drawing from function, form, aesthetics, which, on the surface, seem only to be the simple application of a computation with a measuring tape. Rose (2009) challenges the prevailing notion that the type, quantity, and enduring length of one's formal education alone belies their intelligence, and that "work requiring less schooling requires less intelligence" (para. 9). Further on, Rose writes: "Our cultural iconography promotes the muscled arm, sleeve rolled tight against the biceps, but no brightness behind the eye, no image that links hand and brain" (para. 10).

Dealing with the sacred task of cleaning out my father's bureau, I immediately knew the purpose of the neat, narrow rows of numbers penciled in his own hand, the weekly list of eggs and other dairy products representing the replenishing of inventory. But representing his work as a simple task of filling lacunae ignores spoilage rates or other disparate sources of knowledge, such as individual shopping patterns and idiosyncrasies, seasonal or holiday spending. "Although we rightly acknowledge and amply compensate the play of mind in white-collar and professional work," writes Rose (2009), "we diminish or erase it in considerations about other endeavors—physical and service work particularly" (para. 16).

After his retirement, my father had become a voracious reader: books, magazines, anything set before him. He was also fast. When I questioned him about a book that I had given him for his 72nd birthday, Gurganus' (1989) *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, wary that the choice might not have piqued his interest, he told me he already read it. As if I could ever play the role of his teacher, scolding him into submission. The inscription I included in the Gurganus novel was a gentle but humorous reminder of the task he sought to begin: "Perhaps this book will jog your memory a bit!"

My father had been writing a few poems: romantic pastorals. He had purchased an electric typewriter and was teaching himself to type in order to finally tell his stories about the war. Meanwhile, my mother's muscle memory from her long-ago high school classes kicked in, and she effortlessly blew by him, pretty much dusting him with sheathes of "all work and no play make jack," in a display of columns of perfect symmetry marching down the page. I cannot be certain that this sudden surprise attack of competition may have put him off the idea of becoming a competent typist. He also always wanted to learn how to play the piano, but the baby grand I bought some years ago and, with the help of many, muscled into the living room, instead became a platform for family photographs and a fancy home for several generations of mice. He was convinced that his hands were too big, his fingers too thick to be able to play. My father had the largest hands of any man that I have ever seen.

I visited my parents one weekend while still mired in the muck of trying to figure out graduate school, whereupon my father, modest but proud, brought out two identical Sony tape recorders, one for me, one for him. I would use mine to record interviews for my dissertation. He would use his to record and transcribe his stories about WWII. Turns out that he was listening to me after all. He planned to put my suggestion in motion: set aside his afternoons, sit down, open up a beer, and talk into the machine as the tape rolled. His project slipped into the recesses of my mind until I brought it up again some years later. His player "didn't work" he told me. I neither pressed nor bothered to take a look.

A few short years later, both of my parents gone, the ink on my dissertation barely dry, I set myself to going through the remnants and effects of their collective lives. Along with some other of my father's things, I discovered the tape recorder in a brown paper

bag in the garage closet, along with a few cellophane-sealed blank tapes. My own tape recorder had since become glitchy, so I plugged his into the wall to see if I might be able to get it to work. There was a small lever on the side of the machine, which, unbeknownst to my father, had been set to pause. Save for the few stories he told repeatedly during the holidays when alcohol lubricated his tongue and loosened the words from his memory, all other traces of what had happened, all that he endured, all of the stories as he would get to tell them, are gone. I would have hoped his renderings might explain how he lived his life in the aftermath of his hero's journey: four enlisted years, two of them in Europe, the role of his Fourth Armored Division's in The Battle of the Bulge, landing in France on Utah Beach, south to Reddon, Lorient, east to Nantes, Lemans, Orleans, fighting their way across in the rolling, close-quartered metal enclosure, on to Bastogne, leading Patton and his Third Army, the muddy trudge across Germany, liberating Ohrdruf Concentration Camp, and on through to Czechoslovakia.

Neither my father nor my mother was able to finish high school. In spite of an education system that failed them, they managed to keep me from the brink, advocating for my elementary schooling when I was in trouble and at risk of expulsion. But negotiating the complex system of education required social capital that they simply did not have. They could not identify with my desire to jump social class. Instead, throughout my prolonged and elongated college career, they fretted silently while offering emotional support.

The trappings of social class kept me in jobs that I could not bring myself to leave yet propelled me towards a career that I dreamed about but secretly felt that I could never possibly hope to obtain. In my subsequent search for an academic post, I took more than a few hits of rejection, dusted myself off and tried again. However, mine is not a story of one individual overcoming the odds. I simply cannot lay claim to working-class grit without acknowledging the invisible power of white male privilege at work in my life story. When I was in graduate school, and my mid-thirties fast approaching, I did not feel the pressure of having to "settle down." A woman would have had a much different experience. I began teaching freshman composition as a graduate assistant and as an adjunct, shifting towards teacher education by way of visiting appointments and ultimately, a tenure-track position. Although I felt the need to adapt my persona in my transition from blue collar work to academic career, I never felt that I would have to dress or even talk a certain way in order to demonstrate my intelligence. The hurdles that I faced were class-based, whereas others experience a variety of obstacles at every step, with signage delivering the same message: "You don't belong."

My father taught me the curriculum of work. Our stories demonstrate how education happens *despite* school. Beyond the world of work, in the time in between, and especially after he hung up his apron for the very last time, my father read widely. He also wrote and, in his final years, expressed the desire to write more and to leave behind a legacy of words.

This past fall, decades since ever setting foot inside any of the A&P's that once had a dynastic hold on the supermarket industry—since been swept off the face of the North American retail landscape—I found myself in a small IGA in Boiceville, NY. Just

meaning to pick up a few things, I ducked into the backroom to use the facilities, and I was stunned by the combined smell—an alchemy of soap, sacks of onions, unmistakable Eight O'clock coffee—and pieced together how years ago this building, with the smells of my childhood emanating from its pores, once housed and A&P. Perhaps out of an unshakeable forty-four-year habit, company loyalty, or maybe because he just wanted to help safeguard a corporation that, though floundering, was still signing his monthly pension checks, my father would take my mother to shop here, several miles out of the way from where they set up their retirement, in the same house over which I am the current, passing steward.

References

Borkowski, D. (2004). "Not too late to take the sanitation test": Notes of a non-gifted academic from the working class. *College Composition and Communication*, *56*(1), 94–123.

Gurganus, A. (1989). *Oldest living confederate widow tells all*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Hiatt, J. (2011). Adios to California [Song]. On *Dirty jeans and mudslide hymns*. New West Records.

Kogan, R. (2016, February 5). Documentary celebrates John Prine and his timeless music. *Chicago Tribune.* http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/ct-john-prine-folk-singer-documentary-ae-0207-20160203-column.html

Rose, M. (2009, June 1). Blue-collar brilliance: Questioning assumptions about intelligence, work, and social class. *The American Scholar*. https://theamericanscholar.org/blue-collar-brilliance/

Updike, J. (1996). A & P. In M. Meyer (Ed.), *The Bedford introduction to literature: Reading, thinking and writing* (pp. 487–491). St. Martin's Press.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Saxon House.

On Decolonizing the Curriculum: Thoughts of a Black Pre-Service Teacher

By Welly Minyangadou Ngokobi
McGill University

Having attended French schools across the African continent, I argue that Eurocentric curricula have been constructed to perpetuate a harmful single story: in my experience as a learner, history classes always maintained African countries' etiquette of post slavery nations bound by poverty; French classes indoctrinated us that French literature can only be white and European, and rarely—if ever—shed light on acclaimed French and Francophone authors of color who have greatly contributed to the French patrimony; Field trips were all organized to view colonial sites or slavery museums. While these sites have their place in general culture and are part of history, they certainly do not tell the "whole story." Furthermore, one cannot ignore the emotional and psychological impact their consistent and persistent visits have on minoritized students.

Given that education has been an effective weapon of domination during slavery and colonial times and is today the foundation of beliefs and value systems that individuals learn from a young age and carry through life, I intend to explore, through self-study and supportive materials, how my experience was a product of the maintenance of elitism in Eurocentric education on the African continent and to reflect on how these findings have informed my current philosophy of education and the teaching practices I intend on taking on as a future teacher. In short, I will attempt to answer this question: "How can experiences of Imperialist education inform a novice teacher's philosophy of education and teaching practices?"

My inquiry will be led by the notion that educators should consistently reflect on the hand we play in the perpetuation of systemic oppression and will follow these points of consideration:

- How can we use our personal experience as students to inform our philosophy of education?
- Does our approach to education and our lesson materials align with our community's interest?
- How are we promoting student empowerment and inclusion of all students within an education system?
- How can we offer students of diverse backgrounds a safe learning environment?
- How can we adapt our course materials in order that they reflect our community of learners?

To address these points of inquiry, my work will first provide an introduction and explanation of my choosing of the *currere* method. Then, and as per this research method, the meat of my work will be divided in four main "moments," which will discuss my research question in forms of reflection. I then conclude my work with a summary of my findings.

Methods and Methodology: *Currere*

It is well known that the methodology of *currere* is particularly fit for students of curriculum who have repressed the frustrations they carried throughout their personal and academic development. The introduction of this inquiry has made my stance quite

Ngokobi, W. M. (2022). On decolonizing the curriculum: Thoughts of a Black pre-service teacher. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 60–68.

clear. Through this methodology, I explore my frustrations that stemmed from feeling invisible as a student, which now informs my advocacy for inclusive curriculums and pedagogies. This research project was initially conducted in the context of my Master's degree at McGill University and was initially written as a Capstone, which I worked on throughout my degree. It was then converted to fit the requirements for this scholarly journal.

My methods for this inquiry include data from personal reflections, field notes, notes from my reflexive journals, and informal conversations with peers and family members. As mentioned earlier, the methods of this inquiry will be discussed through four different moments: the regressive stage, in which will be discussed my past experiences in a Eurocentric curriculum, the progressive stage, in which will be presented the now informed pedagogical approaches I intend to take on as a teacher, the analytical stage, in which will detail the connections made between my past, present, and future experiences with Eurocentric curriculums, and the synthetical stage, where my conclusions will be drawn. This inquiry will close with a summary of my findings.

Findings Through *Currere*

Regression Moment: Overview of My Past Experiences

As a student, my experience in the French system in expatriate schools around the African continent deeply tarnished my understanding of what it means to "learn." My in-class participation and my grades were the sole metric of my intelligence and my assimilation to French academic and behavioral standards and requirements. Absent was an acknowledgement of my cognitive abilities and my overall growth as a learner and future global citizen. This was a restrictive experience of what learning is or is meant to be. My journal entries from my time as a young learner in French schools established on African soil suggested that people of color had no place in curricula.

I felt, as a person of color, that we were tokenized during momentary celebrations of French diversity. Moreover, we seemed to have been negatively depicted as either victims or perpetrators of human rights violations. This included child labor, slavery, civil wars, and genocides. The moments when we got to the "slavery chapter" in history classes will forever be engraved in me. The "here we go again"s. A journal entry from 2007 simply reads: "I just pretend to look in my bag when we talk about this now, because why can't they at least stop staring?" I was 13 years old.

This teacher-centered pedagogy relegated students' critical thinking abilities to the margins, which marginalized working-class students, especially if they were non-White. I recall having a conversation with my mother, who reminded me of the efforts of a group of West African mothers, of whom she was a part, to help the schools we attended at the time develop a plan to create, at the very least, spaces for student cultural identities within the school and develop activities to represent us all in a healthy, harmless manner. In this conversation, my mother took me through the process of approaching the school and negotiating at length for the implementation of various projects that could or should be implemented. The school eventually welcomed the ideas, made space for the mothers' committee, and accommodated the activities. These included a much more vibrant, more inclusive Francophonie (of which the venue they had relocated to any Kenyan school that would be able to receive us for the day), fund raisings for struggling communities outside of school, and trips to various locations to offer community service.

Narrowing Down the Problem Areas

I recall several instances throughout High School in which I thought "we're in a French school, so it makes sense that we're learning French things … I'm French too,

so why don't I see myself in what we're learning? Well, I *am* Black after all. Maybe it's different." In this sense, I had started sensing that "things were not adding up." I recognized the logic of learning about French culture and history—seeing as I was in the French school system—but I felt deep in my gut that the curricula skipped a large portion of Frenchness that not only exists, but is a huge contributor to what France is today; French people of color and their cultures. One of my English teachers, Mrs Chigiti, did her best to have us read Black authors of color, but none of them were recognized as worthy of being studied for high stakes exams in the French school system. In turn, it made it seem to me like Shakespeare and other White authors wrote "real" literature. I thought, "If we're studying it for high stakes exam, then it must be what's legitimate."

It was only when I attended an African Literature class at the university level in Montreal that I found out that writers of color can and do have pieces that are world renowned. Imagine my surprise and my disbelief, reading about places in Africa I had lived in, cities I have gone to school in, and streets I had walked on in texts qualified to be studied at the university level! Until that time, I had not even known about Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé, Marie Ndiaye, and so on, despite them being part of the "patrimoine Français." I will note here that this African Literature course and its content were niche, in the sense that the content was specific to this course. As such, there have been rare occasions—if any—in which I have studied material from a Black author or an author of color outside of the context of a class explicitly labeled as containing material created by Black authors or authors of color. For instance, I have taken a class on early 20th century Literature, or even American Literature, and encountered no Black author/content there.

Making Connections with Personal Experiences Learning in Canada

My experience with learning in Canada has been similar to that in French High schools. As mentioned in the last portion of the previous paragraph, I have consistently noted that Black History Month and any other event under "diversity and awareness" is typically tokenized as *the* occasion to showcase diversity in the student body/the curriculum, social and racial struggles, or even to bring forth content that is usually tucked away in a niche. ("Here we go again.") For instance, I have sat through a lesson in which we were to watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous TED Talk, "The Dangers of a Single Story," as part of our unit on diversity. Adichie was the only Black author/creator whose content we were explicitly made to engage with in class throughout the entire program I was in. Another instance I recall was when we were given texts to read about the history of the mis- and underrepresentation of Black people in search engines such as Google. I do not recall sitting through a lesson in which Black content was used for any other reason than diversity week or for digging deep in the symbolic or explicit and quantifiable violence we deal with. We were given some readings pertaining to diversity and inclusion, but those were optional, easily skippable. As such, there has been a clear overall maintenance of the etiquette of the Black students and students of color overall; the lesson materials only seemed to have space for this community of learners when discussing topics of injustice, crime, racism, genocide, prejudice, human rights violations, and so on. This is almost as if the only space our voices hold any legitimacy in is when topics related to harm are brought forth. There needs to be visibility of all communities forming the body of learners at all times and across the spectrum. Not necessarily because it is the topic at hand, but because it is who is consistently addressed in a classroom.

Progressive Moment – Who do I envision myself to be as a future teacher?

My idealized approaches to teaching are reflective of my experience as a learner throughout my educational experience. It is imperative that, as a future teacher, I consistently revisit my idea of the ideal classroom in order to avoid partaking in a vicious cycle of rebranding a system that is lacking in inclusivity and authenticity. As such, my own pedagogy will mostly be student-centered, where students are made agents of their own learning and around which the teaching will occur.

I envision my classroom as a shared space for students' voices. The learning environment that I want to offer my students is clear: the diversity within my community of learners is recognized and appreciated. Visually, and at surface level, I want my classroom to be decorated with student work and art. Additionally, student responsibilities will be established in terms of taking care of the classroom—cleaning, tidying, and computer assistance. At a deeper, cognitive level, I envision that my students will learn within the spheres of radical and culturally responsive pedagogies. As such, my students will have space for authentic critical thinking, where they can engage with materials at a personal level, while involving their positionalities and understandings (Giroux, 1992).

My lessons and materials will be curated according to observations that I gathered from learner profiles I will create at the start of the year. I will also ensure that all content discussed and shared in class resonates with my learners and is representative of them (Cunningham, 2001). I plan to make space for students' indigenous traditions and cultures in my classroom curriculum. This approach to curriculum building is specific to Funds of Knowledge and Identity, in which students' personal and cultural knowledges are made part of the learning process to achieve given learning goals (Moll, 2019; Subero et al., 2017). I successfully put this teaching approach to practice during my first practicum. My field notes, my supervisor's and Co-Operating teacher's evaluations, and most importantly, the feedback from my students attest to its effectiveness.

Lastly, I hope to develop reflexive teaching practices by consistently reflecting on and tracking my teaching practices, the outcomes of lessons and interventions, and my subsequent adjustments (Grant & Zeichner, 1984). Reflexive teaching will have its place in my overall transformative approach to teaching, one that deeply questions the pedagogical structures and practices set in place for a diverse community of learners (Shields, 2009).

Analytical Moment: Connecting my past, present, and future experiences as a pre-service teacher

The main element that connects my past, present and future experiences with European (and/or Western) curriculums as a pre-service teacher is reflexive thinking and learning. Reflexive thinking, as defined by Grant and Zeichner (1984), is an aspect of teaching and learning that was emphasized extensively in my pre-service teaching program. During my Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning at McGill University, I was encouraged to give myself the space to reflect on my envisioned (and/or current) teaching practices and to redefine my philosophy of education. The entries in the journal I started in our first professional seminar indicate that this process felt strange and time-consuming to me at first but, with time, has uncovered a few sets of arbitrary rules that I have unconsciously been subscribing to.

For my part, I knew that my philosophy of education had to take the form of a response, in its own ways, to my experiences as a young learner. My frustration with the European education system fostered at first a sense of rebellion and frustration,

which translated to my somewhat a personal vendetta against a system of authority that I believed robbed me of a well-rounded, intentional, and inclusive education program that reflected its actual community of learners. Indeed, with French schools exclusively geared towards the transfer of Eurocentric knowledge at the time, there was no space for authentic learning in the curricula. Attending the graduate program at McGill and being able to reflect on this past has shown me that teachers have the power to navigate curricula in ways that make up for the system's shortcomings. As such, with time, my philosophy of education settled into more of a comprehensive statement of the vision I have for myself as a teacher, and for my community of learners. It was after dissecting each fiber of frustration and grudge that I was finally able to construct a philosophy of education that is valid in its quest to eradicate the remanences of colonial education in Eurocentric curriculums, all the while respecting the boundaries of emotional projection. Indeed, my philosophy of education dictates that learning must be critical, authentic, progressive, and inclusive. As such, its main tenets are: all members of the classroom are learners—students and teachers alike, teachers and learners are self-reflective, positively culturally aware, and responsive. As well, learners are consistently encouraged to find and use their voices through learning materials and content that are relevant to them. Finally, learners must feel safe in the classroom. Thus was born the vision I have today for myself and my learners and the ideal classroom in which we will all be learning with, from, and for the sake of each other.

With this philosophy, I hope to "fight back against" the French education system that shadow-banned the aspects of Frenchness that would have made learning meaningful to us Black students and students of color. Indeed, I have now understood that the French curricula have been positioned in non-European settings (that is, in French schools established in African soil, for instance) as being the only legitimate curricula to guarantee academic success and worldwide respectability. This was historically emphasized in French schools, which emulates elitism and exclusivity (DeSoto, 1971; Sabatier, 1978). To develop a form of inclusivity, however, the French system has a been abiding by the theory of universalism, the main tenets of which ascertain that all students are held to French values, regardless of their social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds (Achille et al., 2020). As attractive as equality in the eyes of administration may be, this idea still casts a shadow on and mutes the multicultural student body. In this sense, there is no space intentionally made for Black, Indigenous, and students of Color in the curriculum. As such, as great as universalism may be to forge a community of learners bonded by values that are greater than all, it actively separates the student from the being, the school attendee from the child with intricacies that do deserve to be recognized and for which space should be made, especially when the school is built on their own native land (Cunningham, 2001).

Putting these thoughts and theories into consideration in my first year as a teacher, I was able to see my students' responses to my approach. I started small, by creating habits of allowing my students to speak their minds, during and outside of lessons, as well as by intentionally curating my lessons to the students in front of me, diversifying the sources of my learning materials in a way that would be most meaningful to them. It's important to note that my students were predominantly Black, though I was their only Black teacher. My experience of this was powerful, because I know how much my past self would have loved being seen and heard. I cannot speak for my students, but I will quote one of my high school students, who said, randomly, in the middle of class: "Miss Welly, I'm so happy you're Black. You just get it. I don't know. It's nice."

Another example, drawn from a field entry I wrote during my first year as a teacher, was a solid marker in my becoming as a socially-just pedagogue. February was approaching, so I casually brought up the topic of Black History Month and asked students how they felt about it in general, and if they wanted us to celebrate it.

> They rolled their eyes and were clearly uncomfortable. I asked them what was wrong. They said, "Here we go again with this. We don't want Black History Month, Miss Welly. Last year they made us watch documentaries on slavery and colonialism, and we saw slaves being whipped and getting their hands cut off on camera, and we don't want to see this again. Let's just move on" [my students would have been 12 years old at the time of this event]. I told them that Black History Month is meant to be a celebration, that "there are so many other things to talk about that reflect Blackness." They answered, "Bah, like what?"

Together, we explored the concept that Blackness is not a momentary or trendy event. We took this opportunity to discuss topics that we didn't get to spend enough time on during the rest of the year. For example, we did vocabulary lessons under the theme of diasporic foods—which my students consume on a daily basis. We went through their history, my students' personal experiences with them, and I had them create their own diasporic dishes. I noted that "February was so fun, it felt like we weren't even in class." More than this, February was my opportunity to go through another "here we go again" moment from a completely different position. This time, as a teacher who was seeking to show students that they, with their sociocultural backgrounds and communities, are seen and that their knowledge base, as generally marginalized and racialized individuals, belongs in academia. Unfortunately, a conclusive observation I made was that

> regardless of how much I grew as a person and an advocate for inclusive pedagogy, the field of education, especially in Eurocentric school systems, has not. So, here we are again, same problem, different scale. Because now it's about me, a Black teacher, trying to work with teachers from the dominating culture to get students never to feel those "here we are again" moments, while still facing that gaze in doing so.

By "facing that gaze," I meant literally being looked at for tips, tricks, and answers when Black History Month is mentioned in board meetings (I was once told, "Ah! Black History Month is going to be so great now that you're here!" Here we go again.).

Synthetical Moment: Making Sense of it All

My past experiences as a learner have been the hammer and the chisel of my becoming a teacher. By looking back at my journey as a learner in a Eurocentric, traditional education system, I now understand that a student's learning environment will dictate their relationship with learning in general and impact their sense of identity and belonging in a community of learners or the classroom culture. In this sense, my learning environment was the root of my feeling of inadequacy in all spheres related to learning. Not seeing myself represented in lessons in any capacity has led me to believe that learning and growing are two separate processes, when in fact they inform each other. Drawing on Apple (2008) and Kelly and Brandes (2001), schools must represent the cultures of the student body, As such, students who are under-represented

and do not relate to the school context will not have the same opportunities to grow and personally develop as other, better represented student populations. This is too often the case in many Eurocentric education systems, which were established for the purpose of colonization and epistemicide (Mesaka, 2017). Rooted in the principle of Eurocentric Diffusionism and the Inferiority paradigm, Eurocentric education systems have been geared towards self-gratifying agendas of societal forging and indoctrination (Blaut, 1999; Faith, 2013; Tate, 1997).

It took me years to understand that literature can be written by authors of color. While this seems insignificant—an unfortunate moment in my growth as an individual—it deeply affected my perception of self. I had no understanding that narratives could include anything other than a white, Eurocentric perspective. Indeed, I believed that all narratives that were generated from European (and Western) peoples were universally dominant in terms of legitimacy and that African and Black narratives were exclusively relegated to elective courses, fun facts, and diasporic conversations. I now recognize that Mrs. Chigiti, my High School English teacher, put in much thought to her teaching. She proved to us that a teacher could include literature authored by people of color, even when the texts did not generate conversations about race and culture.

The elitism forged in Eurocentric education systems tends to be masked in universalism and egalitarianism, where all students' social differences are merged into a single identity, one administered by the representative state to which the school belongs (Achille et al., 2020). Inevitably, these proceedings halt individual growth and transformation. They have harmed generations of students, especially those of color, who are left with the heavy work of re-discovering self and repositioning oneself in the world. When students of color understand the racial and cultural power dynamics that limited their becoming as active members of society, then they can finally move past the repressive institutional discourse that limited their participation in our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Tate, 1997).

Progressive education systems must correlate with the ways in which our world functions today (social relationships and overall dynamics) (DeSoto, 1971). What I suggest is that teachers, especially those of color in European or Western curricula, who are new to the teaching should allow their inner student to have presence in their process of building their philosophy of education throughout their career. This will encourage an honoring of self, avoiding disruptive cycles of misrepresentation, and racial and cultural disparity. What I propose is different from projecting onto students what a teacher wished they had learned when they were students. Learning experiences are personal, but our approaches to teaching and learning do not need to be. This look within is a critical reflection that takes knowledge from past experiences to inform how to craft future teaching practices. It is essential to consider exterior elements that are independent of self. Who is the community of learners? How can you create content that all students can relate to and connect with authentically? How can you reach students to positively impact their growth as members of society? How can you show students that learning requires them to be present in the classroom as "students" but also as their full selves?

Conclusion

It is our duty as educators to ensure that curricula in ethnically and culturally diverse spaces that reflect, include, and make space for the community of learners and the mosaic of people who hold the flag of its representative state. It is understandable that we must transfer knowledge that resides within the boundaries of the educational

agenda of the representative state—to abide by the general guidelines brought forth by Ministries of Education. However, abiding by the curricular policies should not restrict us from creating curricula that represent and serve only the dominant culture. Instead, we should gather the funds of knowledge and identities of our community of learners and transfer knowledge that is recognized by both the governing state and its peoples. The way we transfer this knowledge must also be culturally responsive, radical, and reflexive. Indeed, and to put it in simple terms, what we teach must be meaningful to our community of learners.

Allowing ourselves, as pre-service teachers, to take on archaic teaching practices and curricula serves no one. With education systems slowly changing, new curricula are developed that better reflect our world dynamic and what is deemed important for young learners to know as they become active members of society. Pre-service teachers can take the lead and teach youth in a progressive, inclusive, and meaningful manner. Failure to do so harms our students as they realize that the educational institutions are attempting to indoctrinate them with obsolete colonial ideals. This can then cause a disconnect with their identities as individuals and learners, especially peoples of color attending Eurocentric schools in or outside their native lands.

Thus, as educators entering the field, it is our duty to reflect on our experiences as learners and allow the meaning stemming from these reflections to inform our teaching philosophy and practices in a relevant manner. More than projecting our learning experience, it is about seeing students who would have been invisible in education systems and helping them see that they and their societies can move beyond the colonial era.

References

Achille É., Forsdick, C., & Moudileno, L. (2020). *Postcolonial realms of memory sites and symbols in modern France*. Liverpool University Press.

Apple, M. W. (2008). Can schooling contribute to a more just society? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *3*(3), 239–261. doi:10.1177/1746197908095134

Blaut, J. M. (1999). Marxism and eurocentric diffusionism. In R. Chilcote (Ed.), *The political economy of imperialism* (pp. 127–140). Kluwer Academic. www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/10/021.html

Cunningham, A. M. (2001). *Building connections: Spiritual dimensions of teaching*. Peter Lang.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.

DeSoto, A. (1971). French education: Philosophy and fact. *Journal of Thought*, *6*(3), 167–176. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42588254

Fatih, Z. (2013). Colonial 'gimmicks' of French cultural education. *French Cultural Studies*, *24*(4), 332–345. https://doi:10.1177/0957155813500914

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. Routledge.

Grant, C., & Zeichner, K. M. (1984). *On becoming a reflective teacher*. Allyn & Bacon.

Kelly, D. M., & Brandes, G. M. (2001). Shifting out of "neutral": Beginning teachers' struggles with teaching for social justice. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *26*(4), 437–454.

Mesaka, D. (2017). Education for conquest and Africa's underdevelopment: A quest for epistemic liberation. In M. Mawere (Ed.), *Underdevelopment, development and the future of Africa* (pp. 369–388). Langaa Research & Publishing.

Moll, L. C. (2019). Elaborating funds of knowledge: Community-oriented practices in international contexts. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, *68*(1), 130–138. https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336919870805

Sabatier, P. (1978). "Elite" education in French West Africa: The era of limits, 1903-1945. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *11*(2), 247–266. https://doi:10.2307/217439

Shields, C. M. (2009). Administration, leadership, and diversity: Reproduction or transformation? In S. R. Steinberg (Ed). *Diversity and multiculturalism* (pp. 471–485). Peter Lang.

Subero, D., Vujasinović, E., & Esteban-Guitart, M. (2017). Mobilizing funds of identity in and out of school. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *2*(42), 247–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/030576X.2016.1148116

Tate, W. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, *22*, 195–247. https://doi:10.2307/1167376

What Knowledge is of Most Worth?

By Zheng Yang
Sichuan University Pittsburgh Institute

A Bathroom Encounter

It was *him*. Oh my God! I knew my high school English teacher was behind me when I entered in the school bathroom. Thinking of how to acknowledge him made me nervous, as I was not doing particularly well in his class. I wondered if I should I say something first. Before I had a chance to decide, Mr. Dawei addressed me.

"Yang Zheng, I know, you are troubled. *You need to work for it.* English is very important, you know, not only to get a good score on the Gaokao, but also to get into a good college. You'll need to have CET 4, then CET 6..."

I understood every word he said. I knew he was going to say something about my poor English, yet I could not think of a single word in response. His words rendered me speechless. The sadness and hopelessness that I felt soon turned to anger. "Damn him and the Gaokao! Damn all of this!" With so many emotions swirling in my head, I didn't know how I felt. After Mr. Dawei left, I washed my hands in the bathroom sink, replaying his words in my head, unable to erase his voice from my thoughts. I stood in front of the mirror for a long time, splashing water in my face while trying to shake off his words. I wished there were a magic potion to make my English as good as his, but I understood there were no quick fixes when it comes to learning a language, so I probably shouldn't worry about it anymore.

The Best Mathematics Student

I had just shared a solution to an impossible problem in math class. My classmates were amazed by the elegance of my approach. Several expressed disbelief. "How in the world did Yang Zheng come up with that argument?"

"Yang Zheng is not a magician! He's just a very talented young man. More importantly, notice how hard he works in this class. I don't give him anything. Everything Yang has accomplished has been earned through diligence, tenacity, and intellect! Students, I call on all of you to learn from Yang Zheng! Be like Yang Zheng in all that you do, and you will go far!"

I was so moved by my math teacher's compliments that tears welled up in my eyes. I was proud and happy to know that Mrs. Yanhong recognized all of the effort I had been putting into learning mathematics, and I knew I could do *even better* if I practiced more. With the encouragement of Mrs. Yanhong, I began to play a more active role in class. For instance, when my classmates were stumped on difficult problems, Mrs. Yanhong and I would work together to help students. I became increasingly interested in mathematical proof during this time. Whenever my classmates could solve a problem using deductive reasoning (rather than through measurement or trial and error), I would encourage them to do so.

As the year progressed, I assumed the role of teacher more frequently, leading the whole class in recitations of theorems that I used many times to figure out proofs. On numerous occasions, I was able to complete arguments that stumped Mrs. Yanhong. My classmates began to look to me as their teacher. For instance, the most popular student in my classes started asking me for help. While he was better than me at so many things, I took pride in knowing that I could compete with him for the title of best mathematics student!

Yang, Z. (2022). What knowledge is of most worth. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 69–75.

Preparing for the Gaokao

My Future, My Reputation, My Family

In less than a year, I was going to take the most difficult high school exit exam in the entire universe, the dreaded Gaokao. The exam is like a final battle—all of my previous years of study and efforts were in preparation for this battery of eight-hour tests. I could not believe the time had come. I didn't want to face it. Over the years, my older friends and family shared their thoughts and memories of the test. Their descriptions of the Gaokao induced anxiety in me throughout my time in high school; they undermined my self-confidence. I wasn't not sure if I'd be able to answer enough questions correctly on the Gaokao to earn a place in a good university.

> *If I don't get into a good college, I won't be able to get a good job or earn enough money to take care of my wife and children. Without a good job and family, how am I supposed to be a successful adult? Oh. My. God!!!*

The more I thought about it, the more my stomach turned. It became increasingly apparent that my entire future hinged on the Gaokao. My father once told me he would quit smoking (once for all!) if I were accepted to Xi'an Jiaotong University—a prestigious school near my home. My father worked there. If I didn't get in, I knew my father would lose his face in front of his co-workers and friends. They would know *exactly* what happened—that Yang Zheng failed the test. They would ask him about it, and the questions would devastate him. So, the pressure of the Gaokao wasn't limited to the test-taker, but extended to the entire family. *The pressure was truly intense.*

The Sciences + Chinese + Mathematics + English = Content Concerns

I wished that I had more time to prepare and had more teachers who were better equipped to help me learn. I would have stayed in the lab longer doing science experiments. Maybe I would have taken more interest in building my English speaking and writing skills, too. I wished that my teachers and classmates were more patient in helping me. Unfortunately, there wasn't time to help slower students.

Physics and chemistry were going to be challenging. I had three high school chemistry teachers in less than three semesters: the first teacher was very good. He engaged us in inorganic chemistry using teaching methods similar to those that I encountered in middle school, so it made sense to me; the second teacher was not bad, but her explanations of diagrams in organic chemistry were baffling. And she spoke *so fast*. I never figured out her diagrams; they were so bad, I just gave up on them.

In addition to the sciences, I was concerned about my ability to do well in the three "core" Gaokao subjects: Chinese, mathematics, and English. I didn't see why I had to take the English exam. Too many tough words, too many long sentences, even longer paragraphs, and MUCH longer articles to interpret. And don't get me started on verb tenses and grammar: *past future tense, past finishing tense?* These don't exist in Chinese. To be honest, to this day, I've found few similarities between Chinese and English. "*Why is English is so difficult for me? Is it true that Chinese people can't learn English? Would it have been easier to learn if my native language was German or Spanish rather than Chinese?"* I wished my Chinese teacher and English teacher could come to the class at same time and teach us the two languages together so I could understand them better. *Why not?*

For me, the most intimidating aspect of the English test was the wide assortment of readings on the exam, each accompanied by a litany of multiple-choice questions.

None of the articles would be familiar. Nobody would have read them prior to taking the Gaokao.

English is a Dark and Dangerous Forest

The English exam was a dark and dangerous forest, and I found myself all alone in the middle of it without any equipment—no map and no GPS to guide me. Each word was an adversary—cold, unfamiliar, and dangerous. And when words stood together to form sentences, I was in mortal danger. For the most part, I was unable to make sense of sentences—much less paragraphs, passages, and articles.

The multiple-choice questions that followed the readings were like arrows coming from nowhere in rapid succession, slung to penetrate my heart, to kill my chances of having a happy, successful life. I felt hopeless, looking through the list of the subjects. I had wasted my time doing challenging mathematics problems when I should have put more effort into learning English.

> *Who is to blame? Am I the problem? Perhaps I didn't use the right methods to learn? I'm beginning to think there's more to it than that. I'm starting to wonder if there is something inherently wrong about the Gaokao itself. Or maybe the entire system of education? Is it right to focus so much energy on a single high-stakes test? If a student wants to study mathematics (or any other content) after high school, why not let them? Do I dare raise such questions?*

In the quiet of my room, I began to think the unimaginable. What if I skipped the Gaokao and instead focused on what I want to do as an adult? I really wanted to be a teacher, focusing on either mathematics or Chinese. I was leaning towards mathematics, since I was so good at it in school and because helping others brought so much joy to me. I liked the feeling of sharing my mathematical insights with classmates like I did back in Mrs. Yanhong's class. I had not found the same joy in other subjects, like physics or political science. However, my dreams of becoming a teacher were tempered by the realization that my poor performance on the Gaokao would matter.

> *How can I even be qualified as a teacher when I am such a poor student in so many subjects? Maybe I can teach my students by sharing my failures with them. Is that even possible? Has anyone teacher taught things that way? Not that I know of, and certainly not the teachers I've had so far. They say you learn more from your defeats than from your successes. If that is true, maybe I have something new to offer my students—namely a new perspective about student assessment, achieving one's goals, and the nature of teaching and learning.*

(Note: When I took the Gaokao in 2003, it was possible to get an exemption from taking the test. For instance, if a student won a medal from an academic competition, they could petition to skip the test in that subject. However, due to my personality and lack of information around that time, I was never trained or thought to be trained or engaged in the activities of math Olympics. So, I had to take the Gaokao.)

Learning English from Many

"There is an exchange program between your school and a school similar to yours in the United States. You think you want to go? I can ask your uncle about it."

"Yes, I want to go. I just want to be better at English, and I want to study mathematics.

I'm curious to know how the Americans learn math."

"Yang, you can do that! Your uncle can help you!"

"The only classmates I've ever had have been Chinese. I'm so eager to explore new places and new people—a bigger world!"

Within a few months, I received notification of my acceptance into the program, and I was able to get a visa to the United States (without question, this was an incredible stroke of good fortune). I arrived the airport in Topeka, Kansas, at 2 am, with a group other bleary-eyed Chinese students from the same school. I still remember the date, August 17, 2005. From far-away, I could see a group of Americans waving hands at us. They were all smiling. Later, I learned that some of them were professors from my new school, Emporia State University. Others were future friends from the local church. *I was very excited, and I couldn't explain exactly why.* In fact, I still don't know how I was able to speak English that time, or why I was so desperate to speak, since my English was truly poor. I got into a van in the back seat with an African-American student,

"Hey, Asian dude! What's your name? Where are you from?"

"My name Yang Zheng. I from Xi'an."

I was getting more and more excited as I talked, I didn't care about my grammar mistakes because he was such a good listener and talker too! I could not stop talking even though I spoke with disconnected words and made extensive use of hand gestures to help describe. I don't recall how long it took for us to get from the airport to the school dorm, but I was not sleepy when I finally reached my destination. During the ride, I probably used much more English than all my past years at school in China. I was so happy that I could speak English in the moment and people could understand me. I was in the United States, a country where people speak English, and I was going to be successful. I could feel it!

After I arrived at the dorm, I settled down and talked with Chinese friends who also came along for this trip. It was about 4 am. The assistant (who was also Chinese and working at international office) who in charge of our program came to tell us that ther ewas an English test that I had to take in the morning at 8 a.m. in order to be placed in at the appropriate level for English lessons. Only those who had high TOFEL scores or who decided to major in English were spared! "My God!" I thought, "*Will I ever escape English tests?"*

I ended up getting placed to the lowest level of English speakers. As such, I would need to complete ALL of the English lessons that the staff had created: speaking and understanding (intermediate level), grammar (advanced level), and reading and writing (intermediate level). Even now, nearly 20 years after the fact, I can recall how motivated I was to learn all those lessons. I made strong friendships with all my English teachers (all Americans) and more happily, I befriended many students, all English Language Learners from many other places in the world, including Japan, South Korea, and Middle East countries. I found that learning language with my classmates was a natural and joyful activity. English is the common language we spoke. Occasionally, we shared our native languages and cultures with each other. At the end of year, I finished all of my assigned English lessons with high marks. I even won the first award in my life, for the best performance in reading. I was starting to understand English better. As famous mathematician Heisuke Hironaka is reputed to have said, "I believe that the best learning outcome is something we WANT to learn, not what we NEED to learn." I couldn't agree more. In fact, I did not just learn English from attending class. I also learned by watching movies in the dorm with other students. Moreover, I purposely struck up conversations

with strangers in the cafeteria to improve my speaking, and I spoke English with my Chinese friends. All of these steps helped me to improve my English-speaking fluency. Once my learning attitudes changed and once I believed in myself as an English speaker, I learned much better and more quickly.

Year 2050: An Imagined Future

"Professor, this problem is impossible, so I asked TXGM."

"TXGM? Transformer X Great Mind? I don't know how I feel about that."

"You're not sure if you like it? Professor! TXGM is awesome. Look, it already generated a solution!"

"Okay, that's fine. But you see…"

Before I have a chance to explain how I would attack the problem the "old-fashioned" way (i.e., using my own knowledge without assistance from a machine), the student has already run out of the room for another class. I don't blame him. This is very typical behavior in my classroom. The content that I teach—calculus, linear algebra, differential equations, probability, statistics—are trivialized by TXGM. The machine solves math problems better than my best students or my strongest teaching colleagues. *The machines are the solutions*. For a "teacher" like me, I mostly teach the theory that underlies the problems my students study. If I'm being honest, the best part of teaching is teaching students about history behind the mathematics we study—the personalities and political contexts that gave rise to the mathematics that we take for granted today. Since students can solve calculations with TXGM, I have more time to share humanistic aspects of mathematics with my students. I also love sharing my life with my students—personal stories, my research work, and anecdotes about teaching and learning. Unfortunately, TXGGM (i.e., Transformer X Great, Great Mind) can do ALL of these things better than me or my colleagues. Moreover, it is common for students to take 100 credit hours or more of coursework each semester. Thirty years ago, this would have seemed ridiculous. Back in the 2020's students weren't allowed to complete more than 20 hours a semester (even that was too much!). In addition, much of the mathematics I learned in college is now taught in the middle grades or high school.

"So TGM1 (i.e., Transformer Genius Mind 1st generation), can you offer me some hints for proving this theorem?"

"Theorem? This?"

"I know. I know. I'm still not totally sure if we can call this a theorem. I just made the conjecture, but I believe it's true. Please, just some hints, not the final decision, because I want to think for myself a little bit more…"

"OK, I cannot prove it either. But I can show you more evidence for why this might be plausible."

"That would be useful. Go ahead."

This is what I usually end up doing, again, talking to the machine to ask for help. EVERYONE does it. Me. My teaching colleagues. All the undergraduates. Just like my student, I cannot prove the conjecture, so I resort to using the machine. Honestly. I don't feel like thinking for myself anymore. Research collaboration between two humans is now exceedingly rare. Research papers are often written by human and machines together. Of course, machines like TGM1 have published countless papers with humans. In other sciences, like biology, chemistry, or physics, many papers are written completely by machines. Thanks to the AI technology popularized many years ago, I have published more papers with machines than with my human colleagues.

After the day of "teaching" and "research," I choose to walk back home, since I'm tired of using TGE (Transformer Great Energy) to take me home in just 5 seconds. I also don't feel like I have accomplished much during the day (Maybe I have already completed a math research paper, but that seems too easy and little boring). I hope to see some real people like me on the way home.

An old man comes up to me, "I'm so sorry, I forgot to bring my TGM (Transformer Great Map) with me. I'm lost. Can you help me."

I look at the name of the station and I immediately realize this is one of the stations I passed by earlier today. I didn't recall exactly where it was, but I knew the route I had taken.

"I can just walk with you and show you where it is."

I don't know why, but I have never been so excited, even though I also don't have the answer for him. For a long time, I have not engaged in this kind of simple conversation with a real person. It's been a long time since I was able to help someone without the assistance of machines. It feels good to walk. I want to make mistakes, and I want to talk with this man on my way home.

Wait, isn't he my high school English teacher? I have to ask him!—because maybe he's just another machine human. Who knows?!

Back to Reality

During a break of the International Conference of Education (The theme of the year is on implications of the new world with super-intelligent machines), I was interviewed by a student:

Q: How has your role changed?

A: I have always seen myself as a student, rather than a teacher, even though I have been in the job for more than 10 years now. From kindergarten (about 4 years old) until finishing a PhD at university as a 30-year-old, my role was that of student. My job was to learn from many teachers, other students, from my parents, and many other friends—all real people. We rarely learned directly from machines, except sometimes using computers to help do some standard work or simple mathematical computations. After I became a university teacher, I realized that my students' backgrounds were not like my own. Their daily world is saturated with technology and intelligent machines. I find it necessary to learn from the "new" world and the evolving technology, so I can better understand what I teach and who I teach. So, this is why I think I am also a student.

Q: What are advantages and disadvantages of this "new" world?

A: This is such a big question for all of us to think about. Our knowledge is updated. Technology helps us solve problems that we
thought were too difficult or impossible. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has helped mathematicians proving countless conjectures, something I find very exciting. Since we've invented an intelligent machine to solve Gaokao problems, students in China can focus more time exploring topics that matter—global warming, overpopulation, poverty. Although this is a blessing without question, AI also brings potential disadvantages. For example, now that smart machines do everything for us, how do we help our students remain motivated? For so long, the Gaokao was THE reason students worked hard in

China. Now students need to find other sources of motivation. This transition to a post-Gaokao world is not an easy one for teachers, students, or curriculum developers.

Q: This situation is worrisome. Can you say some more about how the machines impact the Gaokao?

A: This is a difficult question for me to answer. There are both potential advantages and disadvantages to the Gaokao itself. The answer depends on the individual. One advantage is that we use the test to help us select the students who can continue to do well academically. Of course, we also know this cannot be a fair test for ALL students. Now with the developing AI technology (and more advanced technology in future), we have many problems to face. For instance, we need to fully understand the AI so we can use it wisely. The other is that we need to rethink what we should teach to our students given the powerful technology. There are certainly lots of decisions to make. Recall that some people have access to AI and others don't. For those who don't have it, this presents the equity issue for education.

Q: Will these challenges continue to exist for students in future? Overall, do intelligent machines provide more benefits or more
problems?

A: I actually do not have an affirmative answer to your last question. I hope the machines can provide humans more benefits. And we will have to face new challenges in future. Based on my own learning experience, I would certainly prefer to have my experiences rather than the precise answers that are offered by the machines. To really learn, it is necessary for humans to struggle, to think, and to understand with our internal minds. For example, machines have started to help us better understand principles of physics, chemistry, and mathematics. I honestly think that machines should help us to learn better, like the VR technology, to help young students to do experiments that I could not when I was in school, so they may better understand the theory and discover new things. I expect machines will truly help students in learning mathematics by letting students focus on the core ideas and concepts connected to other fields, so they can understand and discover the interest in mathematics for themselves, without doing repeated practices which may not entirely be necessary (like many of those I was doing in middle school). Certainly, the machines can help us translate one language to another. So English isn't really hard for Chinese to learn (the way it was for me).

Rethinking School Crisis Plans in Principal Preparation

By Brett Anthony Burton
Xavier University

The method of *currere* has opened an avenue for curriculum theorizing that I was not familiar with until a colleague introduced me to this fascinating and relevant approach (Pinar, 1975, 1994, 2012). Before I started this venture with *currere*, I had to consider the intent and purpose of this article. As Pinar (2012) states, a scholar should ask the question, "What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?" (p. 1). I have spent time engaging in the four steps of *currere*—regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic—and this has helped me reconstruct my experiences as a 7th-grade student, building principal, and current professor in a new light. This process has given new meaning to my experiences that I can integrate into my present role as a professor serving and preparing future school leaders.

Encountering the Past

I recalled learning experiences that stemmed from my first encounter with death by suicide. In 1984, I was 12 years of age and transitioning to the 7th grade at a junior high school located 40 miles west of Chicago. I have a contrarian viewpoint when I reflect on my childhood experiences. You see, my family and I experienced a tragic loss the night before I started the 7th-grade. I could never have predicted how this tragedy would impact my leadership capacity as a middle school principal years later.

The night before my 7th grade school year began, my father's best friend, Paul,[1] committed suicide. Paul was a funny, energetic, and giving man with a son, Jackson, a wife-Trisha, and a dog named Max. Paul's family and my family spent many summer weekends together at little league baseball games, birthday, and swimming parties at Paul's house, as well as Friday night dinners at the local Sizzlers' restaurant. Unfortunately, Paul and Trisha had legally separated, and later I found out that he had become severely depressed. Researchers have stated that divorce among males is a risk factor for suicide (Sullivan, 2019). The memory of the night that Paul passed stirs great sadness, and my 7th-grade school experience will forever be remembered as the night I was introduced to death by suicide.

The night that Paul died, I remember a knock at our front door at approximately 10:00 p.m. My parents were already in bed, as my mother had to wake up for work at 3:00 a.m. My father was typically up by 5:00 a.m. to make it to his place of employment for his 6:30 a.m. shift on the assembly line. It was a typical August night in Illinois, which commonly meant hot days followed by cooler evenings. All the bedroom windows were open, with pedestal fans running throughout the house and in bedrooms to keep everyone cool. I remember lying in bed that evening close to the fan in my room when suddenly I heard knocking at our front door. I remember thinking to myself: Who would be knocking on our front door at 10 p.m. on a Sunday? I could hear my father whisper to my mother in their adjacent room. He got out of bed, walked to the front door, turned on the exterior front door light, peeked out the window, and said, "Oh, that's Paul's younger brother, Mark." My father opened the door and said, "Hey, Mark, you alright?" I could not see Mark as I stayed in my bed trying to listen to the faint conversation between Mark and my father. I heard Mark say something using the words "dead," "suicide,"

Burton, B. A. (2022). Rethinking school crisis plans in principal preparation. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 76–85.

"afternoon." It was difficult to hear the conversation, but I immediately knew something was wrong. My father told Mark, "Thanks for letting me know, and I'm sorry, Mark."

My father closed the door, turned off the front light, and walked back to the bedroom where my mother was lying awake in bed. My father closed the bedroom door, and I heard him say, "Paul killed himself this afternoon. He hung himself in his garage." At that moment, I recalled the most awful, shrieking sound of sadness that I had ever heard. My mother frantically yelled, "No! Please, God, please not Paul, please Tony, tell me this is not true! Oh my God, God please, please, no!!!" I remember hearing my mother and father whispering to one another throughout the night, but due to the circulating fans, closed bedroom doors, and my anxiousness the night before school, I could not hear what was being said between them. I recall wondering, while lying in bed and trying to process this current tragic event, if my sisters and I would even attend the first day of school. As I was experiencing all the emotions ranging from anxiousness to sadness, I eventually dozed off and went to sleep. I woke up the next morning to the sound of a very loud alarm clock. I immediately turned off the alarm and sat in my bed. I remember asking myself, Was this a bad dream? Did Paul kill himself? Am I going to school today? When I got up from my bed and opened the door, I remember hearing someone in the kitchen. I was not sure if it was my father, mother, or sisters. My sisters attended elementary school, and my oldest sister, Bea, was beginning 5th grade. My youngest sister, Robin, was beginning 3rd grade. Their school day began at 8:00 a.m., and since the elementary school was only two blocks from our house, both of my sisters walked to school together. My school day did not begin until 9:00 a.m., so I would leave the house after my sisters.

When I walked into the kitchen, my sisters were sitting at the kitchen counter eating bowls of cereal with their hair brushed and wearing new school clothes, which was a rite of passage for all three of us. We loved school clothes shopping as it was one of the few occasions when we would wear our best clothes to school. When I peeked into the kitchen, Bea and Robin looked at me and laughed (which was normal). Bea said, "What's wrong with you?"

I did not respond right away because I remembered thinking, Maybe I had a bad dream? Bea just gave me a look when I did not respond. I snapped out of my daze and responded to her second question with, "Where are Mom and Dad?"

Then, both of my sisters looked at me and laughed. Robin, the youngest, said, "Brett, they are at work, remember, and today is the first day of school. We are leaving in 15 minutes so that we can play on the playground before the first bell."

I looked at both of my sisters and asked, "Did you guys hear anything last night? Didn't someone knock on the front door, and Dad was talking to someone?"

Both of my sisters gave me a puzzled look and said, "What's wrong with you?"

Both got up from the barstool seats at the kitchen counter and poured the milk from their cereal in the kitchen sink and went back to their room to finish getting ready.

As Bea cleaned out her cereal bowl, she said, "Brett, dad left you a note and wants you to call him at work before you leave for school."

I responded, "Okay, I will."

My sisters finished getting ready and walked to school. I decided to have a bowl of Cookie Crisp in front of the television, since I was home alone and had the TV to myself. After eating my cereal, I decided to get dressed for school; then, I would call my father. I remember thinking that I had dreamt that Paul had died. I had assumed that my parents would not go to work if someone close to our family had committed suicide, and the same for us regarding school. So, I had figured the night before that we would all stay

home, and my parents would inform Bea, Robin, and I that Paul had died. However, this was not the case. After getting dressed, I returned to the kitchen and called my father. I was completely confused.

When I called my dad's work, he answered the phone. "This is Tony, may I help you?"

During this time, caller ID and cell phones did not exist, at least within the mainstream.

I responded, "Dad, it's Brett, and your note said to call you." My father responded, "Brett, did you hear anything last night?" I replied, "Yeah, but I thought it was a bad dream."

My dad said, "Well, Brett, I am sorry, and I thought your mom, or I should stay back this morning just in case you or the girls heard something, but you know we really cannot miss work as we need the money. So, you heard Paul passed away then? He took his own life, and your mom and I are heartbroken. Are you okay?"

I answered, "I am okay, but why did Paul do that? Does Jackson know?"

My dad started, "I am not sure, Brett. It is hard, but we will all talk about it tonight.

I do not think Bea and Robin know, so do not say anything, and we will talk tonight. I need you to go to school and focus on your education today. It is your first day of 7th grade, and it is important for you to be there. I hate to say it, but death is a part of life, and we cannot change what Paul did to himself, so we all must move forward. We will talk tonight. Make sure you lock the side door when you leave and be strong today, and again, focus on school. I will talk to you later. Bye."

I said, "Bye," hung up the phone, put my lunch in my bookbag, and walked to school. As a child, I was not completely sure how I should feel, respond, or even act. My parents were ill-prepared to provide me or my younger sisters with a roadmap on how we should process or grieve the death of a close family member. I remember saying to myself, Be strong, Brett and things will be okay. Since I was uncertain and inexperienced with understanding mortality and death, coupled with my father's apathetic reaction to losing his friend, I did as my father instructed and went to school.

Facing the Present

During the Fall of 2019 as a first-year professor, my first semester instructing the Principalship Course, I became fully conscious of how my personal and professional experiences as a student and school leader have provided me with knowledge that I can incorporate into my syllabus that will support my graduate students when they are practicing educational leaders (Pinar, 2004). One assignment that I require my students to complete in the Principalship Course is to conduct a gap analysis between two building crisis plans. The rationale behind this assignment is to provide future school leaders with an opportunity to critically examine their building crisis plan from a building principal's perspective and make recommendations for improvement. The Crisis Plan assignment is a culminating activity for principal candidates to conclude what they have learned about school crisis policy and safety plans and requirements per state mandates (Ohio Department of Education, 2022). The one aspect of the Crisis Plan assignment that I attempt to examine in-depth with students pertains to student death, specifically death by suicide.

Many times, school districts will provide professional development for building leaders before students and teachers return from summer break. During these professional development opportunities for administrators, district leadership will provide an overview of crisis plan state requirements. For instance, Ohio State Law (Requirements for the Emergency Management Plan and Test, 2017) requires school districts to create

and implement an "Emergency Management Plan." A school buildings' emergency management or crisis plan is typically left for the building principal to review, revise, submit to the state, and conduct trainings accompanied by emergency drills throughout the school year for students and staff. Furthermore, building principals are not only expected to lead every aspect of the emergency management or crisis plan, but they are also supposed to have expertise in addressing crisis situations that take place before, during, and after the school day. In response to state requirements for principals with crisis plans, colleges and universities have attempted to integrate aspects of crisis planning leadership into existing leadership courses. In addition, education departments across the United States have provided tools and roadmaps for building principals to use in their buildings. However, the tools and crisis planning roadmaps typically do not provide school leaders with resources that support their own social-emotional needs. Specifically, a roadmap for school principals to implement when one of their own students or staff passes due to suicide. For example, the state of Ohio School Safety Center provides a roadmap on staff training, suicide prevention, suicide hotline numbers, and postvention (Ohio School Safety Center, n.d.) but does not provide any resources or tools that will support the social emotional needs of the building leader.

During my graduate studies, I did not benefit from learning strategies that would support my efforts to lead a building during a student suicide. There was no roadmap and limited guidance was provided by my parents. The tragic situation was simply transactional, and I learned to frame death and loss as part of life. However, my personal life experience with death by suicide has provided insight into leading a school community during a crisis. Bolman and Deal (2017) state that "crises are an acid test of leadership. In the heat of the moment, leaders sometimes hesitate until events pass them by" (p. 297). When a student passes away, whether by suicide, car accident, or disease, school principals must have the capacity and ability to remain calm and focus on what they can control (Prothero, 2021); school leadership courses at the graduate level must create educational systems that will incorporate and prepare future leaders to lead during times of crisis. School leaders are expected to lead by example during a crisis, but school districts and university principal preparation programs have not provided adequate training throughout the years. The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) in 2018 created an After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools resource guide for school administrators to use if a school community experiences death by suicide. However, the one component that is not reviewed in this resource guide is a social-emotional roadmap for the self-care of principals.

During my second year as a middle school principal and my 18th year as an urban school administrator, I encountered losing a student to death by suicide. In the Spring of 2017, our district had a School Improvement Day, which is essentially when teachers and administration conduct professional development sessions driven by the school's improvement plan. The School Improvement Day is a non-attendance day for students, and they are all required to be off school grounds and at home. This particular School Improvement Day is a time that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I have made concerted efforts to apply what I have learned from this tragic experience and weave this knowledge into the Principalship Course I teach in Educational Administration (Pinar, 1975).

Maria was a 6th-grade student in my school who took her own life on that spring School Improvement Day in 2017. I remember receiving a phone call that night at 9:15 p.m. from our school resource officer. Officer Still informed me that Maria Perez took her own life by hanging herself from a ceiling fan in her grandmother's bedroom at

approximately 1:00 p.m. Her grandmother was responsible for supervising Maria and her 1st-grade brother while both of her parents worked factory jobs at a local warehouse. Maria's family emigrated from Mexico to the United States when she was in second grade. Her parents worked many hours, and it was quite common for Maria and her brother to be in the care of Maria's grandmother, or Abuela.

When Officer Still informed me of this tragedy, I was shocked and speechless. As I was listening, I tried to recollect what Maria looked like in my mind. My school had over 750 students, and about 275 were sixth-grade students. After Officer Still's phone call, I immediately opened my laptop to identify Maria, identify the teachers she had on her 8-period schedule, and look for guidance on action steps in my school crisis plan. I located Maria's picture in our student information system, which contained her demographic information, phone numbers, address, parents' names, emergency contacts, etc. I recognized Maria but did not know her well. She was incredibly quiet, small, and unassuming, like many sixth-grade students in a large middle school. Just as I did as a 7th grade student, my default mechanism was a transactional mindset. I focused on tasks to avoid the vulnerable emotions I felt during both tragic experiences. I decided to call my school's social worker, Ms. Braddock, to notify her that one of our 6th-grade students passed away and see if she had any interactions with Maria that school year. Ms. Braddock stated that Maria never visited her office, nor did she have peer mediation or complaints about Maria. Ms. Braddock informed me that she would be at school by 7:00 a.m. Monday to support students and teachers. I thanked Ms. Braddock and informed her of the action steps I would take starting that night and over the weekend.

Next, I printed out Maria's schedule from my home printer and secured the names of her teachers. Before I contacted the teachers, I created an email notifying our school community that one of our sixth-grade students had unexpectedly passed away during the day. I shared her name and information. In addition, I informed the staff that we would have a staff meeting as a school faculty in the technology center on Monday at 8:00 a.m. Then I drafted an email to my staff. In the email I informed staff that our school and district crisis team (made up of counselors and social workers from my school and other schools in the same district) would be available in the multipurpose room starting at 8:00 a.m. on Monday. Next, I shared with staff that we would review our crisis plan protocol and procedures for student support during the Monday faculty meeting. Finally, I closed the email by asking all to please keep the Perez family in their thoughts and prayers. Although I had a draft of the email in my queue, I would not send it until I contacted Maria's teachers by phone.

I started contacting Maria's teachers one by one. Unfortunately, my building's crisis plan did not have a script of what to say and how to convey such a message to teachers, so I simply shared the information that Officer Still had given me. As one can imagine, Maria's teachers were shocked and heartbroken by the news. After I contacted every teacher, I sent the email to the rest of the staff at the middle school. Once the appropriate communication plan was completed, I realized that I needed to go to school on Saturday morning and collect Maria's items from her locker and classrooms.

After a sleepless night thinking about Maria, I got up around 6:15 a.m., took a shower, and headed to my middle school. After deactivating the school alarm, I walked to my office to locate the student locker book to find Maria's locker number and combination. I remember walking through the quiet and dark hallways alone, sad, and mentally exhausted, thinking about why a 12-year-old child would take their own life. When I arrived at Maria's locker, I kept asking myself, Why? What did we miss? Was it bullying? Was she depressed? Did something happen at home that our school was not informed about? As I asked these questions to myself, I followed the locker combination

steps: place the dial on the number zero, turn the first number two times around the zero, turn the dial counterclockwise to the second number, and then turn clockwise to the third number. Finally, the lock popped, and I lifted on the handle and opened the locker door, all the time wanting to cry, run out of the building, and resign from my principal position. However, I could hear my father's voice, "death is a part of life." I leaned again on the transactional crutch of moving forward and denying my own feelings of hurt and guilt.

Maria's locker was what I imagined it would be for a 6th-grade student. She had a few pictures taped to the inside door that included a picture of a small dog, her baby brother, parents, and a picture of her and a handful of friends that had been taken at a local park. I vividly remember how Maria and her friends seemed happy, carefree, and enjoying a beautiful fall day at the playground in that picture. I began to examine all the contents in her locker. First, I opened a few of Maria's textbooks to see if there were any written letters or notes that would provide me with some indication as to why she took her own life. As I placed Maria's textbooks into an unused book bag, I kept thinking, How is this possible? As a school leader and student, I have made a concerted effort to learn from demanding situations, specifically tragedies. I had said to my 7th-grade self before the first day of school, Brett, be strong, and things will be okay, but now I knew things would not be "okay" for quite some time, if ever. However, as the building principal, I had to be okay. I had to lead our school community out of the darkness of this tragedy by being "okay" and staying strong. I would have to grieve later; I needed to place my emotions aside and support the stakeholders of my school.

I continued to look for any clues or hints that I would find about why Maria took her own life and suddenly came across a purple spiral notebook. I opened the notebook and made sure that Maria's name was in it, which it was. I continued to flip through the spiral notebook. I came across a handwritten letter that was from Maria. I had found her "goodbye letter." There was no date on the letter, and it was not addressed to anyone, but it was devastating. My first inclination was that Maria committed suicide due to bullying or harassment that had taken place, and it had gone unnoticed. However, the letter Maria wrote was in some ways worse from my perspective. In her letter, Maria explained that her life was not worth living. She noted that no one cared about her, and if she disappeared, no one at home or school would even notice. Maria stated that she had few friends and that her parents always worked and did not have the resources to provide her with a cell phone, iPad, or laptop, which were all things she wanted to possess for her to fit into her peer group. In that one-page letter, Maria's last statement was, "Good-bye world, and it was nice knowing you." I tucked the spiral notebook under my arm and examined the other folders and notebooks, placing them in the unused book bag with the other items. Maria's letter, as one could imagine, broke me into pieces. As a father of a 10-year-old daughter and school principal who had just lost a student to suicide, I was broken. I knew that it was not the time to process my own emotional needs and that I had to keep moving forward. The school community depends on the principal to lead during a crisis.

I contacted Officer Still and notified him that I found a letter of interest that may provide insight into Maria's death. Next, I sent an email to my superintendent and Director of Student Services explaining how I cleaned out Maria's locker and discovered a letter of interest that would be turned over to Officer Still. I placed Maria's letter in a locked cabinet in my office until Officer Still could take it into his possession. After securing the letter and Maria's belongings, I transitioned to the needs of students and teachers who would need social-emotional support on Monday. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) claim that, when a school faces the death of a student, "members of a school community

will often rally together" (p. 143) and develop a closer bond and relationship. I knew our building crisis team and teachers would rally on Monday and support our students when they returned. Mentally, I had to prepare myself to conduct a faculty meeting on Monday at 8:00 a.m. and share general information about Maria's passing and the course of action we would take to support our students and each other. Again, I heard my 7th-grade voice in my head, Stay strong, and things will be okay. I was not okay. I thought my life experiences should have prepared me to lead my school community through this time, but I felt completely inept and vulnerable as a school leader, just like my parents who had lacked the knowledge and resources to support me in processing Paul's death by suicide when I was in 7th grade.

On the Monday following Maria's passing, our crisis team members arrived and assembled at 7:00 a.m., which was 1.5 hours before students would arrive. We checked in on one another and immediately focused on preparing for student arrival at 8:30 a.m. Also, I had to mentally prepare myself to lead a faculty meeting where I had to communicate information about Maria's passing and our action plan to support students and building faculty this week.

In our school's conference room, I referred to our building crisis plan, which had a section for the "death of a school community member" and action steps that should be taken to provide community support. The crisis plan's action steps stated that the principal and administration team should collaborate with social workers and counselors and create student stations in a large venue with private barriers, tables, chairs, tissues, water, snacks, paper, pencils, and crayons when students return to school. As a collaborative team, we prepared to greet and comfort students and staff. At 7:50 a.m. I made an announcement on the intercom for all faculty to report to the technology center for the 8:00 a.m. faculty meeting.

I had a total of 73 staff members at my school—73 grief-stricken faces of teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, etc., entered the room. Once everyone arrived and was settled, I stated, "Good morning, and thank you for coming." Next, I informed the staff that we had a tragic passing of one of our 6th-grade students on Friday due to death by suicide. We paused for a moment of silence in honor of Maria. After the sorrowful moment of silence, I informed the staff that, if they needed support, we had counselors available for them and substitute coverage would be provided. Then, I transitioned my focus to student support. I informed the faculty that at 9:00 a.m. I would announce over the intercom to students informing them that our school lost one of our own and counseling support would be available in the multipurpose room. I asked teachers to be visible in the hallways and to gently escort any student who appeared to the multipurpose room for social work support. After the meeting, I kindly thanked teachers for attending and supporting one another during this tragic experience. My faculty and I eventually supported our school community, specifically students. We provided support to Maria's family as well. Our teachers, counselors, social workers, and building leadership navigated Maria's services with our presence at the wake and funeral. Even though I was broken inside, my capacity to lead and support my school community during a crisis was fulfilled to the best of my ability. Perhaps this was solely because I focused on accomplishing tasks and denying my own sense of loss and self. I realized that this might not be my last encounter with death and tragedy within a school community.

Now

During this *currere* process, I have learned from my past and present traumatic experiences as a student and principal, which have influenced my teaching and

instruction in educational leadership. I have realized that traumatic personal and professional experiences have overlapped in my lifetime. When I reflect on my past experiences with death by suicide as a junior high student and school leader, I realize that there are crisis situations that will disrupt the normal routine of school and cause me to question my knowledge and leadership capacity. In many ways, I felt that I had failed Maria, her family, as well as my school community. When Paul passed, I did not understand the magnitude of the situation and how it impacted my family, as we did not discuss it. When Maria passed, as an experienced school leader, I felt ill-prepared socially and emotionally to compassionately lead my school community. My leadership was transactional; I focused on action steps that needed be addressed—cleaning out lockers, setting up the gymnasium facility for counseling sessions, communicating with staff and the district office. However, I was ill equipped emotionally to address my own emotional state as I had learned to suppress my own emotions as a 7th grade student. When Maria passed, I had regressed to that 7th grade student who went to school with little emotion, focusing on the completion of tasks, the day after a close family friend expired.

I learned from both experiences that school leaders must be progressive when a crisis occurs. I was by no means an expert leader in death by suicide as a 7th grade student or as a principal, which is why I focused on process. By focusing on the process and transactional tasks that needed to be completed, I did not have to tend to my own social-emotional state. In reflecting on those experiences, I have concluded that leaders should implement supportive and participative leadership strategies in times of crisis such as these. Supportive leadership is defined as showing concern for your community during stressful situations (House & Mitchell, 1974). Participative leadership is defined as collaborating with stakeholders and listening to staff who are experts in specific areas (House & Mitchell, 1974). As I prepare my graduate students in the Principalship Course, I aim to provide students with a repertoire of leadership style tools and a crisis plan framework that may support them with the potential tragedies they will encounter as leaders. I share with principal preparation students what I learned through my experiences of leading through a crisis, as well as the importance of not focusing on the transactional steps leaders will take during such events and striving to become a transformational leader for the school community. Transformational leaders are collaborative in nature and encourage stakeholders to provide feedback to support members of the school community (Bernard & Stogdill, 1990). These are the leadership skills principals need to utilize when a school crisis takes place.

Once the principal preparation students are introduced to transformational leadership and have a foundational understanding, I provide crisis scenario case studies for the class to process and use to integrate transformational leadership strategies. We collaboratively process the case study action steps that leaders may consider and discuss them in teams before transitioning to the entire class. The reality of school leaders today is that principal prep students must be provided strategies in their principal preparation graduate studies that will support them when they encounter challenges such as COVID-19, contentious school board meetings, school shootings, etc. The Ohio School Safety Center provides a framework for suicide prevention as well as resources, but I am not certain if this information is sufficient to prepare future school leaders to address the high volume of students who need social-emotional support.

Currently, school principals are leading communities where “35 percent of U.S. parents with school aged-children are concerned or extremely concerned about their child’s mental health” (Dorn et al., 2021, p. 7). Perhaps, now is the time for higher education institutions to reimagine and expand coursework in principal preparation

programs to include courses such as "Crisis Intervention in Schools" and "School Culture," two courses required by Xavier University's School Counseling Master of Arts program (Xavier University, n.d.). As higher education professors in educational leadership, we must continue to seek and disseminate strategies that will support our future leaders in navigating the volume of challenges they will encounter in their roles as school leaders.

Epilogue

I began teaching the Principalship Course at my university in 2019. Before my transition as a full-time assistant professor, I served in public education for 25 years. I spent 20 of those years in school leadership. I served as an elementary and middle school principal, high school assistant principal, and athletic director in a diverse, suburban community. Although I have been fortunate to serve as an educational leader at multiple levels, as a current assistant professor, I consistently pursue a curriculum that I can use in my school leadership courses to prepare future educational leaders. Specifically, I pursue a leadership curriculum that will prepare future school principals to lead school community members during times of crisis. I have never viewed my 20 plus years of experience as an educational leader as a potential curriculum or curriculum theory until recently.

As I explored and reflected on my *currere* journey, I realized that both of my experiences with death by suicide changed my perceptions of life. I learned through both tragedies that I must never take any person or individual for granted, and each of us, regardless of our career position, gender, racial background, socioeconomic status, etc. have hardships and trauma. We do not have a choice in this matter. However, as an educational administration professor, I have made a choice to instruct my graduate students with compassion, empathy, and grace. I model these characteristics for university students, but more importantly, we dialogue and discuss how effective school leadership is unsustainable without creating and fostering positive relationships with educational stakeholders. I believe that school leaders who exhibit and utilize compassion, empathy, and grace will foster a school culture that is based on trust, respect, and love. During times of crisis these are the transformational qualities our students and teachers need and deserve.

References

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, & Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2018). *After a suicide: A toolkit for schools* (2nd ed.). Education Development Center.

Bernard, M., & Stogdill, R. (1990). *The handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed). Free Press.

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2017). *Reframing organizations* (6th ed.). Josey-Bass.

Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2021, July). *COVID-19 and education: The lingering effects of unfinished learning*. McKinsey and Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning

Gruenert, S., & Whitaker, T. (2015). *School culture rewired how to define, assess, and transform it*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

House, R. J., & Mitchell, T. R. (1974). Path-goal theory of leadership. *Journal of Contemporary Business*, *5*(1), 81–94.

Ohio Department of Education. (2022). *School safety and safety plans.* https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/School-Safety

Ohio School Safety Center. (n.d.). *Suicide prevention*. https://ohioschoolsafetycenter.ohio.gov/pre-k-12-schools/suicide-prevention

Pinar, W. F. (1975). *The method of currere* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association (AERA), Washington, DC, United States.

Pinar, W. F. (1994). *Autobiography, politics, and sexuality: Essays in curriculum theory 1972-1992.* Peter Lang.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* (1st ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Prothero, A. (2021). 5 ways for principals to turn crisis into professional learning. *Education Week*, *41*(12), 8–11.

Requirements for the Emergency Management Plan and Test, Oh. Admin. Code 3301-5-01 (2017). https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3301-5-01#:~:text=Rule%203301%2D5%2D01%20%7C,emergency%20management%20plan%20and%20test.&text=The%20purpose%20of%20this%20rule,3313.536%20of%20the%20Revised%20Code.

Sullivan, G. (2019, June 30). Divorce is a risk factor for suicide. Especially for men. *Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/acquainted-the-night/201906/divorce-is-risk-factor-suicide-especially-men*

Xavier University. (n.d.). *School counseling (MA): Curriculum*. https://www.xavier.edu/school-counseling/index#curriculum

Endnotes

[1]All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of the actual individuals in this article.

The Story of Two Female Multilingual Teachers: Teacher Identity and Locality

By Pooja Bhatia Narang & Alexandra Krasova
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Having been English as an Additional Language (EAL) speakers and having taught English in diverse cultures, religions, races, and abilities, we have both formed multiple identities. In this collaborative autoethnography, we present our struggles with teaching EAL and how our identities as teachers and teacher-scholars were shaped by the local cultural and social values of our teaching and learning contexts. By reflecting on our past perceptions and experiences, we began to realize that multilingual teachers' identities are complex and involve tensions and conflicts. However, these conflicting experiences have developed resilience in us and helped us understand what it is to be a multilingual and transnational teacher. By comparing our past struggles with future teaching goals, we reconceptualized our classroom teaching pedagogies and understand that being a multilingual teacher is about adapting to the needs of the students and equipping them with the tools necessary for their success.

We wrote this paper to argue that local practices (Pennycook, 2010) have to be recognized and implemented by English language instructors because they reflect cultural and social aspects of language learning, which is an essential part of being engaged with a foreign language. In this collaborative autoethnography, we look at our teacher identities through Pennycook's concept of locality, which views language as a local practice. Language as a local practice encompasses "perspectives, the language ideologies, the local ways of knowing, through which language is viewed" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 461).

Pooja: Juggling and Transforming Teacher Identity Formed in Transnational Spaces

I am an Indian-origin multilingual transnational teacher and student who has lived and worked in India and Saudi Arabia, earned a master's degree from the UK, and is currently pursuing a doctorate from a university in the United States. I've developed a transnational identity as a result of my experiences studying and teaching English as an additional language in multilingual environments. I chose to write about my experiences as a transnational teacher in Saudi Arabia for the purpose of shedding light on the challenges and conflicts that come with being a teacher in a foreign country. Transnational teachers often need to juggle and negotiate their identities to resolve conflicts that may arise in their classrooms. Through my narrative, I also highlight that second language teachers need to consider their students' needs and prior experiences and continue to challenge their assumptions and beliefs throughout their teaching in order to promote effective language learning.

Bringing my Western-based Teaching Identity and Practices into the Saudi EFL Classroom

After teaching English to middle school students in India, where I gained some teaching experience, I decided to earn a degree in English education. I joined an MA in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program in the United Kingdom in 2009. Throughout this teacher education program, I was profoundly influenced by SLA theorists who emphasized subconscious language learning or

Narang, P. B., & Krasova, A. (2022). The story of two female multilingual teachers: Teacher identity and locality. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 86–94.

creating a natural environment for students to learn rather than studying grammar and other linguistic forms consciously (Krashen, 1985; Schmidt & Frota, 1986). In October 2010, I successfully completed the program.

Upon graduation, I began searching for TESOL-related positions in the UK. I also subscribed to numerous job search websites. However, due to my status as a non-native English speaker, I was unable to find any jobs. After a month of struggle, I decided to return to India, despite knowing that it is difficult for a master's degree holder to get a job at a college in India until they pass some competitive exams and earn a higher master's degree such as Master in Philosophy. Later, I learned from one of my Saudi classmates that teachers with an MA in TESOL from a western country are in high demand in Middle Eastern universities, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Since I had never taught at a college level before and was unable to find employment in the United Kingdom, I decided to apply for a position at a Saudi Arabian university. To my surprise, I received a positive response and was hired as an EFL instructor at a community college. I immediately returned to India to apply for a work visa and verify my degrees (one needs to verify their degree if they want to work in the Middle East). Within three months, I was able to finish all my paperwork and travel to Saudi Arabia with my husband.

In January of 2011, I began teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a girl's college within a public university in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's teaching and learning culture was quite distinct from those of India and the United Kingdom. In Saudi Arabia, the majority of colleges have separate sections for male and female students. Female teachers are hired for the girls' section, while male teachers are hired for the boys' section. In addition, women of all religions are required to wear the "abaya," the traditional dress of Saudi women that covers the entire body. I quickly adapted to the new culture and practices, despite not being accustomed to wearing such clothing. Since India is a multicultural nation where people of various religions, including Muslims, reside in each state, it was not too difficult for me to adapt to Saudi culture. Moreover, I was mentally prepared to wear such attire and fully cover myself in public because, during the course of my paperwork, I became more acquainted with Islamic heritage and Arab customs. To some extent, this practice also influenced my teacher identity, as I became more cautious with my classroom teaching practices, especially when it came to discussing forbidden topics in Islamic culture, such as alcohol, tattoos, etc. Since India and Saudi Arabia are both Asian countries, there are also similarities between them, such as the fact that we do not discuss sex openly in India and that Indian families expect women to wear what is deemed appropriate attire. Adapting my classroom instruction to the religious values of Saudi Arabia was, therefore, not particularly difficult. However, adjusting my classroom teaching and practices according to my students' needs was a challenge indeed, for my teacher identity was re-shaped by my MA TESOL degree, which was mainly based on western-based pedagogies.

My teacher identity was largely influenced at the macro (societal) level, followed by the meso (institutional) and micro (classroom) levels (De Costa & Norton, 2017). My beliefs that western teaching methods are preferable for teaching English as a second or foreign language and that teachers can apply globally accepted teaching practices to local contexts affected my classroom practices. Based on the belief system that I had developed in the UK and institutional policy, I began incorporating English-only pedagogies and discourses into my Saudi EFL classroom. For instance, I restricted my students from speaking Arabic in class. This practice was based on the widespread belief that use of a first language hinders second language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). I also

began to rely more on the implicit method of instruction, in which students discover grammar rules and vocabulary on their own rather than having the teacher explain them explicitly (Schmidt, 1990). Even though I used an explicit teaching approach in India, earning an MA in TESOL fundamentally altered my outlook on the profession and the way I approached my Saudi classroom.

As my Saudi classroom was composed of students of varying abilities, my students' responses to my teaching strategies varied. Students who had spent time in the United States or other western contexts or who had attended a private school responded positively to these strategies. Those who had attended government schools for their education and had never traveled abroad reacted negatively. These students were accustomed to learning grammar via translation. Even after a decade, I can still visualize their confused expressions. I can also recall their silence in my classroom, especially during group projects. As I prohibited these students from using Arabic or translations, they resisted participating in my classroom. A few students even requested a transfer to the class of an Arabic-speaking instructor. I felt terrible. However, I eventually discovered that one of the students had decided to defer the English course because neither my Saudi colleague nor I allowed Arabic in the classroom. When I told my colleague about this student, she told me that she did not believe in bilingual teaching methods and did not care if her students attend classes taught in Arabic and English by other teachers. She, like me, believed that teaching English required using only English. Even the curriculum was designed with the assumption that students should not use Arabic in the English classroom. I never imagined that a student would stop learning English as a result of my instructional practices or assumptions. I had a moment of self-realization and self-discovery at this time. I began to question myself!

Mixing and Transforming my Identity

I began to wonder whose fault it was. Teachers? Educational institutions and their policies? Or teacher preparation programs that do not take into account the local context and the needs of students when preparing teachers? I sat down and began to consider my classroom practices. This reflexive attitude made me realize there was a gap between my imagined classroom practices and the reality of my students. I began to question my assumptions and beliefs. By challenging my assumptions, I abandoned the technician role of a teacher who simply follows standard procedures (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) without questioning their beliefs and looking at their practices through a critical lens (Freire, 1998; 1968/2000).

Gradually, I began to make adjustments to my classroom teaching methods. Keeping institutional policy in mind, I adopted a hybrid identity. A hybrid identity is a combination of two or more identities, allowing multilingual people to make use of their different identities (Canagarajah, 2002). I allowed my students to use Arabic at the start of each assignment or activity so that everyone understood what was expected of them. Students would engage in conversation in Arabic and explain the assignment to one another before presenting their work in English. Occasionally, depending on the topic's complexity and the needs of my students, I also allowed advanced students to translate Arabic words or information for other students.

Considering the experience of the Saudi student who dropped my class and the class of another teacher without discussing her needs with us, I also decided to create a dialogic learning environment in my classroom. Although things have begun to change in Saudi Arabia, they were very different a decade ago. In Saudi Arabia, women lacked free will and were prohibited from expressing their opinions. Understanding the needs of

my students and viewing them through a historical and cultural lens, I came to realize that my female students needed to feel empowered and have a voice and that my classroom would be the first step in preparing them to achieve this goal. For this reason, I began implementing minor adjustments to my teaching. For instance, I asked my students to choose a topic for their discussions and assignments. I also created multiple contexts for classroom discussions, given some students may feel more comfortable talking in small groups over large, whole-class discussions. In these spaces, I also encouraged my students to discuss openly what they liked and disliked about my classes. As I was able to abandon dominant ideologies by adapting my teaching practices to meet the needs of my students, I also flattened the hierarchy between my students and me.

Who Am I Now?

My identity as a language teacher is also shaped by my current experiences as a doctoral student, which I will briefly reflect upon to connect to my previous teaching experiences. My learning experiences in the United States remind me of my students' struggles and the importance of a teacher considering a student's cultural background. For instance, when I write a course paper or any other assignment, I often struggle between the American and Indian ways of writing and thinking. I understand that, in order to achieve academic success, I must socialize in American discourse communities. However, it is not easy for me to do so. Luckily, I have professors who recognize that it is difficult for a multilingual student to abandon one identity and adopt another. My professors give me ample opportunities to consider my identity and negotiate with them. These experiences allow me to place myself in the shoes of my students and understand what it means to be a multilingual educator. I've come to the realization that a multilingual classroom environment requires negotiation and flexibility and that language is not an entity, as Pennycook (2010) emphasized.

From a socio-cultural perspective, identity is dynamic and evolves with time and space (Norton, 2006). Similarly, I believe that my teacher identity has evolved with time and space. I would like to conclude my experiences with the following quote:

> I hold that my own unity and identity, in regard to others and to the world constitutes my essential and irrepeatable way of experiencing myself as a cultural, historical and unfinished being in the world, simultaneously conscious of my unfinishedness. (Freire, 1998, p. 51)

Alexandra: Transformation of Teacher Identity Through Locality

I am a multilingual female teacher, a Ph.D. student at a U.S. university in Western Pennsylvania, who was born in Kazakhstan, grew up in Russia, and used to study in France. I have taught English and French to Russian students at various levels and Russian to American students at a western university in Pennsylvania. I have been engaged in different cultures throughout my teaching career and this experience, as well as my role as a language learner, played a crucial role in forming multiple identities, which I am eager to reflect on.

I argue that instructors, possessing multiple identities, bring various dispositions into the classroom and, depending on their local practices, different methodologies. Relying on Bourdieu's idea that everyday practices become regulated and form ways of thinking (as cited in Pennycook, 2010), I believed that instructors from two different countries, Pooja and I in particular, would have distinct pedagogical strategies in the same classroom due to their local practices.

Raising my Identity in Russia

I started teaching when I was an undergraduate student in Russia, and I used to work with young learners whose native language was Russian. After graduation, I earned a position at a local language school in southwestern Siberia, Russia, which was attended primarily by Russian-speaking students. My classrooms lacked cultural diversity, and it impacted my teaching approaches because I could easily use translation in the classroom instead of finding appropriate definitions for some words or phrases. Unlike Pooja's experience, translation was allowed in my classrooms, and students used it a lot during classes. I still feel that that experience put me through a lot of challenges as an English instructor. For instance, using the native language in a monolingual classroom did not give me a chance to know multiple cultures and students' diverse backgrounds. It also led to the lack of practice speaking English in the classroom, which made my students unconfident in their speaking abilities. The translation approach increases students' comfort with speaking their native language and decreases their motivation to speak English. Accordingly, a lot of approaches that work in multilingual classes do not work in monolingual ones. For example, paraphrasing, or using definitions to explain certain words and phrases, works perfectly in diverse classrooms. Also, when students from different countries work in pairs, the only language they share is English, so they try to find a way to explain everything in English, whereas the students I used to teach in Russia often switched to Russian for explanations.

Developing my Identity in France

As Pennycook (2010) states, "our everyday activities are always in places that become part of the process" (p. 56). Therefore, I did not want these activities to become my practice, and I moved forward with my local teaching experience and went to France. After several years of teaching practice and pursuing my teaching education degree in France, my teaching values and beliefs changed due to the local cultural and social values of my learning context. I was engaged in a French locality, which taught me various concepts about the student-teacher relationship, which seemed to be relatively casual and honest. I had a literature course back in 2013 at Francois Rabelais University in France, where one of my classmates pointed out that the professor's manner of teaching was not quite understandable for students and offered some suggestions. For instance, she noticed that the pace the instructor was teaching the class seemed too fast for her and other students. To my great surprise, the instructor agreed! This was a valuable lesson for me as a teacher because in a Russian classroom, a teacher-centered approach is most common. There is not much negotiation between a student and an instructor; consequently, students try to keep quiet even if they disagree with something because there is more fear than learning in most classrooms in Russia. I decided then what kind of instructor I wanted to be: the one who hears students' opinions and listens to them. Although my local background was different, I felt that I could change it. After returning to a faculty position at Omsk State University in Russia, I allowed my students to speak up, to provide me with fair feedback about our classes, and to be flexible towards students' challenges and difficulties. My approach was sensational for students, because it put them in the center of a learning process and gave them a voice in the classroom.

My next attempt to shape my English teacher identity by the local context and practices happened in London, where I had a chance to work with multilingual students and learn how to teach multicultural students. I leaned on Pennycook's idea: "to speak of language as a local practice is to address not only the embeddedness of language in place and time but also the relation between language locality and a wider world" (Pennycook,

2010, p.78). I aimed to learn "local" there, finding some similarities between my home local and London local in the sense of teaching, and I found a lot of locality in one single classroom due to its multiculturalism. An interesting fact was underlined by Pennycook (2010) that "languages are always adaptable" (p. 97). For instance, some regions of Northern Russia have more than a hundred words to describe snow; others use multiple words for various kinds of fish depending on the region where they live. I found the case to be the same in the UK. There are hundreds of words the British use to describe the weather. So, while teaching students whose locality is different, instructors might have a lot of challenges since they are not aware of these details.

My teacher identity expanded in London due to several reasons. First, the classroom was filled with students from different countries, which made it impossible to use a translation approach. It challenged me to find necessary and easy definitions and explanations for students to understand. I started using a lot of pictures so that my students could visually imagine the things we were talking about. Second, all of them brought their cultures, religions, ethnicities, and traditions into the classroom. We shared our diversity and learned from each other by expanding our knowledge about different countries. Finally, my professional identity developed due to the new materials used in the classroom. I had to work with books, files, and create presentations based on the topics I previously had not included in my classroom discussions. Thus, my teacher identity was shaped in London in several ways.

Shaping my Identity in the USA

Though, my teacher identity had been shaped by creating new methodological materials and working with students with various levels of English and diverse backgrounds in Omsk, Russia, and in the UK, I felt the necessity to deepen my knowledge and broaden my practices even more. I went to the United States to study and teach at a program that provided me with a tremendously important experience. According to Pennycook (2010), "diversity, however, wears the face of discernible difference, and rarely includes sameness" (p. 49), so I aimed to find this diversity in teaching methods and approaches. I found out a lot about the U.S. classroom setting and approaches to teaching and studying. For instance, asking for a course evaluation to improve my teaching, being open to talk about my personal life outside academia, respecting students' needs and addressing their concerns by answering emails in a quick manner, and using up-to-date materials. My identity changes every time I enter a Russian language or English language classroom. It changes when I communicate with my students during office hours, and it changes when we organize events on campus. My teacher identity is complex, multicultural and multilingual, and as many think, I cannot separate my identities; they are flexible, but inseparable. When I enter the classroom, I do not choose my identity, but rather use all of them simultaneously. So, our identities are influenced by the language practices that we use, thus, connecting them with a particular locality where we use them.

Overall, locality impacts our teacher identities in a lot of ways. First, we can transform and rearticulate our locality or adapt to other localities that have become global. Second, differences can be beneficial for global learning since we can share the experiences and practices we have been engaged in. Finally, if we think about *language as a local practice*, we include cultural aspects in it as well as its historical contexts, which play a huge role in its understanding. I would like to conclude with Pennycook's (2010) words, which underline the importance of locality: "however global a practice may be, it still always happens locally" (p. 128). From my experience, if an ESL/EFL

instructor is not aware of local practices, it might be quite challenging to transfer the cultural and social aspects of language to students. As the meaning of certain words may vary depending on regions and areas, the intonation of sentences, pronunciation, and even grammar structures can be different. Thus, it is necessary to look at language as a practice that reflects the social and cultural sides of life rather than a structure that is quite abstract (Pennycook, 2010). For instance, when teaching multilingual students, I lean on their experiences and their visions of the world to better understand some concepts of language. The main challenge for me as a teacher and a student is to learn about local practices may be hidden and only can be learned over time and practice. For example, being a Ph.D. student in the U.S., I need to adopt new local practices that I have never been engaged in before, but this is what helps me to shape my identity.

Moving Forward: Reconceptualization of Language Teaching Based on Local Practices

In this section, we share themes emerging from our narratives coupled with specific implications that can be used to reconceptualize the concept of language teaching and its connection to locality, which plays an important role in an EFL or ESL classroom. Shaped by multiple localities and various cultures, you could find some similarities in our stories as well as some differences concerning our ideologies and views. We both were able to shape our multiple identities through our teaching experiences in various contexts and localities, and we share the idea that a single way of teaching does not exist due to the diversity of language classrooms. Pooja's experience showcases that multilingual teachers are constantly required to challenge their assumptions, while Alexandra's experiences demonstrate that local practices have a great impact on what instructors bring into their classrooms.

Multilingualism, Translanguaging and English Language Teaching

Most classrooms are multilingual, and students come from various places having different backgrounds as well as diverse local language practices, which might have positive and negative impacts as well. Teachers should know about their students' differences and consider them as their strengths rather than weaknesses so that students can successfully lean on their background experiences and use their previous knowledge to build new language practices. Thinking about multilingual students coming from different parts of the world makes us claim that social practices students possess affect the methodology that should be used in the language classroom. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2019), "multilingualism has a social dimension because multilingual speakers learn languages while engaging in language practices in a social context" (p.132).

The concept of "locality" also helped us break monolingual myths, practice translanguaging, and decolonize our classroom practices. As our stories highlight that *translanguaging*, as opposed to standard English, allows multilingual students to utilize resources from languages they know/speak/write to explore concepts, ideas, and to construct knowledge (Garcia, 2009, p.140). Therefore, we believe that it is important for ESL/EFL teachers to consider the local needs, as it can assist them to come up with their own methods and practices or language forms rather than relying solely on fixed or predefined approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This, in turn, can help them understand that language teaching is not a cookie-cutter approach.

We also believe that non-native English-speaking teachers, native English-speaking teachers, policymakers, and all those associated with English language teaching need to reconceptualize what language means and how languages should be taught. We need to abandon the thinking of considering languages as something fixed or rigid. This practice

will also stop us from falling into the trap of the deficiency label of the non-native speakers (see Canagarajah, 2012). In short, the need is to welcome multilingualism and translingualism as teaching resources in our classrooms.

Language Teaching as a Local and Social Practice

We also support the idea of Pennycook (2010) who states that "languages are a product of the deeply social and cultural activities in which people engage" (p. 1), referring to language as a local practice, and that is how we perceive it. We know that ideologies are originally born in families where students form their values and beliefs. Furthermore, they interact with various communities, and their ideologies either shape or change depending on their experience. Thus, we are exposed to various language practices throughout our lives, all of which come from local practices. For example, English is not considered an official language in Russia, although students learn this language from a very early age, and schools are planning to make the Final English State Exam mandatory for all students. Obviously, practices in English classrooms in Russia greatly vary from those in Saudi Arabia and India, and they are completely different in the USA, considering the nativism of the language. This standardization is common for academic English or international exams, although regarding various contexts this way might not be suitable for everybody. So, second language instructors should consider various localities and students' different backgrounds to respond to students' needs.

We find locality pivotal in shaping language teachers identities and classroom pedagogies. We believe that locality is all about treating language as fluid. It also refers to taking into account the social and cultural values of a local (educational) community. Something similar to what Bourdieu highlighted. Bourdieu (1977 as cited in Pennycook, 2010) suggested that "we need to account for both time and space, history and location" when we consider language as a (local) practice (p. 2). However, it is important to understand that local context or being local is not limited to physical and temporal locality (Pennycook, 2010, p. 461). One should not mix local practice with "language use in context" (p. 461). Language as a local practice encompasses "perspectives, the language ideologies, the local ways of knowing, through which language is viewed" (p. 461). This means that language emerges from the activities; they are not predefined or limited to a particular context or space. As Pennycook (2010) also pointed out, "to speak in terms of language as a practice," we need to move away from the "attempt to capture it [language] as a system" (p. 9).

Our Final Thoughts

Though we have practiced and continue to practice different ways to deal with the complexities and conflicts that arise in our classrooms, we both consider the students' needs and local context crucial for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Finally, and most importantly, based on our experiences, we strongly believe that teacher training programs should train new teachers to learn to be reflexive in their attitude rather than merely focusing on teaching approaches and methods. By practicing reflexivity, teachers can display transparency in their classroom teaching and understand their intentions, teaching goals, and pedagogical choices (Greene & Park, 2021, p. 25) and move beyond methods (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

References

Canagarajah, S. (2012). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203073889.

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2019). Multilingualism, translanguaging, and minority languages in SLA. *The Modern Language Journal*, *103*(Supplement 2019). 130–134.

De Costa, P. I., & Norton, B. (2017). Introduction: Identity, transdisciplinarity, and the good language teacher. *The Modern Language Journal*, *101*(S1), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12368.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum. (Original work published 1968)

García, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, & A. K. Mohanty (Eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp. 140–158). Multilingual Matters. 10.21832/9781847691910-011

Greene, M. V., & Park, G. (2021). Promoting reflexivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, *5*(1), 23–29. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/9717

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Laredo Publishing.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). A postmethod perspective on English language teaching. *World Englishes*, *22*(4), 539–550.

Norton, B. (2006). Identity as a sociocultural construct in second language education. *TESOL in Context*, *Special Edition*, 22–33.

Pennycook, A. (2010). *Language as a local practice*. Routledge.

Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, *11*(2), 129–158.

Schmidt, R., & Frota, S. (1986). Developing basic conversational ability in a second language: A case study of an adult learner of Portuguese. In R. R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to learn: Conversation in second language acquisition* (pp. 237–326). Newbury House.

Breaking Chinese Female Norms

By Jingyi Zeng
Miami University

Chinese people are taught to study well and work hard since China has limited resources and a large population. As a Chinese woman in China, I am expected to be docile and subservient. The duties of the home predominantly fall to women who are supposed to do household chores and have a major role in childcare. Chinese tradition dictates that these subordinating roles are not questioned or challenged in any way.

If I could speak to my past self, I would not tell her to diverge from the winding path that led me to where I am today. If I could speak to my future daughter, I would not tell her to surrender her beliefs for an accepted norm.

Regressive

It is 10 p.m. on an October Sunday. I sit at my desk reading articles for tomorrow's classes when a WeChat call from my mom cuts through the silence.

"How is it going in America? Have you been busy recently?"

"Everything is fine. I just have a lot of upcoming assignments this week and so many papers to read."

Then she abruptly changes the topic and says, "You will be 28 years old this year. You need to start your family soon, so you will have energy to have babies and take care of your family."

I do not want to say anything. By now, I've lost count of how many times I've had this conversation with her since I've been in the States. She keeps saying, "Look at our neighbor. Their daughter is two years younger than you and she already has children. Your life as a woman is incomplete if you do not have a child."

I sit in silence—sad, hurt, and angry—as my mother continues to talk. To make my mother happy, I should get married and take care of her. But why do I have to follow the path like other Chinese women? Do not get me wrong, I think it is great that my neighbor chose this path. She can find her Mr. Right and have a beautiful family. However, that should be her choice alone. I have my own ideas and dreams. I want to choose my own path and make my own destiny. Mom, why can'y respect my choices and support me?

"I can also help you raise a child. If you do not want to have a child now, and you wait until I am 60 or 70, I will not be able to help you. You will be 29 years old when you come back home. Do you think you can find a decent job since there are many positions having age restrictions? I am telling you, getting married is more realistic and reliable for your life. Do you want to waste your life on something unpredictable? My unmarried 28-year-old daughter does not even have a full-time job. You made our family disappointed."

I do not know if I need to keep listening to her or hang up. Why do I have to follow the life path like others do? Why does the definition of success as a female, depend on marriage status or having a child? Mom, why do you care more about our family's reputation than my dream?

Progressive

Dear daughter,

I cannot believe that I am writing this letter to you in 2021 while listening to a Jim Croce song from the 1970s. *Time in a Bottle* is a beautiful song. The lyrics resonate

Zeng, J. (2022). Breaking Chinese female norms. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 95–97.

with me, capturing my need to live my one wild and precious life to its fullest: "Do the things you want to do once you find them." The lyrics speak to me as a modern Chinese woman. I should have pursued what I believe regardless of the circumstance even if my dream contradicted an expectation of my family or their traditional values. I was strongly encouraged by your grandma multiple times that, as a Chinese female, I should start a family and a career early, have a stable job and devote myself to my husband and my children. My little girl, I must go against your grandma on this point.

Growing up is momentary.

Perhaps you feel responsible for your life while dancing with your partner at the prom. You may consider having a romantic relationship some day or you might not. More than anything, I wish and hope that you will be able to make your own choices rather than conforming to outdated notions of the rightful role of women in Chinese culture. No drifting with the tide, my precious one! Perhaps, you struggled with your major in college or a career for your life. However, your friends or enemies have chosen their path successfully. Do not rush! Resist the urge to compare yourself to your peers about your career, marriage, or any other choices. If you feel confused about your future, take a gap year before starting.

Time will reveal much to you. Everything you are experiencing now will ultimately point out your life's purpose. I hope you will have enough time and space to consider your passion and then stick with it. Every choice is made by you, ONLY YOU! We all have different times we go through our lives. I know too many people who rushed into marriage and careers based on others' notions of success without considering their own goals and dreams. Now they have to do a job or live with a person they dislike for their entire life. What a waste of a life! Getting a degree after 40 is still an achievement. Being a single parent is also beautiful. We have infinite possibilities regardless of which life stage or status we are in.

I am writing this letter because I hope you can realize, earlier than I did, that sticking with yourself can equip you in becoming a great person and a modern Chinese female. I wish you will have enough space and time to be yourself and feel confident enough to forge your own path whatever the surrounding is. You are YOU.

Love,
Your mom

Analytical

Confucianism is a part of the Chinese social fabric and way of life. The societal values in China emphasize harmony and conformity. Peace and stability are valued more highly than personal needs or desires. Confucianism calls for individuals to subordinate to the needs of larger societies. People establish a solid loyalty to their family and respect their elderly parents in a society influenced by Confucian thought (Richey, 2013). In ancient China, the social code of behavior for women was Three Obedience and Four Virtues (三从四德). Women were supposed to obey their fathers, husbands, and sons and restrict their speech and manner in public. Now, to support ones' family, Chinese females seek careers rather than choosing the traditional role of housewife, but the duties of the home still fall to women. All the principles still apply in modern Chinese society somehow, and women are still viewed and criticized through the lens of the historical and cultural expectations of the public (Wang et al., 2009). For example, a female should get married or give birth at a certain age. Chinese males do not want to marry a female whose degree is higher than theirs or who earns more money than them.

I am influenced by Confucian ideology sincerely and spontaneously. As a Chinese woman, I should comply with my aging mother and take care of her as a daughter. I should continue the harmonious tradition as a Chinese female and go back to China to marry someone. I should cease my profession as a 28-year-old graduate student and find a decent job in China. What if I do not want to follow these frames? What if I do not want to feel trapped by these or let the traditional roles obstruct my goals? As a Chinese female student who grew up in a Chinese environment, studying in a western country, which has a totally different perspective, how do I evaluate my roles? Now being exposed to a new culture and way of life, should I follow the traditional path like most Chinese females, or can I choose my own path?

Synthetical

I am afraid of being left behind and unable to bear the biases and doubts. I asked myself multiple times, who am I? Beyond the cultural norms, religion, background, who am I? I want to choose my own identity rather than being told who I am by others. "It is a freedom first exercised over oneself, which refuses the enslavement of the self by oneself or others to institution" (Wang, 2004, p. 31). I remember my parents told me countlessly that I needed to study hard in order to get accepted into a prestigious university. After this, I could have a respectable job and marry someone, then start a happy family. I was living in this frame carefully and expectantly for over 18 years until I failed the Gaokao (China's annual college entrance exam). At that moment, I realized I would have to deviate from the so-called "successful path." I felt as though my life was an embarrassment to all my family members and felt like a failure because I thought there were no other options I could choose in order to have a happy and bright life. However, I have learned throughout the darkest period of my life that there are thousands of successful paths that a person can choose rather than following the traditional path.

I hope every Chinese girl can recognize where they came from and decide what they want to be. They can make their own choices and have interactions that change them for the better. Our identities are determined by individual fiat. I am inspired by my past experiences to become an educator to facilitate the development of young minds by helping them find their own identities. In my class, I compare different cultures with students' native cultures to equip them with the flexibility to choose the best part of each culture. We are the residents of our own country but citizens of this world. Students can adopt alternate cultures to achieve their individual aims.

References

Richey, J. (2013). *Confucius in East Asia*. Association for Asian Studies.

Wang, H. (2004). *The call from the stranger on a journey home: Curriculum in a third space*. Peter Lang.

Wang H. F., Jia S. H., & Li S. X. (2009). xing bie yu gong zuo - jia ting chong tu de zhong jie xiao ying yan jiu (性别与工作-家庭冲突的中介效应研究) [The mediating effect between gender and work-family conflict]. 心理科学 [*Journal of Psychological Science*], 32(5), 1221–1223.

Academic Exploitation: *Currere* as Getting Lost in Motherhood

By Whitney Neumeyer Roach & Elissa Bryant
Texas Christian University

This work teases apart myriad tensions parent-scholars experience, embody, and endure in navigating academia as we situate ourselves within considerate self-reflection and intentional dialogue via a method of *currere* (Pinar, 1975). Intent on unpacking individual and overlapping experiences, we, the authors, with respect to our positionalities, both identify as white, able-bodied, cisgender females. One author is a queer transracial adoptive mother, and one is a heterosexual biological mother. It is through narrative, autobiographical, curricular conversations that we reexperience our past curricula of mothering.

The process of *currere*, derived from the Latin "infinitive form of curriculum meaning to run the course" (Pinar, 2012, p. 44), emphasizes curriculum as a complicated intertextual conversation to underscore specific places in particular moments of history. *Currere* asserts a postmodern curriculum that encourages a critique of academic knowledge in hopes of engaging participants to labor in curriculum just as curriculum is a result of such labor. Deprived of ignorance, which once allowed us to indiscriminately follow hegemonic ideals, today we find ourselves constrained by the innumerable, inescapable, and often intolerable possibilities of choice. Motherhood, as we understand it, is embodied and experienced by a wide array of individuals—not limited by one's gender identity, sexual orientation, or biological relationships. However, our experiences as mothers are uniquely our own and, as such, are impacted by our historically marginalized identities as women in the academy.

Academic exploration has transformed our multifaceted, yet compartmentalized, identities as academics, educators, women, spouses, and mothers to the unrecognizable, often non-negotiable, assemblage we reckon with now. As newly formed parent-scholars, we find it difficult to differentiate the multiple facets of our identities from one another while navigating the praxis of critical theory. We embody hybrid identities that demand an interrogation of seemingly trivial parental choices and their impacts on our children's livelihoods, happiness, and educational opportunities (Noddings, 2003).

Accustomed to hiding behind masks of complacency, while at other times dichotomously refusing to be ignored, our needs scream for attention—through inner voices and our children's needs. Restless nights fraught with skewed reasoning and justification of our imperfect choices, ongoing paradoxical concerns, and conundrums of choice create an aggregate of *currere* and what Lather (2001) calls "working the ruins," which is our method. The ruins of our experiences and inability to make sense of or control the data that emerge from our lives create sites of possibility that allow us to move from realist to interrogative work of reflexivity through inquiry, "knowing through not knowing, knowing both too little and too much" (Lather, 2001, p. 205).

William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet (1976) encouraged students and educators to engage with the present in meaningful ways by first reconstituting and understanding past experiences through the aesthetic process of *currere*. By reading and writing the self in relation with the world as a reflection and anticipation of possibilities for the future, Pinar and Grumet (1976) imagined *currere* as the core of curriculum inquiry. By subjectively unearthing complex past experiences and recognizing temporality, we delve into past iterations, reexperiencing specific moments to gain a clearer vantage point of

Roach, W. N., & Bryant, E. (2022). Academic exploitation: *Currere* as getting lost in motherhood. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 98–106.

the present. Applying Derridan deconstruction to the work of *currere* as post-qualitative study, we find similarities in Lather's (2007) post-structural analysis of subject formation and subjectivity that requires complex negotiations of relations to various inter/intra-acting axes of power.

Rethinking what academic validity might mean in light of post-foundational discourse theory, Lather (2012) offers four frames that might position validity "as a space of constructed visibility," which allow the "underthought of thought" to be seen (p. 120). Of these proposed framings, the fourth, termed *Voluptuous/Situated Validity*, posits traditional scientific epistemology as shaped by a "male imaginary" and encourages asking "what the inclusion of a female imaginary would effect where the female is other to the male's Other" (Lather, 2012, p. 125). This divergent frame acts against the "murder of the mother" central to Western culture (Irigaray, 1985) as the researcher's authority is not granted by attempted "objectivity," but through engagement, entanglement, and the "risky practice" (Sawiki, 1991, p. 103) of self-reflexivity that underlies feminist praxis by bringing ethics and epistemology together (Lather, 2012).

We are imbricated throughout experiences, such that we cannot separate pieces of ourselves from that of our work. This situatedness, according to Lather's (2012) frames toward the post-qualitative, offers us validity. By reliving experiences as memories through Pinar's (1976) method of *currere*, we change how these events interact with the present, thus, acknowledging a potential to change history itself.

A Palimpsest of Self

We construct failed negotiations and view ourselves through a deficit lens of "should and could," positioning active roles as mothers against the naive parenting aspirations of our youth—the ephemeral "perfect working mother" we occasionally see in ourselves in a masterful moment and then apply as our standard of behavior in every moment thereafter—fuel for an inner narrative of ruthless critique. Family, friends, colleagues, and strangers remark on their astonishment of working mothers (more so than that of other caregivers) and working academics, of which we are both, who seem to navigate multiple schedules, temperaments, and responsibilities with ease. There is nothing easy about it. Yet, in a perplexing contradiction, this positive recognition from others continues to center our faults over our accomplishments, as we are often lauded as superheroes but are rarely offered help or leniency.

What follows is our offering of a duo-*currere* on how we have come to understand motherhood and, as such, our roles as mothers in society. Through this split text, we attempt to relive, without hierarchy or distinction, pivotal moments of our respective upbringings, highlighting how they exist in tandem. In doing so, we hope to explicate differences in our experiences as children, which informed our perceptions of required roles, expectations, and actions of motherhood.

Elissa	Whitney
I grew up in a Southern Baptist home as a pastor's daughter. To those familiar with white evangelical Christian culture, this sentence alone conveys much of my early experiences with and understanding of gender roles. Most of the assumptions these people would make would be correct. My upbringing was very conservative,	My understanding, knowledge, and expectations of motherhood are rooted deeply in my upbringing and the ways I experienced my Mother's maternal responsibility and role. Today, my Mother describes herself as a phenomenal father. That is to say, she proclaims that her limited

very white, very much about appearances, and even more about internalizing shame, especially for women, as a need for repentance, and, thereby, salvation.

In other ways, it wasn't as bad as one might expect. My father was one of the rare and radical Baptist ministers who believed women can and should teach and lead in the church, even to men, and encouraged me to learn and grow spiritually on my own. (Fortunately, that spiritual journey has led me very far indeed from my Baptist foundations, but I long ago learned to speak in the theological language that resonates with him, and I have convinced him to "trust God with my journey." He mostly does, as long as I strategically avoid certain troublesome topics.)

My Mother stayed at home to raise me and my brother, and she did all the household duties that came along with this role. My father was gone most of the time working at the church or on some associated project, and all of the work fell on her shoulders. I am only now beginning to realize what that must have meant for her. When he was home, he was a strict disciplinarian, but I always knew he loved me. We recited often, in a singsong refrain after being given instructions: "Obedience is: Doing what you're told to do, when you're told to do it, with a happy heart." I had a safe and sheltered childhood. I was at church all day on Sundays, attended every church event offered for kids throughout the week, and talked excitedly about my church and my Jesus to all my childhood friends.

I once bouth a Spice Girls CD, and my Mother referred me to a Christian counselor within the church to explain how precious women's bodies are to God and that we shouldn't celebrate exploiting ourselves. I understood and felt terrible for still enjoying singing along with my friends when my parents weren't around. According to any Southern Baptist, mine would have been the and instead describes her role as that of a financial provider and a poor nurturer. Defining her parental role in this way speaks volumes to the social influences and attachments on designated roles of binary parent figures.

Throughout my adolescence and early teens, my Mother was undoubtedly the most beautiful, feminine, and accomplished woman in the world. She was petite and thin, had light blue eyes, delicate mannerisms, and demanded the attention of all those present. She was a powerhouse of authority, owning her own business and filling her free time with activities that interested her. To me, she was the ideal of modern womanhood.

I, however, with my awkward, not yet fully developed sense of queer Otherness, however, failed to model any of her defining feminine characteristics. Instead, I presented myself as overly confident, had little interest in women's fashion, refused to follow feminine trends, and was generally self-sufficient— refusing the help of men or boys.

My Mother trusted and respected me as an autonomous human being. She rarely inquired about where I was or with whom I was spending time. My Mother never questioned my interest or involvement in school, with homework, or in education broadly. She allowed me the freedom to explore my physical place in the world through multiple DIY piercings and various rainbow-colored hair options.

As a Christmas present at age 13, she placed an orange peel up my right nostril to protect my septum while shoving a large diaper pin through the outside flesh of my nose; she quickly filled the new hole with an old earring

ideal upbringing, apart from my father's radical belief that I should take spiritual learning upon myself, which I'm sure they would contend has been my downfall toward my present state of feminist depravity.

For the most part, as a child, these gender roles seemed natural to me. It was never a problem to me that I was given the nurturing and household pretend toys while my brother played sports and collected Pokemon. My parents tried to put me in softball once, and I hated it. I sat in the outfield looking for ants and flowers. On one occasion, a ball miraculously landed right next to me and nearly knocked down the twig house I had built. I simply picked it up and leisurely walked it to the pitcher. That was my job right, get the ball to the pitcher? I couldn't understand why the parents were all yelling at me. That was my last childhood softball game. Nevertheless, I was routinely called a "tomboy" for reasons I still can't understand, perhaps simply because I liked being outside—creating, exploring, and getting messy.

My first real experiences that led me to the realization that the gender-based expectations placed on me were not at all natural came in adolescence when purity culture hit my world with full force, and I attempted wholeheartedly to supplant my identity with the "Proverbs 31 Woman"—imaginary superhero (even in the text, not a real person) who. with the help of a full staff, takes care of her husband, children, and the poor in her community, manages a vineyard, buys and sells land, keeps a strong and beautiful physique, wears only the finest clothes, trades internationally, and gives wise instruction, all while her husband sits around all day with the other men at the temple gate—somehow interpreted to mean that women's place is in the home while men work to support the family financially. and proclaimed my new nose piercing a success!

We held long conversations about future financial aspirations: which businesses I should start and how to best profit from them. She allowed my friends and my then-girlfriend to spend evenings with me in my bedroom. I recall only a few (less than 3) instances when my Mother lost her temper or disciplined me for my multiple teenage mistakes. She was a stellar adult who allowed me to live my life as I so desired.

By age 15, I was out as a Lesbian, in an egregiously inappropriate relationship with a woman well into her 20s, I had essentially dropped out of school, and I felt utterly hopeless. My Mother understood my struggles as yet another challenge to address—though the visibility of my undesirable actions countered the efforts to maintain her image as the ideal mother and businesswoman. It was then that her lacking maternal instincts, need to streamline all aspects of her life, and desire to present as "the complete package" culminated in a sharp shift of care.

Overnight I found myself with investigators questioning my then 1-year relationship with my girlfriend, enrolled in a continuing education program, and, most upsetting, was no longer welcome in my Mother's home. I was told I would live with my father, a man I rarely saw, and around whom I felt utterly awkward. I pleaded my case through tears, a profound lack of understanding, and the immediate contradictory life changes being thrust at me. I begged my Mother with all of my being to allow me to stay with her—while questioning the sudden shift to my prior freedom. She, however, did not sway, remaining steadfast in her decision. Without raising her voice and while maintaining her professional

growing up right alongside me, three years younger. I started to realize that something was wrong when none of these incredibly high standards were being applied to him as he reached the same age milestones. The expectations they held for the two of us in adolescence were so starkly different, I couldn't understand it. I knew this was supposed to make me feel "special" and "precious" to God, like I was told by my Spice Girls Interventionist, but it didn't feel that way at all.	"fatherly" demeanor, she stated the facts: this was happening, and I had no say in the matter. Shortly after, while living with my Father and Stepmother 10 minutes away from Mother's apartment, she announced that she, my older sister (18), and my younger brother were moving to Texas. I cannot recall if I was invited to join them, but I did not. Instead, I remained in California until after my 18th birthday.

Through each step along the path of mothering, we stumble away and (in)to each other as fellow mother academics. As our manifestations fail to adhere to guidebooks we once held, the radical, often uncomfortable transformation from audacious confidence to cautious scrutiny unites us in the daily struggle against and toward enlightened incompetence. For many, the implicit expectation and sometimes explicit demand to be present on Zoom with "cameras on" manifested a world for working and learning in which the etiquettes of "professionalism" are often mutually exclusive and, thereby, exclusionary. Whether due to repetitive quarantining after exposure to COVID-19, concerns about potential exposure, or simply an inability to find and afford suitable childcare, many working parents find themselves with children hemmed just outside of the virtual frame. With an expectation to remain visible, is it more professional to change a diaper, breastfeed a baby, or help a child navigate their virtual-school experience on-screen or to turn the camera off? If neither is permissible, the expectation must be that those, like ourselves, who care for children are not welcome to participate in working and learning at all.

Elaborating on Husserl's (1970) metaphor of the writing-table through a personal anecdote, Sarah Ahmed (2006) shares the frustrating impossibility of writing when children are present to illustrate the political economy of attention, wherein an uneven distribution of attention-time significantly affects who has the opportunity to write at all, as well as the objects of writing and time available for writing. Meaning that "for some, having time for writing, which means time to face the objects on which writing happens, becomes an orientation that is not available, given the ongoing labor of other attachments" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 547). In examining the process by which attention is distributed and particular orientations are achieved, Ahmed (2006) proposes a queer phenomenology that "faces the back" or "looks behind phenomenology" (p. 549). This queering directs attention away from the objects of the "world as it is given" or the "world which I am in" and toward "what that is around"—the objects that are relegated to the periphery, but which nevertheless are necessary for the "world which I am in" to exist (Ahmed, 2006, p. 545).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us suddenly became isolated, while others lost any refuge of time or space we once had for ourselves (Krueger, 2021). In this sense, various forms of personal and professional exposures are imposed on each of us: Zoom meetings at home, caring for children during work hours, disclosing underlying medical conditions and family circumstances to colleagues, asking our supervisors for accommodations, and many more. Conversely, some remain insulated from these

exposures almost entirely, capable of meticulously arranging their time, personal appearances, and work environments in ways that feel most presentable.

Elissa	**Whitney**
In planning for our growing family, my husband and I set aside funds to pay for full-time daycare—the full amount of my Graduate Assistantship stipend—and moved closer to both of our parents to open possibilities for the support I would need to attend evening classes, when childcare is otherwise unavailable. My second child was born in April of 2020, right at the onset of the two week shut-down intended to "flatten the curve." Suddenly, our daycare (at no reduction in cost, to retain staff) was frequently and unpredictably closed for 10 days at a time, and with a newborn and toddler at home, my plans to rely on grandparents, all designated at high-risk of death from the virus, were entirely void.	At the onset of COVID-19, I found myself at home with my two school-aged sons. As I worked to home-school them and complete the final semester of my Ph.D. coursework, I experienced a split between the professional academic life I had spent years building for myself and the ever-growing needs of my children, their schooling, and our overall social emotional well-being. How was I to "have it all" when I didn't have the time or support to attend to my most basic care? It was then that I experienced the shattering of my idealistic history and perceptions of motherhood with that of my reality/life as a mother.
We were mothers and graduate students before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was at this point that the disconnect between who we hoped to be as working mothers in academia diverged in insurmountable opposition with who we needed to be for our children, spouses, families, and even society as a whole. With no choice but to either abandon our academic endeavors to stay at home without any prospects for even our financial independence, much less intellectual fulfillment, or to fully integrate our mothering itself into our academic pursuits, we leaned heavily on each other for what support we could find to share, but we largely just engaged in a wide variety of unsustainable practices of placing ourselves last and neglecting our own basic needs. This has put our lives ever more starkly at odds with the feminist and de/anti-colonial ethic of our own work and continues to raise both ethical and practical questions about the aporia of our willingness to be complicit in our own exploitation for the sake of maintaining some representation on behalf of the institution that marginalized populations can ever expect to be given the support to succeed, or even the opportunity to "belong" in academia.	

The presence or absence of exposures serve important purposes throughout professional endeavors, causing either great ascendance or harm. These exposures vary by individual, reducing autonomy, increasing one's privacy, or shaping perceptions of equivalent exposures as either unprofessional or endearingly relatable per hierarchical and heteropatriarchal norms (Crenshaw, 1990). The image many of us have the privilege to project for the world through technological distance is achieved with utmost intention, designed to display only what we decide. However, often directly out of frame, and unavoidably visible for many, is the beautiful chaos of life. Although we are proud of all we have accomplished for ourselves and our families while subjected to these mutually-exclusive expectations and onto-epistemologically violent learning environments, we wonder what we have lost in the process. What could we have done, in our studies or for ourselves, had we not been bombarded with demands to place our "care" elsewhere?

Conjuring Our Utopia

The second step of *currere*, known as the progressive step, asks us to look freely into the future toward what has yet to happen. This step welcomes a free association of imagination to construct a utopian future to be present in the past, wherein we are not who we are in this present moment, we feel what will be missing, we know what we are seeking, and we see who we wish to be. A palimpsest of the self, inspired by *currere*, asserts that the past is now and the now is present, integrates a greater understanding of our present selves by envisioning a future utopia of mothering. The future is not already not yet, but rather, it already was. Understanding this process constructs the future, and as such, we must ask: What elements of the present will(not) sustain us tomorrow? In answering this question, there are quite a few embarrassingly obvious places to start. For example, in the provision of childcare for students and faculty who must attend or facilitate classes, which for graduate students occur often at night when daycares and schools are closed and when younger children and babies should be sleeping.

Without imaginative constraints or pragmatic burdens, we cultivate a future wherein equity ensures a collective balance of the self throughout individual pursuits of livelihood and joy—leaning into love by choosing to cultivate the self, whether through an academic venture, ambitious career, spiritual journey, or creative expression, which does not conflict with parenting. In this fantasized tomorrow, we are free to be ourselves and to follow the joys and interests that led us to academia. Our future selves do not question the reality of this freedom, nor do we calculate its value in terms of what it can produce for consumption or material wealth, for we already know, and perhaps have always known, that life is meant to be explored and enjoyed. We enjoy the mundane and the exciting responsibilities of parenting rather than scrutinizing possible failures, because we approach this as we approach all things—collectively, with contributions toward child-rearing having little to do with biological relationships or one's ability to procreate. We cultivate a life that allows us to love, parent, read, question, write, and teach with passion, gratitude, and joy.

Imposed Panopticon

The analytical stage, or third step, of *currere*, encourages examination of the past and future. Through this process, we gain an understanding of our past curricula and knowledge of mothering. By theoretically bracketing the past and the future, we allow space for subjective freedom wherein we might inquire about the temporal complexity of the current moment. We assert that mothering is a form of learned curriculum that we reinforce as parents and scholars.

Foucault's (1975/2007) *Discipline and Punish* describes Bentham's Panopticon prison, in which the behaviors of all inmates are controlled, not by the more traditional physically coercive tactics—impenetrable dungeon walls, chains, bars, locks, and heavily armed guardsmen—but rather by the psychological coercion accomplished via the complete visibility of each isolated individual. Great care is taken to ensure that no prisoner can ever know for certain whether or not he (or they) is (or are) being observed by administrators at any given moment, provoking paranoia that initiates self-monitoring, making guardsmen unnecessary. For some, the immediate shift to distance learning and teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic delineated a sense of employment freedom and untold possibilities to attend to their presumably neglected home lives. The illusions of such freedom, however, insidiously subverted and demanded an always perfect and always available employee.

Adding to these newly inequitable and exclusionary practices, as mothers, we were already struggling with an inability to separate our personal and professional lives.

From pumping breast milk in a public bathroom stall during a ten-minute class break to bringing children along when childcare falls through, we attempted the balancing act of always meeting our children's needs while minimizing their capacity for disruption. For many academics, who, by the standards of academia, are labeled Other, expectations to separate the personal self and the professional self have proven increasingly impossible amid the pandemic.

These experiences reinforce that as academics our roles as mothers are burdensome, something to negate or work around rather than something entirely compatible with, and even of great import to, academia. As scholars of education, this disconnect resonates especially deeply, as children, adolescents, and the developmental processes that impact them are the subjects of our studies. There is a very real risk inherent in this paradox that situates the resentment that builds to resist our circumstances either toward our own children or toward our academic pursuits. Designed to highlight and value specific ways of knowing and being, academic spaces exist and are reified by original design. Thus, the academy is little more than a curricular machine, attending to itself to maintain its own exclusionary criteria. The interrogation of mothering as a curriculum, similar to Patti Lather's (2012) concept of a "double(d) movement that uses and troubles a category simultaneously" (p. 73), makes way for "something else to come about" (p. 7). When we juxtapose the conflicts of mothering and curriculum in this way, they complicate one another by impairing and fracturing inherent expectations and ways of knowing. This disconnect positions our curriculum as mothers against our curriculum for mothering.

Fragile Fortitude

In the synthetical step of *currere*, we tune in acutely to our historical inner voice as we inquire about the present moment. In doing so, we encourage self-mobilization by attending to a public pedagogy of mothering. Opportunities to subjectively reexperience understandings of the past and present and the significance they have on us as mothers and academics reflected undeniable fortitude and fragility. In this space, we witness each other and ourselves bravely transforming, evolving, and emerging into stranger-selves we have yet to meet. Arguably more noticeable than our presumed ideal colleagues, we, as outlier Others, fail to fit not only the academic ideals imposed on us, but also our own superhuman expectations for ourselves, which we would try not to impose upon others. We contend, however, that radical counter-hegemonic academics, those who fail, or refuse, to meet limited expectations of professionalism or endless availability might apply a queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006) to challenge these professional exposures. The mothers of academia who demand to be seen and cared for with the same tenderness we afford to others must adopt a collective plan of resistance.

We must understand the relationship(s) between our exploitation as women, the curriculum of mothering, and our academic overexposure and exclusion as meticulously designed and maintained. Further, we must interrogate whether or not our heroic efforts to uphold our commitments to our families, our selves, and our intellectual purposes in institutions that only welcome the childless may implicate us as complicit in perpetuating our ongoing marginalization. In looking toward the transformative possibilities of fugitive forms of study, Leigh Patel (2021) recalls that, when W.E.B. Du Bois was once congratulated for being the first African American to earn three graduate degrees from Harvard, including a Ph.D., he famously responded, "The honor, I assure you, was Harvard's." Patel urges us to define ourselves by our relationships rather than our institutional affiliations and reminds us that, in a world where study is everywhere, "refusal opens space for the otherwise" (p. 161).

References

Ahmed, S. (2006). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *12*(4), 543–574.

Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299.

Foucault, M. (2007). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press. (Original work published 1975)

Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology* (D. Carr, Trans). Northwestern University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *The sex which is not one* (C. Porter & C. Burke, Trans.). Cornell University Press.

Lather, P. (2001). Postbook: Working the ruins of feminist ethnography. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *27*(1), 199–227.

Lather, P. (2012). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. Suny Press.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education*. Cambridge University Press.

Patel, L. (2021). *No study without struggle: Confronting settler colonialism in higher education*. Beacon Press.

Pinar, W. (1975). *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists*. McCutchan.

Pinar, W., & Grumet, M. R. (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Sawiki, J. (1991). *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, power, and the body*. Routledge.

Curriculum Reform: The Liminal Experience of In-service Teachers through *Currere*

By Heather McPherson
McGill University

Current education reform initiatives replace traditional, teacher-led instruction with student-centred pedagogies (Asghar et al., 2012; Barma, 2011). As noted in the scholarly literature, these reform initiatives involve sweeping structural changes that can only be successfully implemented when there is a sense of genuine collaboration between all stakeholders (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves, 2019). Successful reform implementation should include extensive in-service teacher training that encourages dialogue between teachers, administration, and school board personnel (Capps & Crawford, 2017; Lotter et al., 2017; Potvin & Dionne, 2007).

In Quebec, Canada, reform curricula emphasize student engagement with complex global problems that require cognitively demanding and creative real-world solutions. These innovative science curricula incorporate sophisticated teaching strategies focusing on inquiry and authentic problem-solving skills (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport [MELS] 2007). Teachers are urged to incorporate these pedagogies into their classrooms to facilitate students' ability to translate knowledge into action.

Too often, large-scale reforms fail because they focus on developing innovation rather than shifting school culture (Fullan, 2016). The implementation process is fraught with peril. For successful reform implementation, it is imperative that teachers' beliefs and dispositions towards the ideals of reform curricula are addressed (Melville et al., 2012; Ryder & Banner, 2013) and that teacher preparedness is adequately attended to at the school level (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec [MEQ], 2003). Teachers can find developing reform-based practices challenging, which is why the transition is inevitably characterized as a time of stress and discomfort (Stoll et al., 2006). Thus, teachers must have access to meaningful professional development (PD) activities if there is an expectation that teachers will engage with reform implementation.

Situating Myself in the Research

I have been a science teacher for 30 years. In 2007, the province of Québec, Canada, released the guidelines for reforming the educational system at the senior high school level. Teachers were encouraged to incorporate pedagogical strategies such as open-ended problems, research, and interdisciplinary projects (MELS, 2007). Delivering these sophisticated reform-based pedagogies required a paradigm shift for in-service teachers.

My reform implementation experiences left me with unresolved questions. I was dissatisfied with my capacity to deliver quality learning opportunities and was baffled by many of my colleagues' overwhelming resistance to the reform. I observed that teachers were bewildered when they realized they lacked the pedagogical knowledge to enact sophisticated reform pedagogies. This experience has informed my understanding of this *liminal space*—a time of transition described as ambiguous and indeterminate (Turner, 1967). In this paper, I envision the liminal space as the gap between traditional professional practices and reform education policies.

This paper explores the barriers that impede reform curriculum implementation by examining in-service teachers' struggles. Teachers' struggles to overcome resistant institutional discourses and the widespread opposition to systemic change were central

McPherson, H. (2022). Curriculum reform: The liminal experience of in-service teachers through *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 107–117.

to this work. Given the barriers I witnessed, I questioned and challenged the status quo, and I examined issues of educational stagnation. My research questions focus on the institutional barriers to curricular change, specifically, how do teachers navigate the gap between traditional and reform professional practices? This study explores curricula reform implementation amidst strong forces of opposition posed by institutional structures and discourses. Little literature examines teachers' voices about evolving professional practice and developing innovative reform-based pedagogies. This research can inform researchers, educators, school boards, and policymakers of the complex work teachers must undertake if they are to self-author as reform-based practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Turner (1967), I focus on transitioning from traditional teaching practices to reform-based practices. Turner (1967) described the cultural times of transition as a *betwixt and between* time, an ambiguous and indeterminate space that he referred to as *liminality*—the times in cultural cycles that are necessary harbingers of change. These liminal spaces are characterized by stress, emotional upheaval, opportunity, and growth. As teachers engage with learning and growth processes, they can develop a new identity within their professional community (Meyer & Land, 2005). Exploring the transition, or liminal space, that teachers inhabit as they navigate educational reform requires an examination of the bookends that structurally define the two boundaries of this space—reform-based pedagogies on one end and the actual enactment of these pedagogies on the other. Teachers and their struggles to develop reform-based identities are moving betwixt these dynamic and shifting forces. My objective in this study is to examine educational reform policies to gain insights into the liminal space teachers traverse as they transition from traditional to reform pedagogies.

Study Site, Methodology and Methods

This article draws on a subset of data from a more extensive study that examined how science teachers' praxis shifted through pedagogic work in a professional learning community (PLC). My position in this project was as a study participant and researcher. The dual act of participant/researcher gave me the necessary tools to study and interpret the complex relationships between the social and cultural structures and processes associated with education reform. I have included the voices of Guilia, a novice teacher in her second year of teaching; Liam, a teacher with 26 years of experience; and Vera, who taught for 15 years. Liam and I work at a large public school exceeding 1500 students. Vera teaches at a nearby public school of 1500 students, while Guilia teaches at a small public school with a population of fewer than 300 students. All schools are in bilingual suburban communities.

Teachers had diverse motivations for joining the PLC. They were interested in developing their professional practice, and many were enthusiastic about learning through collaboration with colleagues. The PLC meetings were held at one of the high schools for eight sessions for two to three hours per session. Afternoon meetings occurred on average once per month from October to May. The focus of the PLC meetings was on developing reform-based teaching practices.

Data collection included individual semi-structured interviews, video-recorded PLC meetings, and my reflexive journals. Participants were interviewed twice for 45-60 minutes. The first interviews occurred before the first PLC meeting, and the second interview followed the last PLC meeting. The interviews' focus was to gain an understanding of teachers' professional background, epistemological beliefs,

pedagogical practices, and tensions with reform policies and their enactment. PLC activities, interactions, and informal conversations were video recorded, and portions of the meetings were transcribed.

Transcripts and reflexive journals were organized into data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Items that arose among multiple participants were identified, developed into themes, and compared, defined, integrated, and reduced following constant comparative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I incorporated an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to generate a detailed thematic description and interpretation of the data set, identifying themes developed at a semantic level. The themes that emerged from the data corpus included teachers' beliefs regarding reform-based teaching and the implementation barriers teachers overcame as they transitioned to reform-based instruction.

Findings

In my findings, I have drawn on my reflexive journals and the ethnographic data focusing on three participants' voices. My interactions with teachers provided insights into our struggles and challenges in enacting the reform curriculum. As I navigated the in-between period of education reform policies to the actual implementation of these policies, I understood how my reaction to the liminal experience shaped me professionally and personally. Throughout the reform experience, my professional identity was challenged as I struggled in isolation to make sense of the reform curricula. I had to find my voice, to assert agency, since this journey involved difficult personal and professional conflicts. The experience, the passage from old to new pedagogies, has thus been both demanding and rewarding. The paradigm shift is my story, and it is a story that I share with many in-service teachers as they endeavour to implement very new teaching practices.

My self-narrative documents my experiences with reform policy implementation. I have drawn on Pinar's four moments of *currere*, including the *regressive moment* in which a writer examines the past to elicit memory; the *progressive step*, where the writer anticipates possible outcomes of what could be; the *analytical stage* where the author analyzes the past and present; and the *synthetical moment* where the researcher examines the present to understand the field of study and the researcher's presence within the study (Pinar & Grumet, 2014; Strong-Wilson, 2017). Thus, I have documented my journey of understanding the reform curricula by following the tenets of *currere.*

As I examined my experiences with curriculum reform, it seemed that a complex, seemingly unsolvable problem bound me. I was stuck in a quagmire of archaic pedagogy, lacking the skills that could set me free to teach the reform curriculum as envisioned. The intricate problem of reform implementation is like a Gordian knot, an elaborate knot with a hidden end that has a simple solution to its untangling (Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022). Understanding how to untie or cut through the Gordian knot of curriculum reform was partly made possible by exploring my dispositions and beliefs about the curriculum reform process.

Looking Back: Examination of the Knot that is Curriculum Reform

The first moment of *currere* is eliciting memory by looking back to capture what was (Pinar, 2015). In my effort to understand the complexities of the seemingly unsolvable riddle of the Gordian knot that is curriculum reform, I turned back the clock, remembering the time before the reform was introduced. Then, it seemed that every high school course I taught, every day, month, and year, followed a predictable and

comfortable rhythm. I began teaching in 1989. The teaching landscape at that time seemed to have changed little from when I was a high school student in the 1970s. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, the daily events of teaching—the iterative and predictable structures of lecturing, following a textbook from day one to the end of the school year, procedural labs, testing, the ever-recursive loop—ceased to make sense. Everything came to a screeching halt. What happens then when the ordered structures of one's professional life implode?

In 2007, educational reform curricula were introduced. The new curricula structures presented innovative teaching methods. Aware of the looming educational changes, I actively sought PD activities that would facilitate my ability to teach the reform curriculum effectively. Over the first five years of the reform implementation, I participated in numerous yearlong PD initiatives and developed an emerging understanding of the complexities of the new curricula. Furthermore, my school board introduced the reform curricula during half and full-day implementation sessions dedicated to helping teachers orient themselves within the new curriculum. I remember one particularly contentious meeting when a school board consultant attempted to describe competency development and evaluation. The room erupted—teachers were hostile, angry, and resistant. I remember feeling bewildered. I did not understand competency, and my head exploded when we were told that evaluation should focus on "the most recent snapshot of the student at that point in their journey throughout the year" (Heather, reflexive journal) rather than on a cumulative average. My memory of the reform implementation was consistent with Vera, an experienced teacher who said that the Ministry of Education "had no resources available. They did not have enough training and preparation for the teachers to start implementing. They kind of just said, well, guess what you're doing this next year. And I still don't know." Vera and the literature noted there was limited monetary and expertise resources for reform implementation (Potvin & Dionne, 2007). Furthermore, the top-down implementation process, from Ministry to the school board to consultants, and finally to teachers, resulted in, as Vera said, mixed, incomplete, and confusing messaging.

However, despite the myriad of compulsory PD sessions, teachers in my jurisdiction were, for the most part, resistant to reform implementation. Fourteen years post-implementation, teacher conversations in our staff room include the hope that the reform will "go away" (Heather, reflexive journal). Additionally, to date, there have been no school board PD opportunities that focused on developing teachers' pedagogy.

My struggles during the transition period of curriculum reform were exacerbated by the merger of my high school with another high school in the same neighbourhood. The teachers in my high school had made progress with teaching the reform. However, the school we merged with was larger, and they had limited experience teaching the reform. As Liam noted: "The schools merged two years ago. We just didn't do that [the reform]. We were more traditional." Following the merger, the teachers in my department followed more traditional teaching practices, leaving me isolated, with aspirations of becoming a reform-based teacher. I plodded along, working to develop my professional practice.

During the two years following the school merger, I felt like my professional identity was constantly attacked. The teachers in my department felt that everyone in the department should follow the same teaching trajectory—teaching the textbook chapter-by-chapter, student evaluations based on a straight average rather than the most recent snapshot. My colleagues told me, clearly and with no ambiguity, that collectively we had to teach the same topics in the same order. All teachers' evaluation ponderations had to align. Thus, I was told that my practices had to conform to the rest of the

department. I refused. In our jurisdiction, the education act "allows teachers to choose their pedagogical approaches according to the situation, the nature of the learning to be accomplished" (MEQ, 2005, p. 8). Given no choice, the other teachers grudgingly left me alone to pursue my professional vision. Looking back on this time, I can confidently say that this was the most challenging three years of my 30-year teaching career.

Mercifully, the opportunity arose whereby I could initiate and facilitate a PLC. Establishing the PLC, collaborating and working with eight teachers, provided a vehicle for teachers to work and learn within a community of peers. Together, we co-developed our understanding and enactment of reform pedagogies. Experienced, mid-career, and novice teachers worked collaboratively to master these pedagogies in a social learning environment. The PLC participants were tangled up in a messy transition between safe, traditional teaching practices and the reform pedagogies that were new, uncomfortable, and not fully understood. We would not go back, and thus, we struggled to move forward.

The tension many teachers experienced when the reform was introduced is captured in the PLC meeting focused on student competency and competency development. The following excerpt occurred between Vera and me as we shared our reflections about reform implementation:

Vera: When the reform came about, I went to every workshop, every talk. You name it. I signed up for it, and not one person gave me straight answers. I remember going to a conference about evaluation and assessment. I'm like, "Great. What can you tell me about assessment?" "Oh, well, we don't know yet." How are we supposed to implement this program if you can't tell us how we're supposed to evaluate and assess? I found the whole thing to be frustrating.

Heather: I don't think they've ever come back to fill in the gaps in any conversation. So, we got this blank when we learned that they couldn't answer anything, but they've also never revisited it.

Vera: No, they just backpedalled. For implementation, they had no resources available. They did not have enough training and preparation to start implementing. They kind of just said, well, guess what you're doing next year? And I still don't know.

The excerpt above voices teachers' frustrations, anxieties, and professionalism. Teachers' perceptions about reform implementation were that the process was a mistake, there was a lack of funding, and overall, resources were limited. However, the PLC provided an opportunity to work with others to untangle and make sense of the teaching practices outlined in the provincial curricula.

Beyond the opportunity to work together as a learning community, the PLC created a structure for teachers to engage in critical conversations about school reform. Together, we examined our shared experiences with reform implementation. Thus, the PLC operated somewhat like slicing through a Gordian Knot. Teachers were confronted with a tangled mess of confused messaging, and the tangle was left knotted and unresolved for more than ten years. The PLC provided a way forward, a relatively simple solution to detangling the message. Together, teachers collectively negotiated a cohesive understanding of reform-based teaching. The "betwixt and between" position (Turner, 1967) that comes with change was mitigated when teachers collectively navigated the space from traditional to reform-based praxis. This journey was characterized by stress, emotional resistance, and opportunity.

Looking Forward: Struggling to Untie the Knot that is Curriculum Reform

Where would I like to be, in the future, as a teacher? In the PLC, we discussed problems with teaching as a profession. Liam asked, "would you undergo surgery with a doctor who is using the surgical techniques of 1960?" Clearly, the answer is no. Why then does it seem so challenging to move the teaching profession forward? What prevents teachers from seeking to enact innovative pedagogies? How do we untie the seemingly unknottable Gordian knot of reforming teachers' practice?

Critical mass. What is the minimum number of teachers required to effect change? If the teaching landscape is to change, in-service teachers need access to PD that unfolds over extended periods. PD needs to provide teachers with opportunities to experiment with new pedagogies in a supportive environment. Furthermore, PD should provide participants with opportunities to reflect and dialogue. As Bakhtin (1984) wrote, "I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)" (p. 287). We can find a route across the quagmire through reflection and working with others, aligning the curriculum policies with our professional practices. Furthermore, working in a diverse community of practitioners gave novice teachers the time to reflect, plan and work with experienced teachers. They needed supportive structures to experiment with innovative teaching methods learned at university, moving beyond the status quo of safe, traditional teaching practices.

Following Pinar's (2015) suggestion, I have looked forward and thought of the work needed to move the reform educational experience forward. Untangling the messy realities of reform implementation calls on the various stakeholders—universities, school boards, and schools—to adequately develop the primary actors in this drama. Teachers. Be they experienced, novice or pre-service teachers, PD is essential if the broader educational community is to resolve the reform implementation problem.

Analysis of the PLC Experience: How to Cut Through the Gordian Knot

I feel deep frustration as I recall the novice teachers' narratives about the induction experience. How to end the cycle of novice teachers struggling in isolation? The literature suggests that new teachers leave the profession partly because they are "generally woefully unprepared" to deal with issues related to classroom management, unmotivated students, and a general absence of supportive structures (Karsenti, 2015, para. 3). In Karsenti's (2015) study, it was evident that novice teachers needed support. Furthermore, they were not receiving the support that was undoubtedly required. That novice teachers remain in the teaching profession because of individual effort, long hours, grit, and determination in the face of difficulties is a testament to their commitment to teaching. However, their stress and sense of isolation speak to systemic failures (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). During their induction years, more attention should be given to novice teachers to promote their professional integration into the teaching profession.

Working in a PLC provided the necessary support for five novice teachers. All participating teachers, but most significantly the novice teachers, developed their professional repertoires while reducing the sense of isolation that is an everyday reality for many classroom teachers (Hord, 2008). Guilia summarized this experience in her third reflexive memo: "Being able to converse with other adults is refreshing!" Guilia's observation is consistent with Lave and Wenger (1991), who assert that learning is a culturally mediated, inherently social experience. The PLC allowed participants to engage with a curriculum focused on developing abilities to enact the reform curricula.

My second response to where I find myself now is my feeling of regeneration. I found that collegial support helped cut through the tangle associated with a school merger, working in isolation and the predominantly traditional vision of teaching at my school. As I examined my past and present experiences with reform implementation, I appreciated the emancipatory power of a collaborative PD model. Together, my colleagues and I were able to create a space open to experimentation as we supported each other in realizing our professional vision. The fabric of institutional life (Pinar, 2015) became more satisfying because of the PLC experience. The PLC participants are no longer struggling, feeling oppressed, and isolated.

Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), the beliefs of a social group can exclude an individual from participation in social spaces if their "sense of one's place" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471) does not adhere to the established laws or norms of the social world at play. As I rejected the models of teaching that my community endorsed, my subsequent exclusion from the teaching community was not surprising. My refusal to accept the school norms left me alone and isolated. I struggled to navigate the dominant discourses of my department. I became more conscious of the nuanced portions of the reform curricula that celebrated teachers' right to use their professional judgement to provide a learning environment informed by high-quality teaching.

At the outset of this liminal experience, I was overwhelmed, caught between what I hoped to accomplish professionally and what the dominant school discourses would permit. The collective goal of my department was to maintain the status quo at all costs. However, my professional vision focused on implementing the reform. The liminal experience, the struggle for professional growth, allowed me to transform my professional practices as I incorporated new teaching models into my daily routines. Working together in a community created an interdependence that generated a unified voice where collectively, we had the strength to assert our professional identities that integrated elements of a reform-based praxis.

Pinar (2015) asks, "How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both" (p. 78)? In the present, in the here and now, I find myself wandering as I negotiate this liminal space. I can see the goal post, but the goal post is sometimes shrouded in a mist. Seeing the future through the mist and the fog means finding the courage to claim what is possible. Working with teachers to traverse the liminal space between policy and practice could make this possible.

Synthesis: The Gordian Knot Untangled

How has the PLC experience transformed my identity? I have begun to conceptualize a path moving beyond the miasma of departmental roadblocks, crossing the liminal space, mooring safely on the other side. When I initiated this study, I began with my preoccupation with the reform curriculum and its associated practice. Wanting more professionally meant that I had to relearn how to teach. How was I to do this? In an optimistic moment, I thought that perhaps other teachers were similarly positioned—asking questions and wanting more. Thus, the PLC journey began. Beginning small, with baby steps, together, we developed our professional practice. We studied, laughed, and wrung our hands, sharing our emerging reform-based pedagogies.

The PLC experience seemed like a small thing—16 hours, eight working sessions. However, the PLC work made an immeasurable difference to the novice teachers. They completed the year feeling validated and optimistic. In our first meeting, they spoke of fear, stress, and exhaustion. The feelings of isolation were replaced with supportive friendships that show signs of enduring. The sense of trust and camaraderie created a space where the nine teachers could learn and enact reform-based pedagogies in their

professional repertoires with the aim of improving student engagement and achievement. This study explored the teachers' collective journeys of collaborative learning and teaching.

Final Reflections

As the year-long PLC played out, I mused over what was gained. Personally, of course, I developed confidence as a reform teacher. Equally important was the opportunity to work, learn, and develop professionally with like-minded colleagues. The lessons shared, the skills gained, and the laughter furnished a panacea that helped me re-establish and elevate my professional identity. My professional practices continue to flourish because the culture of friendship and support was an intrinsic aspect of the PLC. On another level, this self-study has provided insights into acts of resistance. Working within a PLC gave me the courage to slip beyond institutional pressures to conform. I have found my voice, and I am confident and certain that my professional vision has value. I believe the time will come when reform-based pedagogies will be commonplace in more classrooms.

On a personal note, working and learning in the PLC was a transformational experience. My professional practices developed, as did the practices of the eight participants. The journey to develop reform-based pedagogies was, in many ways, a rite of passage. The eight teachers and I had to critically examine our professional practices. First, we deconstructed our pre-reform practice, acknowledging that maintaining safe traditional pedagogies was tantamount to remaining stuck in a quagmire. As we laboured to develop new teaching methods, we began the work of untangling the Gordian knot of curriculum reform.

The process of enacting reform practices involved struggle, confusion, and disorientation. During this liminal time, the PLC teachers explored the puzzle of the Gordian knot. Positioned between pre-reform and reform professional praxis, our task became one of collectively resolving the tangle created by the misalignment of the QEP curriculum policies and our daily practice. Through our joint pedagogic work, we, the nine science teachers in this study, simultaneously transformed our practice as we were transformed by untangling the curricular knot. The journey to find release from the quagmire was hard work, characterized by frustration and, at times, a sense of being adrift, alone in a liminal space. The act of breaking free and solving the riddle of the Gordian knot provided teachers with the necessary foundation to reconstruct their vision of teaching the QEP as reform-based practitioners.

Today, the PLC members are no longer pre-reform teachers. The novice teachers leveraged the necessary support that gave them confidence to continue the work that began during their pre-service experiences at university. In contrast, the experienced teachers are evolving into reform-based practitioners. Today, four of the PLC participants continue to develop reform-based pedagogies as they work on another reform-based PLC project. Three participants are doing graduate work, and one participant continues to experiment and discuss his progress outside the PLC experience. My journey to elevate my practice continues in my roles as teacher educator, researcher, and high school teacher.

Like untying a Gordian knot, curriculum reform is a complex process. At the crux of the problem is teachers' need for high-quality PD. Reform implementation involves a change in classroom practices, which requires that teachers have the necessary support to develop new ways of teaching. Breaking down institutional barriers to empower teachers on this liminal journey is essential. Disrupting the status quo is an intricate task,

a tangle that needs to be untied. In this study, the solution was not unduly complicated, and the knot was neatly sliced as teachers engaged in a community of practice.

Teachers need support and access to high-quality PD opportunities that improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, leading to observable and measurable pedagogical improvements to elevate student learning (Thompson & Goe, 2009). PD that incorporated practical teaching tools and content knowledge aligned with the reform curriculum could have promoted a lasting change in teacher practice. Government documents clearly articulated what reform implementation would require—energy, expertise, and determination (MEQ, 2001). Although there was a broad understanding that in-service teacher training was a fundamental requirement for successful reform implementation, this prerequisite was sadly neglected since the funding and expertise failed to materialize, inevitably hampering teacher preparedness (Henchey, 1999; Potvin & Dionne, 2007). PD opportunities were scarce as budget constraints, and "a genuine culture of implementation did not seem to exist" (Potvin & Dionne, 2007, p. 394). Thus, teachers were unprepared and insufficiently informed to implement the reform curricula (MEQ, 2003; Potvin & Dionne, 2007). Although we are now fourteen years post-implementation, many in-service teachers in my jurisdiction have not had access to meaningful PD that focuses on reform pedagogies.

Effective teacher learning can improve teacher practice. This research studied how teachers engage, learn, and enact useful and practical structures and processes that facilitate exemplary teaching practices. Accordingly, this research will benefit researchers, educators, policymakers, and school boards on implementation barriers to curriculum reform. The literature indicates that, after two decades of educational scholarship and policy efforts, teacher practices continue to rely on traditional teacher-centred pedagogies in the classroom (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves, 2019). This study examined the challenges faced by teachers as they work to develop reform-based pedagogies.

References

Asghar, A., Ellington, R., Rice, E., Johnson, F., & Prime, G. M. (2012). Supporting STEM education in secondary science contexts. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, *6*(2), 84–125. https://doi.org/10.7771/1541-5015.1349

Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems in Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans. & Ed.). University of Minnesota Press.

Barma, S. (2011). A sociocultural reading of reform in science teaching in a secondary biology class. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *6*(3), 635–661. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-011-9315-9

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Capps, D. K., & Crawford, B. A. (2017). Inquiry-based instruction and teaching about nature of science: Are they happening? *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *24*(3), 497–526. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10972-012-9314-z

Cochran-Smith, M., McQuillan, P., Mitchell, K., Terrell, D. G., Barnatt, J., D'Souza, L., Jong, C., Shakman, K., Lam, K., & Gleeson, A. M. (2016). A longitudinal study of teaching practice and early career decisions: A cautionary tale. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(5), 844–880. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211431006

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE.

Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2022, November 6). Gordian knot. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gordian-knot

Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teacher's College Press.

Hargreaves, A. (2019). Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects. *Teachers and Teaching*, *25*(5), 603–621. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1639499

Henchey, N. (1999). The new curriculum reform: What does it really mean? *McGill Journal of Education*, *34*(3), 227–242.

Hord, S. (2008). Evolution of the professional learning community: Revolutionary concept is based on intentional collegial learning. *Journal of Staff Development*, *29*(3), 10–13.

Karsenti, T. P. (2015). *Analyse des facteurs explicatifs et des pistes de solution au phénomène du décrochage chez les nouveaux enseignants, et de son impact sur la réussite scolaire des élèves* [*Analysis of the explanatory factors and possible solutions to the dropout phenomenon among new teachers, and its impact on the academic success of students*]. https://frq.gouv.qc.ca/histoire-et-rapport/analyse-des-facteurs-explicatifs-et-des-pistes-de-solution-au-phenomene-du-decrochage-chez-les-nouveaux-enseignants-et-de-son-impact-sur-la-reussite-scolaire-des-eleves/

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lotter, C., Singer, J., & Godley, J. (2017). The influence of repeated teaching and reflection on pre-service teachers' views of inquiry and nature of science. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *20*(6), 553–582. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10972-009-9144-9

Melville, W., Bartley, A., & Weinburgh, M. (2012). Change forces: Implementing change in a secondary school for the common good. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, *133*, 1–26. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ971064.pdf

Meyer, J. H. F., & Land, R. (2005). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher Education*, *49*(3), 373–388. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6779-5

Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). (2007). *Quebec education program. Chapter 6: Science and technology*. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PFEQ/6c_QEP_ScienceTechno.pdf

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ). (2001). *Policy environment for the implementation of school reform*. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/autres/organismes/CELA_incidence-reforme_a.pdf

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ). (2003). *Profile of the teacher as keystone in secondary reform implementation*. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/autres/organismes/CELA_profil-enseignants_a.pdf

Ministère de l'Éducation du Quebec (MEQ). (2005). *The education reform: The changes under way*. http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs54241

Pinar, W. F. (2015). *Educational experience as lived*. Routledge.

Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. R. (2014). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Educator's International Press.

Potvin, P., & Dionne, E. (2007). Realities and challenges of educational reform in the province of Québec: Exploratory research on teaching science and technology. *McGill Journal of Education*, *42*(3), 393–410.

Ryder, J., & Banner, I. (2013). School teachers' experiences of science curriculum reform. *International Journal of Science Education*, *35*(3), 490–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2012.665195

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, *7*(4), 221–258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8

Strong-Wilson, T. (2017). Following one's nose in reading W. G. Sebald allegorically: *Currere* and invisible subjects. *Educational Theory*, *67*(2), 153–171. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12232

Thompson, M., & Goe, L. (2009). *Models for effective and scalable teacher professional development*. Educational Testing Service. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505574.pdf

Turner, V. (1967). Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites de passage. In *The forest of symbols* (pp. 93–111). Cornell University Press.

Conceptualizing Art Integration Through *Currere*

By Stephanie Harvey Danker
Miami University
& R. Darden Bradshaw
University of Dayton

Art integration toward social justice guides our teaching philosophies and practices. Prior to transitioning into higher education, we were both middle school art teachers where content integration and collaboration with colleagues was part of our daily teaching practice. For Stephanie Danker, art integration was a part of her preservice teacher preparation through *Art Across the Curriculum*, a course she now teaches at Miami University; it changed her perception of what teaching can be, opening up concepts of art education, and forced her to stop seeing education as siloed. It fostered more relevant artmaking and exposed new ways to communicate through art. Darden Bradshaw, on the other hand, found herself falling into art integration as a new middle school teacher. Her preservice teacher preparation program had no formal training for art integration; yet her experience as an artist meant easily seeing the connections between and among content areas in K-12 settings. Art integration opened up spaces for students to come to their learning in meaningful ways while shifting the typical experience of an entire class of students producing artworks that all looked the same.

Beyond the walls of our classrooms, art integration prompted new experiences with collaboration as we found ourselves working closely with folks from other disciplines and areas of study. It was exciting and enriching and required a tremendous amount of listening, negotiation, and open-mindedness. These skills were not addressed in the teacher preparation programs from which we graduated. New to higher education, we individually built art integration partnerships within our local communities. We also sought out research collaborations with colleagues from other universities based on their approaches and writings about art integration. Now, six years later, our discourse has led us down various paths. In the last year and a half, one of those paths has been *currere*. We have relished *currere* personally. Professionally, it has led us to awareness of moments of tension impacting our teaching practices in which we have privileged community partner voices over those of our students. That tension, and our attempts to resolve it, are the basis of this paper. Through our reflective practice, we have identified three concepts in which we use *currere* in relationship to art integration: how *currere* intersects with conceptions of education, *currere* as a means of moving toward reciprocity in community, and how moments of unlearning can deepen pedagogical practice.

Currere Intersecting with Concepts of Education: Art Integration in Place

One of the aspects of *currere* that draws us to it is the manner in which it allows us to reflect upon the curriculum from which we arise (Pinar, 1975). In the act of examining our own teaching practice, the underlying philosophical, ideological, and cultural beliefs we associate, either implicitly or explicitly, with teaching and education, and the way those beliefs manifest in our actions and words as teachers of future teachers, we come to more fully understand the "experience of our lives" (Pinar & Grummet, 1976, p. 18). With understanding have arisen moments of disquiet.

Danker, S. H., & Bradshaw, R. D. (2022). Conceptualizing art integration through *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 118–127.

We recognized a common trap within the field of education: the desire to define concepts and ideas so rigidly that other ideas are excluded. In fact, in 2019 while conducting a survey of Ohio teacher preparation programs to discover how art integration was being included in higher education curricula, we found ourselves falling into that trap. As we analyzed the data collected, we saw that *art integration* was not a universally held concept. How do diverse interpretations of the words "art" and "integration" inform the way future art teachers are educated? Do we need to share definitions for such education to be effective? As we started paying closer attention to how we, Stephanie and Darden, were thinking, communicating, and verbalizing what *art integration* looked like in our worlds and what we meant by using those terms individually and collectively, we found ourselves recognizing that how one perceives art integration is context driven. Therefore, this desire to counteract defining and labeling the work we were doing, and to understand how we arrived at our understanding(s) of art integration led us to individual *currere* investigations addressing the question, "How did I come to know art integration?"

Newly drawn to the *currere* process in 2020, we attended the *Currere Exchange* in summer 2021. We were excited to use this method to further investigate our question. Our *currere* processes and the methods we employed to answer the question were very different. In fact, we found ourselves, much like the folks we had surveyed the year before, moving further away from any semblance of commonality. At first, we were deterred. Engaging in deeper conversations and reflecting on some of what we had heard from *Currere Exchange* presenters, we sought to re-present, to share with each other and clarify our beliefs about what art integration is and can be. This led to an acknowledgement that art integration does not fit into a box or universal definition; art integration can, and should, be a multiplicity.

Art Integration

In fact, the act of trying to not categorize, define, and limit art integration for the purpose of conveying a definition to others created spaces for us to entertain questions about which prior conceptions or unexamined/under-examined ideas about art education and art integration our students, emerging art teachers, might hold as they arrive in our classes. Elliot Eisner (2004) in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* encourages educators to consider the beliefs that underlie teaching. He argues, we teach as we have been taught unless we make a conscious choice to do otherwise. And educators often repeat and re-teach or reinscribe that which we have been taught. In the same way that much of western U.S. culture is steeped in heteronormative, cis-gendered, able-bodied conceptions of whiteness, so too are concepts and beliefs about art education. What we teach and what it means to be a teacher are mired in the experience of being learners in American classrooms, institutions founded in and through which White supremacy has been suffused (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021).

Art integration theory and practice take many forms within education and art education. Integrating art can support and deepen a learners' understanding (Brioullette, 2019; Marshall & Donahue, 2014), empower school leaders and build student knowledge (Diaz & McKenna, 2017) while serving as a "third space" for learning (Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Marshall 2005, 2019). Others see art integration as a method for teaching creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (Goldberg, 2012) or connecting different bodies of knowledge and disciplinary realms of study (Krug & Cohen Evron, 2000; Parsons, 2004) dismantling silos in education. More importantly, for us, the boundaries

of art education expand with art integration; educators and learners can consider their positions in the world and become activists in working toward change. Looking at, creating, responding, and reflecting through artmaking enlarges understanding—we find our way in the confusing world in which we live. These are among the reasons we are drawn to art integration. In addition to being drawn to art integration, we have found that the process of integrating the local into educational activities, bringing together teachers, students, and community, makes learning dynamic for all stakeholders (Smith & Sobel, 2010).

Recognizing Content of Place: Context in Community

Through a place-based approach, art education becomes a tool to explore the places people live, thinking globally while creating and discussing art in a more local context (Danker, 2018; Lai & Ball, 2002). Place-based art education provides opportunities for multidisciplinary educators (formal and informal) to come together to create powerful experiences for students and community members through bringing self and community into dialogue with place (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Inwood, 2008). It should be noted that, though we are entering place-based work through the lens of art education, the inherent multidisciplinary nature of the approach can be initiated from other disciplines.

Schools in general, and our institutions in particular, are connected to specific geographic and cultural places. They are enmeshed in cycles of reinscribing and reinforcing ideas and beliefs about education, racism, whiteness, and privilege. These institutions, like all institutions, exist in communities and places that are rife with challenges. So, then, we ask ourselves: are we contributing to these historically problematic conceptions in the way we prepare preservice teachers? Are we taking action toward dismantling the system or becoming overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenge and mired in white guilt? Rather than ignore the question, we advocate an art integration through which, in exploring the issues right around us that directly impact our students, our communities, and ourselves, art becomes a tool to foster transformation and serve as the foundation for identifying the question(s) to address together, collaboratively, and in conjunction with other disciplinary experts and community partners.

Establishing Community: Examples of Unlearning

Working in community can lead to (awareness of) power dynamics and misconceptions that exist among stakeholders. We each approach community partnerships differently. Primarily these distinctions stem from gaps we have identified in our curricula and context of our communities. Partnerships have also been formed around serendipitous moments and curiosities that have been aroused. Below each of us discuss one place-based art integration partnership or model directly connected to our teaching. We tease out moments of unlearning that connect to the work.

Stephanie has been collaborating with educators at the Myaamia Center[1] (Miami University) since 2017 to co-create and implement art-integrated curriculum in the local community with her preservice art education students about aspects of Myaamia culture that Myaamia educators identify (Bergmark & Danker, 2022; Danker, 2020). As of December 2021, close to 1000 elementary school students in Oxford and Cincinnati, Ohio, have been taught the two-part lessons. The following moment captures one of the first interactions, prior to creating their partnership involving preservice students.

> *Stephanie Danker: During my research leave in spring 2017, I recognized a gap in our preservice preparation program for art education in teaching about art of*

cultures that are not one's own. I strived to make connections with the Myaamia Center. I called a meeting with several Myaamia Center educators and leaders to propose my idea of hosting a Native American artist symposium in coordination with the Myaamiaki Conference.[2] *The Director of Education respectfully told me, "you cannot determine who our artists are, that comes from within our community." Tears started streaming down my face in the middle of the meeting. I was so embarrassed. I had been so excited about my potential role in organizing. I could not believe I had been so naive to think that I could come in as an outsider and coordinate a cultural event for a community, without established relationships. It was a moment of unlearning that has transformed me as a collaborator, community partner and educator. I continue to process it.*

Darden's five-year partnership with a Dayton Public middle school came about through the former principal's hope that, by connecting 8th graders with the University of Dayton, students might envision themselves as a future part of that higher education community. Her new, recent integration work around Paul Laurence Dunbar stemmed from an interest sparked by a colleagues' research, as well as too many moments encountering people who had considerable knowledge of the Wright Brothers but not even a passing awareness of their contemporary Dunbar. Dunbar was among the first African American authors to gain national recognition, son of Dayton, and the first African American to graduate in Dayton schools.

Darden Bradshaw: My family and I moved to Dayton in fall 2013. We were excited to visit historic sites and local places that connected to history—including many tied to engineer Charles F. Kettering, who invented the cash register and the electric starter, as well as the Wright Brothers, whose bicycle shop was founded here. I had been to Kitty Hawk, NC, and was surprised to learn that NC's claim to being the home of flight was hotly contested in the Dayton region. About the same time, a colleague mentioned her research focus on Paul Laurence Dunbar. I was unfamiliar with him and his work. And, for a variety of reasons, I mostly remained that way for the next six years. I knew his name and that he had been a local African American author. However, as my time in Dayton grew, more and more I encountered others—middle school students, university students, colleagues, and people from the Dayton area—who, like me, knew more than a little about the Wright Brothers, but had little to no knowledge of Dunbar. Was our lack of awareness informed by systemic racism? As I delved into learning more about the life, works, and history of Paul Laurence Dunbar, I found myself fascinated by him and chagrined to realize how overlooked he has been, primarily in education. I came to the conclusion that yes—racism—both institutional racism and my own internalized privilege of White people (which is a direct result of racism) were at play.

We all operate with and engage in the world through mental models. Evident in the examples above, these may be outdated, ineffective, or just incorrect leading to moments of dissonance. The concept of unlearning, often seen in contrast to notions of learning, invites us to choose an alternative paradigm and see the previous models we used as one possibility, but not the only way. Unlearning shifts knowledge acquisition from a linear, often transactional model to a more rhizomatic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in which a fluid network of understandings, questions, and reflections form an

interconnected web. For some theorists, unlearning is giving up knowledge of behaviors without judging the knowledge of behaviors being unlearned (Hislop, et al, 2014). Jayarathne and Schuwirth (2021) conceptualize unlearning as "a metacognitive process" in which someone knowingly sets aside or relinquishes knowledge, beliefs, or behaviors and, importantly, "consciously chooses not to continue using them" (p. 106).

We espouse MacDonald's (2002) concept of transformative unlearning. In this cognitive process we reflect upon and recognize that the old mental model is no longer relevant or effective. Having given it up, one then works to find or create a new model that better achieves one's goals or aligns with one's values and beliefs and then, most importantly, continually works to ingrain the new model through practice. This cognitive process is not forgetting (Jayarathne & Schuwirth, 2021). Instead, it is a deliberate, conscious process—an intentional act that must be repeated. This is particularly important as humans have a tendency to fall back on old patterns because we have habituated them, regardless of our intention.

When one recognizes that they have had a moment of unlearning, it can be important to be gentle with oneself. We are always (un)learning. We seek out the history behind our behaviors and actions that led to the moments of naivete and (un)learning. This is another way that *currere* can be helpful. We continue to recognize the way our individual history and experiences impact the choices we make. We have found it beneficial to stay with the discomfort and not back away. Emerging teachers, who lack experience, may not be prepared for a moment of (un)learning if they do not have a support system of peers and mentors in place.

Sustaining Community

In moments of unlearning there are various nuances and challenges in sustaining community partnerships. We are constantly making choices based on how a program unfolds; each iteration is unique. As facilitators and liaisons, engaged in art integration, we make choices for our students and community partners, including in what we are willing to invest. There are inherent tensions we must negotiate to ensure reciprocity while bridging our curriculum, the community partnership, and learning outcomes for students. These include goals set by the community partners, the learning experiences, and the boundaries inherent in the academic semester. The partners rely on us for facilitating an outcome that effectively meets their schedules, objectives, and/or needs. Under our guidance, students often deliver the content and implement the experience in the community (e.g., teaching fourth and sixth graders about Myaamia culture and imagery). This means sometimes students do not have a choice in the structure or organization of the partnership with community members in place-based art integration work. This could be because a specific partnership has been built over years and with particular people, often including a formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an organization. At times this structure can result in questions and uncertainty from students. Is the tension associated with unlearning because they are not used to the ambiguity and evolving nature of placed-based art integration in community?

We found ourselves discussing these student experiences. Some anxieties stem from fears of not living up to expectations or, in one specific case, making a cultural mistake in front of the Myaamia Center educators. For others, tensions arise from the unpredictable and evolving nature of the collaborative process. As collaborators and research partners, we, Darden and Stephanie, are constantly engaging in critical reflective practice together. In fact, we work together weekly; this continuity leads to deep discourse. In one of those conversations, we realized we could alleviate some of the discomfort students feel

created by the ambiguity of unlearning moments and support them if we create more structured reflection prompts when engaging with community partners. We identified this as lacking in our teaching practices. It could be key to assisting preservice students with identifying specific growth and articulating richer knowledge acquisition. More structured reflection prompts could assist us in assessing student reflections on content and depth while measuring the quality of reflective practice in order to push students to articulate in deeper language (Lee, 2005). In talking with each other, we realized that up to that point, the prompts assigned were broad and, at times, vague. This could be out of a preference for more open-ended responses or feeling constricted by workload pressures that prevent devoting the necessary time or emotional energy to providing thoughtful feedback. Our experience is that there is an intense amount of work involved in assisting preservice students to become more critical reflective practitioners, not only in required time and mental effort, but emotional effort. We want to be educators who engage deeply with and create spaces for our students to normalize weaving in rich, critical reflection as teachers, to question what and how they are learning, and to question us.

This discussion around structured prompts led us to interrogate our pedagogical complicity, and the ways in which we fall back on comfortable practices, often mired in our early conceptions of education and teaching. Art integration invites collaboration, is designed to make meaning of our world, and espouses unhinging boundaries associated with teacher-student expectations. Yet, there are times when it has been easier as teacher preparators to tell students how we want them to do what we want them to do. This can sometimes come from internalized conceptions of power and assumptions about positionality, on both sides. We were dismayed to realize we are not always thinking about reciprocity with our students in the same ways that we think of power as it relates to reciprocity in community engagement (see Kliewer et al., 2010). As reciprocity is "key to developing rapport and trust, valuing diversity and inclusion, and building connections across communities of difference to further understanding and/or meaningful change" (Lawton et al., 2019, p. 11), we had been more intentional in relation to our community partners.

One negative effect of such focus on reciprocity with external community partnership exposes our assumptions (and potentially that of the university, students, and our community partners) that students will follow along. We were cognizant of our power as educators, particularly as organizer of the curriculum, as scheduler of events, and assessor of learning. But we were blind to how, in our roles as liaison between our preservice students and community partners, we were not aligning our values with our actions. Community partners have power as a voice of the community. In terms of these place-based art integration collaborations, what power are we giving to students? This demonstrates that there are actions we unknowingly take as educators, likely because of how we were taught and unexamined positionalities, that re-inscribe power, whiteness, and privilege. Ultimately, our choices and critical reflections have an impact. We do not want to privilege the long-term sustainability of a community partnership over what students gain from our courses.

This awareness of the ways in which power is often at play in education led us to revise how we coordinate and structure the place-based art integration engagements including from the vantage point of the content we are tasked with teaching, knowing where the students are and what pedagogical skills they have acquired, as well as needs of community partners, for the students to accurately represent their culture or art content of the culture. In this revision, the entire experience can be less overwhelming and problematic; being more intentional in structuring curriculum supports preservice

teachers better while also hearing the voice of community partners. We are transparent as we model this. Students may not yet have the experience and knowledge to make all the choices connected to the art integration work, but if we are *really* interested in fostering art integration toward social justice, we need to further examine the way we share and discuss established partnerships, inviting increased student involvement in the design process of art integration (where possible) and being vulnerable in sharing the missteps that we have taken. Students come to our classrooms with different experiences and levels of openness for art integration. In trying to meet students where they are and inviting them to see the pedagogical power in art integration, we must acknowledge that learning and experiences may look different. We can encourage them to take their learning to the edge of their comfort zones. One way to do this can be sharing moments of unlearning and inviting students to engage in their own *currere* process. "Learners must be empowered first, before critical self-reflection can take place, and, conversely, empowerment then increases critical self-reflection" (Lawton et al., 2019, p. 2). Discussing our own moments of unlearning around our current art integration work could model and invite students to be more reflective, leading to transformation.

Next Pedagogical Steps

We want students to reflect on how they are coming to know the content, processing their unlearning moments, and discuss how they are coming to know new approaches to teaching and understanding art integration within a community. This is a tall order. Given the many moving parts to this work, we posit the following process for embedding a mini-*currere* within our courses.

First, we want to be transparent and discuss aspects of our *currere* journeys. While our experiences are different from theirs, they may provide a model or starting point for them. If we have seen the *currere* process help us come to greater clarity, then how might that same process foster students' distinct voices? Second, our approach is both informed by our content, classroom and place-based art integration partnerships, and philosophical alignment with our values as educators. Before we can even ask them to begin, we want to build safe spaces for this vulnerable work. This is particularly important as many of the social justice topics we address are big or sensitive. Pinar suggests that *currere* offers potential for change in public education precisely because it encourages reflection on educational experiences that connect academic content, subjective knowledge of teacher and learner, with society and historical contexts (Pinar, 2004, 21). While learning new content and new theories, students may also be questioning their belief and value systems. We do not see our role as one of telling them what to believe or value but to provide ways to process their awareness and recognition of those thoughts, beliefs, and values.

Third, in our own experience, we found that moments of unlearning can be hard to digest. *Currere* reminds us that we are at the intersection of ourselves (Williams, 2021). When one recognizes that they have had a moment of unlearning, it can be important to be gentle with oneself. We can encourage students to be open to the process and invite them to share, with one another, the new tools they discover for articulation and processing emotions.

Having individually experienced the richness of what happens when we bring all of these disparate components together, we want to invite our students to take these risks, moving beyond making the grade to making ourselves. To do so we guide students through their own mini-*currere*. Using written and visual prompts, students weave aspects of their regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical lived experiences

(Pinar, 1975). For example, following initial pre-assessments, but prior to digging deeply into new content knowledge or working with community partners, we invite students to mine their past experiences around a topic tied to the content (regressive).[3] Setting this aside, students then read and engage with the new content and learn directly from community partners. Students answer the questions: What is not yet the case? What is not yet present by envisioning the future potential of integrating this content or working with specific community partners (progressive)? At this point, their beliefs, ideas, and values may be destabilized. It is within the third part, where *currere* asks us to be the most vulnerable, that students take action. This may be teaching their lessons to middle schoolers or engaging with the community partners as they practice delivering culturally responsive lessons (analytical). After teaching, students are asked to reflect on what this all means to them as future teachers. How do their new knowledge and experiences contribute to who they are today? (synthetical). An art integration approach invites students to address these prompts in both written and visual forms.

While *currere* is still a very new addition to our teaching practice, we have thus far found that, in the same way *currere* helped us gain insight into the ways our power was playing out in our own classrooms, implementing *currere* with students as they engage in learning about place-based art integration also fosters spaces for students to examine and become aware of the complexities of their learning. They find themselves accepting their educational journey and potentially challenging concepts of what they wish to do in their future classrooms. This new knowledge informs future iterations of our partnerships, teaching, and research. And, in reading our students' *currere* journeys, we have come to know them at a deeper level, and they come to better know themselves.

References

Bergmark, J., & Danker, S. H. (2022). Race-based mascots: Reflecting on university–community conversations. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, *18*(1), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00083_1

Blandy, D., & Hoffman, E. (1993). Toward an art education of place. *Studies in Art Education*, *35*(1), 22–33.

Brouillette, L. (2019). *Arts integration in diverse K-5 classrooms: Cultivating literacy skills and conceptual understanding*. Teachers College Press.

Danker, S. H. (2018). Art activism through a critical approach to place: Charity White's prescriptive space. *Art Education*, *71*(6), 45–50.

Danker, S. (2020). Culturally sensitive art education in a community: Myaamia ribbonwork. *Translations*, *1*, 1–4.

Deleuze, G., & Guatarri, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Diaz, G., & McKenna, M. B. (2017). *Preparing educators for arts integration*: *Placing creativity at the center of learning.* Teachers College Press.

Donahue, D. M., & Stuart, J. (2010). *Artful teaching: Integrating the arts for understanding across the curriculum, K-8*. Teachers College Press.

Eisner, E. (2004). *The arts and the creation of mind*. Yale University Press.

Goldberg, M. (2012). *Arts integration: Teaching subject matter through the arts in multicultural settings* (4th ed). Pearson Education.

Hislop, D., Bosley, S., Coombs, C. R., & Holland, J. (2014). The process of individual unlearning: A neglected topic in an under-researched field. *Management Learning*, *45*(5), 540–560.

Inwood, H. J. (2008). At the crossroads: Situating place-based art education.

Canadian Journal of Environmental Education, *13*(1), 29–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507613486423

Jayarathne, S. W., & Schuwirth, L. (2021). Exploring unlearning in the process of Professional Identity Formation (PIF). *The Asia Pacific Scholar*, *7*(1), 106–108. https://doi.org/10.29060/TAPS.2022-7-1/PV2532

Kliewer, B., Sandmann, L. R., Kim, J., & Omerikwa, A. (2010). *Toward understanding reciprocity in community-university partnerships: An analysis of theories of power* [Paper presentation]. Adult Education Research Conference, Sacramento, CA, United States. https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2010/papers/42

Kraehe, A. M., & Acuff, J. B. (2021). *Race and art education*. Davis.

Krug, D. H., & Cohen-Evron, N. (2000). Curriculum integration positions and practices in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, *41*(3), 258–275.

Lai, A., & Ball, E. L. (2002). Home is where the art is: Exploring the places people live through art education. *Studies in Art Education*, *44*(1), 47–66.

Lawton, P. H., Walker, M. A., & Green, M. (2019). *Community-based art education across the lifespan*. Teachers College Press.

Lee, H. (2005). Understanding and assessing preservice teachers' reflective thinking. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*, 699–715.

MacDonald, G. (2002). Transformative unlearning: Safety, discernment and communities of learning. *Nursing Inquiry*, *9*(3), 170–178. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1800.2002.0150.x

Marshall, J. (2005). Connecting art, learning, and creativity: A case for curriculum integration. *Studies in Art Education*, *46*(3), 227–241.

Marshall, J. (2019). *Integrating the visual arts across the curriculum: An elementary and middle school guide*. Teachers College Press.

Marshall, J., & Donahue, D. M. (2014). *Art-centered learning across the curriculum: Integrating contemporary art in the secondary school classroom*. Teachers College Press.

Parsons, M. (2004). Art and integrated curriculum. In E. Eisner & M. Day (Eds.), *Handbook of research and policy in art education* (pp. 775–794). National Art Education Association.

Pinar, W. F. (1975). The method of "*currere*" [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the American Research Association, Washington, DC, United States.

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* (1st ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum.* Kendall Hunt.

Smith, G. A., & Sobel, D. (2010). *Sociocultural, political, and historical studies in education: Place- and community-based education in schools*. Routledge.

Williams, T. (2021, June 17). *How does currere and one's currerian journey manifest towards healing and collective wellness?* [Plenary 3]. *Currere* Exchange Conference, virtual.

Endnotes

[1]The Myaamia Center at Miami University exists as the research arm for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and its citizens and is dedicated to educational initiatives aimed at the preservation of language and culture.

[2]The Myaamia Center hosts the Myaamiaki Conference at Miami University biennially where Myaamia Center staff, Myaamia students, and invited scholars present research and other topics related to the Miami Tribe.

[3]Regressive prompts for Darden's students include the following: Comment upon the inclusion or exclusion of BIPOC artists and art in your K-12 art classroom experiences.

What do you need to know about race, racism, and whiteness before you would feel comfortable teaching these issues? Progressive prompts invite students to explore what it may feel like for a student who identifies as BIPOC to see themselves included in their art curriculum. This includes asking why art education has historically focused so heavily on art made by white men? Synthetical prompts include: How might this experience of considering moments of unlearning change what you hope to bring to your own classroom and curricula? In what ways will you overcome systemic educational barriers and integrate BIPOC art and artists into art class?

"Together, Together!" Reading Selection in Classroom Relationships

By Nicholas Alexander Hayes
DePaul University

> "Now! Oh, what can be done now?... "Together, together!" she repeated, as if beside herself, embracing him again. "I will follow you to prison."
>
> —Feodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

I have recreated a failure in writing this essay. But any attempt not to fail would be a critical violation. Failure is not without its benefits. Noted Queer Theorist Halberstam (2011) reminds us, "failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent" (p. 88). In this essay, I ruminate on a class situation during which a student critiqued social perceptions based on my identity positions. Specifically, a straight Black man questioned the socio-cultural perspicacity of a Queer white man—which is not in itself an unproductive or unwarranted line of inquiry. I will refer to him as the Theorist because he kept his discourse in the realm of abstraction through postulating a monolithic Black community and a monolithic Gay community, which were in opposition and without overlap. This theoretical worldview occluded the perspective of another student—a Queer Black woman, who existed in and tried to share insights from a permeable zone between these hypothetical and abstract communities. I will refer to her as the Sage.

Here we arrive at the crux of my failure. In describing how I tried to make space for the Sage to share observations from her complex, concrete, and intersecting identities, I did not depict her brilliance, pathos, and joy. Yet my failure is important because those qualities and experiences are hers, and it would be a profound violation for someone in my power position (a white instructor) to parrot them. Instead, I focus on my encounter with the Theorist who provided the opportunity for me to think about the complicated implications of my intellectual inheritance and how course materials can offer oblique ways to engage in complicated discussions without direct and unproductive confrontation.

The dynamic happened in a college-level literature course for adult students that focused on Feodor Dostoevsky's (1866/1989) novel, *Crime and Punishment*. In my youth, I would have argued the universality of the book. But I have come to understand the claim of universality as camouflage for hegemonic, normative power structures including whiteness and heteronormativity. Yet the novel has many themes that resonate in the contemporary U.S. context. Amplifying these resonances is important because I believe literature is experienced as a contemporary event that creates new networks of possible meaning. Literature is not a historical artifact divorced from present encounter (Hayes, 2012, p. 20). From an andragogical perspective, these resonances may keep classic literature relevant through alignment with Knowles et al.'s (1998) contention that adult students need to understand how what they are learning applies to their lives (pp. 64–65).

Experience and Abstraction

Dostoevsky's (1866/1989) *Crime and Punishment* is a novel I have returned to frequently. As a senior in high school and as an undergraduate who had Russian Literature classes peppering his degree program, I was frequently assigned this book. But I love it. I would write poems about the malcontent young men I had crushes on

Hayes, N. A. (2022). "Together, together!" Reading selection in classroom relationships. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *6*(2), 128–133.

and call them Rodya (a nickname for the protagonist, failed revolutionary, and murderer Rodion Raskolnikov.) As an adult, I have returned to Raskolnikov and his compatriots regularly.

The polyvocal nature of the book has allowed me to expand beyond my teenage infatuation. Now that I am older, I understand and identify with other characters. I also understand that my relationship with the characters will change as I engage in critical conversation about them with others. The changing relationship is in turn inextricably linked to the subjectivity of other readers. My relationship with those I am in conversation with also changes as we discuss the text. Psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger (2006) argues that visual art can act as a matrixial borderspace where traces of artist and other viewers create "instances of transsubjectivity that embrace and produce new partial subjects." (p. 149). Visual art allows us a context in which we can think past our singular and isolated selves. I have found literature provides an analogous mechanism.

The last two times I taught the course I integrated supplemental readings to show how the novel's themes were potentially manifest in the U.S. context. The penultimate section of this course ran in Spring Quarter 2017. I tried to integrate essays and stories into the readings between classes. But these texts in addition to the novel and essays students were writing proved to be too onerous. Thankfully, I was able to teach the course a final time in Spring Quarter 2018 before it was retired due to a change in degree structure. In this iteration, I integrated poems that we would read at the beginning of each class session. The poems included Audre Lorde's (1978/2000) "Power," Shin Yu Pai's (2010) "Model Minorities," Harryette Mullen's (2002) "We are Not Responsible," and Margret Hesse's (2016) "Come Home, Our Sons." The poems address systems of power, justice, and race in the U.S.

Using a poem as a class-opener was beneficial for a few reasons. This was an evening class with working adult students, so they often were tired when they arrived. I would hand out copies of the poem. We would take a few moments to review them quietly then a volunteer would read the poem aloud. Reading poems collectively gave us a shared experience to discuss. It was a chance to analyze literature in a contained, low-stakes context since the language and society depicted were familiar. Students could connect their experiences to this literature. hooks (1994) addresses the importance of experience as a location for knowing while cautioning the "need for critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively" (p. 91). For me, the connections that students made with the literature, their experiences, and their classmates provided a diversity of standpoints. Additionally, since everyone was experiencing the poems simultaneously, there was less anxiety about sharing reflections. The contemporary language and ideas allowed us to begin our discussion, so we were already engaged in conversation before we turned to the less familiar phrasing of the novel.

The poems allowed me to engage in discussion with students in an oblique way. Perhaps this is evidence of me taking Emily Dickinson's (1860/1998) advice to "tell all the truth but tell it slant" (p. 507). I used strands of conversation as well as novel themes to help me select poems. The class conversation after these initial readings was congenial and often critically generative. The Theorist homed in on the discrepancies of U.S. culture as related to race. At first, this fruitful expansion of themes about justice and minority populations let us compare and contrast our lived experience in the U.S. with the depictions of minority groups (like Polish immigrants) in the novel. But his comments became inflected with abstract assertions about the Gay community. When he said "Gay," he reduced the entire nexus of sexual and gender minorities to a subset

of the general white population. The abstractions emerged from his experience and perceptions about culture. But the Theorist resisted discussions rooted in complexities and intersections of lived experiences that did not coincide with the abstractions that emerged from his own understandings. This prevented him from acknowledging the Sage's voice or experience.

The Theorist focused on the differences between himself (Black and straight) and me (white and Queer), obscuring our similarities of both being cis male with a nominally Christian religious heritage. The Sage bonded with me in part because of our similar sexual minority. As a Black woman, she had a shared cultural experience with the Theorist. However, as a Muslim, she felt alienated from our religious heritage, especially considering the frequent biblical allusions made in *Crime and Punishment*. The Theorist continued to reduce our individual and collective complexities by retreating to the Black/Gay binary. This thinking prevented more interesting explorations about how identity positions can provide partial subjectivity where various identifications and differences can appear.

His reduction of the diverse LGBTQIAA+ population to Gay white men created tension. In asserting the abstract opposition of Black and Gay, the Theorist created a struggle that could not be resolved and that served only to destabilize his recognition of the full identity and experiences of his classmates. Repeatedly, the Sage, other students, and I encouraged him to see the complexity of Queer lives and to not conflate them with whiteness. Direct conversation left him retrenched in his objectifying abstraction.

A rift was forming within the class because he was not recognizing the nuance of these intersections. To deepen and broaden the conversation, I brought Christopher Soto's (2016) poem "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me." This poem about the Pulse Night Club shooting delved into the violence against the bodies of Queer BIPOC individuals. Reading it, we contemplated the results of violence (which resonated with the murders in the novel). But we also saw a discussion of Queerness that was definitively not white. The Sage spoke about how the poem evoked the grief and anger Queer BIPOC communities felt as witness to the massacre. My hope is that this poem created a borderspace in which more subjects were able to appear.

Perhaps a more compelling narrative would have the Theorist struggle with reconciling the poem and his peers. A 19th century novelist might be able to get away with creating a situation for a tortured confession—most likely in a lantern-lit English garden. I must fail. I cannot crawl into someone else's head to see what they are thinking. If I could, it would not be my place to dredge it forth. I was not privy to any subtle changes that happened to him. But after reading and discussing the poem, the student stopped finding ways to present Black and Gay communities as inherently monolithic and necessarily oppositional. I suspect … I hope that returning and taking different approaches to discussion about the complexities of community and identity helped the Theorist go through a process of double-loop learning. But at least this experience offered me a chance to think through my understandings of intersections of sexuality and race in order to confront problematic ideas of some Queer theorists.

Single and Double Loop

The trouble the student had in reconciling his perception of communities seemed to be a challenge of double-loop learning. Knowles et al. (1998) speak of single- and double-loop learning as important processes for adult students. Single-loop learning conforms to our existing perceptions about the world. It lends itself to the assumption of aggregates and abstractions (p. 140). Perhaps, it is even a useful process in business or professional

environments, which tend toward the dehumanization necessary for corporate efficiency. Double-loop learning conflicts with our earlier assumptions. We must return to a new idea until we can incorporate it into our intellectual frame (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 140). Because double-loop learning requires us to move past our intellectual prejudice, this process can undermine social abstractions and their harmful effects.

Raskolnikov's crisis in the novel can perhaps be seen as an instance of double-loop learning since he must overcome his philosophy of the extraordinary man in order to reconcile with community. His dehumanization of some like the pawn broker is only possible through a process of abstraction, which torments him as his theory's applicability dissolves once applied to real life. Pinar (1979/1994) offers an additional warning about how abstraction prevents us from seeing others: "Without explicit grounding in the concrete …, the abstraction becomes only an extension of the speaker, a sign for something of oneself that is hated or loved" (p. 101). In reworking or expanding our intellectual framework through double-loop learning, we can see individuals in the unique complexity of their experiences and intersections. In turn, this may allow us to better understand our own complexity. As a Queer, white instructor, this forces me to reflect on the intellectual history I bring with me.

Discourse and Abstraction

When Blackness and Gayness are presented as oppositional forces, it feels like someone is walking over a grave or at least stepping on Leo Bersani's rectum. In his seminal Queer Theory essay, "Is the Rectum a Grave," Bersani explored the complicated intersections of sexuality and power during the AIDS crisis. But buried within the essay is the complement of the oppositional dynamic my student asserted. Bersani (2010) contends a monolithic Black community is more politically valued than the Gay community (pp. 9–11). The nuance presented elsewhere in the essay is lacking in his seemingly tacit assumption of Gayness being synonymous with cis, white men. In critiquing Bersani's (1995) book, *Homos*, Knadler (1996) recognizes this: "The unconscious fear that drives Bersani's elaborate rationalizations of narcissism stems from an angry awareness that recent trends toward postcolonial and multicultural studies represent a new form of discipline for gay and straight white men" (pp. 174–175). In other words, Bersani expresses anxiety that white men will not be able to use gayness or Queerness to justify oppression, silencing, or ignoring gender and racial minorities if complex or intersectional identities are acknowledged in discourse. In Bersani's writing, I see a reflection of a pernicious white Queer consciousness I was exposed to in my youth and have had to teach myself to reject, engaging in my own process of double-loop learning.

Bersani is not the only Queer Theorist to err in this way. But Queer Theory has not been bereft of BIPOC adherents. It is no coincidence that Soto references the Cuban American Queer Theorist José Esteban Muñoz in "All the Dead Boys Look Like Me," since this theoretical tradition encourages personal reflection and meaning making.

I suspect that both my student and Bersani surveilled their own experiences and perceived broader social acceptance of a group to which they did not belong. They reduced these groups to monolithic abstractions as a shorthand to highlight their lived oppression. Such reductions obscure the unique trajectories and intersection of individuals, rendering them as partial objects. In an educational zone reliant on the relationship between teacher and student, this reduction can be especially damaging. This is particularly true when we consider the heterogeneity of a group and the individual in their complexity.

In the classroom, we can alight on large scale issues only briefly before the session or term ends. But relations between instructor and student and among students remain a dynamic (albeit brief) zone of engagement. In this zone, we can see the issues from Pinar's (1979/1994) discussion of the concrete over the abstract come into play. Large issues that deal with groups of people often can do this at the cost of individual uniqueness (Pinar, 1979/1994, p. 105). It allows us to talk about Gay culture or Black culture. But it also creates a comfortable disassociation of the phenomenon that would allow some to contrast the groups without realizing the fact that compositions and origins of the groups emerge from radically different contexts (though both are socially determined.)

Final Thoughts

Classroom discourse must allow students and teachers to challenge and scrutinize ideas so that they can be opened further. It is, of course, not the imperative of students to be universal experts on their identity positions, and the instructor should not be final arbiter of learning. Instead, multiple participants through partial identifications can engage in creating a space for new learning. The autobiographic reflection of one student must be brought into conversation with the reflections of other students and instructor.

In such conversations, we might be able to fully experience the ephemeral social space of the classroom. When we make ourselves vulnerable, the likelihood increases that we grow and change and settle in different contexts. Acknowledging change in others and ourselves requires us to be more fully immersed not in grand agendas but in localized possibilities.

The selection and discussion of an introductory poem for each class session allowed my students and me a small place to challenge artificially rigid frameworks of abstract assertions about society. In so doing, I hope we were able to more closely engage with and acknowledge our individual and intersectional complexities and the narratives that emerge from them. To do this we can benefit from literature's static and elastic qualities in that we can return to it for however many loops we need to extend our learning.

The second epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* foreshadows a new hopeful narrative that continues after the novel ends. The omniscient speaker declines to say more because "that is the beginning of new story, the story of the gradual renewal of a man, of his gradual regeneration, of his slow progress from one world to another, of how he learned to know a hitherto undreamed-of reality" (Dostoevsky, 1866/1989, p. 465). I hope that as I progress on my own slow, looping path from the world of abstraction to the world of the concrete I can help my students on theirs.

References

Bersani, L. (1995). *Homos*. Harvard University Press.

Bersani, L. (2010). *Is the rectum a grave? And other essays*. University of Chicago.

Dickinson, E. (1961). Tell all the truth but tell it slant. In T. H. Johnson (Ed.), *The complete poems of Emily Dickinson* (pp. 506–507). Little Brown. (Original work published 1860)

Dostoevsky, F. (1989). *Crime and punishment* (G. Gibian, Ed.; J. Coulson, Trans.; 3rd ed.). Norton. (Original work published 1866)

Ettinger, B. (2006). *The matrixial borderspace*. University of Minnesota Press.

Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Duke University Press.

Hayes, N. A. (2012). *Metastaesthetics*. Atropos.

Hasse, M. (2016). *Between us*. Nodin Press.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

Knadler, S. P. (1996). Leo Bersani and the nostalgia for white male radicalism. *The Minnesota Review*, *47*, 169–176.

Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The adult learner* (5th ed.).

Lorde, A. (1978/2000). Power. In *The collected works of Audre Lorde* (pp. 215–216). W. W. Norton.

Mullen, H. (2002). We are not responsible. In *Sleeping with the dictionary* (p. 77). University of California Press.

Pinar, W. (1994). The abstract and the concrete in curriculum theorizing. In *Autobiography, politics and sexuality: Essays in curriculum theory 1972-1992* (pp. 101–116). Peter Lang. (Original work published 1979)

Pai, S. Y. (2010). *Adamantine*. White Pine Press.

Soto, C. (2016, June 15). All the dead boys look like me. In B. Clements, A. Teague, & D. Rader, (Eds.), *Bullets into bells: Poets and citizens respond to gun violence* (p. 153). Beacon Press.