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I am Here

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I am not here to make you feel comfortable.
I am not here to answer all of your questions on all things Black.
I am not here to answer all of your questions on all things feminine.
Black is
What Black chooses to be.
I am not here to stroke your ego or ease your guilt.
I am not here to entertain you.
Nor am I here to debate with you.
Black is
What Black chooses to be.
I am here to step into the place my ancestors prayed for.
I am here to answer the call that others had the desire to answer
Yet lacked the platform of opportunity.
I am here because this is my time to
Soar
Shine
Celebrate
And
Contemplate.
I am here to be.
Because
Black is
What Black Chooses to be.

Thompson, D. R. (2023). I am here. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *7*(1), 1.

The Anchor, The Bridge, The Lesson

By Tom Romano
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Dr. Z walked into the classroom that first day looking supremely confident. Chair of the speech and theatre department, he was impeccably dressed in a blue tailored suit, white shirt with pearl cufflinks poking out of the sleeves, and a striped blue and white tie. His thinning black hair, combed straight back, looked moist. He was clean shaven, and when he passed my desk, I caught a wiff of cologne.

As the second quarter began in January 1971, I, too, was confident. I had two quarters of speech and English courses to take and a stint of a few weeks working in the university summer theatre. Then, I'd graduate. A short story I'd written was slated for publication in the campus creative arts magazine. And I was a new father. Two weeks earlier, on Christmas Eve, my wife delivered a girl.

One course required of my speech minor was Oral Interpretation II. The previous year I'd gotten a B in Oral Interpretation I. Initially, I'd thought the course title meant that we'd be required to read literature and speak about what it meant, interpret it orally, something that concerned me since my interpretation of literature rarely matched the teacher's.

I was wrong. Oral interpretation meant reading aloud in a way that listeners would understand the meaning, emotion, and import of our literary selection—no explaining, no dissecting. In oral interpretation, we gave breath and sound to words on the printed page. We read at a speed the text seemed to dictate—modulating our voices, pausing strategically, differentiating between an author's omniscient voice and dialog spoken by characters.

Orally interpreting the written word is a skill I've used often in nearly 50 of teaching.

Dr. Z's voice that first class was calm, precise, and deliberate. He enunciated each word. It was like nothing spoken back home in my father's neighborhood tavern. I thought Dr. Z sounded British.

"Welcome to oral interpretation," he said. "You will do well in this course if you are widely read and amenable to being coached to speak in a way that respects the literature. You'll find, no doubt, that you have to leave behind your midwestern dialect."

The next week we began round after round of oral interpretations. And what pleasure it was, if a little nerve wracking until we got comfortable standing in front of our peers reading aloud literature we loved, a diverse sampling of poems, fiction, nonfiction, drama, cuttings from longer works to fit into the three to five minutes we were allotted.

My first two cuttings were from Edgar Alan Poe's "The Raven" and John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," a sensual part when Madelaine undresses for bed as her concealed would-be lover looks on.

I remember a young man delivering a wry interpretation of "McCavity, the Mystery Cat" from T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.

I remember Polly, slim and sultry, like Barbara Stanwyck in a Hollywood film noir from the 1940s: long silvery hair that fell to her shoulders, tight Levis, blue eyes somehow simultaneously languid and lively. One of her oral interpretations was of George Harrison's "Something." She didn't sing it, though she had it memorized. Her voice was seductive, pleading for us to understand something about her lover, something

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ineffable, something impossible to resist. At one point, she shimmied. Her velvet voice, the way she looked so comfortable in her body, the way she filled that space in the front of the small classroom, she was something all right.

I remember one other student from that long-ago class. His name was Michael, handsome, his long brown hair swept to the right. He seemed cool, unrattled. For his first oral interpretation he chose "A Noiseless Patient Spider," a poem I knew from sophomore year when I encountered Walt Whitman's work in an American Literature survey course.

Michael walked to the front of the classroom, pulled out the chair to the teacher's desk, and sat, an unusual move since everyone else had stood, our feet rooted to the floor. Michael opened the book he held, stared at the page, swallowed, and began to read in an assured voice that was unhurried, just like his approach to the desk:

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul—

That's where Michael stopped reading. He stared at the page, breathed in deeply. We at our desks, including Dr. Z., sat stone silent, waiting.

Michael looked up, blinked. "I can't do this."

"Can you not go on, Michael?" Dr. Z said, "You are doing fine."

"I can't."

"You do not appear to be nervous," Dr. Z said. "But if you are, I assure you that with more readings you'll become more confident."

Michael said nothing, just sat, holding his book.

"I know this poem," said Polly. "Your reading is perfect."

"Please go on," Dr. Z said. His expression was pained.

"I can't." Michael scooted back the chair, the legs screeching against the linoleum floor. He rose, cradling the book in one arm, and walked down the narrow aisle between scattered desks toward the door.

"Michael," Dr. Z said. "Please. Wait."

"I can't." He lifted his coat from a desk, opened the classroom door, and left, shutting it behind him with a soft click.

We had a textbook in Oral Interpretation II. I bought mine used. Cream-colored pages, long chapters, no illustrations, no diagrams, no pictures. Just academic prose about literature, its many devices and terms from *alliteration* to *zeitgeist.*

At mid-term we halted our rounds of oral interpretations to take a 50-question multiple choice test over the contents of the textbook, which we were to read on our own without benefit of class discussion.

When Dr. Z returned the tests after a week, quiet reigned. Frowns and beetled eyebrows predominated as students studied their test results. Dr. Z stood at the front of the classroom, his arms crossed. Tension was building. Many of the test questions had been ambiguous and some downright obscure (one question involved the close reading of a long footnote in small print that had taken up a third of the page).

Finally, a student spoke: "What about question six? What's the difference between *synecdoche* and *metonymy* anyway?"

Other students chimed in, asking about that question and others. Dr. Z, in another elegant suit, this one gray, wasn't giving an inch. He whacked moles, warded off blows, and brushed aside complaints. After he answered questions and dictated correct answers, students pressed him still.

Color crept up Dr. Z's neck, moving to his cheeks and his ears until they blazed crimson.

"I think," he said, his eyelids fluttering, "that we've had enough conversation. And I might add that there would be no conversation had you read the textbook and not simply relied on what you had insufficiently learned in high school English classes."

Silence slammed down like an anvil. "Pass up the tests," Dr. Z said. "Please."

Tentatively, Polly, sexy Polly, raised her hand. In a quavering voice, she said, "Dr. Z, look at question 20. I chose *personification*, and its marked wrong. Did you make a mistake? *Personificatio*n is the correct answer, isn't it?"

"The correct answer is *apostrophe*," Dr. Z said. "Pass up the tests."

"But isn't—"

"There is no mistake. Let's have the tests."

Polly bit her lower lip and sat back in her desk. She seemed to disappear.

I remembered pondering question 20 the previous week: "John Keats's ode, 'To Autumn,' is an example of which literary device? A) Metaphor B) Simile C) Personification D) Apostrophe

From that tedious textbook, I'd learned a new meaning of the word *apostrophe*, the literary meaning, not the grammatical one. *Apostrophe* was a literary work addressed to someone or something not present.

"To Autumn" was definitely addressed to a season of the year, a bountiful one according to Keats. But I also remembered an image from the poem that depicted Autumn drowsing and dreaming, "sitting carelessly on the granary floor." Within the ode there was plenty of personification. And for that matter, wasn't personification a kind of metaphorical language? Perhaps *metaphor* could be correct.

I raised my hand. Dr. Z looked my way, his chin jutting out.

"Yes?"

"I remember puzzling over question 20," I said. "I see why Polly answered *personification* instead of *apostrophe*."

Dr. Z swiveled to face me full on, and it wasn't to hear my reasoning. "Did you answer the question correctly?"

"I did."

"Then keep your mouth shut."

Dr. Z's swift rebuke was a finger poke in the eye. Inside, I winced, reeling, my confidence flattened.

Nothing from that class after the midterm exam do I remember, except that the atmosphere of sharing and support we'd developed was not the same. Why did Dr. Z give that picky, multiple choice test that was such a departure from the humanistic endeavor of reading literature, of risking embarrassment as we sought to make words accessible and moving by reading them aloud? Why didn't he invite our reasoning? Why did he refuse to acknowledge the ambiguity of some of the questions? When challenged, even politely, Dr. Z had been petty and short tempered, not cultivated and considerate. I began to see his tailored suits as armor, his speech pretentious, his manner condescending.

The test, I think, was clearly meant to add rigor to Oral Interpretation II, to eliminate subjectivity, to establish right and wrong answers, to add objectivity to a course that required students to be vulnerable and empathetic, qualities that made it unlike most university courses.

I confess that in my long teaching career in both high school and college, I've given tests I thought added needed rigor to a course. And I remember feeling besieged when students questioned clumsy, ambiguous questions I'd fashioned. I became impatient. I knew when students had valid complaints, but I feared appearing weak and incompetent. Instead of seeking to understand students' concerns, I hardened my stance and became authoritarian.

Besides his defensiveness and rising anger, I don't know what else Dr. Z may have felt that day. Did he realize that some of the questions were ambiguous and amend them in the future? Did he dispense with the multiple choice test altogether? Perhaps the test was used department-wide. Did he talk to colleagues who also taught the course? Or did Dr. Z, in fact, lack humility, a quality he seemed to demonstrate when trying to keep Michael from dropping the class?

The second verse of Whitman's "A Noiseless, Patient Spider" ends like this:

> And you O my soul where you stand . . . .
> Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
> Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
> Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
> Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

When I've been my best as a teacher, I've been authentic, curious, vulnerable. I've been open and inviting. I haven't been guarded, protective of my intellect and methods. I haven't bristled when questioned. The filaments I try to send forth are knowledge, preparedness, and humanity. I don't hold back in offering what I have (I do have an ego). But I try to be ever aware of my own fallibility, the gaps in my knowledge, my capacity for misjudgment.

When I'm at my best as a teacher, I create an atmosphere that invites students to venture thinking, to speculate, to launch their own filaments. I want them to question me and their classmates. I want them to question themselves. If they do all that, I know they will accomplish what they might not even imagine. I know they will grow and develop. And I'll know I've taught well. Unlike Michael, they will know that they can.

Ficto-Currere, Post-Truth, and Subversive Uncertainty

By Adrian M. Downey
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What if it Isn't True?

I teach a first semester course to Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students called "Interdisciplinary Foundations of Education." In that course, I often draw on my own experience as a former K-12 teacher to tell stories and create case studies that generate thoughtful conversation among the students. These case studies and stories point to various topics covered in the course, such as the history of education both broadly and within our specific shared geographical context—the small, mostly rural province of Nova Scotia, Canada (see Corbett, 2014)—or to the complex moral decisions teachers must make daily. We also explore the sociological complexities of teaching, and I often draw on my experience in Indigenous education to paint pictures for the students of what solidarity through pedagogy can look and feel like.

Students often comment positively on the course, citing the stories and case studies as a high point in the first semester of their B.Ed. program. Indeed, in what is often perceived by pre-service teachers as the overly theoretical landscape of the university, students appreciate the attention to real-life experience I offer in my course. From my perspective as an instructor, I am, of course, simply happy that they remain interested long enough for us to have conversations about the things I consider foundational to education. For the sake of elucidating the sort of story I am describing, I elaborate one example below.

As a new elementary teacher in a rural community, I found myself rather lonely. I began using a dating website to see if there were any folks in the area with whom I might be able to develop a social relationship. Somewhat dismayed by the options, I eventually connected with a person around my age (24 or 25 at the time) with whom I shared several interests. After chatting for a week or so, they invited me to their home. Walking up to the house, I noticed that all the lights were off except for one in the basement. Slightly nervous, I knocked on the door. It was answered by one of my students, a girl in fourth grade. She looked at me a bit shocked and said, "Are you here to see my sister?"

I usually pause the story there to invite some reaction and initial conversation focused on what the pre-service teachers in my class might do in such a situation. This leads into a discussion about how expectations of teachers change depending on the community and how, in my experience, in a rural community, you are *always* a teacher. Whereas in urban teaching situations once you leave the school you can meld back into the general population of a city, in a rural setting your behaviours are observed with much more scrutiny, and informal communication networks make it so that nothing stays hidden for long. For many students, this idea of always being a teacher is a deal breaker—they need their anonymity and their freedom to act in ways some might say are unbecoming of a teacher. Others don't see this as too demanding a requirement and think the benefits of living in a small, vibrant community outweigh the stresses of living in a larger urban center. Eventually, when the conversation slows down, I resume the narration.

After getting over my initial shock, I decided that my need for social connection outweighed my professional concerns about becoming involved with a student's sibling,

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and I replied, "Yes, is your sister in?" The student's eyes lingered on me before she led me downstairs. When I entered the bedroom, I immediately smelled marijuana (which was illegal at the time) and saw pills and powders scattered across a coffee table.

I often pause the story again there to see how many students would run out of the house before sharing the fact that that is exactly what I did. We all have a good laugh over the story, and I let them know that my reputation in the community wasn't damaged by the experience, though I did walk away with a new perspective on my role as a teacher in that small, rural community. It's a great story, and it almost always elicits equal parts laughter, anxiety, and thoughtful consideration. It is also tied to the specific curriculum goals I am expected to teach in the course: the concept of rurality. But what if it isn't true?

In this paper, I want to think about truth, fiction, and uncertainty in teaching and curriculum studies. I want to think of these topics *now*, when the phenomenon of post-truth has become ubiquitous in global politics (Suiter, 2016). In discussing these topics, I engage the concept of *ficto-currere*, "fictional narrative framed within *currere*" (McNulty, 2019, p. 75), as articulated by curriculum scholar Morna McDermott McNulty (2018, 2019). I argue that *ficto-currere*, in juxtaposing fiction not with fact but with finitude, can serve as a sort of affective resistance to the post-truth movement—a subversive dreaming otherwise within a heteropatriarchal techno-capitalist system that seems endless. Part of that subversion, I suggest, is leaning into uncertainty, and that yields insight into the question above: "what if it isn't true?"

Methodologically, this paper is not precisely informed by *currere* in the way many in this journal are. Rather, it is an act of educational theorizing. The concern of this paper, however, is vitally important to *The Currere Exchange* community. *Ficto-currere*, as an iteration on the form of inquiry central to this journal's project, offers new and exciting possibilities for those committed to the place of lived experience in curriculum theorizing. How those possibilities are understood and actualized, however, is not a given, especially amid the rampant misunderstanding and distrust of the academic enterprise prevalent in post-truth populist movements the world over. I maintain that there is a significant distinction between fiction in research and post-truth, and, however obvious it is, it should be kept front of mind as this field-shifting concept of *ficto-currere* is engaged. Moreover, I also maintain that the field should be vigilant about keeping the intent of *ficto-currere*, and perhaps *currere* more broadly, subversive.

I begin this paper by characterizing the current socio-political moment with reference to the idea of post-truth politics. I then move on to discuss the emerging concept *ficto-currere* and situate it within the larger landscape of autobiographical curriculum studies. Next, I discuss the intersections of those ideas before offering a reframing of both concepts in conversation with Brain Massumi's (2015) writing on the politics of affect. Finally, I conclude by returning to the question of whether the possibility of untruth in my opening narrative matters, pedagogically.

Post-Truth Politics

Truth has very high stakes. In his address to the Ukrainian nation on February 22nd, 2022, president Volodymyr Zelensky made that abundantly clear when, in response to Russia's recognition of the Donbas as an independent republic, he said, "We have truth on our side, and we will never keep the truth from you" (Melkozerova, 2022, para. 14). Throughout the war in Ukraine, the battle around truth has been pivotal, and Russian government officials and state-run media organizations have done everything in their

power to control the narrative coming out of Ukraine. On the other side, Ukrainian officials have denounced Russian rhetoric at every opportunity, and Western media outlets have backed them up with independent investigations on more than one occasion. Yet, that narrative clearly remains subject to influences beyond simple facts, and lives hang in the balance.

Such rhetorical interventions on the truth are now commonplace in North America, particularly in the American media landscape. Indeed, it has become so prevalent globally that Oxford Dictionaries listed "post-truth" as its 2016 word of the year. They defined it as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (as quoted in Peters, 2017, p. 563). The election of the 45th president of the United States and the Brexit movement are often cited as prime examples of the phenomenon of post-truth in politics, but there are many others.

Post-truth operates in several ways. Proprietors of post-truth sometimes argue that there are multiple valid interpretations of certain facts. In other instances, the facts themselves can be changed through the seeming validity of multiple perspectives or through the acceptance of an unproven assertion as fact. Others still defend wild and fantastical statements under the guise of critical questioning. As the definition cited above indicates, the commonality in this playbook is that emotional appeal remains more influential than fact or reason. Suiter (2016) points to reality TV, social media, economic deregulation, and globalization as factors contributing to the emergence of post-truth populism. She also notes that "many lacked the educational opportunities needed to thrive in a globalised world and live with less security and lower wages than their parents' generation" (Suiter, 2016, p. 25). This lack of security has at least correlated with a rise in skepticism of government, media, and academia among some populations.

Accompanied by the climate catastrophe, a growing societal awareness of the prevalence of systemic racism, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement toward post-truth has become one of the defining markers of the socio-pedagogical atmosphere of third decade of the third millennium. While the past six years have seen a steady stream of educational research seeking to disrupt the pull toward post-truth, more theorizing is needed. This paper attempts to respond to that need by considering *ficto-currere* an intervention on the movement toward post-truth.

Ficto-Currere

Ficto-currere was put forward by McNulty (2018) and brought the possibilities of fiction into conversation with the method of *currere. Currere*, of course, was offered up by William Pinar (1994) in the 1970s as an intervention on a curriculum field that was quickly becoming dominated by empirical research. Pinar's contribution was to centre lived experience in curriculum theorizing, inviting more complexity and nuance into a static, dying field (Schwab, 1969). Since the evocation of *currere* in the 1970s, many scholars have taken it up both as method and as ethos, shifting the curriculum conversation more toward lived experiences. Today, journals like *The Currere Exchange* remain committed to the validity of personal experience in education research and its potential as a source for rich and nuanced curriculum theorizing and curriculum making.

In recent years, several interventions on and additions to the concept of *currere* have emerged. Baszile (2015) has suggested *currere*—specifically *currere* informed by critical race and feminist theory (critical race/feminist *currere*)—as a way of decolonizing one's mind. Paul and Beierling (2017) have sought a *currere* 2.0, or a method of knowing oneself amid the hypermediated landscape of the third millennium. Drawing on various

sub-Saharan African traditions, Le Grange's (2019) notion of *Umbutu-currere* likewise responds to the contexts of the third millennium by centering human connectedness with ecological beings in the *currere* process. Each of these interventions creates new possibilities for scholars, and each also shapes the complicated conversation in curriculum studies and *The Currere Exchange*.

Ficto-currere is another variation on Pinar's original idea, this one drawing on auto-fiction and speculative fiction to create a (re)construction of one's lived experience lodged within a fantastical, fictional, and/or speculative setting. Though a few other texts exist (e.g., Sanders, 2019), the definitive example of *ficto-currere* is the novel *Blood's Will* (McNulty, 2018). The novel follows the story of a mid-career academic and mother as she falls in love with a vampire and wrestles with the existential conflicts of her shifting (un)reality. In addition to the main story, there is an afterward by the author (McNulty, 2018) and a subsequent article (McNulty, 2019) that make connections between the novel and the field of curriculum theory. I take those texts up here toward a further elaboration of McNulty's thinking about *ficto-currere*.

McNulty understands *currere* as a form of memory work and says that *ficto-currere* "defies the binary between memory and fiction—both of which are 'unreal' and constructed" (McNulty, 2019, p. 75). Memory is, indeed, a constructed, filtered version of the truth. Memories can be true, but as per Freud, they can also be false, incomplete, or repressed. Rather than trying to reconstruct true events, *ficto-currere* leans into the unreality of memory, reconstructing a fictionalized version of what happened and speculating on what could be. McNulty continues, "as a form of inquiry, fictionalized narratives or *ficto-currere*, are necessary contributions to the disruptions of normalizing and totalizing oppressive discourses produced within traditional frameworks of inquiry, which have constructed centuries of colonized and dead knowledges" (p. 75). By naming it a form of inquiry, McNulty aligns *ficto-currere* with the body of literature in curriculum studies that works against the dominance of empirical and practice-oriented norms of educational research (i.e., curriculum development; see Nellis, 2009), those same norms to which *currere* responded in the 20th century (Pinar, 1994). She also aligns *ficto-currere* with feminist speculative theorizing (e.g., Haraway, 2016) and draws on Sylvia Wynter's work to suggest a decolonial praxis in such speculation.

The theoretical underpinnings of these alliances are in the shared critique of empirical rationality as the standard for truth in research and society. Twentieth-century feminists critiqued patriarchal science as making false claims to truth by asserting objectivity where none was possible—the construction of knowledge is always subjective (Baszile, 2015; Braidotti, 2022). Decolonial thinkers shared this critique and showed the ways that science had been mobilized toward constructing Indigenous and racialized peoples as less than human, with oppressors using their monopoly over truth to justify colonization (Smith, 2012). These logics follow through to today, with Indigenous feminists remaining critical of the way western science is continually legitimized in areas it ought not to be, such as commercial DNA tests being used to justify careless claims to Indigeneity (Tallbear, 2013). Posthumanist feminists are likewise critical of specific manifestations of science, such as the techno-capitalist colonization of space and cyberspace (Braidotti, 2022).

The point of evoking these decolonial and feminist critiques of science is to suggest that what is deemed "true" has never been neutral. The construction of objective knowledge, and by extension capital "T" Truth, has always been informed by those who hold power within a particular society—in the West: white, European, able-bodied CIS men (Braidotti, 2022). In pointing out this concentration of power, feminist scholars and

activists have effectively started to dismantle it. In my reading, post-truth politicians have felt their monopoly over truth slipping, and in response have sought to undermine the value of truth or at least to take advantage of it being undermined by other forces.

While she doesn't speak directly to post-truth, McNulty seems aware of the critiques raised above. Indeed, she seems bent on skirting, if not directly challenging, the centralization of academic power and privilege in claims to objectivity through her embrace of speculation (*ficto*) and subjectivity (*currere*). In this way, *ficto-currere* may respond to neo-materialist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's (2022) assertion that what is needed now is both critique *and* creativity in scholarship. Indeed, as discussed below, I think *ficto-currere* has an immense subversive potential.

Convergence and Divergence

While both the pull toward speculative fiction as a generative source of theorizing in academia and the pull toward playing fast and loose with the truth in politics work at visioning the possible rather than the actual, the effects and intent couldn't be further apart. The key difference I can see, and the reason I find one appealing and the other appalling, is that the speculative modality offers a vision of reality without denying the existence of truth, however unknowable or subjective it may be. As McNulty (2019) crucially points out, "fiction is not the opposite of fact; it is the opposite of finitude" (p. 75). Fiction is an otherwise to truth, not a replacement for it. Moreover, unlike the proprietors of post-truth, authors of fiction make no claim to truth. There is, thus, a transparency in the whole interaction that makes it palatable. This transparency is crucial to legitimacy. Indeed, transparency about the grounds from which one claims truth has become a routine part of research. In the social sciences, researchers lay out their axiological, epistemological, and ontological assumptions clearly, and in the hard sciences lengthy explanations of methodology are the norm. In either case, there is a clear commitment to saying, "These are the grounds by which I know this to be true."

As above, the movement toward post-truth undermines those practices. It becomes acceptable to disagree with someone not based on a fundamental misalignment of paradigm or based on new or contrary evidence. Rather, it becomes enough to disagree based on hearsay (i.e., many people are saying this) or on misinformation (i.e., vaccines cause autism). Moreover, there is no obligation to truly understand the position with which one disagrees. Emotion takes precedence over fact. A brief return to the opening narrative highlights this difference.

I framed the narrative that began this paper as part of my own lived experience. It was a part of my lived curriculum, and my sharing it under those pretenses made a specific, grounded, and located claim to truth. I know this story to be true because it happened to me. Were it to be revealed to the students later that this was not the case—that the story was a fabrication—they might justifiably be upset by my dishonesty. Were this a case of research in which I had lied in my methodology, the paper might be pulled from publication, the results overturned, critiqued, and discredited. In the classroom setting, however, the consequences are immediate and interpersonal. The students' outrage at being deceived could swiftly turn into a wider distrust of everything I had taught up to that point.

If, however, I framed the story as a case study that happened to another teacher—say, a friend of mine—and it was later revealed that my story was a fabrication, the outrage might be less substantial. Indeed, students often come back from their practice teaching experiences with stories that run counter to the discussions we have around

certain case studies. We talk about those tensions and move beyond them. There is never an overt claim that I am lying.

Fiction then, when understood as such, isn't a deceit; it is an "otherwise" because it doesn't claim to be telling the truth. Those invested in controlling political narratives, however, *are* often making truth claims and/or dealing in the negation of established truths in their own self-interest. While this distinction approaches the obvious, I maintain that knowing the difference is critical, both for scholars undertaking speculative theorizing in the face of post-truth politics and for teachers, who increasingly must deal with the by-products of misinformation in their classrooms.

Subversion

In the climate of post-truth, one cannot help but look for responses. The most obvious response is to fact check those who mislay the truth for personal gain. Several public intellectuals and journalist organizations have taken this approach with varying degrees of success. The merit of such a response cannot be overemphasised, and at times it seems the only one available. However, alternative modalities of resistance and subversion exist.

Writing of practical responses to the political climate of post-truth prevalent in the United States, activist-philosopher Brian Massumi writes, "alternative political action does not have to fight against the idea that power has become affective, but rather has to learn to function itself on the same level" (Massumi, 2015, p. 34). Here, Massumi identifies the previously discussed affective nature of political power, where a feeling spread across a group can illicit more change and more movement than a clear statement of fact. Massumi goes on to say that meeting such affective expressions of power requires an engagement on the same level: "meet affective modulation with affective modulation" (Massumi, 2015, p. 34). The response envisioned by Massumi, then, is not logic in the face of illogical rhetoric and post-truth narrativizing. Rather, he proposes that such plays to collective emotion be met with more of the same. Some intervention needs to be made on the level of affect to disrupt the sway held by post-truth politicians.

Such interventions can take many forms. Critical counter-programing, I think, does some of this work—although within the saturated social media landscape of the twenty-first century, the effects of such interventions only register once the standard of virality is met. For their part, teachers have access to a host of pedagogical tools that can help them respond to affective modulation in kind (e.g., sharing circles, guest speakers, personal stories, literature). Here, I add to that affective modulation toolbox the idea of uncertainty as a form of subversion.

By "subversion" I mean "subtle mechanism(s) of resisting abusive forms of power that create and/or maintain oppression and harm" (Portelli & Eizadirad, 2018, p. 53). Subversion is differentiated from resistance by way of the former's subtle nature. In this sense, subversion refers to small acts, usually from within a particular system, that work against the heteropatriarchal, white, ablest, Eurocentric norms of that system (Portelli & Eizadirad, 2018). By "uncertainty" I refer to the state of having imperfect knowledge of something, but I also evoke the idea of infinitude as taken up by McNulty (2019).

McNulty's (2018) *Blood's Will* (2018) plays with this idea of uncertainty through the unreality of the vampire. She maintains that the vampire is "a form of feminist possibilities countering the totalizing discourse of western episteme" (McNulty, 2019, p. 81) in the novel by way of the vampire's immortality. Not bound within the constraint of human temporality, the vampire is limitless. Such limitlessness is one dimension of

its unreality. This unreality, for McNulty, creates the vampire as "'Other' outside the narrative 'norms' labelled as 'Truth' or human, defined by the racist colonial project that ushered forth our understanding of scientific inquiry" (p. 81). She, thus, positions the vampire as an otherwise to Truth, finitude, and certainty.

There is a parallel here between the figure of the vampire and the use of fiction in inquiry. Both take up a subversive, deviant space through their unreality and their infinitude. By taking a research form (*currere*) that situates itself in the embodied and embedded claims to truth of lived experiences and opening it up to the possibilities of the speculative, McNulty subverts the expectations of the field of autobiographical curriculum studies. Subtly, she invites into the complicated conversation equal parts critique of what is, envisionment of what could be, and healthy scrutiny over what is presented as reality within the field. Though I cannot speak to her intentions, the effect of McNulty's *ficto-currere* is to challenge the finitude of lived experience as a source of curriculum theorizing, venturing into a world in which imagination serves as inspiration for theory.

I maintain that this sort of dreaming of different curricular futures is precisely what is needed in the current socio-pedagogical moment. Emerging from the seemingly endless COVID-19 pandemic, societies need radically new possibilities in the form of responses to the changing viral landscape of the world. Likewise, the ongoing climate crisis requires new ways of thinking because the old ones have yielded fundamentally exploitative relationships with the natural world. And, perhaps most relevant to the discussion here, where political power is increasingly controlled by those who effectively modulate affect, new modalities of response in the same register are needed.

Speculative theorizing, and *ficto-currere* specifically, can be precisely that—a response to affective modulation that itself centers affect. By refusing the claims to objective Truth of patriarchal techno-capitalist science and refusing to engage with post-truth populists in a war of facts that seem not to matter, *ficto-currere* opens up the possibility of becoming otherwise. The one addition I would make is this: *ficto-currere* must stay subversive in its intent. Too many methods, ideas, and philosophies that were originally subversive have been swallowed up by the same systems they once fought against (e.g., the commodification of punk culture). Curriculum studies is not immune from this critique, as suggested by Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) in their discussion of the replacement of non-white voices with white ones in the field. Indeed, Pinar (2023) acknowledges this threat to *currere* broadly: "Nothing inherently limiting about progressivism or about conservatism I say, but both can be misappropriated, in our era the former by corporations, the latter by fascists. *Currere* could be too" (p. xi). *Ficto-currere*, then, as an emerging method of inquiry within the field of curriculum studies, must maintain and expand its anti-colonial roots, seeking to envision not just new expressions of self, but new ways of being in the world—exits from systemic racism, heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, capitalism, and, in education, the mind-numbing bureaucracy of the everyday.

An Uncertain Conclusion

One way of keeping *ficto-currere* and education subversive is in the embrace of uncertainty. In my experience, students come to our B.Ed. program seeking answers and practical advice about what to do in the classroom. Despite the best efforts of their instructors, they often see their time at the university in very instrumental terms—as training for the specific tasks they will undertake as teachers (Sanders, 2019). The courses I teach in the foundations of education diametrically oppose this vision of

teacher education. The field of educational foundations seeks a broader engagement with philosophy, sociology, and history in the interest of building a depth of knowledge about education. As an instructor in that field, I view my role as helping students make sense of the disagreements they might encounter in education, helping them learn to be reflective about their practice and helping them comprehend, and develop a respect for, the complexity of teaching.

In this, students and I have desires that are somewhat at odds. I think of it in this way: students are looking for certainty; I am trying to help them accept the uncertainty they will encounter in the classroom. Others have noted the role certainty plays in the affective landscape of teacher education (Britzman, 2007); my addition here is to propose uncertainty as subversive and productive in the teacher education classroom, just as it is in *ficto-currere*.

To return to the beginning: Does it matter if my opening narrative is true? Yes. If I make a claim that something is true based on my lived experience and it is later found to be untrue, the value of the pedagogical intervention is depleted. If, however, I purposefully and clearly articulate this event as a possible reality without a claim to truth, but also without denying the existence of truth, I invite something else, something that adds a further pedagogical layer to the story: reflexive thinking. Is the story true, is it false—you decide. You can also decide whether the lesson shared in that story is true of your experience. That sort of critical, reflexive interpretation is precisely the work of teachers, the work that has been systematically undervalued and eroded through the insidious influence of neoliberalism on education, which attempts to turn teachers into technicians rather than intellectuals (Giroux, 1988).

My call here, then, is to lean toward uncertainty in teacher education, for in uncertainty we find something subversive to those who claim to know and those who say no one knows. *Ficto-currere*, I propose, can be a way of embracing that uncertainty within inquiry and, by extrapolation, within our classrooms, so long as we maintain its subversive intent.

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Braiding a Liv(ed)ing Curriculum

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Forming the Braid

Reflecting on Chambers's (2004) critical questions, "What keeps you awake at night? What do you think about when you cannot fall asleep? What wakes you up in the middle of the night?" I reach towards an understanding of liv(ed)ing curriculum in life writing and *métissage*. How can I emphasize the critical need for stories in curricula? Whose stories matter? Whose voice is highlighted? How do I advocate for a curriculum grounded in place?

Curricula are rooted in the stories of the spaces we inhabit—from salty sea towns spackling the edges of eastern Canada, to bustling cities in Southern Ontario, to Arctic communities where the sun hangs sleepless in the sky in the depths of summer, and to the rainy, densely wooded mountains of British Columbia. How do we create meaningful and authentic curricula in diverse Canadian landscapes? I make attempts to respond to these questions each morning. After a restless sleep, at the break of dawn when the sun is just peeking over the edges of the eastern sky, I contemplate these questions as I make my way to the tiny office on the second floor.

Sunlight splays through the second-floor window. Rays dance on the peach-coloured wall, kissing the edge of a well-loved, dog-eared, coffee-ringed, and, if I'm honest, tear-stained article. Each morning this scene greets me with the aroma of Columbian blend coffee as I pad quietly to the desk in the corner, careful not to wake anyone. Thirty little words highlighted in a luminous yellow jump from the page, "If you find yourself on a path then you must stay on it only if it has heart, and it is only your heart that can tell if it's so" (Chambers, 2004, p. 6). Each morning, those words remind me to choose the path with heart and reflect on the stories that have brought me to this space.

A mélange of narratives, mine, others, human, non-human, reveals paths. I am determined to maneuver through this entanglement, drawing upon life writing, storytelling, and historical artifacts. *Métissage* authors guide my journey, laying a path before me, opening space to weave a tapestry, a *currere*. In this space, through *métissage*, I break the tethered restraints that, as a child and early career practitioner, grounded me in colonial education.

I vaguely remember early school days. We spent most of our time sitting in rows, writing multiplication tables, copying messages written in chalk to lined paper, and regurgitating meaningless facts. I vividly remember my grade one teacher lining us up, like little ducklings, to practice walking in the school halls. *Put your finger on your hip, and one on your lip* was her motto, followed by *don't let it slip*. This practice seems bizarre to me now. Put your finger on your lip, and don't let it slip. An homage to Eurocentric values, children should be seen and not heard, I suspect. Even in my early years, this struck me as odd. I found the factory model of schooling tiresome, intended to produce good workers and citizens who knew how to operate within the industrial model. Where was the action? The excitement?

Although my educators were lovely, they were products of their experiences as practitioners and graduates of a Eurocentric Canadian curriculum. One that hid(es) the ugly truths of Canada. Asking provocative questions, deconstructing hegemonic pillars upholding educational systems, and advocating for curricular change are at the forefront of my investigative quest (S. Wiebe, personal communication, February 12, 2022).

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In scholarly efforts to deepen my understanding of curriculum theory, I turn to Pinar (1994). He describes curriculum theory as interdisciplinary, examining the educational experiences woven in studies and stories. Weaving *our* micro-stories, stimulated by questions—Where do *we* come from? Where are *we* right now? Where do *we* hope things will go?—that need first to be addressed in terms of personal circumstances. As a hopeful curriculum theorist, I must begin with a braid, a *métissage* of Where do *I* come from? Where is *my* place? Where am *I* going? In unearthing these questions, I often ask, "What is the best way to go about constructing a curriculum?" In response, I look to *métissage*.

Used by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, *métissage* stems from the lens of the individual theorist (Donald, 2009). Braiding micro-stories is a critical reflection and challenge to positivistic lenses permeating academic research. *Métissage* celebrates ways of knowing through story and the liv(ed)ing curriculum, moving away from curricula grounded in Eurocentrism (Donald, 2012; Kelly, 2020; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012).

I invite readers to contemplate emergent ideas and meanings embedded in the text, their relation to curriculum theory, and the possibility of educational transformation in life writing and *métissage*. Engaging with the text draws readers into a liv(ed) ing curriculum, represented by three braids; being, (be)coming, and (be)longing—each braid encompassing three strands forming my epistemological, ontological, and axiological stance. Braid one, hand-me-downs, addresses the question, where do I come from. Followed by braid two, death (be)comes, where I question how the past persists, contaminating my daily life in subtle and not so subtle ways (Pinar, 1994). Finally, I turn to braid three, (be)longing, homerun or run/home, where I look back on the chapters of my life as I engage in authoring the future.

Braid One Being: Hand-me-downs

> From the clothes on your back, to the colour of your eyes, ain't no shame in some hand-me-downs.
>
> — Arkells, *Hand Me Downs*

Ted Aoki conceptualized a landscape of live(d) curricula. A rhizomatic, textured web of experiences past, present, and yet-to-come (Aoki, 1993). When describing my liv(ed)ing curriculum, I am drawn to the concept of hand-me-downs. Hand-me-downs from my parents and ancestors before me. Biological hand-me-downs, a double helix of DNA and stories woven together, placing me in this space and place in time. Hand-me-downs to nieces and nephews, to the little people who enter my kindergarten class. Each child brimming with their hand-me-downs. And hand-me-downs from experiences yet-to-be.

Through a liv(ed)ing curriculum of hand-me-downs and accompanying entanglements, I find myself, as an educator, in juxtaposition with planned curricula, at odds with the fabricated language and experiences entrenched within. A planned curriculum dictated by those far removed from the liv(ed)ing experiences and hand-me-downs flowing in school classrooms. It is between two farmhouses where my *métissage*, my hand-me-down story, begins.

Between Two Farmhouses

A frigid November wind rattles the windows of my great grandparents' farmhouse, now occupied by my mother and father. Outside a tiny hamlet in Southern Ontario,

Marlene and Ronald welcomed their first child in this house. Arriving early, on his birthday, we celebrated 38 years together.

Across the road lived my paternal grandparents. Here, between two farmhouses, two barns, and two-hundred acres of land, 17 years of my life were spent. I learned to grow food to nourish my body and felt the freedom of the land to feed my soul.

We spent hours in the "long grass," my sister and I, burrowing and constructing grass huts on the back acre of land. The smell of fresh-cut grass, its sweet fragrance evokes a memory that has slept in the back of my mind. Each spring, more memories awake from slumber as if renewed with the budding of trees and births of a new season. It is as if flood gates have opened.

We snuck into the old barn at the back of my grandparents' farm, jumping from the rafters to the hay beds below, between two farmhouses. Squealing with laughter, hay tangled in our hair, we were left to our own devices. Exploring apple orchards, climbing trees, eating red currents, blackberries, and collecting walnuts.

Surrounded by barn cats, dogs, wild animals, and each other. Between two farmhouses, we learned the circle of life. We watched mama cat birth four kittens. Rescued and nurtured bunnies abandoned after their mother satisfied the hunger of a fox. And witnessed the death of Bullet, the family dog. We gathered apples for cider, chopped wood for the stove, prepared for winter, canned relish and chilli sauce, a favourite of my mother's.

These were my early years, a curriculum of place, my stories derived from and inextricably linked with the land. Chambers (2006) cautions that living off the land and with the land can be fatal if you do not know its stories. Stories address the importance of protocols in honouring and acknowledging the relationship between self, family, the community, and non-human relations. Without stories, we risk violating the boundaries, fatal errors, in relation with the land (Blood et al., 2012). Stories of the land between two farmhouses grounded me in the relationship to my place. My liv(ed)ing curriculum.

I married my husband on the back acre of land, between two farmhouses, under the gazebo crafted by my father. We added our story to the place, the land, and the relationships within. The house still stands but is no longer ours, our stories held within—our stories forever connected to the land, embedded in farmhouses, barns, and etched in our memories—a place of hand-me-down joys, heartaches, and love.

Roots

Genealogy has always interested me. My paternal grandmother, and her mother before, kept meticulous records and stories from generations past. Fleeing Scotland, my great-great-grandmother arrived at the port of Quebec in 1912. With five children in tow, she reunited with her husband. They settled on a small farm near London, Ontario. My great-grandmother, a small child at the time, had long waited to be reunited with her father. A year separated by the Atlantic Ocean seemed like an eternity.

Grandma told stories of their pilgrimage while she quilted. I listened and watched—the needle so precise. Hand-me-down stories from my fathers' big family book, from memory, and a place held dear in his heart. Stories shared between two farmhouses.

My maternal grandparents' told stories as we collected sap at the family sugar bush. We trounced through the snow and mud, through thickets and brush, trying to keep up as Grandpy told stories of his mother's favourite dish, squirrel pie and life on the farm in the early 1900s. His story is in sharp contrast with my Grandmy's upbringing. While stirring the sticky sap in hopes of creating a delicious syrup, Grandmy told stories of her father, a semi-professional baseball player and his wife, a school teacher. These hand-me-down

stories ended here; preceding generations remained a mystery. As an adult, I felt a yearning to know more. What I unearthed was accompanied by pangs of guilt and a heavy heart.

The Burning of Beaubassin

In 2020 when the COVID19 pandemic swept across nations, my husband and I began his ancestral quest. Although we had infrequently picked at his genealogy throughout the years, we immersed ourselves in unearthing his family history this year. Provincial records and historical artifacts offered little information.

His ancestry is complex, grounded in Mi'kmaq, Métis, and French roots. Documents, when available, branded his ancestors as *sauvage* or *savage*. Stories of native ancestry, hidden identities, war, and royal lineage swirled from cousins to aunts, uncles, grandparents, and grandchildren—no one knowing the truth and *official* documentation hidden away.

We had an insatiable taste to extract the truth through the hodgepodge of stories. What we did(n't) uncover left us infuriated, frustrated, and dumbfounded. Numerous records displaying *unknown* child, parent, husband or wife, and multiple name changes left our search in a stalemate—finally, a break, an ancestor rooted in Beaubassin, New Brunswick. I had a vague memory of Beaubassin from my family history located somewhere in the entanglement of ancestors.

It was a Sunday, football Sunday in our house. My husband reclined in his favourite chair, snacks at hand, while I half-heartedly watched, more intently perusing my maternal heritage. Mindlessly clicking and expanding the digital tree, I came across, quite by accident and partly by frustration, Benjamin Church. His brief biography indicated he had sailed to Beaubassin in autumn 1696 and again in 1704. My husbands' unsuspecting ancestors would soon see their community burnt to the ground in the name of the Puritan God at the hands of Benjamin Church, not once but twice. I gazed up at my partner, guilty and apologetic. All I could muster was, "I'm sorry."

Mark Wolynn (2017) reminds us through the entanglement with our family systems, we unconsciously carry our ancestors' feelings, symptoms, behaviours, or hardships as if they were our own. Through literary *métissage*, stories are entangled, ours, others, human and non-human. It is peculiar to think my ancestors and my partners' ancestors faced each other in battle hundreds of years ago. As New England and New Brunswick colonies fought for sovereignty against the harsh environment and threats of war, a liv(ed)ing curriculum began to bind their descendants to the land. A hand-me-down history, situated in stories, land, and pedigree, left me feeling conflicted.

Braid Two (Be)coming: Death (Be)comes

> If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people.
>
> – Thich Nhat Hanh, *A Lifetime of Peace*

> We never lose our loved ones. They accompany us; they don't disappear from our lives. We are merely in different rooms.
>
> — Paulo Coelho, *Aleph*

Different rooms hold different memories, painful, joyous, indifferent. Or perhaps they hold parallel memories. After all, a room is just four walls and a roof. If you are

lucky, a window and door. If not, a cell, a cage, a pen, a place where freedom is lost or gained. Rooms in our homes, institutions, and rooms in our minds. Walls erected and demolished, changing with the zeitgeist.

Each of these rooms (be)coming, not unlike the human experience. As my grandmother would say, coming into your own, building foundations, walls, and pillars to establish your future. However, there are times when our liv(ed)ing experiences shake our foundations. Walls tumble and are (re)framed, (re)purposed, (re)arranged, and (re) conditioned.

Loss and grief play out in different rooms in our minds, hearts, and topographies of our liv(ed)ing spaces. The terrain difficult, at best, to navigate. The room that once held hope for a new life now covered in peach-coloured paint, journal articles, and sticky notes. A desk cowering in the corner with coffee-stained rings, awaiting the next late-night writing session. The room that held uniforms, bats, cleats, and the smell of the baseball diamond after weekend tournaments, now overpowered by moving boxes and the smell of cardboard. The room that once smelled of cinnamon and flowery perfume, now flooded with bouquets of dust and sorrow; unused weights lying haphazardly on the floor.

These rooms had future intentions, accompanied by the humans residing within. Those loved ones now in different rooms, in different spaces, in different times. Leggo (2017), in his timeless poetry, writes,

> As one who is left behind, my calling is to remember my brother and to share stories about him, but my calling is also to explore connections between life and loss, and the possibilities that extend beyond loss. Ultimately the curriculum of loss is a curriculum of hope. (p. 76)

I turn to his work for inspiration and a glimmer of hope amidst the loss in times of unbearable grief.

Cancer

But I am only 24—barely two decades on this planet. So much more to experience. I would rather not spend what may be the last years of my life smelling death in this tiny, sterile hospital room—so harsh and uninviting, cold and bare, save a few steel instruments glistening on a surgical tray.

Traumatic experiences stay with us for a lifetime (Balsawer, 2017). The vulnerability experienced through my cancer curriculum replays in my mind often, poking through the cracks, forcing its way to the surface of my consciousness. When it reaches the surface, vulnerability washes over me again, a feeling of grief, loss, pain, and an invisible ache.

When the memory bubbles through the cracks, it parallels the memory of my grade 10 biology class. The same sterile environment mirrors the tiny hospital room. I empathize with the frogs prepared for dissection. Arranged, pinned, and outstretched on a miniature silver tray, organs exposed. With steel instruments at hand, a pair of clumsy 14-year-old high school students poked and prodded at the most internal of spaces. Lab partners, hormones raging, much more interested in each other than a deceased frog on a tacky tray. In this room, I feel like that frog, being poked at and prodded by a team of specialists. I wonder if they feel like those clumsy teenagers. Are there unspoken tensions, an office affair, perhaps? Funny how the grade 10 biology curriculum is playing out in real life, me as the specimen.

No longer a specimen, I reflect on what was supposed to be. I was supposed to (be)come a mother, a giver of life. Cancer took that from me, my (be)coming. This nefarious disease infiltrated and ravaged my cells, as depression stole my spiritual and psychological (well)being.

My liv(ed)ing cancer curriculum reveals nuances embedded within my positionality as an educator, researcher, scholar, and student. I (be)come more than a medical file by illuminating my voice as a cancer patient and survivor. In education, as in medicine, we tend to rely heavily on paper trails attached to students. I am empowered through my cancer curriculum to look beyond the paper trail tethered to each student; I reach for their story, the human behind the paperwork. We are much more than the documentation and labels others attach to us.

I Tried and Failed

My mother-in-law had come to stay with us for a few weeks after a nasty fall. I had always admired her determination. The oldest of eight, she raised her siblings, tended to children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. No formal schooling beyond the third grade, her tenacity created a life full of experiences sewn together with an unbreakable thread of love. Do what you do with love, a motto she practiced as religiously as she did her Catholic faith. She extended her teachings to me. Her curriculum taught me to tend with care and humility.

On bed rest, we waited on her, bringing breakfast each morning, changing bandages, listening to stories, and spoiling her with sweet treats. Her spirits brightened as the pain subsided, appearing to be on the mend. However, late one Sunday evening, a scream, my name, howled down the hall, bypassing the stairs, my ears rang. Heart beating fiercely, I exploded from the recliner and shot up the stairs, two at a time. I burst into her room. On autopilot, I hollered to my husband, "Call 911!"

I began compressions and rescue breathing in an attempt to resuscitate her—finally, a gasp followed by laboured breathing. I gently rocked her in my arms, reassuring her, "I've got you; help is coming," on repeat for what seemed like an eternity. Paramedics arrived, assessed the situation, then her breathing stopped again. I shoveled my partner downstairs while responding to the insatiable questions from medical staff. Chaos.

Void of sirens and lights, the ambulance departed, making its journey to the local hospital. Deep in my heart, I knew she had taken her last breaths in my arms. The incredible guilt weigh(s)ed on me. I failed her, my husband, and all those who h(o)eld her dear. Hot tears escaped the corners of my eyes. I wiped them away, compartmentalized my emotions, and internalized my grief.

Months later, I came across the works of Carl Leggo through my doctoral studies. His writing, a comfort on days filled with grief. Reflecting on the lessons from my mother-in-law and Leggo's writing, I linger in the moments that provide a sliver of hope, hope that one day will emerge from loss.

A Father's Last Thursday

As hope began to poke its fingers through the darkness, I received a text. The loss of my mother-in-law was not to be our only loss that summer. One month later, after her passing, I would receive a text. Two days after, he would be declared *legally deceased*.

"*I think dad has had a stroke*," was all the text read. My husband and I quickly piled into our old Ford Explorer to make the hour and a half drive to the small-town hospital.

Navigating hospital protocols during a pandemic was not an easy task. However, I negotiated the entanglement of hospital policy, earning entry into the ICU for my sister, mother, and me. A troop of nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, and numerous other

medical staff met us in the corridor. Surrounding the gurney, I desperately tried to usher my way past the nurse. Her attempts to reroute my path towards my father to the family waiting room were successful.

I sulked into the tiny room lined with putrid green plastic-covered chairs. Void of windows, we named the room the jail cell, although I am sure even prisoners have a window in their cells. Detained, we sat in that cell for hours while doctors and nurses settled dad, repeated tests, and ensured he was stable.

Sitting in silence, I began to think about dad's last visit to watch my husband and I play softball. Sitting on the bleachers, my mother by his side, he looked just like I remembered, watching me play baseball some 30 years earlier. He taught me how to hit a ball and practiced, between two farmhouses, with my sister and me. He even drew us a target on the side of the old barn to hone our pitching skills. He carefully curated a baseball curriculum to provide his daughters with opportunities to thrive.

Through sport, he cheered us on, questioned umpires' decisions, and even coached a team of adolescent girls. Interrupting the memory, a young, pregnant doctor entered the waiting room accompanied by a nurse who had been with dad when he arrived at the hospital. The nurse told us how dad was bragging about his kids and grandkids and how proud he was.

Assuming hormones wreak havoc on emotions, I glanced at the young, pregnant doctor, wondering how she was so calm. Here she was in the process of creating life contrasted by delivering devastating news to a family facing the loss of a life. Small tears had begun to form in her eyes as she described dad's current state. The prognosis was not good.

Saturday morning, we received the final news. After completing all tests on the brain, the doctor declared him *legally deceased*. I received a crash course in brain functioning, scans, hemorrhaging, and the impact on the brain's structure. I dug deep and quickly compartmentalized my emotions. I listened intently. I needed to keep my composure as I again had to deliver unimaginable news and respond to insatiable questions.

I listened to the guilt my sister felt, I sat in silence comforting my mother, and I returned home to support my husband, still grieving the loss of his mother. However, despite the pain and despair, I found glimmers of hope in each of their confessions. In loss, there is hope (Leggo, 2017; Wiebe, 2020). My dad gave hope to families through the gift of life and sight. In our loss, another family found hope, and in that, I find hope.

We planned a celebration of life where family and friends gathered to share stories, memories, and laughter. Food was plentiful. Laughs and hugs were free. We saw hope gleaming in the eyes of nieces and nephews, children and grandchildren, sisters and brothers. He had created a space of hope despite the dark times ahead.

Loss is difficult to navigate. Grief sits with us all differently. The wills, funerals and cremations, documentation, signatures, death certificates, insurance, bills, and after-care are seemingly never-ending responsibilities permeating the loss curriculum. However, in grief, I am reminded of those who came before me, planted the seeds, where my roots dive into the soil, strengthening connections to my liv(ed)ing curriculum. I am standing here in this place, connected to the land and its stories through the roots of my ancestors and the grief we endure through familial loss.

Braid Three Be-longing: Homerun or Run/home

> Every year, once spring has sprung, my world regains proper proportion because baseball is back. I love the central metaphor of the game—all of us helping each other to make it home. Funny how a game can teach us so much about life.
>
> — Richard Wagamese, *Embers*

One of my favourite childhood memories is playing softball. I learned (be)longing is a key part of the softball curriculum. (Be)longing, feeling like a part of the team. Be(ing) in longing. Longing to be a part of, longing to be a good player, longing to improve, longing to be admired, and longing to be the best. I was a part of the team but awkward, longing to be(long) and understand social nuances. Not fitting in, but fitting in as an all-star player—it was a weird juxtaposition for a 12-year-old to maneuver.

In times of uncertainty, I turn to the central metaphor of baseball, making it home. I hit the ball, run the bases, team cheering "slide!" "run!" "go go go!" and the opposing team screaming "catch it!" "throw it [the ball] home!" "tag her!" As in baseball, my journey with(in) doctoral studies has felt similar, some cheering me on, some questioning my pilgrimage, some opposing my choices, and others indifferent.

Allyship

I sat with how to (be)long in allyship for many years. In the latter half of my 39 years, I have realized there is no one way to be an ally. It looks different, feels different, and is welcomed, or not, in the spaces we inhabit in a multitude of ways. I am guided by those who journey with me, navigating uneven terrain.

In my masters' degree, I wanted to collaborate with Indigenous communities in language revitalization. I was apprehensive, afraid of making fatal errors. Like a fumbling toddler, I wandered around in the unknown landscape. Guided by Elders, their teachings, gentleness, honesty, and candid stories are kept safe in a place in my heart and mind.

An Elder gently suggested I keep a reflective journal. I was apprehensively drawn to writing but struggled to find the words. I am thankful I heeded the wise words. In rereading the journal, I found what resembles a poem.

> Entrusted with stories
> This scared place calls
> Enter with a good heart
> A clear mind
> An offering
> Sweat beads dripping in blinding darkness
> Wind wailing outside the lodge
> Sizzling heat from scorching rocks
> A welcoming warmth
> Emitting sweet cedar aromas
> Indebted to my guides
> Gentle and still
> I welcome the wave of calm
> I erred, and I learned. I am still learning. I will still err. I will seek guidance.

I acknowledge that allyship takes different forms, grounded in place and space. It is listening, loving, action, activism, and so much more. But mostly, it is a curriculum—a curriculum of love, hope, fear, and (be)longing.

Caution

I am interested in unearthing inequalities, injustices, and power differentials plaguing Eurocentric education. Historical realities embedded in the Canadian curricular landscape are central to my pilgrimage. However, others remind me to proceed with *caution*.

Cautiously, I question the place and space I inhabit. In my early years, plagued by a naive understanding of sociopolitical power structures, I *struck* out, not understanding where I went wrong. Understanding I do not have a role in every place and space was a crucial turning point. Acknowledging my positionality, what I represent physically and my entanglement with others is a crucial part of my liv(ed)ing curriculum and my path with heart (Chambers, 2004).

As foster parents, my partner and I engaged in candid conversations. Youth in our care described how intersectionalities influenced marginalization and discrimination, perpetuating cultures of *oppression*, *impoverishment*, *addiction*, *crime*, *gangs*, and the *stigmatization of mental health*. Their stories of liv(ed)ing curriculum demonstrated the systematic oppression of certain populations.

As Weber and Mitchell (2002) describe, our stories are not only our own. Although they are not my narratives, the entanglement of stories illuminates hegemonic culture. I am mindful when engaging in life writing and *métissage* that authors (be)come exposed and vulnerable. However, it is next to impossible to challenge historical realities without exposing vulnerabilities in our liv(ed)ing curriculum.

Authoring my story as entangled with others opens a space for (be)longing and (re) storying through vulnerable expression. Hopeful to (re)story and (be)long, I continue my pilgrimage with an open heart, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Homecoming

Caught between third and home, the catcher blocking home plate, the third-baseman behind me, nowhere to go. I'm stuck in a *run-down*—attempting to get to home plate or back to third without being tagged out. The run-down, a metaphor for my early adult years, and perhaps, to some extent, I still carry this back-and-forth between home and third with me.

From hitting the ball at home plate, running to first, second, third, and back to home, the base-path, the path with heart, guides me. Bases represent critical stops along the way. Sometimes I linger at a base for a batter or two, sometimes I run right past, touching the tip of the bag as I go. Other times, I'm called out and start over again.

The more I dig into the central metaphor of baseball, the more I see the game embedded in our everyday lives: as a baserunner, stopping and lingering in some spaces, passing quickly through others, rounding first and going to second, or having to start over when I am called out. As a fielder, I have made fatal errors allowing others to score or advance, caught fly balls getting the batter out, and made plays holding runners in place. At different points in our lives, I believe we take on the role(s) of fielder or batter, and other times, we are the (im)partial umpire.

Seemingly there are challenges to coming/home/coming. In baseball, as in life, obstacles prevent us from arriving at the place and space where we root ourselves. I often question, will the reckless entanglement of stories keep me from coming home?

Tying the Knot

> The curriculum is not comprised of subjects, but of Subjects, of subjectivity. The running of the course is the building of the self, the lived experience of subjectivity.
>
> — Pinar, (1994, p. 220)

Through a juxtaposition of past, present, and future, I have presented a tapestry of relational curricula, in constant flux, the Subjects and subjectivity—the liv(ed) ing experience. I introduced my pilgrimage by theorizing life writing *métissage* as a

curricular and therapeutic practice where my *currere* could be braided into larger narratives of curriculum research (Chambers et al., 2002; hooks, 1991). Each braid, hand-me-downs, death (be)comes, and homerun or run/home presented readers with context, a connection to liv(ed)ing curriculum in different spaces and places and times.

Through *métissage*, I pondered the ethos of Canadian curriculum and the path with heart engrained in my liv(ed)ing curriculum, a necessary point of departure for critical curricular and pedagogical studies. To be committed to curricula honouring the complexity and richness of the human experience in a Canadian landscape requires authenticity and autobiography (Chambers et al., 2012).

Give me broken branches, and I will build a fort (Aoki et al., 2004). By looking to *métissage* as a theoretical framework grounded in place and relationality, we can provoke a profoundly relational way of thinking about curriculum. Conceivably, it is time to challenge curriculum development by asking, Why this knowledge? Why this place? Whose knowledge counts? and Whose knowledge permeates Canadian curriculum?

Donald (2009) reminds us we must seek opportunities to develop deep understandings of our shared histories. Through life writing and *métissage*, we can begin to piece together Ted Aoki's broken branches, collectively assembling an authentic and meaningful fort. After all, "There is nothing standing in *currere*'s way except our internal fears and insecurities of what we might look like from a distance" (García, 2021, p. 45).

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Reflections of a Rural White Working-Class Kid in Higher Education

By Jonathan Tyler Baker
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If you've not tried writing a family history, I encourage you to do so. The process is enlightening and cathartic. It also inspires reflection and a chance to see how you fit into the narrative of a larger story where you, the author, are a character who appears towards the end; a character whose significance to the plot is uncertain. In April 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns left me with a glaring need of a hobby, I wrote vignettes of about my family history. They were an eclectic, and sometimes lawless, group of Appalachian descendants who took up residence in southwest Ohio in the 1930s who, by the 2010s, were mired in effects of deindustrialization, the opioid epidemic, and nativist political ideologies. What I couldn't help but notice when writing these vignettes was that the story grew increasingly bleaker as I wrote towards the present. Lost jobs. Overdoses. Anger. Resentment. Helplessness.

By the time I appeared in the vignettes, nothing about life in Southwest Ohio looked the same. In 1952, by the age of thirty, my great-grandfather had fought in World War II, fathered three children, and had employment at the Champion Paper Company in Hamilton, Ohio, for wages good enough that my great-grandmother was a life-long homemaker. By the age of 30 in 2022, I had a Ph.D., no children, and many wages to be desired. Something seemed off. Or, perhaps, I wasn't viewing the stories I wrote through the correct lens. In writing my family's history, I understood how they came to view things the way they did based on their experiences with, and perceptions of, the world around them, especially their relationship with employment, but I did not have the chance to understand how I came to view the world based on the same criteria. I was trying to understand the past without first understanding my position in the present.

I wanted the chance to reflect on my family's beliefs about how one should work, the value they place on contributing to society through one's occupation, and their hostility to higher education—a place that shaped my identity as a scholar and professor in ways that I never expected. What's different now—why I decided to reflect on my identity at this moment—is my relationship with higher education, both as a first-generation college student and now as a member of the professoriate. The kind of reflective journey that I wanted to take required deep introspection and questioning, which I found through the method of *currere* (Pinar, 2004), during the first year of my Ph.D. program.

In this method, one moves through four moments of critical self-reflection—thinking specifically about their educational experiences and the various historical, social, and cultural contexts that give it meaning (Pinar, 2004). One begins by reflecting on their past educational experiences, then imagines the type of future they wish to build while considering how the past shaped what Pinar (1994) calls the "biological present," before finally synthesizing experiences with education to construct a sense of identity and self (p. 26). To answer the question of who I am as an individual, as a scholar, and as an educator, is to engage in critical self-reflection of my educational experiences, but rather than reflect on my time in school, I want to reflect on and make sense of the working-class curriculum that shaped my identity and the liminality of my identity as a child of the white working-class, a first-generation college student, and as a member of the professoriate through vignettes of inflection points in my life.

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"Egghead Liberals"

Where I feel the most strain between my family and career is over their perception of professors and American higher education, in-general. When I first left for college, my dad encouraged me not to let the "egghead liberals"—the ones who would presumably be teaching my classes—indoctrinate me with their "socialist" and "anti-American" ideas. It came to the point where I stopped sharing with him what I learned in my classes. I distinctly remember recalling to my dad how I'd learned that Abraham Lincoln wasn't much of an abolitionist but nonetheless used the abolition of slavery as a military tool to win the Civil War. His response? Something to the effect of, "Did you look at your professor and tell them how wrong they were thinking the Civil War had anything to do with slavery? It was about the South fighting for freedom against a tyrannical federal government." In other words, my family's view of higher education is colored by a healthy dose of partisan political rhetoric, much less a skepticism of higher education. They're not the only ones, though. Study after study has shown that the working class is quite skeptical of higher education and the benefits of a college education (Jaschik, 2017). Since the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016, that skepticism has bordered on outright hostility—mostly from those in the white working-class (Creel, 2022).

The skepticism my father expressed to me when I first went to college lingered in the back of my mind. I paid attention to every word my professors said, waiting for them to say something—*anything*—that proved my father's point of view. Without even knowing it, I'd subconsciously politicized my own education. I felt trapped. I couldn't share my experiences in the classroom with my family for fear of looking like I was giving in to supposed ideological indoctrination. I couldn't tell my professors that I was secretly waiting for them to reveal their allegiance to international Communism. And I couldn't allow myself to learn for the sake of learning.

I reached the breaking point of living between two different social identities. My liminality—that competition between being a college student and a loyal adherent to the white working-class creed—was stretched to the limit. There is an immense pressure within my white working-class community to stand by your beliefs, to not let the views of the outside world influence what is referred to as "common sense" thinking—the idea of always being able to listen to your gut instincts over academic knowledge. Then, in the classroom, especially in the undergraduate seminar, professors encourage students to challenge their preconceived notions, to think critically about why we stand by certain beliefs. How could I be a good college student without feeling like a traitor to the world that raised me? That sounds dramatic, but it was a real dilemma for me.

One conclusion that I've come to is that I made the situation more difficult than it had to be yet lacked the cognitive tools to improve the situation. First-generation college students, especially those from the rural, white working-class, are entering higher education with cultural and social beliefs that do not always serve them well in academic settings that necessitate critical thinking. From my experience, the curriculum of the white working-class life is much more black-and-white, if you will, than your typical open-ended term paper or democratic dialogue in search of meaning. For example, my grandfather was a big fan of the 1950s TV crime caper *77 Sunset Strip*. Regardless of which episode we happened to be watching, my grandfather knew who committed the crime. Being young and not considering that he'd had decades to re-watch every episode, I asked him how he always guessed who committed the crime that was trying to be solved. His response really stuck with me. "Chances are, the right answer is the one that makes the most sense, so I try not to overthink it."

I would venture to say that my grandfather's remark about sensible answers is a key pillar of how most folks in my community view the world. It's how I was raised to view the world. But that kind of thinking only went so far when considering complex academic, theoretical, or conceptual problems. The missing link between the curriculum of the white working-class and the curriculum of the college campus is that there may not always be a right answer, or any answer at all, to some of life's most complicated problems. Sometimes, overthinking a topic, question, or problem is the only way to think about it. I did not understand that when I got to college. I assumed any answer past the most obvious answer was the result of overthinking a topic, making things more complicated than they needed to be—that any complex answer should be received with skepticism. There I was, in college to receive an education, but had no idea how to allow myself to be educated.

Luckily, a sharp-eyed professor sensed that something was off and asked if I'd stop by his office for coffee one day after class. I'd just received a terrible grade on one of his writing assignments, and I assumed the conversation would revolve around why I wasn't a good writer. Instead, and to my utter disbelief, we sat down in his office and talked for nearly an hour about everything but the assignment. He asked where I was from, what I wanted to do after college, and about life in rural Ohio. He shared about his upbringing in New York City and how he came to study politics. He seemed so down to earth. Nothing about him made me think he was an "egghead liberal," or trying to conscript me into the Legion of Doom.

After the conversation reached a lull, though, my professor finally brought up my paper. "I wanted to talk to you about the paper because it seems like you may not have understood the prompt," my professor told me. I asked what he meant. "Well, you were asked to make an argument, but you didn't really have much of an argument, so I figured there might be some confusion." The prompt in question asked students to analyze George Orwell's short story "Shooting an Elephant," about British-ruled Burma in the 1920s and explain what the story represented. To me, it was obvious what the story was about: The British had control over Burma due to Imperialism and could do things like shoot an elephant. Problem solved. I reiterated as much to the professor sitting across from me. He looked a bit exasperated, like I was putting him on, but he sensed that I was serious. Then he said something that, to this day, I still find to be profound. "Have you ever considered that the most obvious answer may not be *the* answer?"

The obvious answer may not be *the* answer. It seems like a simple enough statement, but in the context of my upbringing, news like this was paradigm shifting. My professor explained to me that "Shooting an Elephant" was an allegory for British imperialism in Asia, and my job in the assignment was to argue why Orwell would write the story in the first place. Suddenly, things started to click into place in my head. Thinking critically about an argument wasn't wasted energy overthinking a "common sense" answer but was instead a way of processing and understanding complex problems. I'm not sure how long it took me to fully comprehend the paradigm shift, yet I do remember exactly how it made me feel. Some questions are just too big and too complicated and too interwoven with other complex issues that a simple answer cannot be the only answer, or the *whole* answer, for that matter.

I realized that my professors were not advocating for me to hold different opinions or bend to the beliefs that they believed were correct. No, my professors were encouraging me to think about all the possible ways to answer a question; they wanted me to learn how not to hastily accept the easiest answer and to work my brain to seek all the

information on a topic before answering. If somebody had explained that whole concept to me prior to entering college, I think I would have been saved a lot of grief. Instead, the curriculum of my upbringing taught me to view higher education and my professors in a specific way. I believed I'd cracked some code. I'd found a way to understand how to find success in college without feeling as if I'd been swept away from any connections with my community.

The Trouble with the "Workin' Man's Ph.D."

When I told my dad that I was accepted into a Ph.D. program, he congratulated me and said he was excited that I'd soon join him in the ranks. That confused me. My dad didn't have any college degrees. He saw the confusion on my face, chuckled, and said, "I have a working man's PhD." His response, while clever, wasn't original. It's the hook from country music singer Aaron Tippin's 1993 song, "Workin Man's Ph.D.," wherein Mr. Tippin explains how the lessons of life learned through a career in a working-class occupation—namely manual labor—should earn the laborers a Ph.D. for their expertise on living in "reality" and building "the things that really make the world go 'round" (Tippin, 1993). Consider the lyrics that comprise the song's chorus:

> Now, there ain't no shame in a job well done
> From driving a nail to driving a truck
> As a matter of fact, I'd like to set things straight
> A few more people should be pullin' their weight
> If you want a cram course in reality
> You get yourself a Working Man's Ph.D.

My dad's response—as well as Mr. Tippin's song—highlights a long-standing cultural touchstone of white working-class America: that they do the hardest, most meaningful jobs,' and, by extension, are the most productive members of society. And I've had one hell of a time trying to explain to my family how I'm productive and contributing to society as a professor. My parents, my siblings, and grandmother have, in one way or another, politely asked about what *exactly* I do daily. Since I do not have a typical eight-hour, shift-work schedule like everyone else in my family, it's often assumed that I'm not, well, working. The assumption is that I'm only working when I'm on campus teaching—that everything else is unmitigated free-time. Despite currently teaching six courses a semester, I've had more than one family member ask recently, "When are you going to get a *real* job?" To my family, working is leaving the house, putting in the hours, and then leaving work behind at the end of the day, having something to show for their work.

As a result, I often think about the lack of value my family puts on the work I do every day. As a PhD student, I struggled to even convey what I was studying or working on. My family struggled to affirm the value in what I was working on. I distinctly remember writing a term paper on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and how it applied to working-class college students coming into higher education while sitting at my grandmother's table as I was caring for her after a surgery. After about two hours of endless typing, my grandmother asked me what I was working on.

I told her, without thinking much about my response, "Oh, it's a paper where I'm using a theory to explain how college is sometimes out of reach for poorer students." I regretted what I said as soon as the words left my mouth.

My grandmother tilted her head a bit and asked, "What's the point in that?"

As a teacher-scholar, it is difficult to produce physical, tangible results of your daily work. When my family asked what I did all day, I thought about writing new lessons to use in the classroom, or doing research for my next manuscript, or responding to a steady stream of emails, or spending hours hunched over a computer grading. And yet, to me, the days where I can produce a physical manifestation of my work are reserved for days that I teach or when a publication goes to print. Nonetheless, the product of my labor is only reaching a select few. Even if I graded work for multiple classes and typed words into a budding journal article, it all went away when I closed my computer. Whatever sense of accomplishment I felt was weak and riddled with insecurity. Despite my work feeling intrinsically important, it outwardly had little value to my community or family.

I also had trouble coming to terms with the atypical schedule of a graduate student and, eventually, professor. For my family, any time not worked after the sun came up was, in their mind, time wasted. Mr. Tippin had something to say about that, too. Of early working-class risers who go and get the job done each morning, he sings, "You get up every morning 'fore the sun comes up/A long hard day sure ain't much fun/But you got to get it started if you want to get it done" (Tippin, 1993). My working-class parents wear their hours-worked and early-rise times like badges of honor. My dad never misses a chance to let me know the hour he had to wake up for work that morning to service a crane, and my mom proudly discloses that she's had her alarm set to the same time for 30 years—5:15am. As a teenager, if I woke up after 10:00am on the weekends, one of my parents would eventually quip, "You slept half the day away!" As a result, I've felt that if the sun was up, I should be doing work. Even today, I still feel the need to work—grading, reading literature, writing, responding to emails, teaching, whatever—during the typical working day hours.

What I had trouble understanding was how my family's view of work acted as an ideological curriculum that trained my mind to view my professor—and self-worth—through the paradigm of how much effort I put into my occupation. As a faculty member, that way of thinking is a slippery slope to being overworked, as scholars have recently noted as a phenomenon among "blue collar scholars," or those in the professoriate from a working-class background (Pifer et al., 2022). I'm constantly reminding myself to step away from work when I have the chance, to be more intentional about rest. But the curriculum of my parent's beliefs surrounding work cannot be made to disappear. I've accepted that it is part of who I am.

I've had to be self-critical and reflective, though, when it comes to crafting the curriculum that I use in the classroom. What I learned on my educational journey from being a child of the white working-class to teaching in a college classroom with students who are largely not white, nor working-class, is that my cultural ideas of work are not universally applicable. My curriculum used to reflect my family's beliefs about work. I'd assign students an unimaginable amount of reading and writing assignments per week, believing that higher education—our coursework—was their job, and they had plenty of hours each day to get the job finished. That was a huge mistake.

For as much as I had my cultural beliefs about when and how to work, students also had their own conceptions of work. I learned about the limitations of my family's outlook on work as experience has taught me that factors like neurodiversity and disability influence how and when a student completes their assignments. I had to negotiate between the engrained expectations that I had for myself and the reality of teaching folks from various backgrounds and lived experiences. At the same time, I often wonder

how many of my students are in the same cone of silence with their families about college. Ultimately, I've found myself more in a position to validate students' academic interests and intellectual curiosities because I'm never certain if they're receiving such affirmation from anyone else. For none of us truly know whether a student is from a household where a "workin' man's Ph.D." reigns supreme.

"Why Does That Matter?"

I currently teach African American history and the socio-cultural foundations of American education—two subjects that I couldn't see myself teaching when I initially began my journey from rural Ohio to the halls of academe. Many of my students are, like me, also first-generation. It's exactly what I want. I firmly believe that, without the experience of testing boundaries of my liminality, I would not be doing what I am today. Of equal importance is that, without reflecting on those experiences, I would not be the teacher that I am today. McDonald (2009) argues that a key part of *currere* is learning from the experiences that influence our identities as educators and that the process of sense-making is integral to becoming one's most authentic self as an educator (McDonald, 2020). Such a process of reflecting on my experiences has not only allowed me to fully embody my original self in the classroom but has equally altered my pedagogical approach to teaching.

More than anything, I understand that the care taken by one professor in undergrad led to an important lynchpin moment in my educational journey. To me, what first-generation, white, working-class college students tend to need more than anything else—especially those students who hail from families or communities already skeptical of higher education—is care and patience from their professors. The establishment of care in professor-student relationships is viewed as a key element to recognizing a student's humanity and providing them with a sense of belonging (Monchinski, 2010). And yet, a caring relationship also lays the foundation for epistemological curiosity—a place where professors often must lead white working-class students who feel as if questioning their beliefs is tantamount to treason.

I've taught dozens of students who, like me, were resistant to see any new knowledge as anything more than information delivered with the intent of antagonizing their beliefs. What I've found is that students in this position need the encouragement to view new information out of a place of curiosity, not commitment. Each semester, I'm often teaching controversial concepts like Critical Race Theory (CRT) and hegemony to first-year students who've only heard about those concepts through negative discourse. I can't simply demand that they understand these concepts and take them as fact. I'd lose them in an instant. Rather, I tell my students that I'm merely looking for them to understand a topic, not to instantly agree with it. If professors provide skeptical students with the chance to interact with ideas without the pressure of committing to the ideas, they tend to ask more questions and want to understand more.

Another key takeaway from reflecting on my educational experience is the need to be authentic as a learner and professor. What I mean by authentic is that I try to be the same version of myself in the classroom as I am out of the classroom. I am a child of the rural white working-class who still dresses the part. I still wear cowboy boots and a George Jones belt buckle—even when I teach. I still approach most topics with a sense of skepticism and illustrate that line of thinking when I teach. I want to show my students that one can still hold onto their identity and engage in intellectual curiosity. I want to illustrate that critical thinking is not partisan and asking questions like, "What does that

mean?" or "Why does that matter?" or "Why does somebody think that way?" is an acceptable, and encouraging, intellectual exercise. I want them to know that taking the time to overthink and understand is not a bad thing. That there is never such a thing as too many questions. Presenting my authentic self to my students has created a sense of trust and comfort in our classes together. And it provides me with the ability to draw on my past experiences to create a level of empathy and understanding with my students—something that I wouldn't be able to do without first engaging in deep reflection about who I am as an educator.

My experience of taking a working-class curriculum into higher education and then making my career in higher education while still living daily among the working-class has led me to embrace the whole ordeal as a key part of my identity. I do not want to separate myself from the culture in which I was raised, yet I found ways to break free from the constraints of viewing the world from one perspective. I am at peace with my liminality because it now feels as if it's a gift, a way to bridge two institutions separated by an increasingly sizable gulf. I'm at peace with the fact that my family still has no clue what I do and that they never really try to seek a better understanding of what I do. So long as I'm at peace with who I am and can use my educational experiences to be a better educator, I know that I'm in the right place between two worlds.

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So What? Dialogue about the Limits of Teacher Educators and their Curriculum

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In the spring of 2022, we (Vanessa and Jody) created a cross-institutional book club, inviting both undergraduate and graduate students, practicing and pre-service teachers, to join. Prior to these group meetings, we had spent time studying group literacy structures (Beach & Yussen, 2011; Bowers-Campbell, 2011; Burns, 1998; Cantrell, 2002; Daniels, 2002; McGinley et al., 2000; Scharber, 2009; Twomey, 2007) in coursework, and we had found that the element of sociopolitical consciousness raising (Ladson-Billings, 2006) had been a salient outcome of these groups, especially when the texts selected were compelling reads around historic and contemporary injustices in educational settings. We intended to continue and extend this work by reading texts that were not specifically about the education system but were instead about the other social and political systems that surround and intersect with schools. We wondered what types of sociopolitical consciousness raising would happen when teachers were encountering texts that were not specifically about teaching. We chose two texts: *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond (2016) and *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, From Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* by Marc Lamont Hill (2017). We both had read these ethnographic, historical works. They are riveting texts, going straight at issues we felt were tangential to what we encounter in classrooms. As scholars, these are often the kinds of books that help us think more holistically and critically about educational issues that we address with teachers. The next step seemed logical: continue collaborative group literacy work with different kinds of texts and continue to learn about why those texts matter to teachers.

This essay shares the story of the book club briefly, but primarily, we pivot to share our personal and curricular responses to the book club in the role of leaders and professors. It turns out that, in this instance, the story was not really about the book club and the meetings; it was about us and our perceptions of the role we play in sociopolitical consciousness raising. We encountered a group of critically oriented teachers who were, like us, not new to any of the sociopolitical systems that touch education; they see the lived realities of issues attached to public services, money, and housing clearly in their teaching lives. They were already adept at considering the role of social power and institutional systems applied unequally to the outcomes of children in schools. They already read the world of school inequality and vulnerability (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Yet, we met together each week faithful to the texts, the process, and each other. In short, as professors of pre-professional teachers, we are often introducing sociopolitical consciousness raising (Ladson-Billings, 2006). But as we reflected in our first meeting about the book clubs, Jody asserted:

> In [the previous studies], I really was not *in* the group, *in* the conversation. I was able to view it from an outside/insider gaze. I knew the content (certainly, I was the *expert!!*), and I was able to swoop in and comment at the end, act as an overseer,

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> seize the power dynamic. I was not *of* those conversations. This is going to be different, and it will likely be uncomfortable. I am urging myself to *lean in*. And to *chill*.

This was a conflict that we both felt as we engaged with the book club and throughout processing the meetings, as data, in our intentional dialogue with each other. Rather than evade this tension, we engaged in intentional dialogue during the summer of 2022 and began to examine the book club experience and our role as teachers through the lens of curriculum theory. Using *currere* (Pinar, 1975) as our guide, we went through a process of self-understanding, uncovering our own curricular experiences as practicing teachers and junior professors, connecting those experiences to the future and the present, and eventually landing in a hopeful place of *becoming*, where Pinar (1975) says, "[We are] placed together" (p. 13). Ultimately, we are still reading together and recommitting to the *becoming*, despite our impatience with the process.

Taking a critical pedagogical stance (hooks, 1994) in our teaching has always been work for us in our classes. We are both grounded in the idea that part of teacher preparation is acknowledging that teaching is political (Kincheloe, 2008), and we have commitments to preparing teachers in culturally relevant education so that they are prepared to contend with and ultimately address "sociocultural issues emanating from society and affecting our schools" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 200.) It is gratifying really, in our work as professors. Each semester, bright-eyed students enter our classrooms, and we get to talk about critical pedagogy in a foundational way. Creating this book club felt like another opportunity to engage with our students in this foundational work.

After the first book club meeting, though, we both knew this experience would be different from our every-semester encounters in our classrooms. The members of this book group did not need the foundational work. They were already there. We had spent years in our classrooms and with our colleagues bringing others along. Often, we speak of critical engagement, of anti-racism, as a journey, as a progression. We had spent time further along on this progression than those we had encountered in our institutional contexts. We immediately knew, though, that this book club was different.

Conversations were dynamic; in our initial debrief about the meetings, the fear that accompanies a group of strangers meeting to talk about injustices in education was almost immediately dispelled. "We were prepared for the awkwardness of the first meeting," we debriefed. Based on class experiences where the curriculum often butts up against norms of neutrality—which generates awkwardness when social norms are disrupted—this book club moved past that phase quickly. Vanessa said, "no one here is new," and Jody reflected, "I probably don't have anything to teach anybody in this. I mean maybe. But that's not my job. I'm not the teacher—I'm *of* it. … They are on the road."

The Book Club

This particular book club was organized cross-institutionally. Both institutions identify as Catholic in their teaching and missions, one Marianist and the other Jesuit. We invited undergraduate and graduate students to join in a book club about the sociopolitical systems that impact the lives of children and families served in

schools. Five students: three graduate students, one non-traditional undergraduate, and one second-career graduate education student joined us each week for five weeks. On average, we missed one person each book club session, but no one dropped out of attendance. Of the seven participants, five were either prepared as, preparing for, or are active social studies content teachers. The two remaining participants are generalists who expressed interest in history or policy. We advertised widely but certainly caught a niche in teacher education. All meetings were held on a video meeting platform in the spring 2022 semester, and all meetings were recorded per Institutional Review Board approval. Participants were not supervising nor teaching any students during the semester that we met but had been in teacher-student relationships with Jody or Vanessa in the past. Meetings were approximately one hour long.

After completing the book club meetings and considering the ways that we might report or story findings of sociopolitical consciousness raising, of which there were a few, we felt unsettled in our decision making as teachers and scholars. Rather than telling a story about how teachers, who were already socially and politically attuned before reading, continued to name and reiterate the prevalence and reality of state violence, we wondered, "If there is nothing new here, then what is here?" As curriculum scholars, we hoped that what Pinar (2019) promises is true: "Curriculum theory can help" (p. vii). Rather than evaluating the objective of our study and measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of sociopolitical consciousness raising, we instead turned to the book club as curriculum and dug deeper into "what it means to teach, to study, to become 'educated' in the present historical moment" (Pinar, 2019, p. vii). What we hope to present here is a better understanding of curriculum that is not introductory with clear demarcations of "before and after" sociopolitical consciousness raising, but consistently and continually *learning* as we critically engage with a dynamic and complicated landscape of education. We share here the results of "*complicated conversations*" (Pinar, 2019, p. vii) about sociopolitical consciousness raising curriculum with engaged and politically active participants.

Data analysis for this project took place as duo-ethnographic dialogue (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) between the two researchers over the course of two weeks. Both of us revisited researcher journals kept during the spring 2022 semester, reviewed written notes from weekly debriefing sessions, and rewatched all five hours of the book club meetings synchronously. To capture the dialogue between us, we recorded our conversations while we rewatched the meetings. Next, both researchers began reading individually about the themes and big ideas that we wanted more academic theory to support—namely, sociopolitical consciousness raising as a journey, a process, and a non-destination. Finally, during the process of writing vignettes and reflective stories for this essay, we reread the dialogue transcripts for big ideas and meaning making across meetings and between ourselves and our own sensemaking.

Vanessa –

I attended a teacher preparation program as an undergraduate to teach in elementary grades. As a student, I was open to learning whatever the experts taught me. As a first-generation college student, I had seen teachers. I knew what they did. I thought I could emulate that, and I was eager to learn from experts. Education was, after all, the key to my individual success. But there was a social studies preparation methods class that interrupted the flow of knowledge from the professor to my brain. From the beginning

of that class, we were assigned books that didn't teach methods; they were exemplar texts about building community and bringing democracy to life in the classroom. What was that about? I was there to learn how to *do* teaching not how to be political. You were either born Republican or Democrat; you inherited it like the division between Ford and Chevy. Of course, America is a democracy. Why did that need to be repeated so often?

I have distinct, if not assuredly accurate, memories of being baffled as to why I had a professor who returned repeatedly to democratic life as central to classroom living and social studies instruction. Was it really our job to teach our politics? Wasn't democracy *explicitly* politics? That's not what any teacher of mine ever did. So much of my K-12 education did not prepare me to see beyond the knowledge provided. Read the chapter and answer the questions at the end of the book. If I got the answer right according to the author of the book, I was rewarded with As (credentials) and sometimes a dinger (a gumball wrapped in a lollipop shell) by my government teacher.

The book was written by an expert. I was not an expert.

Jody –

I have spent time in recent years, especially since I began my career in the Academy, considering the past—the environment in which I grew up, what I learned both explicitly and implicitly about *life*, specifically the systems and forces that played a substantial, but silent, part in how I was socialized and came to be. As a young person, it seems, I inherently gravitated towards sociopolitical, justice-oriented issues. Government was my favorite class, and I majored in political science. In these spaces, in ways I cannot explain, I remember having a very strong notion, a pull, a *knowing* of what was just, what was *right*. I simply knew, in my bones. My knowing did not necessarily align with my environment, though, nor with my family's beliefs, nor with my schooling. In those early years, though, I just *knew*.

I can see a version of my younger self in so many of my students now. My upbringing was insulated and siloed. It included just a narrow slice of the world, and it took me years to understand there was so much more, despite those early pulls. In those days, I would not have considered criticizing the education system, as it was (and is) a system that I had (and have) learned how to access and manipulate to meet my needs. Uncovering systems of power that directly benefit me took some time to fully materialize.

In *currere*, Pinar (1975) calls on curriculum scholars to examine their own biographies, their biographic situations, both past and present, to narrate their lived experiences, their educational experiences. We (Vanessa and Jody) wanted to delve into our biographic pasts—the "regressive"—to "hold the photograph in front of [ourselves, to] stud[y] the detail" (p. 9). How did our past experiences in school, experiences with sociopolitical consciousness and knowledge, impact who we are now, who we are as scholars and professors, as we interact with teachers and colleagues in dialogue? Vanessa's experience as a first-generation college student, one that was steeped in meritocratic values and immersed in the banking system of education is revealed in her early interactions and dialogue around the political, the democratic. Jody's experiences, as a student who learned implicitly how to navigate and leverage systems of power, but who was instinctively pulled towards an opposing ideological stance from her environment, reveals an early naivete, a compliance of sorts to the culture of power.

As we spent time in dialogue, examining the data from the book club meetings, we surfaced these regressive memories. These memories, and others, "hover over the present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 6) in a way that forced us to reconsider how it is that we encounter our work of sociopolitical consciousness-raising, how we have bridged the act of *knowing* to *noticing*. Ladson-Billings (2006) points out that many "teachers have not developed a sociopolitical consciousness of their own" (p. 37). She continues, "True, most hold strong opinions about the sociopolitical issues they know about, but many do not know much about sociopolitical issues" (p. 37). As aforementioned, we had spent the last few years immersed in studying sociopolitical consciousness-raising in our research. When we examined our own biographies, we found that, in our younger years, we were not much different from the many students we were encountering in our roles as teacher educators, but we had emerged out of that place at some point, at least a little. When we considered the progressive—how our wonderings might influence our present (Pinar, 1975)—we troubled the notion of *knowing* vs. *noticing* and if we had enacted, or could enact, the work in sociopolitical consciousness-raising that we had so deeply desired, moving from *knowing* to *noticing,* and perhaps beyond.

Vanessa –

I have been researching reading groups and their outcomes for about four years now. I have created and participated in reading groups about social justice, activism, feminism, and anti-racism. I have spent time reading with preservice teachers, teacher educators, and university colleagues. Whereas I once looked towards books as a site of mirrors, windows, and doors with idealistic optimism (Sims Bishop, 1990), in Spring 2022, I was increasingly drawn to the final points that Sims Bishop (1990) makes in her seminal article about the potential of multicultural children's books:

> literature, no matter how powerful, has its limits. It won't take the homeless off our streets; it won't feed the starving of the world; it won't stop people from attacking each other because of our racial differences; it won't stamp out the scourge of drugs. (p. xi)

In the spring, as we met for the book club, we were talking explicitly about vulnerable people made vulnerable by the ways that the state, via policy, fails to protect children and their families (Hill, 2017). As teachers, we are explicitly members of the state, accredited by the state, credentialed by the state—and so the language of state violence felt immediate and implicating. In early March, I stepped away from the accreditation process of the elementary education program to contemplate the book club and the scope and limits of reading in my journal:

> *I have been thinking about Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), which ultimately theorizes that, when we encounter texts, we don't just encounter a text; we encounter ourselves somehow. Sims Bishop (1990) wrote about mirrors, doors, and windows as a metaphor for encountering books. Looking into the mirror is what I think readers do with texts: written, visual, multimodal, etc… I don't think the text does anything other than provide a new angle on the mirror. Then we tell stories about ourselves, to ourselves, to others, and then other texts (other people) hold up new mirrors to ourselves. I believe there could be an infinite number of*

> *mirrors to see ourselves and our world. Because it's not just looking at ourselves—it's looking at the forest; it's how we fit into a bigger picture. We are seeing the world, but we are increasingly seeing ourselves in the world.*

This is where I feel like I cross the boundary between wanting written expression and wanting art. I want an immersive visual experience that conveys this idea better than I can in writing. A room full of mirrors—ceiling, floor, wall to wall. But the mirrors are broken. No, the mirrors are small circular discs that capture only parts of the room at a given point in time. Each mirror is a surface to reflect the larger context, but not one mirror can show all of it. So, we witness, we look, we look again, we look again, and again, and again until we see ourselves and our bigger picture, our context. And I don't feel like we need a different book/piece of art every time. Because every day I return to a mirror, I see an older woman and an older world. Maybe one minute, one day. But time is a dimension that creates an ever-changing world to see and witness.

So why do we read? The book is never the point—except for the author. The reader is the point. But the point of reading is not to be a solo reader. Because there needs to be some kind of dimension to the art that grounds us in order to see. We cannot consider just a room full of mirrors and only ourselves to see. We have to see more and more and more. Maybe behind me is a rolling screen of places, faces, engagements—encountered in multimodal texts that shape what contextualizes me. The more this virtual screen moves, the more I see. The more I engage with texts, the more I see. The texts can be real/not real. They are the literacy of my life. The more I engage with what I cannot imagine on my own, the more I witness.

I was dissatisfied with my stagnant image of myself, with the world moving around me. I think I wanted to be active. I began to consider, is knowing enough?

> *Why are we reading these two books together? We aren't really opening our eyes/consciousness, raising ideas/concepts/injustices that are new to any members of this book club. So why read it? Why do I read it all?*

I began to consider, inspired by another writer: Glennon Doyle (2020):

> *Glennon Doyle says—the longer you are a philanthropist, if you are thinking at all, you will become an activist. Otherwise, staying in the philanthropist space is to be a co-conspirator with systems of power that continue to generate opportunities for philanthropy.*

Is reading in a book club—especially with this group of people—academic philanthropy?

Jody –

At one point during our debriefing, both Vanessa and I finally voiced what both of us had inherently known but were apprehensive to say out loud, for fear of the *what now* in our study: the stories we were reading about in both *Nobody* and *Evicted* were about issues we *knew* about, and so did our participants. We were aware of the issues of insecure housing, of the corruption of our criminal justice system, of the racism that influences infrastructure and economic decisions in our society. We *knew* all of this, and so did all the members of our book club. And in this book club, my role was not to

share this knowing with others, as I so often do as a teacher. The question turned from a *knowing* to a *noticing*.

During one of our debriefing sessions, we considered the idea of knowing, the understanding that political and cultural and societal forces often plant themselves into our bones and our veins and into our beings in ways that don't allow us to see things clearly, to actually *notice* what is happening around us. It happens frequently, and it was a part of the experiences of the members of our book group as well. We *knew* all of these things. But did we ever *notice* it? Walking away from the book club, I couldn't help but wonder, what do we do when we realize that knowing is simply not enough, that we need to also *notice*?

The *New York Times* ran a story in the summer of 2022 about a school district in New Hampshire (Barry, 2022). Essentially, people in a small town in New Hampshire had stopped "showing up" for the democratic process in their community. They *knew* that participation was important. They *knew* what was important to them as a community. But they stopped *noticing*, *showing up*. When they stopped *noticing*, they stopped actively participating, and the town's three-person select committee cut the community's school budget by about half at an under-attended community meeting. The cuts were actions that the majority of the community did not agree with, nor support. While this story is interesting and important in the greater landscape of school policy, it is the scenario of informed, yet inactive, citizenry that drew me to the story. In our reading group, we discovered that *knowing* was not enough. We recognized that we also needed to intentionally engage in the work of enacting justice in the democratic spaces that are our classrooms and our community.

The book club, for me, was an experience that very boldly, and very clearly, caused me to question my work as a teacher, as a teacher educator, and as an active and informed participant in democracy. I had been resting in a place of *knowing*. I had become complacent, maybe even stuck in an illusion that my work was more meaningful and impactful than it truly is, that I was *doing* something through my work to engage preservice teachers in the work of democracy. The book club showed me that *knowing* is not enough.

Horton and Freire (1990) write, "The more people become themselves, the better the democracy" (p. 145). This was an opportunity to become *ourselves* for all participants—for the graduate students and ourselves. Attention to the teacher is often forfeited to the role of the student, but a critical pedagogue has to always try to be both. "There is no teaching without learning" (Freire, 1998, p. 29). After this experience, we asked, *Who are we? What is the contribution of our scholarly and professional work to who we are as educators, teachers, and citizens?* (Pinar, 1975, p. 12). The book club, which unabashedly troubled issues around money, infrastructure, criminal justice, incarceration, and more, illuminated our deep knowledge of the injustice that surrounds us, that we are embedded in. But in our work as teacher educators, were we simply passing along the knowing? Or were we giving our students the tools to begin *noticing*, and then, in turn, acting. Vanessa's connection to Glennon Doyle's (2020) assertion that philanthropy can be transformed to activism resonated with us.

In courses, we hope that we are supporting teachers as they learn to critically read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), consider the role of power in outcomes for children in schools and social and political spaces, and apply their knowledge of power

to their professional work in schools. In other words, schools are both our site of study as well as a site of real-world application (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Our experience in this book club, more specifically in the conversations between the two of us in the months following the book club, caused us to examine these desired outcomes in our teacher education courses and how we accomplish those goals.

So What?

In our curriculum, we lean heavily on books and the conversation that follows. We know that the act of reading *might* expose the reader something they did not know before. We hope that stories humanize our own experiences and the experiences that others have in the world. As college professors, our tools for sociopolitical consciousness raising are books and other multimodal texts that describe research and tell stories about the world. But our teaching has limits. And the limits of a book club are individual and not socially engaged. It's building a knowing. It's building a knowledge base.

At this reflective moment in our teaching and scholarship, we wonder—so what? Does it matter? Sociopolitical consciousness raising is critical work for teacher educators in preparing culturally responsive educators. But is the sociopolitical consciousness raising that we see in classes effective enough to go beyond mirrors, windows, and doors (Sims Bishop, 1990)? We see in our own narratives of our lives that sociopolitical consciousness raising is a process. And at this point, when consciousness has been raised—what are the next steps towards justice? Our next commitments are action-oriented. Simultaneously, we re-engage in journeying with students—at every place along the path.

As teachers, we engage with humans whose experiences are always complicated and entangled with social and political histories, current realities, and future hopes. And we are no different. At the conclusion of this paper, there is no clear "so what," just as there was no clear "so what" at the end of the book club. This tension has at least two potential outcomes: futility and hope. Futility leads us to say *so what* and abandon the task of teaching. It doesn't make much of a difference anyhow—Ford or Chevy. Instead, we choose hope. We hope that we, as teachers, become more human. The humanity of students is seen in the narratives that we choose (Sims Bishop, 1990), and the realities of social and political life are manifested as present in the concerns of teachers and schools. As we tell stories about our lives and the lives of children and families in education, we name and theorize (hooks, 1994) experience. Knowing more does not lead to action. But action without theory is simply, "blah, blah blah" (Freire, 1998, p. 30).

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Gratitude Journaling Practice: A Reflective *Currere*

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In this work, I reflect on the concept of gratitude within the academic setting. Through the practice of journaling, I explore the past, present, and future using the *currere* method as a framework. I inquired into life events that influenced the development of gratitude. To begin, I asked, "How do I practice gratitude? How do I know if I am grateful? When I practice gratitude, do I feel, think, and behave differently as an educator?" To frame this work, I leaned into the work of Pinar (1975) who developed the *currere* method. Pinar (2012) states that the method is for teachers and academics who aim to grow personally and those who seek to constantly reconceptualize and understand the impact social change has on our lives. He states,

> The method of *currere*—the Latin infinitive form of curriculum meaning to run the course, or in the gerund form, the running of the course—provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction. (p. 44)

To practice *currere*, there are four moments to consider "the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45). Together, they frame opportunities to reflect and wonder about one's autobiographical presence in the experience of education. As well, it is a time to heed the interrelationships of our practice and life events (Pinar, 1978). An individual can quietly move in and about the four moments of *currere* with the goal of growing self-knowledge and gaining insight into issues. One can pause longer in some moments, reflecting deeply.

Gratitude

Gratitude is generally understood as a broad, complex concept (Bono et al., 2012). It is considered a positive universal human attribute debated for centuries by philosophers, religious leaders, and theologians (S. Allen, 2018). Emmons and McCullough (2003) describe gratitude as

> derived from the Latin root gratia, meaning grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. All derivatives from this Latin root "have to do with kindness, generousness, gifts, the beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something for nothing" (Pruyser, 1976, p. 69). The object of gratitude is other-directed—persons, as well as to impersonal (nature) or nonhuman sources (e.g., God, animals, the cosmos) (p. 377)

Howells (2004) argues that learner and teacher gratitude enhances learning, especially when students learn to apply the concept. Ramzan and Rama (2014) reported a relationship between gratitude and wellbeing in public university professors. Grag et al. (2022) sought to understand the gratitude effects in the workplace of university teachers with resulting suggestions of how to embed gratitude throughout the work setting.

Gratitude is also understood as having "a moral affect because it results from and stimulates behavior that is motivated by a concern for other people's well-being" (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 559). Howells (2004) states that a teacher's gratitude in

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their community or home life is not separate from their teaching roles, each affects the other. Gratitude is also understood as being a positive experience on health and wellness. It is described as more complex than joy, though joy is foundational to development of gratitude (Emmons, 2014a). Emmons also states that to be thankful for life is to be thoughtful and be attentive to understanding gratitude. Emmons and Stern (2013) elaborate our understanding of gratitude as having a transcendent and worldly meaning.

> In its worldly sense, gratitude is a feeling that occurs in interpersonal exchanges when one person acknowledges receiving a valuable benefit from another… [and] the transcendent meaning of gratitude is widely recognized in the major spiritual traditions in which thanksgiving is a worldwide response to life. This fundamental spiritual quality to gratitude, which is at the core of every major religious tradition, is aptly conveyed by Streng (1989): "In this attitude people recognize that they are connected to each other in a mysterious and miraculous way that is not fully determined by physical forces, but is part of a wider, or transcendent context" (pp. 5, 846–847)

In practice, gratitude when expressed toward another may include thoughtful statements: "thank you for reviewing my syllabus, that was helpful; thank you for chairing, I was not prepared; or thank you for doing the guest lecture, the students appreciated your expertise." As well, gratitude may be expressed in giving of a gift or a written card as an expression of thanks. Emmons (2007) states this expression of gratitude:

> for life's blessings—this is, a sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation—is likely to elevate happiness for a number of reasons. Grateful thinking fosters the savoring of positive life experiences and situations, so that people can extract the maximum possible satisfaction and enjoyment from their circumstances. Counting one's blessings may directly counteract the effects of hedonic adaptation, the process by which our happiness level returns, again, and again, to its set-point, by preventing people from taking the good things … for granted. (p. 35)

In turn gratitude can also be expressed toward one's belief in a higher power, a God of one's understanding, a transcendent being, fate, Mother Nature, and the earth (S. Allen, 2018; Emmons, 2007, 2016). For example, this gratitude may be expressed as a prayer "thank you God for the earth, the beauty, the ability to walk gently on the earth this morning as I plan my day. Thank you for the creatures we see living on the earth" (See Image 1: Morning Walks to Pray and Plan the Day).

Image 1: Morning Walks to Pray and Plan the Day (Photo)

Finally, scientific research on gratitude as a practice continues to grow (Emmons, 2007, 2022; Nelson & Lyubonirsky, 2016). The benefits of gratitude are many and are described as being experienced physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually (Emmons, 2014a, 2014b). However, Manela (2015) also makes a good point in that one who receives the kind gesture from another, may in turn feel indebted to the giver, thereby, evoking negative effects of gratitude. The receiver may not respond with positive words or gestures of thankfulness for a gift, thereby, leaving the giver with negative feelings related to the expectation of gratitude. The thought that gratitude generates negative emotions is not generally a first-thought when we discuss gratitude, being grateful, or thankful. Generally, the practice of being grateful, through written word, speech, acts of kindness, or cognitive thinking is understood to evoke positive thoughts and feelings that in turn benefit us in other aspects of life (Emmons, 2007). It is this positive understanding of gratitude that led to framing this reflective *currere*.

Regressive: Three Short Stories

In the last year I experienced several events that moved me spiritually. They are day-to-day occurrences, nothing dramatic, just living. Together, they afforded opportunity to express gratitude through the practice of journaling (poems), art, and photos.

Grateful to be Alive and Be

I try to start each day by "making it a day of gratitude" (Al-Anon Family Groups, 2008, p. 47). This work is difficult, as it nudges up against my need to breathe and my propensity to be ponderous and quiet. During the pandemic, I wrote in poetic form as an expression of life:

> I am a broken self, that enjoys a strong cup of coffee when my feet, first hit the floor.
> In these moments I look outside into the darkness of the early morning, the last stars fading.

I pull on my Cowichan Tribes hand knit sweater, zipped close to my neck.
Running shoes on, I head into the bush, the early light dawning
The last of the owl calls, clearly heard.
I am cold, the early March winds blow wildly down Kluscap Mountain, I breathe deeply.
I search for early buds on the maple trees, the pink and red buds swollen.
There is no membrane between the earth and my feet.
I plod over the earth, the moss, and hop streams.
Tree roots aim to trip, I gently place my feet between their roots.
I yearn to be, breathe, and belong, my energy rich, ready to be shared.
The earth and atmosphere give me one more moment.
One more hour,
One more day.
And, I remain a broken self
Grateful for my breath.

Spiritually Awakened

Later in the spring, I travelled to Egypt for business. As the pandemic lockdowns and travel restrictions eased, I carefully planned this trip with my peer. We arrived and attended to the academic business at hand, enjoying the warm sun and beauty of the city. During this trip, my peer insisted we visit the garbage city. With a skilled driver leading, we were driven past the waste sorting zones to visit the garbage city in Nahshiyat Nasser and the Monastery of St. Simon the Tanner (Leven, 2006; Wilacek, 2020; Zanzottera, 2020).

I was not prepared for what was to unfold. I was initially fearful while we moved past the piles of recycling, the trucks and donkey carts piled high, and people sitting, working, and observing. As we arrived in the city, I was silenced deeply, in awe of the stone carvings. I experienced a spiritual awakening made poignant by the peoples' eyes. My chest began to hurt from the angst, tears flowed.

After walking with my peer, we stood silently in veneration inside the sanctity of the auditorium carved into the rock. This is a space and place where Coptic community street workers and faith-based organizations work together within the distinctive odor of waste. I was humbled. It was as if I were floating in a space unknown to the rest of humanity, yet it is a well-known place. I was spiritually moved and cried in response; my friend offered reassurance. I wondered,

> Who am I in this space, a privileged nurse educator from Canada? I have enough food and water and clothes. Why, when visiting the monastery, does it remind me of my purpose as a teacher and educator. How would I explain this trip to students?

I felt like an intruder, not knowing the history and culture of the Zabaleen. I wondered, "Was I grateful for my life, breath, and for being?" I felt as though I was being reformed, refreshed by a power greater than myself.

In the last hours visiting, I prayed. I talked quietly with my friend. I felt an embodied sense of needing to move. I looked in wonder—unable to capture in my mind the vastness of the church (Church of Saint Samaan the Tanner, 1994). A soccer ball raced past, nudging me from my tears. Cries of excitement followed, and a group of young soccer players in brightly coloured shirts raced past. Soccer, this I knew. I stood up from the church bench and took in several deep breathes. I joined the energetic group of

boys. Soccer is universal, a game I played with my siblings and friends through spring, summer, and into the early months of snowy Canadian winters. My physical tensions diminished as I tried to keep up with the children. The driver watched me nearby, the tall white woman in a long skirt and running shoes playing soccer. I felt awkward, yet the emotional and spiritual responses were tumultuous, unsettled, and were not yet fully understood. Later, I journaled extensively. In my writings and sketches, I sought to understand my responses—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. During this visit, I re-named my journal, my gratitude journal.

The Winds Prevailed

Some months later, a hurricane, caused extensive damage in Atlantic Canada. I sat quietly in the basement of our home as the winds rose to deafening levels, the electrical sources out for eight days. I calmed my fears by continuing to journal in the notebook I had used in Egypt. I wrote, "I wonder how I will remain or be grateful if we lose our home?" This questioning was over-laid with memories of my visit to the Monastery of St. Simon the Tanner. I prayed for safety of our friends and for our community. We had prepared our home as recommended putting away garden and vegetable pots and lawn chairs. As the storm raged, peas and beans hung in the garden ready for winter storage. Tomatoes ripened in the warm sun, were whipped by the winds. Shades of brilliant blue, purple and yellow of gladiolas, cosmos, marigolds, and roses swirled circularly in the wind. Valiant grapes ready for the first frost to deepen their taste, dropped to the earth; I could imagine the taste of grape juice in the deep, cold Cape Breton winters. Yet, as the hurricane pounded the earth, the trees were whipped around, damaged forever (See Image 2: Trees Sustain Damage).

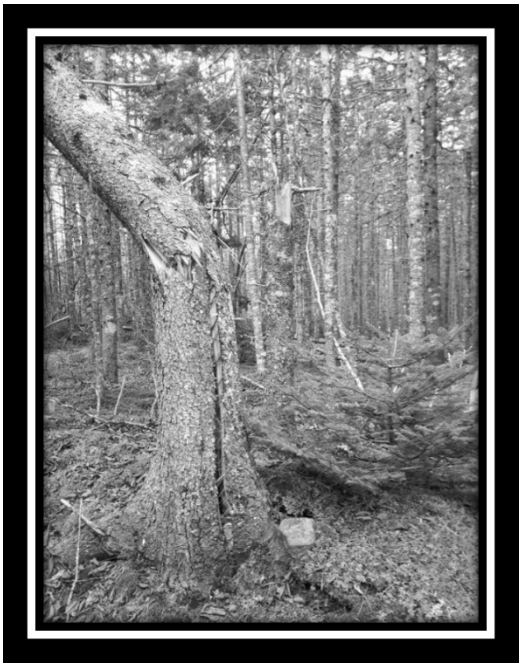

Image 2: Trees Sustain Damage: Whipped to the Heart (Photo)

Progressive

Upon returning to my island home and university classroom, I discussed with students and peers my spiritual awakening. I heard myself saying, "You have to know what you believe as a nurse. You do not have to be an expert, but you must know how to ask patients about their spirituality. You have to be able to ask patients what their preferences are for their spiritual care." This awakening changed my response to home, work, and in my creative space. I talked with my peers and friends about how I felt different—spiritually. I shared about my trip to Egypt and the role of my gratitude journal. I explained that my journaling reflected a new enlightened focus. I related to the learners how I leaned into my journaling and sketching during the hurricane. I am a person who journals, yet for me, the journaling focus was renewed; it was not the same. I understood more clearly my intentions when sitting and writing; each note reflected my growing care for my family and my higher power. Sketches reflected transcendent beings, spiritual entities—"this entity protects me, reminds me to be thankful" (Journal notes, July 2022). I felt uplifted. I felt as though my spirit was changed, more positive. Therefore, I imagined continuing my journaling and sketching activities and searching the literature on gratitude to further understand the concept.

I also wondered how the study of gratitude would be accepted by the academic community. I am writing in a time when I experienced increasing pressure to perform as a tenured professor (Berg & Seeber, 2016); and I am not immune to the pressures in the academy. I also know that I worried about criticism when writing about spiritual and emotionally laden topics. Yet, Emmons (2022) reminds us to reach out for support during these times and when practicing gratitude. He states: "after being self-sufficient for so long and then experiencing difficulties, I eventually sought assistance from some individuals, who assisted me" (p. 49).

Analytical

In my gratitude journal, I reflected on notes written in efforts to frame the spiritual lingering that hovered around my soul when I pondered. There was a tension within, a tension I did not fully understand. I held close to my heart a sense of awe made poignant after visiting the garbage city. It took time to express and process these emotions. Berg and Seeber (2016) remind us that as academics working on projects, writing is "often the expression of the deepened understanding which some individual has acquired, through much reading, discussion, and reflection, on a topic which has been in some sense 'known' for many generations" (pp. 55–56). Interesting, I did not feel pressure to write daily or perform in my journaling; instead, I focused on the language of gratitude, terminology, and images created (Emmons, 2007, 2022). Using pen, paper, paint, and colored pencils, I journaled and sketched about the blessings of my family, the earth, the ocean, gardening, access to potable water, and time to read and write. As well, I reflected on God. I needed to know that there was a power greater than myself caring for me, looking out for me, and guiding me during times when I did not understand. These positive beliefs offered me reassurance when life did not seem kind or easily understood (Emmons, 2016). (See Image 3: Early Dawn and Fishing Day)

Image 3: Early Dawn and Fishing Day (Acrylic on plywood)

In analysis of my journal notes, I noted a shift in my search of writings related to gratitude. “I yearn to understand the complexity of gratitude” (Journal, August 2022). I also reflected on the power of the act or practice of journaling as an academic. Emmons (2007) discusses efforts needed to contribute to nurturing gratitude in one’s life. The first effort is to start a gratitude journal. The second is to remember the bad, or challenging times; this concept was more difficult. Though it seemed smooth and comforting to journal, I knew I was not fully prepared to understand the bad or negative feelings. Yet, Emmons offers comfort by asking, when “remember[ing] the bad” (p. 191), why would one want to remember these difficult times? He asks us to consider the following response:

> Why would remembering the worst that life offered be an effective strategy for cultivating gratitude? Because it capitalizes upon natural mental tools and normal human thought processes. For one, psychological research has established the empirical truth that “bad is stronger than good.” Negative stimuli often evince powerful reactions that can be difficult to ignore or surmount. The adversities of life, seasoned with strong emotions, are deeply etched in our memories and for this reason are easy to recall. (pp. 191–192)

Was it the difficult emotions that I did not understand? Was it the negative, the bad, the sad, the difficult that I was struggling to comprehend (Manela, 2016). As I reflected, I clearly did not, and do not understand the complexity of the Zabaleen, the traditional waste (garbage) collectors of Cairo, who recycle up to 80 percent of waste (Fahmi, 2005; Fahmi & Sutton, 2010). I do not understand storm events when the people and the earth are harmed and damaged. How was I to be grateful now?

Synthetical, Reconceptualization of Life Moving Forward

My life today as an academic remains full of questions about gratitude. However, I seek to be more grateful to others, expressing sincere thanks. I pray more and sit

reverently looking at the beauty of the mountains, trees, and flowers that surround. I continue to write poems as my form of finding voice and a space for contemplation (Finley, 2011). I wondered, "What is it about reflecting on life events that leaves an impression on my life?" Is this not the purpose of the *currere* method? I think so. I asked myself, "Why can I see the faces of the children energetically playing soccer in dire conditions? Why can I now freely describe my spiritual experiences? Why can I share with students and my neighbors the experience of visiting the Zabaleen? Why do I say that reflecting and learning from life events, have changed me?" Now, when I hike into the bush, I am more aware of the earths' spirit and energy. I pray in thanks, with a sense of gratitude for having both my feet on which to walk. I float on the deep moss as I hike, grateful to my higher power. (See Image 4: Moss, Floating, No Membrane Present)

Image 4: Moss, Floating, No Membrane Present

As a result of the storm, our communities sustained significant damage to the power sources, roads, bridge infrastructures, and homes. Yet, we were safe, blessed, I said. Yet, I continued to feel burdened and overwhelmed by the recent events of travel and the vastness of the storm. I continued to revisit the literature discussing the journey of the Zabaleen in policy, research, health, and education studies (Klein, 2020; Leven, 2006;). I asked myself, "Had I not just visited the Monastery of St. Simon and visited the garbage city, would I not be more grateful for my quiet life? What could I learn?" And the negative feelings associated with being "too blessed" and "not thankful enough" for our health and safety was my response. I was burdened, uncomfortable with worldly possessions, and all that had been given to me, family, music, art, education, faith, and health. My response was emotions that were "associated with itchiness or guilt, [and

were at times] … uncomfortable or painful" (Manela, 2016, p. 130). Why then as the storm passed, did I feel sad, with a deep angst inside? Had we not just come through a hurricane with minimal damage? Why then in a post storm frame of mind was it so hard to sustain my sense of gratitude? Emmons (2007, 2022) states, practicing gratitude is daily, moment-by-moment work. Should I not now be a more grateful for my family, home, and the land on which I live? Why was this such a difficult time spiritually? I wondered what were the obstacles that were impeding my being grateful. I understand myself to be in process and continuing to process gratitude.

Discussion

Engaging in the reflective *currere* phases has helped me come to understand the concept of gratitude with deeper meaning. This is important work, as in the academy we are being shaped, and changed, socially reconstructed by life events (Pinar, 2012). Utilizing the *currere* process was effective in supporting the reflective activities needed when seeking to understand how life events impacted my self-growth and reconstructed me as an academic (Pinar, 1975). By engaging in the *currere* process and focusing on gratitude, I grew as an educator.

Stories of Gratitude in the Lives of Others

In the literature, there are authors who express gratitude—their writings a shroud of comfort as I grew my understanding of gratitude within the academy. In community college, I was introduced to the writer James Allen (1920/2021) and his work, *As A Man Thinketh.* In this insightful book, James reminds us that "in the ocean of life the isles of blessedness are smiling, and the sunny shore of your ideal awaits your coming. Keep your hand firmly upon the helm of thought" (p. 90). He also focuses on the strength of our minds:

> It is suggestive rather than explanatory, its object being to stimulate [people] to the discovery and perception of truth that "they themselves are makers of themselves" by virtue of the thoughts which they choose and encourage; that mind is the master weaver, both of the inner garment of character and the outer garment of circumstance, and that, as they may have hitherto woven in ignorance and pain they may now weave in enlightenment and happiness (1920/2021, p. 9).

Exley (1992) in her study on happiness, cites Richard Wagner who states, "Joy is not in things; it is in us" (p. 37). As well, Nancy W. (1992) in her writings on recovery from trauma, reminds us that, when we are "overwhelmed by past and present feelings, thoughts, and experiences and feel most vulnerable" (p. 115), we can be grateful and affirm who we are through the gift of acceptance. She states that by accepting this gift one can be kinder, gentler, and nurturing to self and others. A family friend, Joan Levy Earle (2016) in her book, *Jack's Farm*, leaned into journaling and painting when expressing gratitude for life and later in grief with the sudden loss of her dear husband Jack. In these times she returned to writing, creating, and publishing all embedded with gratitude. Johnson (2002), in her study of the experience of grace in our lives, reminds us to cultivate our thinking of thankfulness. Using a gardening analogy, she reminds us to weed out the negative, yearn for the good and kind and to plant flowers to bring joy.

Michael J. Fox (2002), the well-known actor, expressed gratitude for his family, friends, and peers when sharing his memoir and journey alongside chronic illness.

He discusses the complexity of life, the slow progression of Parkinson's Disease, and associated discouragement; yet, he remains thankful. Finally, Dalton (2022) a professor and director, curator of the Acadia University Art Gallery, studied the life of Maud Lewis. Lewis is a well-known Canadian artist. Dalton writes so eloquently of hope and joy when she discussed Lewis' brightly coloured art:

> The art of Maud Lewis brought light into her simple, rural life. It reflected an inner light that found joy in memories and imagining of rural Nova Scotia, and the animals, landscapes, and activities that define country life. It brought light into the lives of those who saw and acquired her work, and who passed her wondrously painted home. (pp. 24–25)

Practicing Gratitude

To practice gratitude in the academic setting, whether in writing, voice, or action, to another or to reference a higher being can be challenging, even when we know the benefits to our wellbeing (Bono et al., 2012; Emmons, 2007; Howells, 2014). Grag (2020) focused on the role of gratitude for teacher leadership and education. They reported, education on gratitude was a necessary for overall teacher development and "for all seven dimensions of educational leadership (i.e., Inspirational Motivation, Idealized Influence (attributed), Idealized Influence (behavior), Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Contingent Reward and Management by Exception)" (p. 895). They further argued that more research focused on gratitude within the academic setting is needed. For students the discussion on being spiritually awakened was openly shared, an opportunity to encourage others to understand their spirituality and expression of gratitude. Finally, Emmons (2004) reminds us that studying gratitude as a virtue

> is not as active as most (courage and generosity…), nor is it an ongoing disposition to behave in a socially responsible or congenial manner (temperance and truthfulness…). We do not usually think of it as being cultivated as a habit (although some of its superficial trappings, such as saying "thank you," obviously may be), and (like many virtues) its status as a virtue as opposed to an emotion is in much dispute." (p. vi)

Gratitude in Action

Emmons (2007) discusses practical activities in which we can engage to nurture gratitude in all elements of our lives. These are applicable to our lives as academics. To grow one's gratitude, it is encouraged that one journal and ask yourself the following questions: "what I have received from [a person's name], what have I given to [another, and] what troubles and difficulty have I caused" (p. 192). These questions guide us to learn to understand gratitude to another and to a transcendent being. In addition, Emmons, recommends learning prayers of gratitude, and having present visual reminders such as pictures, photographs, or collage. As well, he recommends we grow our language of gratitude and choice of verbal expression. He encourages us to pay attention to life, now—in the moment, to breathe, and to be thankful. In this moment, I understand that some of my journaling was more of a to-do list, a log of tasks to be completed, a list of articles to read, papers to be graded, and meetings for which to prepare and contribute.

Emmons (2016) further discusses actively seeking gratitude, looking for joy, and receiving the good and kind gifts and in turn giving back to others around oneself. He

states that this is possible when we start by being grateful: "to feel gratitude, we have to be attuned to the good in our lives, and this gives rise to joy, which is the pure and simple delight in being alive" (p. 67). Finally, Emmons states these active cognitive experiences may awaken joy from within, in "all our senses, energizing the mind and body. Both gratitude and joy reflect a fully alive, alert, and awake state of attunement between self and the world, which is necessary for sustainable wellbeing" (p. 68).

Final Thoughts

Emmons and Mishra (2010) state, "gratitude is foundational to well-being and mental health throughout the lifespan [as evidenced in] accumulating evidence" (p. 249). This is relevant to our lives as academics. They state that having "a sense of contact with a divine power, and sentiments (e.g., beliefs that all living things are interconnected) independent of specific theological orientation" (p. 253) grows our positive health and wellbeing. Emmons (2016) also challenges us to receive the good around us "without crippling feelings of indebtedness, embarrassment, or a sense of inferiority" (p. 70).

Finally, more research on the concept of gratitude is needed within the academic setting (Grag et al., 2022). Through the study and cultivation of gratitude I feel and seem happier. This is ongoing work, moment-by-moment. As an academic, I recognize my journal writing has shifted to reflect gratitude for day-to-day events, positive and difficult events. I wonder through journaling, how they are changing my spirit, my relationship with my God as I understand, and as I continue to work to apply what I have learned from this study. This is a journey, not yet completed. Allen (1902/2021) states,

> The weakest soul, knowing its own weakness, and believing this *truth that strength can only be developed by effort and practice*, will, thus believing, at once begin to exert itself, and, adding effort to effort, patience to patience, and strength to strength, will never cease to develop, and will at last grow divinely strong. (p. 59, emphasis in original)

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Endnotes

[1] Munroe and Slavich (2019) state life events include stressors experienced internally or externally.

[2] Kluscap Mountain defined:

> After the Mi'kmaq world was created and after the animals, birds and plants were placed on the surface, Creator caused a bolt of lightning to hit the surface of Wsitqamu'k. This bolt of lightning caused the formation of an image of a human body. It was Kluskap (gloos-cap), first shaped out of the basic element of the Mi'kmaq world, sand. (Mikmaw Spirit, 2016, para, 5)

[3] The garbage city is an illegally built "inner city at the foot of the Cairo Mokattam Hills in the Manshiyat Naser district (covering 5.5 km2), known as the Garbage City, because of the recycling of waste, which is the main source of livelihood, as an informal economy, for the local Coptic Zabbaleen community" (Wilacek, 2020, p. 102).

[4] "In the zabaleen area there is a monastery and one of the largest churches of the Middle East, St. Simon the Tanner, which is built into the rock. The area has developed significantly over the last 30 years. With the help of foreign donors, people received credits to purchase recycling machines. Houses were built and the standard of living has risen" (Howeidy et al., 2009, p. 51).

[5] The cave church is at the top of the mountain Muqattam, one of the highest peaks in Cairo (Klein, 2020).

Rural Rivers Deep in my Veins: *Currere* as Care

By Melaina Marie Weiss
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100 years from now, don't look back and think me quaint,
Don't judge and call me sinner, don't judge and call me saint.
We lived beneath the arch with a mix of grit and grace,
Just ordinary folk in an extraordinary place.
(Daley, 2007, p. 67)

Rural knowledges and rural education live far beyond what happens in rural schools. Some of the most useful knowledge I have exists from a history of improvising, making, building, gardening, tending; my past, present and future is situated in an animated worldview (Fidyk, 2013; 2017), relational to land, community, non-human animals, and cosmic energies. Corbett (2013) remarks,

> We might understand the rural as a space of intersections and tensions, of people and place, of people and people, of place and space, and so forth. Rurality, as I understand it, is about connections and stewardship. Rural matters because we make it matter, sometimes as a discursive spatial rubbish bin for the evasion of complexity. (p. 2)

A substantial amount of rural educational research problematizes rural communities, with the pretense that there is something wrong with rural as compared to urban (Howley & Howley, 2014). To be clear, I am inspired by much that exists in rural educational research (Donehower et al., 2007; Rautio & Lanas, 2013; Shaft & Jackson, 2010; White & Corbett, 2013). In a vein of respect for rural, I pursue its inherent complexity. In this piece, I utilize *currere* as an expression of care in order to engage an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) in research, as researcher.

Why have I chosen this research? Why has it chosen me? How is it layered into my "self and its evolution and education" (Pinar, 1975, p. 19)? Why and how do I *care*? To explore myself as researcher, I go through Pinar's (1975) process of *currere*; I explore the regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical and do so according to his practice outlined in "The Method of *Currere*." I am looking for a "point of coherence" connecting my "biography as it is lived," taking "myself, and my existential experience as a data source" (p. 20). I am not just looking at myself as researcher, I am looking for my *relations* in the research. My research is situated in the community wherein I grew up, so of course *I* am located there. But, how am I located there and why does it matter? "To ascertain where one is, when one is, one must locate the past" (Pinar, 1975, p. 22); I engage in *currere* to immerse into the past, present, future and their analytical and synthetical interplay. *Currere* in this case is central to locating myself, so that I can be freed to recognize myself and, thus, recognize the import of other relations in my research.

An ethic of care "reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships," and "it evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent" (Gilligan, 2013, p. 696). Among other things, *currere* attends to the cumulative, relational, and interdependent. *Currere* can be an expression that imports an ethic of care (Noddings,

Weiss, M. M. (2023). Rural rivers deep in my veins: *Currere* as care. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *7*(1), 55–63.

2013) byway of illuminating our relations of care. To do *currere* with care in mind looks at differences between *I want to care* and *I ought to care*, the latter being ethical caring (Noddings, 2013). I see *currere* as a method to explore *caring* as a researcher. Through *currere* I visit myself as researcher and as one caring deeply about rural educational research.

Regressive

> "One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 21).

Six Years Old

I'm walking across the yard and then our dirt gravel driveway towards the old Dawson Creek airport building in the middle of the yard. I don't know why we have an "airport" in our yard, but it is where we keep things. Seed bags in piles, stacked. Salt blocks for the cows. Sometimes salt blocks are blue, but today they are browny-red. I lick a salt block as I crawl over them to get into the farm storage. I make my way through all the piles of things stored here. There's red clover seed spilled on the floor. I drop down to a squat and run my finger through the tiny beads. I take a few and put them between my four front teeth. I pop the seeds with my teeth. A taste only connected with stored seeds pops into my mouth—dried-out floral, the story of the flower that made it. I'm here to clean my sister's tack room. There's a mess of horse tack inside. The seed bags in the room *are* the saddle horses. The saddles and blankets are on the floor. I push the stacks into place, place a blanket on top and its saddle. The saddle is so heavy that once I drag it onto the blanket, the pile has shifted and so has the blanket. I'm small but tough. I push (and pull) each piece until I have a straight stack. I repeat for the other two saddles. I pick up the bridles and place them on the saddle horns. Now, to the tack box. And, entirely empty it out—brushes, neatsfoot oil, saddle soap, horse wrap, bug spray, extra bridles, bits, and leather, a leather hole punch. I sort through all of the things and organize them into categories of horse care. I arrange them into the box. I sweep the room and then sit on a saddle and imagine I am out riding. Kassia will be happy to have the tack room cleaned. She likes things clean but does not like to clean them. I like to clean. Maybe we will go for a ride sometime later this week.

Ten Years Old

The red ford with bale forks is in a field two fields East of our house. **N**ever. **E**at. **S**hredded. **W**heat. I always face South and repeat those words so I know where to go when Michael says we are headed to the rock wall North East of the house (or in any other possible direction for any other thing. Go clean the seed drills, North of the corrals.) My dad drives me to the truck. East of the house.

"Do you think you can drive it home?" I have never driven the truck without my dad. I know I have to clutch at the right time to shift gears. He always clutches and I shift. I have been driving beside him or on his lap for as long as I can remember. I know I can get the truck home. I want him to know that I know how to drive.

"Yes!" He leaves me with the truck. He does not start it for me. He just trusts. Maybe he thinks I can walk the less than kilometer home if I can't do it. I will not let this happen. I get in the truck. I turn the key. Nothing happens. Dad does something when I turn the key. The clutch! I have to nearly stand on the peddle to get the truck to start. Success. I let off the clutch. The truck lurches and stalls. No matter. I know how to

start it now. I start it again, slowly let of the clutch as I give a little gas. I lump the truck forward in first. I know there has to be a way to go a faster, in a less lurchy way. I stand on the clutch and move from first to second. I stall again. I am better at shifting when my dad clutches. I repeat the cycle and lose count of how many times I stall. I hope my dad doesn't come get me. I want to get the truck home myself. I also hope he *does* come get me. I don't know anymore if I can drive without him. I don't know anymore if I can get the truck home. I resolve to keep trying until he comes to get me. Again, I start the truck and move into first—release the clutch, give a little gas, go forward, the engine gets louder. It's time to shift again. I clutch and then shift and then release. I give a bit of gas. The engine revs and then quiets, but does not stall. I don't have much further to go. I'm standing at the wheel with my butt just on the edge of the seat. I slowly make my way across the field to our driveway. Constantly scanning the road ahead—the one I have to cross. No one is coming. I get to the road and stop. When I give the gas. I stall again. I start up again and get across the road and slowly drive the truck into the yard. I'm smiling a mile when I see my dad. He returns the mile wide smile. He waits for me to stop and park the vehicle. I get out. It took a long time to get home. I am not as good at driving without my dad, but I *can* do it. He says nothing about it. Just helps me out of the truck and we're on to other chores.

Fifteen Years Old

This year is fragmented. There is no coherence. My sister and dad both died in separate accidents twenty-three days apart. My older brother, Michael and I worry that my mom will sell the place. I take my younger cousin on horse rides. I take my older cousin on quad rides. We tell our mom that we know how dad mixes seed and how much to feed cows. We tell her we know how to pull calves and how to do all of the chores. We tell her we can do this. My brother is eighteen. Michael goes to college and is home to help on the weekends. Neighbors help with fixing fences, haying, and feeding. Everyone remembers this year differently and everyone thinks that they did *all*, all of it themselves. Except my little brother. Matthew remembers nothing. I remember a lot. Times when I was alone. Times when people came to help me out of a bind. Times when I lay on my side in my room with a shattered heart in my chest, leaking half fluid remnants into a paralyzed arm. My family allows me to gently remind them their memories are inaccurate and so are mine. This allowance is granted to no-one else. I remember accidentally killing a newborn calf, when my brother was in school. I remember him dropping out. I remember everything simultaneously falling apart and being held together. I remember eating frozen entrées from Costco instead of home cooked meals. I still hate chicken cordon bleu.

Sixteen Years Old

I have the 89' Chevy truck and can drive to school, home, to different farm locations, and the occasional trip to town. I am responsible for a lot. School, cows, haying, seeding, calving, feeding, etc. My older brother, and I, and a farm hand Greg do almost everything. My mom does the books and has gone back to teaching. My little brother helps along the way. I have breaks in my schedule at school. I often go home to work or get cows back into a fence if a neighbor calls the school to tell me they are out. Most of my friends hang out in the student lounge in between classes. I do sometimes. My high school friends talk about things that happen in the lounge or parties I never go to. Just like when I never mentioned I was cutting greenfeed for sixteen hours on the day

of the community fair, I never mention that I wasn't there at those parties and events. I don't tell anyone how much work my brother Michael and I do. I don't tell them that I break and fix equipment. I don't tell them about the hours of fencing. I don't tell them that I take my horse out every other day during the summer months to check cows, fix fence and ride with my dog. I don't tell them that I work day and night on the farm. I don't tell them that my brother drinks too much. They know some of it, but more often than not, when I do hang out in the lounge, everyone talks about school assignments, weekend parties, volleyball, and hockey. That is what I talk about too. Except when I get up to leave and someone asks me where I am going—I say I have to feed cows.

Eighteen Years Old.

I'm at college. I could have gotten into a city uni, but I did not apply. I knew if I did, I might go, and I can't be far from home. I party away the first semester. I never miss a class or assignment, but I am doing terribly. I party during the week with my friends. There are different ladies' nights all over town. Snapper's is on Wednesday, Pour-house is on Tuesday, and The Corral is on Thursday. Booze is incredibly cheap on these nights; between $0.25 and $1.25 for highballs depending on the night and where you go. I try to get my homework done in a hungover haze during the week, because I have to go home to work on the farm on weekends. I pass all my courses and manage to keep all of my scholarships. I resolve to be a better student in the second semester; I get mostly B's and A's second semester and feel like I'm back on track. I don't tell anyone how I nearly failed calculus.

Twenty-three Years Old

Since starting college, I have stayed at home and worked on the farm in the summers. I have a summer job in the oilfield, painting. It's to pay for school. I garden every evening I possibly can. This summer is killing me. I got demoted because a guy younger than me asked for more responsibility. My boss told me this guy would be in charge, and I would train him and be in charge of him getting all of my old jobs done.

The guy younger than me tells me it isn't a real job. "Oilfield's easy money." He talks about my tits all day. He doesn't listen to me, and he does not do all of the jobs I used to do. I don't do them either. Every Friday my boss calls me in to his office and tells me off for not training this guy properly. I go home every day and do the millions of chores on the farm I have done for forever. I cannot hack this. My cousin offers me a job surveying in Fort Saskatchewan. It pays more than my current job. I quit my job that I've had for four summers. My boss tells me I am screwing him over. My old boss (his boss) tells me he is sorry this happened, and he understands why I am leaving. This is the last summer I spend on the farm full time. When I leave, my mother and I fight. I tell her I am leaving because I cannot handle all of the pressure anymore. She tells me that at least I get to leave some of the time and that I am selfish. We don't talk again until my little brother graduates. I do not live at home for many years to come. I finish my undergrad degree at the UofA.

Twenty-six Years Old

I do my masters in philosophy at Queen's. I am more out of place here than I have ever been in university. All of my farm skills do not matter. All of my thinking skills are inadequate.

Twenty-eight Years Old

I have just graduated, and I decide I'll teach in a rural college or uni without a PhD. I want to be in a rural space because I want to support students who were like me. I don't want to do a PhD because I think I can't hack it. I apply all over western Canada. I get a sessional position at Augustana Campus. What I learn there over the next seven years is tied to rural and not tied to rural. I love my students. I do not love the institution. I drive to campus two to five times a week. The fields and spaces crack open my chest with each drive. I watch the seasons change as one can only witness them in wide open rural Albertan spaces. I return home to my family farm more often again. I dream of moving home, but I don't know how it is possible. I settle for imagining I live East of Edmonton in the countryside.

Progressive

> "We look … at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 24).

One Year from Now

I've been working on this cabin in my mind for years and in reality for one. Gifted to me by Opa, the land overlooks the Peace Country. The fields beside me on this slight hill all gradually slope down towards the North. My porch faces North. It's not finished. Painstakingly long project. Stubbornness is built into every crevice and every length of scavenged wood: power poles dug deep into the earth, connected with the largest and longest boards I can afford, sided with rough cut wood slats. I look over the land that fills my soul and expands it. This farmland is home for me, but will it be for Maxine? Will Eddie grow to love this space? He seems reticent. It is laced with the arsenic of a family who has lost too much, and they have deep hurts. In turn, they hurt us—never intentional. I consider whether it is possible to move home, yet again. This dream of mine, to help move our family farm forward. Sure, I have always come home, delved into farm life the instant my car turns down my mother's drive. Now I am moving back, after so many years of not being able to come back for more than two weeks at a time. I am here to be a part of the landscape that built me. I am here to give my daughter the gifts of knowing that only come in close commune with a tight knit social community, a rough but ready relationship with the land, and a heartbreaking and heart-making relationship with animals. I am here so she knows the river—*the mighty peace*. I am here so she knows the hills—*the saddle hills*. I am here so she knows I did not run away, that I care and that this place lives in my bones. I am here as much for me as I am for her. I am here for Eddie too. His distant rural roots gifted him slow bones—he thinks and lives most exquisitely outside of city life. He has a longing for the rural, but maybe not this place … maybe not my rural. I do not know. For now, I continue to build a space for me, so that I can come back. My brothers say it's good to have a place for yourself.

Two Years from Now

I'm working on my research with community members. The creative process is driven by the things they need to get done, to build, to work with, to maintain. Improvisation and creativity live in the hands of my co-researchers. Today, we are fixing a set of rakes for haying. The tire has blown and tines need replacing. It should not be too difficult of a fix, but ya never know. I arrive at the field and get started, coffee in hand. I take a look at where the tines are missing and how many to replace. I think about

whether we will replace all of them or just some. The tined wheels on the rake still pick up hay relatively well, and you do not need to replace all of the broken ones. It's just good to have a larger ratio of unbroken tines to broken ones. By the looks of it, the tire has had many holes. Maybe not so simple a fix. The heavy paint from the distributer coats the tire parts. My neighbor arrives, and we chat. He talks about how he does not want to replace all the tines.

"You could go through a lot, like that." We aim to take the tire off first so it can go to the repair shop. Fix the tines while we wait. It's a good day to dry hay, warm and windy. Too bad the tire blew. Pull the bolts. Jack up the rakes. The tire is solidly melded to the axle. First attempt. Hammer at the rim of the tire to loosen it. A good round from both of us. It does not budge. We go through a number of other attempts. Over an hour has passed, and the tire is still in exactly the same place. Perhaps the metal heating and cooling over the years of use has fused the two together. Frustrations are high. The hay continues to dry, ready to be picked up. Eventually, we cut the tire loose with a cutting torch and drop it off at the shop. Using different metal cylindrical parts, we create a new axel. We repair the tines together—one holding tines in place, the other removing and replacing. Everything is ready to go but the tire. The hay continues to dry. The tire shop closes for the day. We are finished whether we want to be or not.

Five Years from Now

I'm visiting home. Maxine is six and is excited to go to our cabin. She misses her cousins, the fresh air, the stars at night, the wood stove. It's fall. Skies will be good—

lots of comets this time of year. Not quite as many as in August, but enough to blow your mind as you lay in the field with blankets and look up at the night skies. I need to learn more star formations for gazing. My dad knew so many.

Maxine is also worried. She is not as loud or as boisterous as her cousins. She doesn't know all the ropes. She isn't from the Valley. Her eldest cousin can easily unseat her because he just naturally knows how, what, why, where, and when, without ever needing to glance at his parents for confirmation. She worries. "Will I know where North is?" "How many cows do they have?" "Do I have to use the outhouse again?" "How come we don't have any animals?" "Should we get a donkey?" As her questions flood our 640-kilometer drive, I realize I often forget her anxieties because of my own. We both anticipate, we both worry. Did I condition her for this? Should I have just moved home full time?

I assure her that the stress, conflict, and care are worth it. As we pull off of the highway onto our gravel road, she seems to levitate in her seat. I pull to a stop a ¼ section before ours and point North.

She yells, "Look Dad, Mom, ELK!–They're our neighbors." A coyote crosses in front of us, just a few meters from a dead one hung on our neighbor's fence. My daughter's voice is in the background incessantly counting the ungulates. Something (us or the coyote) spooks the elk. They scatter and are gone. We drive to our cabin. Unlock it, gather wood, start a fire, haul water in, and then unload our things.

Present

> "The biographic present is not part of a conceptual system; the system is an aspect of the present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 26).

I'm getting ready to go home. The semester is nearly finished. I have one more class, until candidacy prep. I am writing papers for my finals this semester. I have papers

to submit and re-submit for publication. I am brain-dead. I am constantly cooking, cleaning, and caring for others. I sneak my work into the hours that Maxine sleeps or is able to play independently from me.

Today, we go drive out to the country to some crown land. We explore with the dogs and then pick out a Christmas tree and cut it down. A rural tree for an urban house. It will be our own little thing. It is good to make time for just us, that is not merely the doldrum of everyday life tied to the pandemic. To be honest, I don't mind quieter holidays. The pandemic gives my little family space to spend time with each other, often outdoors. It alleviates the pressure to spread ourselves thin in the short bursts of time we are not working. I will go home soon. I miss the land and my family. I'll go for coffee with Yvonne. I'll go to my land and plot out a space for my cabin and sit and think. My present right now is littered with both thoughts on the past and anticipation for the future. My Maxine brings me back to the present. She pulls on my leg. We build a piano fort and her blue eyes sparkle. We read some books in the fort. She finally understands how awesome forts are. We snuggle, giggle, and hide-out from the world.

Analytical

The present is infused with my past and future. I never emotionally left the farm, nor how I ought to care for it. There exists the stressful break at age twenty-three. Yet, my rural self is with me—always. If I get fed up with thinking and writing, which is often, I go to my garage and build something, or fix something, or make some kind of make-shift art with wood scraps; I go into my yard and split wood, garden, or tend to the yard. My past lives in my ability to improvise, fix and make. It lives in my penchant for gardening and cooking. Some of my most important education has been to learn how to build a fire, fix mechanical things, plant and harvest gardens, care and tend for animals, cook for those I love, etc. I use these everyday.

I do not use my academic education in daily tasks, but for the fact that I exist in an academic institution. It is as if I have built a job from my academic training so that I have a use for it. The present is anticipatory. And, centered around daily tasks and caring for my daughter, among others. My daughter brings me into the present in very visceral ways. She is tied to the future because I want her to be a part of the farm and farm life. The future keeps me at an arms-length from my rural upbringing, but it brings me and my family closer into the folds. My future research is a product of how deeply I care about *my rural relations*; past, present, future.

Synthetic

Little me, teenage me, adult me, future me—the farm and rural landscape of the Peace Country is me. The researcher is me. My family is me. There is a line of hurt and separation that runs through me. It is tied to my past, present, and future. Repair and care for my past me, exist in my wish to do research in the rural. I am mobilized to work through the hurt because of the value of everything I gained from a rural upbringing and my ongoing ties to rurality (Corbett, 2013). I am mobilized to work through the hurt towards a future that more relationally includes the farm. I am mobilized to care beyond my natural want to care. I ought to be doing respectful rural educational research. Yet, I worry Eddie may not follow or Maxine may not fit. These are small worries, because Eddie has rural roots and so does Maxine. I worry none-the-less. The self that I am is a deep river and all its channels. The river is a rural, land-based self, running deep from my veins. The channels are all of the offshoots and tangents that remind me daily I am a rural person living in the city. I do not fit in either rural or urban. I do not fit in academia.

But, this not-fitting, is good. It places me in a position of being able to connect, explore, and make within my rural community and as my researching self.

Concluding Remarks

> "Literally, we are holistically—and synthetically … a part of the landscape and the historical event; the aesthetic experience allows us to enter the process of healing and understanding" (Slattery, 2017, p. 189).

The aesthetic is embedded in my style of writing *currere*. I am in the spaces I am writing about. Tenses are inconsequential. I taste the salt lick and feel the gritty substrate embed in the knees of my jogging pants as I crawl across it. I am in a shower, tired after a hard day's work, wondering if my sister is dead, before I know it is true. I am watching helplessly as a calf I was responsible for does not make it. I taste the crumbly, rubbery, cheesy, salty formerly frozen chicken cordon bleu. I am filled with Maxine's infectious, mile-wide smile she has from her grandfather and uncles. I sit on a porch with the land filling the chasm of my chest. I have my hand in Eddie's as we participate in wordless exchanges by the fire place in our part-time rural home.

The synthetic moment feels all encompassing. Past is present is future—is total, holistic and inseparable. I am partial to Slattery's (2017) aesthetic interpretation of the synthetical moment; "nature, life, and self all merge in a phenomenological encounter, a synthetical moment, a visceral rather than visual experience" (p. 192). His description, in line with Pinar's (1975) coherence that comes through *currere*, is an aesthetic and lived coherence, and "not necessarily a logical one" (p. 20). I am grateful to do the visceral work to locate the *I* in my future research and to do the work to strengthen the biography that informs me as a researcher. I feel care that is natural and wanted and care that is an ethical *ought to* (Noddings, 2013). Lastly, I experience all of the tributaries of possible care from me to my rural relationships in and of the extraordinary places we inhabit.

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Currere: Exploring Disorientation & Disability in a Time of Pandemic[1]

By Kelly P. Vaughan
Purdue University Northwest

In December 2021, after my first semester of in-person teaching since the pandemic, I visited my doctor for what I thought would be a routine exam. Instead, my doctor found a tumor and arranged for me to be seen at the cancer center later that afternoon. Within 30 minutes of meeting an oncologist, I had an excisional biopsy. I canceled my evening classes but arrived the following day to teach for six hours. I taught mainly from my chair, unable to move without pain, but more unable or at least unwilling to stay home, worrying about my pending biopsy results.

While sitting in my office a few days later, my doctor called to tell me I had cancer. After more biopsies and a radical vulvectomy, I began immunotherapy. Because of COVID-19 protocols, I could not have anyone with me for my seven hours of appointments, lab work, and infusions that marked my first day of treatment. During those hours of reflecting and journaling, I thought a lot about my child's hospital experiences—my first experiences with PET scans, MRIs, CT scans, and even infusions were those of a mother supporting a child. As a cancer patient encountering similar tests and procedures, I have benefited from my child's willingness to share his knowledge and experiences. My child cautioned me about the discomfort of the IV during infusions and the need for candy and activities when sitting for long times. He warned me about the sounds of banging drums in the MRI, sounds made even more cacophonous because I requested Motown to be played during the tests.

While getting my scans and infusions, I recognized a familiar feeling of disorientation. Sarah Ahmed (2006) describes moments of disorientation as a "bodily feeling" that can "shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life livable" (p. 157). The ontological function of such disorientation, according to Parrey (2016), is to "expose and leave us exposed to, the many, often strange, relations through which meaning and experience emerge" (para. 18).

In this paper, I utilize Pinar and Grumet's (1976) *currere* process to explore disability and disorientation during a pandemic. Specifically, I engage in the four phases of *currere*: remembering (regressive), reimagining (progressive), reorienting (analytic), and reacting (synthetic). Within this process, I will seek to understand my past experiences to situate myself in the present and imagine and work (collectively) to move toward a more just future.

Regressive Phase: Remembering

Campbell (2009), as cited by Parrey (2016), describes disorientation as "the lived experience of facing at least two directions: towards a home that has been lost … and to a place that is not yet home" (p. 194).

Sitting in the infusion room, my body (even more than my mind) remembered the feeling of anxiety in a hospital setting. I distinctly remember sitting in a hospital room with my just-turned-three-year-old child preparing for discharge after a four-day hospital stay. I felt anxious and afraid that I didn't have the skills to keep him safe during

Vaughan, K. P. (2023). *Currere*: Exploring disorientation and disability in a time of pandemic. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *7*(1), 64–69.

a seizure. In that first year, my orientation (ontologically) remained consistent—toward a home that I didn't yet recognize as lost or at least transformed.

It was not until I felt (more) confident in keeping my son safe and more focused on advocating for (and with) him in educational settings that disorientation occurred. I was disoriented because I had thought I was informed about disability and inclusive practices. I was in a Ph.D. program in curriculum studies, and I always (or at least usually) remembered to write "and disability" in a list of social identities and oppressive systems. But, in advocating for my child, I began to recognize the depth of my un-knowing, un-questioning, un-theoretical understanding of disability. While I had worked to develop pedagogical strategies to serve my students with learning disabilities, I had failed to question my epistemological and ontological assumptions about disability. In this way, disability was more than "unknown" to me; it was, as Campbell (2009) describes, "unthought" (p. 14). "Unthinkingly," I embraced a medical/deficit model—one in which I (as the teacher) would seek to "fix" my student by teaching how to use graphic organizers or checklists or allowing some choice in the representation of knowledge (see Goodley, 2014). My disorientation came as I contemplated my lack of theory and the harm I had done when I believed I was doing good.

During this experience, I sought out new theories and found Disability Studies, a multidisciplinary field that rejects the notion that disability is an individual problem. I discovered a social-political model of disability that identifies "the problem of disability … in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being" (Kafer, 2013, p. 6). Thinking with theory helped to ground me and help me move toward reorientation.

Progressive Phase: Reimagining

Recently, I was at my child's Individualized Education Program annual meeting. I was proud that my son presented a beautiful vision for his future; however, I was exhausted by the bureaucracy, deficit-centered labeling, and assumptions. Even though the meeting included a team of talented educators and we had technically gotten what we wanted, the conference felt painful because what we need is a better system. There is not a sense of urgency in creating something new.

In a speech to college students, Michael Dumas (2017) asked his audience to think about "25 years from now" (n.p.). He explained that

> you will be sitting here, and you will wonder what you have done to actually try to imagine that moment. If all you have done is think about what is practical and what people told you to think about, you will not get anywhere. (n.p.)

During the pandemic, I often thought about Dumas's words. About the value of dreaming and working toward a future that may seem impossible. Dumas's call to wonder, similar to Freire's imperative to "revive within ourselves our ontological capacity for dreaming" (Araūjo Freire, 2007, p. xvi), took on greater meaning.

I am not sure what disability justice looks like, but I know that visions of disability justice are more often seen through art and activism in community groups than in academic spaces. In *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) describes the struggle for social justice as "telling a story that is still being written" (pp. 167–168). This is beautiful and radical—the idea of writing a new story. I dream of a future where Universal Design for Learning is a given, a taken-for-granted baseline from which we build (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). I imagine a school system

where support services, untethered from damaging labels, are provided because they benefit children, not because parents with social, cultural, or professional capital know how to work the system (Harry, 2008; Ong-Dean, 2009). I envision a focus on culturally sustaining and inclusive practices instead of accommodations after the fact for children who aren't expected or welcome. I dream of collaboration between students, teachers, families, and leaders of disability justice movements striving to create more inclusive schools and communities (See Jarman & Kafer, 2014; Mingus, 2011). I contemplate conferences, annual meetings, and gatherings with virtual options so those valued members who cannot attend (because of disability/accessibility, or health crisis, or finances, or lack of childcare) can always be present because their presence is important to the community. As a parent, my dream includes building a world where young people can bring their whole selves to schools and communities without having to shield their spirits from ideologies entrenched in racism, ableism, and sexism.

Analysis Phase: Reorienting

> *Ryan Parrey (2016) argues that "Disorienting encounters put us—all of us—in touch with where we are (here and now) and what might unfold (the future), but they also put us in touch with how these encounters are each time (re)shaping the paths that led 'here' just as they shape the paths we follow 'there.'" (para. 2)*

I have now had eight treatments—I have at least seven more. In one of my journal entries following a challenging month of treatments and side effects, I wrote:

> I wish I could write a song about the overwhelming love I feel … since my diagnosis, but I am not a songwriter, and I cannot carry a tune. If I could sing, I would write about [my husband] waking early each morning to bring me coffee and care for my wounds. I would write a verse about my son, emotions always on his sleeve, calling me "cancer mom" and writing me poems, or my daughter making me the journal I am writing in and finishing a quilt we started when she was just a young child and presenting it to me after surgery. I would write about my mom and brother always being there to help and friends and family sending books, food, and love to let me know I am not alone. In prose, it sounds so mundane. If I could write a song, it would have faint sounds of sadness in the background, but chords of longing, of gratitude, of healing, and [of dreaming].

In the weeks and months after my diagnosis, I had a second experience of disorientation. I struggled to navigate my experience as a nondisabled scholar writing about illness while grappling with notions of ableism. I have consistently recognized that, in an ableist society, disability must be understood at least in part as socially constructed. But, it also became clear that there are, sometimes, embodied differences that cause pain or discomfort. As Wendell (2001) explains

> some unhealthy disabled people, as well as some healthy people with disabilities, experience physical or psychological burdens that no amount of social justice can eliminate. Therefore, some very much want to have their bodies cured, not as a substitute for curing ableism, but in addition to it. (p. 19).

During my treatments, I was frequently frustrated with my own body. This feeling of frustration made me remember an experience with my child. My then five-year-old son,

growing up in a house filled with stories of disabled activists, poets, and scholars, asked me, "Is it ok that I don't like my seizures?" This question stopped me in mid-movement. I instantly understood that my effort to reframe disability in our home, combined with my (toxic) positivity created a barrier for my child to claim and express a range of emotions. I immediately apologized to my child, and we talked about all the things about seizures that made him frustrated, overwhelmed, and sad.

While I am still navigating my own experiences, I am grateful for my amazing team of doctors providing life-saving care and a community of activists and scholars providing the theoretical tools to frame my experiences (e.g., Clare, 2017). As a currently unhealthy woman without a disability, theories of disability and chronic illness (Wendell, 2001) have helped me frame my desire to heal from my cancer without feeling broken or at war with my body.

Analysis Phase II: Reorienting During the Pandemic

I was diagnosed with cancer during a pandemic. The pain of the pandemic to our larger communities is palpable—the loss of life, the struggles of isolation, the loss of learning for many children, the lack of resources for those impacted by illness or job loss, and the celebrations of re-turns to work/life/school as "normal" without acknowledging those for whom re-turn was not yet possible (or even desirable). Yet, healing and parenting through the pandemic also demonstrated glimpses of a more accessible future. In my home, I witnessed my son thrive with online learning. The new technology and skills developed during online learning benefited him even when most of his classmates returned to the classroom. While my daughter missed in-person school and friends, she found joy in cultivating new talents in her found time. As a teacher, I watched some of my students struggle and others thrive within a system of greater flexibility. While healing during a pandemic was lonely in some ways, the technologies popularized during the pandemic allowed me access to family and friends. As many disabled activists pointed out, things like working remotely or receiving care through telemedicine that were previously deemed infeasible were suddenly widely available. My third moment of disorientation came with the realization that we already had many tools needed to make a more accessible world. What is missing is a desire to create the spaces we need.

Synthetic Phase: Reacting

In this paper, I used the *currere* method, which Pinar (1975) describes as a way to "bracket the educational aspects of our taken-for-granted world" (p. 406) to analyze moments of disorientation (as in Petrina, 2014). I recognize that disorientation can help us question previous unexamined assumptions and dream differently. As I move toward re-acting, acting with new knowledge, new urgency, and a desire not to "return" to life as normal but to re-turn to a new way of living that centers access, justice, and belonging, I recognize that I do not need to fully know before I can act (in fact, such knowing would be impossible). I am committed to acting with urgency to create a more accessible future by parenting differently, teaching differently, healing differently, and thinking collectively.

I will end by sharing that writing this essay has been valuable to me, but I am uncertain if it is helpful for you to read. Yet, I am sharing my experience with those of you reading this essay, even though sharing made me feel vulnerable and uncertain, because I hope that if we begin to share both our vulnerabilities and our imaginings, we may be able to dream more, and in collective dreaming, we may free ourselves to build

something new and better. We may be able to move in the direction of more just and accessible "homes" and schools and communities. I hope that we might dream a new vision and that, 25 years from now, we (or those who come after) will see that vision enacted and feel empowered to dream things we cannot yet imagine.

Postscript

I presented an earlier version of this essay at the *Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice* with two of my scholar-friends, Jamie and Sandra. After our presentation, I went with my colleagues to the cafeteria, where I got lightheaded—a physical disorientation that is a side effect of a now chronic condition caused by treatment. Without a word, my friend Jamie caught my arm, carried my tray, and helped me sit down. I immediately apologized for my body, my weakness, and the changes I was experiencing. Even while theorizing with disability studies, deficit thinking and guilt crept into my social interaction. Essays sometimes make our experiences seem reconciled, but our experiences are messy. While filled with moments of insight, I recognize disorientation can also look like trying to push aside feelings of shame while being uplifted by a community that embodies an ethic of disability justice and care.

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Endnotes

[1] The *currere* process is, by nature, autobiographical. Because our lives are entangled with those with whom we make a life, my story is not just mine. I have shared this work with family members named in the piece, and they have (graciously) allowed me to share. However, I acknowledge that, if they were writing their memories of the same events, they would have differences in recollection, emphasis, and analysis.

Co-Constructing Assessment in Teaching and Learning: A Season for Depth, Reflection, and Responsive Teaching

By Terah R. Moore, Megan C. Osterhout, Hannah L. Clemens, & Spencer L. Lambert
The College of Idaho

The College of Idaho, a small liberal arts college, was founded in 1891 as the state's first private liberal arts college. The College is a "close-knit community of 1,000 scholars, athletes, artists, and critical thinkers" (College of Idaho, 2023, para. 1). The residential campus is located near historic downtown Caldwell, Idaho. The education department employs four full time faculty and two part-time faculty and is one of 18 departments that make up the campus. The education program offers a fifth-year certification with the option to add a master's program and on average has between 7-15 pre-service teacher candidates enrolled. Pre-service teacher candidates complete their undergraduate studies and then stay for a year-long student teaching placement while completing methods and research coursework. The following year, teacher candidates earn their Idaho teaching credential and a master's degree.

The pandemic offered opportunity to learn. Post pandemic offered time to reflect upon those experiences and to interpret that reality and to seek to understand the curriculum (Pinar, 2012). We entered Fall 2020 with the smallest fifth year cohort in the program's history. Fifty percent of the group decided not to enroll in fall courses due to uncertainty prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this was not sustainable for the program, there was little option, and it is worth recognizing that the small cohort was a gift in itself. Rapid changes were implemented across the nation. Daily pandemic reports shifted the direction in teaching platforms. The story of this class unfolds here through a *currere*-based reflection. Pinar (2012) describes *currere* as an attempt to "run the course" (p. 43). As such, this piece works to determine "what has been and what is now the nature" of this unique educational experience (Pinar, 1994, p. 20).

In an essay describing the application of the *currere* approach, Poetter (2015) summarizes this process unfolding when we purposefully engage text and the cycles of our life stories together in an effort to construct new meanings, understandings and insights, and to conduct complicated conversations. This foundation guides the journey of this reflection. The steps are woven into the text marking moments, naming processes initiating change, articulating aspects of the course that are forever altered, and detailing an organic rethinking of a course prompted by teaching during the pandemic.

Returning to the Past

I, Terah, revisit fall 2011, the semester I first taught the assessment course in the fifth-year program. This time period also reflects the framework I adopted hook line and sinker. It is captured within the graduate catalogue course description for EDU 520 Assessment for Teaching for Learning:

> The course is designed to guide future teachers through the various processes of educational assessment. The relationship among teaching, learning,

Moore, T. R., Osterhout, M. C., Clemens, H. L., & Lambert, S. L. (2023). Co-constructing assessment in teaching and learning: A season for depth, reflection, and responsive teaching.. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *7*(1), 70–76.

> and assessment will be emphasized. Special emphasis will be placed upon creating, administering, analyzing, and communicating the results of teacher-made tests for classroom application. Interpretation of standardized tests will also be addressed. (College of Idaho Graduate Catalogue, 2022, para. 1)

This language has not changed in over a decade, likely two. I have structured the course similarly over time, relying on the same standards to shape the same learning. In essence, I have let the standards dictate my teaching. I have not questioned why these structures are the ones shaping such a critical piece of my work. Nor have I taken the time to rethink what might be, until now. The structure in place, as well as the course description in the catalogue, was based on the work of an individual who taught prior to my hire; what had been done continued to be done with little question.

Looking the Other Way

Out of the ordinary circumstances spur on change or at least offer space to recognize the need for change. Moving into the fall season of 2020 revealed that nothing about this term was normal. Program enrollment was the lowest in history, institutional instruction shifted to online platforms, faculty members were encouraged to work from home, student teaching placements were conducted virtually, in remote learning settings, or in hybrid models. Because 2020's fifth-year cohort was so small, made up of just Megan, Hannah, and Spencer, we had the option to meet off campus and in outdoor settings. I jumped at the chance to share my peaceful farmscape with others.

Merging Stories

The teacher candidates were eager for the interaction and the opportunity to hold class around the pond, weather permitting. Together we were a quartet, venturing into uncharted territory. We had time and space for breaking bread together, we had time to deconstruct and question, to unlearn and unravel, time to rethink and establish appropriate foundations to our approach of assessment. bell hooks (1984) set the stage by urging for us "to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions" (p. 12). We were on a journey to understanding what assessment might hold for us as teachers.

Our Biographic Present

Together we sat. We literally started with a blank slate. Our first session included dishing up plates of spaghetti in my small and humble farm kitchen. We sat in a circle in camp chairs under the walnut tree near the pond eating our food, discussing events, and sharing experiences.

- The Teacher Educator, Terah, brought with her 16 years of teaching experience in private liberal arts institutions. Prior to teaching in higher education, she taught all subjects in the 5/6th grade bilingual classroom.
- The 2nd grade Teacher Candidate, Megan, had field experience during this time taking place in virtual and hybrid K-3rd grade classrooms in local elementary schools. Upon completing teacher licensure and defending her master's research, she was hired by the local school district to teach 2nd grade.
- The 4th grade Teacher Candidate, Hannah, received her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education in May of 2020, and her Master of Arts in Teaching in

May of 2021. When the assessment class took place, her teaching experience was with upper-elementary grade levels, and she has since been hired to teach 4th grade in a local school district.

- The Kindergarten Teacher Candidate, Spencer, completed his field experience during this time in a kindergarten classroom. After the pandemic, he defended his master's research and became employed as the Director of Student Accessibility Services at a private liberal arts institution.

Conversation naturally went to the wonders of how to teach kindergarten and fourth graders in completely virtual environments. How would students learn? How would teachers know what was actually accomplished? Would there be negative hold over from poor performance on testing? Would all students have access to the Internet? What does absence look like in these settings? None of us had answers to these questions, but we discussed them and pondered them together, and we thought about what our immediate future might be. Our conversation that first night took almost two hours. Looking back, the questions were closely tied to assessment. We did not conclude the conversations; rather, we set them aside to be continued.

Our next "blank slate" activity was to explore what we thought we knew about assessment. We applied backwards design techniques (McTigue & Wiggins, 1998) to develop an assessment curriculum, under guidance, reconstructing the course with the end in mind. This was a complex action of using ourselves to learn about the concept that we then worked to apply within our own educational settings. With four members, the messiness of the navigation was manageable.

Sheets of butcher paper were set up around the pond. Each of us added content that unraveled what thought we knew about assessment and ultimately and organically determined our learning objectives. We loosely followed McTigue and Wiggins' (1998) backwards design principles: of identifying desired results, determining assessment evidence of our own learning, and then planning learning activities and experiences that drove our instructional time.

Our next step was to determine our belief system surrounding assessment. We compared and differentiated concepts of "assessment" and "visible learning." This dialogue and course activities revealed that we held basic knowledge about the terms, but we struggled to fully connect the two, and most importantly, we struggled to transfer the concepts to actual classroom practice.

The group had a common factor—all had participated in the same district training about visible learning, an assessment framework championed by John Hattie (2012). This framework referred to making student learning "visible" to both teachers and students. A major take away from this training was that teachers were responsible for shaping the process that helps students take ownership of their own learning. According to the district training, the "learning" component referred to approaching the act of teaching in terms of its impact on student learning (Hattie, 2012).

All members had basic levels of practitioner application of the visible learning concepts. All were certifying in the elementary authorization, all taught within the same district, and all received similar professional development training through that district. The group unanimously determined that understanding assessment through the lens of visible learning would be a beneficial use of our time in the assessment course. We determined that Hattie's framework would supplement our learning journey.

The course roadmap developed, it was time to co-construct the syllabus. We intentionally named each step of the process—because the act of identifying learner needs, constructing the syllabus aligned to standards, and selecting activities and assessment outcomes that act as indicators were all authentic steps within the assessment process. It was critical that we took time to recognize and name each. We examined those learning competencies that guided our time together. The "pin the standard" or the alignment process (aligning standard to indicator to outcome activity or project) yielded the following plan.

- I know where I'm going
    - Defining Assessment and Understanding Background
    - Project One: Defining Assessment and Teacher Interview
- I have the tools for the journey
    - Assessment Tools and Practicing Strategies
    - Project Two: The Visible Learning Strategy Evaluation (a running record- evaluating assessment strategies)
- I am capable of monitoring my work
    - Using Assessment Knowledge; Application to Real Life Classrooms
    - Project Three: Assessment Philosophy and Evaluation Policy
- I recognize when I am ready for what I need to do next
    - Visible Learning Assessment and Call to Leadership
    - Final Project: The Classroom and Beyond—A synthesis and application of knowledge (Frey et al., 2018)

Collaboratively, we discussed possible evidence that might demonstrate knowledge gained at each step in the process. Poster pages with the learning task projects were displayed around the pondscape, and the standards and learning competencies were separated into individual pieces. Collaboratively, we assigned or pinned each standard and learning competency to the learning task project that it matched best. This action took time; however, it was time well spent. Pacing and moving through the text became a non-issue. The learning and application of our own assessment processes easily transferred to the K-12 classroom settings.

Reconstructing

One visible outcome was that we co-constructed a competency-based matrix that guided instruction over the semester. This activity offered teacher candidates a firsthand experience in constructing competency-based matrices. Together we documented our learning; we created a guide that helped us track learning and informed the happenings of each class session. The learning about assessment was formative and authentic. As a collaborative team we participated in an in-depth practice of developing a standards-

based report card from scratch. In the process of re-thinking how assessment looks in the classroom, this experience offered solid practice with standards-based assessment.

Because the assessment course is strategically offered during the student teaching placements, candidates gain classroom experience concurrently. For this group, our class sessions were held in-person. The entire course was metacognitive in nature and demanded constant interaction, visitation, and articulation of why we did what we did concerning assessment.

Pandemic-induced course shifts included the use of a new text that matched the needs of the group, a collaborative and dynamic course construction, the physical organization of the outdoor classroom, intentional selection of and paring down of course activities, and the construction of uniquely focused topics for the authorization level. These shifts were long overdue and beneficial.

- Knowledge of needs and former training allowed for a uniquely and relevant constructed curriculum, including the selection of a text tailor-selected for the teacher candidates, that more aptly addressed teacher preparation standards.
- A co-constructed syllabus and shared teaching allowed for authentic curriculum development.
- A face-to face outdoor classroom venue fostered a safe environment.
- A narrowed focus on elementary practice allowed for depth focused on elementary classroom practices and applications.

With two class periods to spare, the group made a remarkable and deep breakthrough, one that, anecdotally and historically, has not occurred during the course. In a collaborative, storytelling chat discussion, where each member contributed, added, and expanded or polished the work done previously, the group carefully and articulately defined "assessment," "visible learning," and "evaluation." This moment marked a checkpoint in our learning, as noted in the collaborative remarks below:

> Assessment – any form of gauging and documenting where a student is, at a particular point in time in their learning that can be understood and presented in a way (possibly different ways) to the student, teacher, administration, and parents. A place for all to understand what they know and where we can go from there. To set goals for growth. Assessment is a communication tool and serves as feedback from the student to the teacher to help the teacher understand the student's current standing. Assessments are a way for teachers to explain to parents and others where students are if they need more assistance. Assessments also provide students the opportunity to see where they are on the learning continuum; assessments can help determine if students retain information, understand the material, and can apply or transfer that knowledge.
>
> Visible Learning – is an assessment tool that prompts teachers to reflect on their assessment by looking through the eyes of their learners. Visible learning allows for students to take responsibility for their own learning and identify the progress that they have made and the steps that they need to take next. Students can see what they have learned and where they need to grow in their learning so they know in what area they will need more support in-order to grow, along with providing better insight for teachers into the retainment of material by students. Visible learning allows for the setting of goals and reflection for both the students and the teacher.

Evaluation – is assessing the student knowledge through quizzes, tests, projects, writing assignments, small group activities, and more to see what the students have retained and to see if we need to review or alter the way we are teaching materials in the classroom. Evaluation is a check in and an overview all at the same time. Academically, socially, or otherwise. It is a place to see how far we have come, see where we have gone, and see what gaps we can find and fill in. Just as an assessment is a communication from the student to the teacher, the evaluation is the communication from the teacher to the student. Evaluation is a pivotal point in the assessment process and the means through which the next steps are formulated and happen. Evaluation is making sense of the student data to truly come to an understanding of what the students know and have yet to learn and to help the student understand these areas themselves.

Experience and Selves Merging, Meaning Constructed

The summary of these terms act as evidence of enduring understandings that will remain; they are embedded in our philosophies and are engrained in our teaching. Further applied, each of us will use these new understandings to ground us in specific and positive mindframes that will indeed promote healthy and productive assessment practices crucial for learning to happen. This was a season that allowed each of us to claim: "I really get it!" We will strive to lead and to be responsible for the learning that occurs under our care. Thus, a major conclusion was that time in this class was well spent.

So, what really changed in the grand scheme of teaching and learning in this assessment course? In closing, each of us share a few takeaways from the pondscape assessment class offered during the pandemic that ultimately initiated change in the immediate setting and beyond.

Terah: What understandings must remain? Blank slates are not all bad. I must be in tune with specific needs of the group and not rely so heavily on existing structures used previously. Great learning gains are made through learning by doing and by journeying together; I must not separate myself from my learners, especially when the course topics are assessment and learning. This investment was intense and constant and demanded that I learn alongside, that I work to understand where each learner was, that I had a pulse on where we needed to go, and that I was comfortable in sharing the role with teacher candidates in determining how to "get there." This shared role in teaching and planning was crucial in the understandings that emerged from this course. I was reminded of the power of relationship and the importance of togetherness. I will forever conduct an open inventory with teacher candidates as a first course activity. This course in particular reminded that me that less really is more, and that course quality should not be measured by the number of activities that one can fit into a term. I was reminded that the power of learning is refreshing and opportunistic. I was humbly reminded that sharing the control, co-teaching, and co-construction is not easy, but it is worthwhile. And I must remember that I, too, am a learner, and therefore, I need to use new and unfamiliar resources in my teaching.

Hannah: There are countless course concepts, ideas, and themes that I found resonant this 2020 term—things so resonant and powerful because they have shaped my outlook on assessment, have shown me ways to use assessment to empower, and have introduced me to a new and upcoming (and incredibly exciting) wave in the educational world. I particularly enjoyed learning about visible learning and how I can use that in

assessment to meet a student where they are at, capitalizing on what they know, and using it to guide my subsequent instruction and shape the student's next steps. I feel very excited, hopeful, and optimistic leaving this class with my new knowledge, and there truly isn't anything I feel like I didn't get out of it or think that I didn't learn enough about. And if there are any instances in the future where I realize there are things I wish I would have learned more about, I feel that I have the right perspective on assessment and grasp on what it truly means, that I could accurately research it myself in an unbiased manner, which is something I would not have been able to say on the first day of class when I was obviously very biased and had negative feelings about assessments.

Megan: Most resonant from the 2020 term is the idea that everything is assessment—visible learning tools and strategies can be assessment-based. These ideas are great but are only useful when put into action. They resonated with me because it took a bit of a journey to get to this point of understanding. We, as a group, started with heavy restraints on our understanding of these concepts, but through the course of our class sessions and large modules, I found myself gaining more and more perspective each time.

Spencer: I can say I know about visible learning and assessments and how they are different and what makes each useful when teaching. One of the most important things for me is that I learned how to observe my students learning. Most of what I took away from this course resonated with me because each session was so memorable and so enjoyable and was done on the basis of relationship. Beyond that, the concepts we did address were relevant and were applied in our classrooms. I learned the value of giving the right feedback to students, and I got to practice all of it.

Together we journeyed. Together we learned.

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The Emotions that Walk into School

By Olivia Weisbrodt
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Regressive

It is senior year of high school; a group of students and I are involved in a club called Hope Squad at my high school. This club is based around the continuing issue of teen suicide in our nation.

"Olivia, do we really need to meet in every study hall?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. Allison[1] is our president, and that is what she wants to do."

Ring. Ring. Ring.

"Hurry! We are going to be late for our first study hall meeting!"

"Hello everyone! Thank you for showing up today! My name is Allison, your Hope Squad president. Since today is our first day, I think it would be good to bounce some ideas around. Our club focuses on kindness. So as a big group, let's throw out some ideas to practice weekly acts of kindness."

Ideas were thrown around like confetti.

"Let's hand out candy!"

"Let's cancel class!"

"Let's make coffee for the whole school!"

"Let's hold doors for everyone in the morning!"

"It would be the easiest thing!"

"And the cheapest!"

"And it would be very impactful!"

"Let's hold doors starting at 7:15 every Monday morning!"

"Okay, how about we start next week?"

"That works for me."

"Me too!"

"Same!"

"Alright, 7:15 Monday morning! Everyone be there!"

Gosh that is so early. People are going to make fun of us too.

The next Monday quickly rolls around.

"OH
MY
GOSH!"

I am so nervous. This is going to be so embarrassing. People are going to judge me.

The Hope Squad group gathers at the front doors of the school at 7:15 on the dot.

Here we go.

Of course. There is a large group of girls approaching the school.

Here comes Happiness.

They are all walking in sync.

"Who is that?"

"Oh no."

"It's Hannah and her posse of popular girls."

"Of course. They are all decked out in their Victoria Secret Pink sweatshirts, black Lululemon leggings, and tan, fur Ugg boots."

"Why do they have to be the first ones to come in? Ugh."

Weisbrodt, O. (2023). The emotions that walk into school. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *7*(1), 77–86.

"Olivia, how do you know them?"

"They all are in my fifth period Pre-Calculus class, and they make me so nervous. They are all just sooooo pretty. All of them are too cool for backpacks and lunch boxes, so they just use shopping bags from Lululemon as lunch boxes, and fancy tote bags as backpacks."

I wonder if they are as put together on the inside as they are on the outside.

No one is perfect. But these girls are really good at faking it.

"I wonder if they are perfect at home too?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think that they are always happy and put together at home like they are at school?"

"I have no idea. All that I know is that I wish I looked that good and had that many friends."

Wow. Their makeup and hair are perfectly done.

"Hey Olivia!"

"What's up John?"

"What time do you think they all woke up this morning to get ready?"

"Probably 3:00 in the morning. LOL."

I should not have said that.

Students who seem to have everything need more support.

Happiness number two is coming in now.

"Is that Kate!"

"It is!! I love Kate!"

"How do you know Kate, Olivia?"

"Oh my gosh we have been best friends since we were in elementary school!"

"That is a long time!"

Her yellow shirt and white skirt make her look as bright as a sunflower.

"What did you get from Starbucks, Kate?"

"The usual! Venti iced white mocha."

"That sounds so good! Gosh you have your life together! You made time to look cute and get Starbucks?"

"Somehow I did, haha!"

"Well, you look good. I hope that you have a good day!"

"You too! Thank you for holding the door for me!"

"Of course, Kate!"

How can she get any more perfect? She is so sweet.

"I love your Nike sweatshirt Theo!"

"I love your tan sandals, John!"

Of course. She is complimenting people too.

She is just so perfect and easy to love. I want to be like Kate.

Students who seem to always do the right thing need more support.

Regressive

Here comes Sadness.

"Oh my gosh Olivia. Don't make eye contact but Tom is walking towards the school."

"Wait, why can't I look? He doesn't care what I do."

"Wait, do you know what happened?"

"What??!?! Something happened to Tom?"

"On Friday Tom missed the winning shot at the game, making our team lose our chance at going to the state finals."

"Wow, I did not know that. I guess I don't keep up with basketball enough. I guess it makes sense as to why he isn't walking in with his big, popular group of basketball players."

"Dang. I actually kind of feel bad for him. I can't imagine feeling the embarrassment that he feels now."

"Yeah, everyone is giving him a hard time. You shouldn't feel bad though. Tom has disappointed and hurt you when he got in with the popular crowd."

"I guess you are right."

I still can't believe that we used to be such good friends.

Tom walked through the door and passed me without saying a word.

He actually looks lonely for once.

Wait.

Should I ask if he is doing okay?

No, he's too cool for me, I'm too scared.

"I can't believe that he is dressed in all black. Wearing an off-brand sweatshirt and sweatpants with dirty tennis shoes. That's so not him."

"I agree. It's so weird. He normally is dressed up in his nice Polo shirt, khakis, and Sperry shoes."

"Tom needs someone to lean on. I guess I'm just not that person."

"I agree."

Students who lose their identity need more support.

Here comes Sadness number two.

"It looks like there is something wrong with Sarah."

"Really? Why do you say that?"

"Well, there is a phone glued to her hand, and she looks white as a ghost."

"Maybe it's just an important phone call."

It's not just an important phone call. There really is something wrong. She never has looked this worried in my composition class.

"What's wrong with Sarah?"

"Sarah is on a call and looks like she just got some terrible news."

I won't say anything. I won't interrupt.

But I just want to know out of curiosity.

Sarah is normally so upbeat and happy; she looks like she isn't even here.

"Oh my gosh she's crying."

"Guys just give her some space now, and I will check in on her in our composition class."

Later, I found out that Sarah's grandmother passed away the night before school.

I. Feel. Sick.

Sarah was so close with her grandma. She always wrote beautiful papers about her.

I feel helpless.

Who is going to step up and be there for Sarah?

"I have no idea, but someone needs to.

Students who lose a loved one need more support.

Regressive

Here comes Anger.

"Oh boy, I see Brad and Alicia."

"Oh no. Are they arguing already?"

"Seems like it."

"Gosh it's everyday now, isn't it?"

"Seems like it. I mean they have been 'together' since middle school, but they have broken up so many times that it doesn't even count anymore."

"Alicia, why did you cheat on me with Anthony after the game Friday night?"

"Brad, where on earth are you coming up with that nonsense?"

"Gosh. Why are they even together?"

"I have no idea. I think that they should just break up because Brad is going to Ohio University, and Alicia is going to the University of Alabama.

"It will never work. Never. Ever."

These two make me so mad. Why do they feel the need to stay together?

Brad looks mad and begins to puff his chest out.

"Brad, I did not cheat on you!!!"

Her mascara streams dowwwwn her face.

"Olivia, can you imagine being in a relationship like that?"

"No, I really can't. I feel bad for both of them."

"Someone needs to say something to them to end things for the better."

"I agree."

Students in toxic relationships need more support.

Here comes anger number two.

"Oh my gosh Anthony looks pissed."

"Wait, why?"

"He is just walking alone and looks angry as ever."

"I feel bad for him. He always just keeps to himself and is shy. I wonder why he looks so mad."

"Someone must have said something in the parking lot. Maybe because he walks to school or something."

"Gosh that irritates me. The other day I saw someone bully him for wearing the same clothes every day and saying that he smells bad."

"Did you say something to them?"

"No. No I didn't. I choked up. I really wish I did."

"Do you ever wonder what Anthony's home life is like?"

"I mean I can only imagine. Dang. I want to be friends with Anthony so badly, but he just looks like he doesn't want anyone to come up to him."

"I get that. I really do."

"I mean, he is in my gym class, and he gets docked points every day for not bringing a change of clothes. Isn't that messed up?"

"Yeah, that sounds illegal!"

"Someone needs to step up and help."

"Agreed."

Am I the one to do this? I can't be.

I don't know him like that.

This. Is. Messed. Up.

Students who don't have their basic needs met need more support.

Progressive

The students who walk into my future classroom are going to come with their own different emotions and states of being. It may be sadness, anger, or even happiness. Or it may be a mix of those things. All I can think of as a future teacher is that I want to provide a safe space for all these emotions and states of being that students walk into my classroom with. I want to have ready-to-go resources for students dealing with depression, break ups, grief, and confused feelings.

Having practical tools that are easily accessible is what I want for my future students. Some of these tools will be a calm down corner, utilizing a self-regulatory tool like the zones of regulation, a wall of resources, and flexible seating. Thompson states that "Many students enter the classroom facing challenges, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACES) or trauma, which affect their ability to self-regulate and thus learn in the classroom" (Thompson, 2021, p. 4). If a student is feeling overwhelmed, stressed, angry, or just needs some time to themselves, a calm down corner would be the perfect place for them. A calm down corner has comfy seats, stuffed animals, books, and different self-regulatory tools. It is a place for students who need to walk away from the big group, and they can return to class when they are ready. When a student is in the calm down corner, the other students must respect that they need to take some time to be alone. I just want my students to feel loved, seen, and heard. This means not only having good intentions as a teacher, but also providing students with different resources and outlets to self-regulate. Overall, an open line of communication between the student and the teacher is crucial.

I also want to be able to teach young kids that every emotion is valid; it is just important that we can identify our emotions and use our strategies to cope with them. A great tool for this is the zones of regulation, where students can identify if they are in the red, green, yellow, or blue zone when entering the classroom. Some emotions that fall into the red zone can be mad and angry. Emotions that fall under the green zone can be happy and calm. Some emotions that fall into the yellow zone can be frustrated and worried. Some emotions that fall into the blue zone can be sad and sick. The zones of regulation can be utilized as a daily check-in where the teacher guides the class into identifying the specific zone that they are in. Students also can share with others about how they are feeling if they are comfortable so that everyone can learn that it is okay to open yourself up to your peers and be vulnerable. Mutter (2016) explains that,

> using a cognitive behavioral approach, the Zones curriculum aims to teach students a variety of skills that will lead to appropriate self-regulation. These skills include: recognizing a range of emotions, understanding the emotions they are feeling and being able to identify what zone they are in, reading others' facial expressions and understanding what others are feeling, and gaining perspective about how others see and react to their emotions. (p. 8)

Utilizing these check-ins as the teacher is crucial in making sure that the kids' basic needs are met before we dive into the curriculum for the day. I really want check-in time to be a time for people to share and be there for each other. Kindness can and needs to be taught.

Analytical

In college, I see the same thing that I saw in high school. Getting older doesn't make your feelings go away. It may even be that it highlights your feelings.

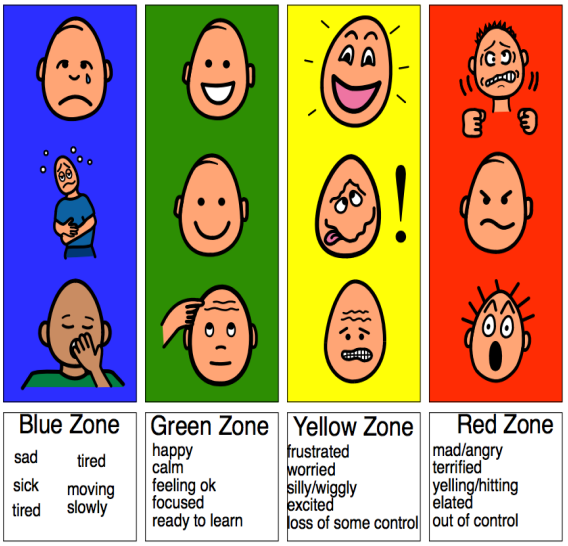
Life gets confusing. College is challenging. Becoming your own person outside of your childhood is tough.

I see my friends and I see random students and professors come into class frustrated, angry, sad, happy, excited.

I see it all. And you know what? It is all valid. College is hard for both students and professors. As preservice teachers it is crucial that we learn about identifying our own feelings, and how we need to first address them before we try to dive into our work.

The pretending and the facades in college last about the first month of class. Then they start to wear off, and the real feelings show. The tears flow more easily. The yawns become a bit louder, and the wrinkle lines grow a little bit bigger.

The emotions are always there. But it makes a difference when college students are proactive about it and face them head on. I had a professor last semester who had our class practice using the zones of regulation as class check ins. It was honestly really nice. This is the image that this professor used every day that we had class:



Note. Wilson (2014)

Though it seems silly, using this tool as a check-in with our inner emotions was very beneficial, even for a group of 20-year-old students. Sometimes it was surface level, and we all just said that we were in green. But other times we were honest and had open conversations about our struggles as students and pre-service teachers—the struggles of trying to balance school, work, and a social life.

It brought humanity into the classroom. It made us slow down and realize that we are all just trying to survive. Seeing a college professor use this tool has been really beneficial for me in my learning process as well.

I feel seen when we are provided with tools to identify our emotions before we start to learn.

I feel heard when my professors validate my feelings and talk with me when I am comfortable.

I feel cared for when I am provided with practical resources to address any struggles that I am going through.

Every student needs a teacher who is going to make them feel seen, heard, and cared for.

Things would go very differently for the students that I mentioned from my high school if teachers truly made them feel this way.

Would Hannah and her friends know that it is okay to not seem beautiful and rich all of the time?

Would Kate know that her grades don't define her, and she doesn't have to be perfect?

Would Tom know that he is not defined by basketball, and he is not alone?

Would Sarah know that she has a support system to help her grieve the loss of her grandmother?

Would Brad and Alicia feel that it is best for them to end their toxic relationship?

Would Anthony know that he is cared for and will get resources at school?

I can't guarantee that all of these people's situations would be any better for them if they had teachers who cared and loved them, but I can say that what I am learning in my college classes is that, as teachers, we are called to care about and love our students. And sometimes this love and care might not seem to change a whole lot, but what it can change is so worth it. Because of this change, our efforts should never fade away.

I wonder if my approach to education would be different if I experienced these tools and resources at a young age?

Would I set healthy boundaries with school? Would I value education over grades? I don't know.

All I do know is that I am going to take every opportunity to fully learn and understand the tools and resources that I am taught during my time at Miami. This is where the difference starts.

It starts at Miami University.

In McGuffey Hall.

Spending countless hours learning.

To change my approach to education.

Synthetical

So here is the deal. We are all human. It's a crazy thing. I know. But just sit on that for a minute.

We.

Are.

All.

Human.

We all have our baggage. Our facades that we put up at first. Our fears that we hide. And school is a keeper of all of those things whether we want to admit it or not.

Every student has their own baggage, and every student needs more support.

Though Hannah and her friends have parents with money, they still go through hard things. Money can only cover so much. The clothes and perfume are all a coverup. The teachers need to provide a space for Hannah and her friends to dive deeper and identify how they are doing on the inside.

A student like Hannah would benefit from a daily zones of regulation check-in.

Hannah and her friends may seem to have everything that they could ever want, but they also need to learn to identify their emotions by recognizing what zone they are in. This will overall help them process through any hard or tough feelings that they may feel. It will also provide them with a safe space and time to not always look like they have it all together.

Though Kate seems to be the perfect student who has it all together. She really doesn't. All of the teachers love Kate for her smarts, but do they really know her beyond that? Kate's so easy to love that maybe she felt like she could never be anything short of perfection. I mean she is smart. Funny. Talented. Hard-working. The teachers never have to go out of their way for her. But maybe they should. The teachers need to provide a space for Kate to stop her busy life and identify how she is truly doing on the inside.

A student like Kate would also benefit from a daily zones of regulation check-in.

Kate may seem to have everything together and be the perfect student, but she also needs to learn to identify her emotions by recognizing what zone she is in. This will overall help Kate process through any authentic feelings beyond perfection that she may feel. It will also provide her with a safe space and time to be a human who has struggles and needs a break.

Though Tom normally is the popular basketball star of the school, he is human too. He is not always going to score the winning point, and that is okay. The teachers need to provide a space for Tom to feel welcomed and accepted when no one else in the school makes him feel that way.

A student like Tom would benefit from a daily zones of regulation check-in.

Tom is so used to being the popular basketball star that everyone loves, but he's not so popular anymore, and teachers need to provide a safe space for him to feel welcomed and like he still belongs. Within this space, it would be healthy for Tom to learn how to identify his emotions by recognizing what zone he is in. This will overall help Tom process through every sense of sadness, disappointment, and anger that he may be feeling. It will also provide him with a safe space and time to be a human who has struggles and needs a break.

Though Sarah is viewed as this great student that is sweet and writes beautifully, she experiences hard things too. The loss of her grandmother was so devastating and crushing. The teachers need to provide a space for Sarah to feel comforted and have outlets for her to process through her feelings.

A student like Sarah would benefit from some silent time in a calm down corner.

Though Sarah isn't necessarily angry and worked up, she would benefit from a calm down corner because she needs to be given the opportunity to take time to process her feelings. Within the calm down corner there would be soft pillows, comforting books, fidgets, and so much more. Having this time to be silent and absorb the news of losing her grandmother would be helpful in Sarah's grieving process. The last thing that Sarah needs is a bunch of people asking her questions and coming up to her. When someone

is in the calm down corner, it would be a class rule that the students and teachers let the student be alone until they are ready to return to the big group in class.

Though Brad and Alicia seem to just be your average annoying on-again/off-again couple, they are more than that. There is something going on that goes deeper than what their relationship shows people. Relationships are hard at any age, both romantic relationships and friendships. The teachers need to provide a space for Brad and Alicia to feel like they can dive deeper and work through their individual struggles.

Students like Brad and Alicia would benefit from an opportunity to take some time in a calm down corner.

Brad and Alicia are always angry with each other, which results in them both being on edge. Whether students are going through relationship drama or just need a space to calm down, a calm down corner is a great outlet to take a breath and process the heightened emotions that they are feeling. Though Brad and Alicia are high school students, they too could benefit from a more mature calm down corner where they can take a minute to sit and then return to class when they feel comfortable.

Though Anthony seems like a student who is poor and doesn't have the resources to live comfortably, he is more than that. Teachers not only need to provide Anthony with resources that will help meet his basic needs, but they also need to provide him a space where he can feel comforted and like he can work through the many different emotions that he feels.

A student like Anthony would benefit from a teacher who prioritizes students' needs according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Anthony needs his teacher to step in and make sure that he has safe transportation when getting to school, clean clothes to wear every day, and food to nourish his body. Not only does Anthony need these lower-level needs, but he also needs to feel love and safety. A teacher who prioritizes all of these needs and is consistent with them will lead Anthony to reach the highest level of self-actualization after a period of time. It is all about building trust, and students like Anthony need a trustworthy adult in their lives, and that can be the teacher.

School needs to be a safe space for all of these vignettes.

No matter what emotion or state of being that the students walk into school with, they all need more support.

Hard things don't go away when that bell rings. There were so many teachers who should have and did not help the many emotions that walked through the doors that one Monday my senior year. That needs to change.

This is the reason why I want to teach. I want to teach young kids that we are all human, and we must treat each other with kindness. Everyone feels every emotion, and the cool thing is that we can work together to support each other and face these emotions head on. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains the idea that, as humans, we need to feel loved, safe, and like we belong somewhere before we reach our full potential of self-actualization. Students need a space to be able to feel any emotion and be provided with outlets and resources for those emotions. Students should never have to pretend like they are always happy, or not get the resources when they are struggling with different issues featured in my regressive moments. McLeod (2018) explains that

> every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by a failure to meet lower-level needs. Life experiences, including divorce and loss of a job, may cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy. (p. 3)

It is our job as teachers to make sure that we meet and provide the resources for students' basic and psychological needs so that they can reach their self-fulfillment needs.

The classroom is where this needs to start.

My goal as a future classroom teacher is to make sure that my students feel loved, safe, and like they belong by giving them the resources and strategies that I have learned at Miami University. I have gone through and seen my peers go through many highs and lows throughout high school and in college. I know that I will see my future students go through many highs and lows as well. Wishing for my future classroom to be rainbows and butterflies is like wishing for rain in a desert. It's really not likely. Throughout the regressive moments that featured happiness, sadness, and anger, I want to say that the teachers in these situations really did care about their students. They have a heart for kids, just like I have a heart for kids. Having a heart and good intentions only go so far. Just like these high school students' situations showed, teachers need to be prepared. Teachers need to be prepared for happiness, sadness, and anger. Teaching is about both the heart and knowledge.

Teachers need to be prepared. Educated. Loving. These are all so important.

Using practical teaching strategies like calm down corners, zones of regulation, and resources to meet students' basic needs are vital in a student's education.

It's all about practical love.

Sounds simple, but it takes education, training, time, and patience. I will strive for this every day in my future classroom.

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Endnotes

[1] A pseudonym. All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of my classmates.

Nightmare at 20,000 Feet: *Currere*, Teacher Education, and the Invitation to Imagine Otherwise

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There is something about the somatic experience of airplane travel that resonates deeply with me. In my rural childhood, the dream of and fascination with aviation was a regular family hobby despite our inability to remotely afford air travel. We spent sweltering summer days at local air shows, built model planes and rockets, and dreamed of what it must be like to travel like the rich and famous on an airplane.

I was an adult before I was able to experience that first rush of adrenaline, which quickly morphed into a brief chapter of apprehension and an urgent need to understand the physics of flight that eluded me. Years later, I'm grateful to have shaken off that fear and have logged many hours hurtling through the atmosphere snacking on peanuts and Diet Coke, learning about the world. Concurrently, many hours were spent pondering how this engineering marvel and strong metal hull was such a deeply somatic space, often-used metaphor, and site of lived educational experience for me.

A Regressive Takeoff

At dusk, nestled in my narrow window seat, headphones in (*introvert note: this is the universal sign of not wanting to chit chat with one's neighbor*), I let the droning and humming of the engines wash over me. The sublime sense of quiet and the ethereal beauty outside my window takes over. Immediately I'm transported to a view of silent twilight and thinking that I must have arrived on the edge of the universe. Everything becomes peaceful and eerily contemplative.

In the quiet of my airline ride, I gaze outside the window towards the wing and wonder if anything might be there. Would a rare atmospheric phenomenon greet our path? Even more, could something nefarious be plotting to harm this journey? And I wonder how many unsuspecting passengers can also see … what I'm questioning if I am even seeing.

"There! There. Right there. That creature…messing with a panel on the wing. It was just there. Did you not see it? .... No, I'm fine. It must just be my eyes playing tricks on me."

It doesn't take too much analysis to consider where this regressive moment and early imagery is formed, takes root, and begins to breathe deeper meaning into my present lived experience. Enter a Mr. William Shatner (*you remember, Captain Kirk from Star Trek*); he acted in some episodes of the classic television show, *The Twilight Zone*, in the 1960s. Although I was born years after the series aired, my dad made sure we were versed in popular culture moments that were appropriately related to science fiction, the cosmos, and his own childhood space-age dreams. *The Twilight Zone* series provided the viewer with short stories interwoven with dramatic literary and visual twists, turns, and most embedded with unexpected parables.

Created by Rod Serling, these televised stories embodied the fantastic and the frightening. My favorite tale and inspiration for this *currere* reflection was titled, "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," was written by Richard Matheson, and aired on *The Twilight Zone* in 1963. This classic episode explores a single passenger, Mr. Robert Wilson (played by Shatner), who is convinced he sees a creature sabotaging the flight

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by messing with a panel on the airplane's wing. Meanwhile, as his urgency to notify the pilots and save the doomed flight grows, he quickly realizes that no others on the plane are able to see it. They deem him the irrational threat instead when he takes action to confront the creature on the wing. The episode concludes with Mr. Wilson being detained and escorted off the flight. As he is being taken away on a stretcher, he knowingly glances at the "yet undiscovered" but fully pried-open wing panel and smiles knowing that he may now rest in the assurance of his truth and evidence.

Midflight: The "Nightmare" that is Now the Present

I find it peculiar and delightful having now fully adopted "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet" as a reference for my professional life in education for nearly two decades. *Twilight Zone* moments have indeed become standout fragments of my childhood, and some key episodes and plots I regularly put to use as metaphors and visual images in personal and professional discussions to illuminate the challenges that I see in schooling, teacher (mis)education, one's life in academia, and the dilemmas of the present in education.

At times, I have used the classic black-and-white photo image from that episode of a young William Shatner looking out his window at the creature on the window with alarm as my subversive social media protest post or changed profile photo when things seemed to be ridiculously out of sorts in the educational spaces I inhabit. *Does anyone else not see what is taking place? Right there, just right there, see it?*

As I wrap up my fifteenth year in teacher education at the university level (and 20+ years in education overall), I vulnerably admit that one thing has remained consistent. I feel more and more like the passenger played by Mr. Shatner each year—gazing out the window and mystified at the lack of urgency for the metaphorical gremlins on the wing.

Berliner and Biddle (1995), nearly three decades ago, spoke about their fear and outrage regarding "organized malevolence" and the "manufactured crisis" that was underway by opponents of public education through myths and disinformation. By 2003, after decades of accusations about the national failing of schools, teachers, and the programs that prepare them, Taubman (2009) stated, "the language of crisis was driving educational reform" (p. 11). Taubman (2009) reminded us of the "almost overnight" and "metastasizing" discourse of standards that fueled school (de)reform efforts in the years after 2001, sharing what he experienced as the erosion of robust theoretical writing on educational topics once informed by the humanities, arts, and critical pedagogies to one that shifted quickly, almost imperceptibly, to reflect what he suggests are "terribly askew" views of testing, accountability, and audit culture (p. 4).

Pinar (2012) equally rebuked "the early 20th-century remaking of the school as a business, a scheme in which teachers first became factory workers, children the raw material, and the curriculum the assembly line producing saleable products" (Pinar, 2012, p. 6). He even called it an "absurd situation" (Pinar, 2012, p. 6) and the "nightmare that is now the present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 14), a line from his first edition that I've connected to my beloved *Twilight Zone* memory for years now, thinking it couldn't get any worse.

And so, we now find ourselves in the continued mess that is leading into 2023, the ongoing deprofessionalization of the field is joined by renewed legislative censoring and surveillance of teachers and teacher educators. In my state, the use of mandated scripted curriculum has increased exponentially, and the continued testing and accountability mania inflicted on teachers and children has intensified to a space where they are expected to be compliant and yielding without voice. In my context, elementary teachers are provided a script for many content areas that must be read with fidelity (*no additions*

and no deletions). While many educators recall the intentional art and craft of designing learning experiences and lessons for and alongside learners that promoted student choice and voice, that craft seems to be vanishing. Elements of social studies education have been deemed divisive or entirely illegal, the mention of other non-majority religions is silenced, and classroom libraries are regulated and monitored with entire families and individuals forced out of representation in children's literature.

Indeed, given this environment, I am often prone to continued languishing within a mirage of academic freedom that my colleagues across campus (i.e. chemistry, biology, humanities) seem to enjoy in reality. Over the years of this *currere* adventure, I have continued to revisit one piece of "wisdom" I was given in my early pre-tenure years that "*there is no academic freedom in teacher education*" …, and yet I still look out the window over the wing and tell myself that there must be a way to negotiate the boundary between the broad academic study of education, with its vast collection of scholarship, and the current curriculum narrowing and credentialing process of schooling. There, in a third space, perhaps we can attempt to speak to the transformative powers possible in the elementary classroom spaces and lives of our pre-service teachers while concurrently remaining fully aware of the harmful impacts of state-driven credentialing and the joy daily removed from the classroom. But the creature creeps closer, and the narrative shifts. The dominant messaging returns, and time is diverted to the overwhelming noise of high-stakes and high-stress teacher performance measures and data-driven accrediting demands. Compliance is the expectation, and the removal of most foundational studies of curriculum theory and historical/contemporary educational scholarship becomes so commonplace that most don't even notice they are missing. And yet, there is this nagging feeling that we are committing educational malpractice by not speaking louder as to what we are witnessing while juggling mixed messages and gaslighting that often takes place when truth is spoken to power.

So, I find myself daily wrestling with my own lived experience and *currere* as a recurring existential dilemma, one that regularly bounces between the regressive, the progressive, the analytic, and the accompanying feelings of nostalgia and potential future promises of what could be versus what I see as the reality before me. I return to Pinar's (1975) original premise that I must continually examine "*what has been and what continues to be the nature of my lived experience*" (p. 2) and that "the running of the course—*currere*—occurs through conversation, ongoing dialogical encounter among students and teachers in classrooms but also within oneself in solitude" (Pinar, 2020, p. 51). And as Sophia Greco (2022) suggests, I begin to ask myself anew, "What does it mean to be a teacher within spaces that actively reproduce existing relationships of power and oppression?" (p. 20).

Similar to Greco, I think how rare it is these days to encounter a deeply engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) in elementary teacher education or K-5 educational spaces. I am consistently, as hooks (2003) suggests, at "odds with the environments wherein we teach" (p. 91), and the good fight (*which I am fully aware has been fought more valiantly by so many before and around me*) has become acutely painful and grievous. I return to a trusty beloved quote, "Fellow educators—are we not lost? Do we know where we are, remember where we have been, or foresee where we are going?" (Huebner, 1999, p. 231) and add to this lament—fellow educators, do we still not see what is happening on the wing?

Landing: An Invitation to Imagine a Contemplative Otherwise

In the handful of days each year when I am fortunate to travel to contemplative spaces (*like the Currere Exchange Conference and the Bergamo Conference*) to share in beautiful dialogue and community with fellow curriculum studies travelers, I am reminded of the wonder and opportunity that is available to me within the scope of curriculum studies that informs, supports, and counters these notions and nightmares. It's as if all the William Shatners from across a broad educational spectrum gather in one room to share their experiences of their own "flights in peril," our shared social actions, and attempts towards engaged pedagogy, and work towards transformation surfaces in the form of autobiography and compelling, qualitative narratives of reflection and liberation.

In those spaces, I regularly return to *currere* as a method to explore the self, work in teacher education, and as a process and pedagogical tool to be used with my undergraduate and graduate students. Within the affirming work and community of *currere*, I feel grounded to challenge orthodoxy, reconnect with my authentic self, explore and engage tensions in teacher education, and develop and renegotiate my own pedagogy of teacher education. As Loughran (2006) urges, "teacher education should be a place where challenging simplistic notions and practices should be normal for it is where the seeds of change for the profession surely reside" (p. 14).

Curriculum studies, and *currere* specifically, can also serve as a vehicle to encourage a more humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1968/2018) for young teachers and the recently languishing teacher educators who work with them. From using *currere* in ways that encourage pre-service teachers to explore their own identities and memories of education to opening up dialogue about defining and challenging orthodoxies in ways that feel emancipatory, finding authenticity in dehumanizing times, and beginning to imagine otherwise, *currere* seeks to align our critical consciousness to educational experience. Segall (2002) suggests that "it is not student teachers' inability to imagine otherwise that restricts the possibility of educational change but teacher education's inability to provide them 'otherwise' experiences that break with the traditional, the expected, the obvious, and the taken-for-granted" (p. 167).

As I again reflect on the power of *currere* for self and in the classroom looking forward, I find myself drawn to the work of scholars who advocate similar contemplative pedagogies that begin with an inward focus for students that seeks connection and insight (Hill, 2020). Framing *currere* as a contemplative curriculum studies practice provides us a method to explore the self first. A place to seek out what we can call the bass notes of our identity, purpose, meaning, experiences, and challenges. Laura Hill (2020), speaking to the concept of contemplative inquiry, suggests, "Whatever your discipline, it is one of our cumulative roles as contemplative educators to demonstrate the importance of slowing down while standing alongside students" (p. 113).

Perhaps, using *currere*, we can begin with these simple questions while standing alongside students. What is the nature of your lived educational experience? What kind of problems do you want to solve? What kinds of joy and experiences do you want to bring to others? What joy do you want to experience yourself? How might we imagine otherwise? Pinar (2011) suggests that only by seeking meaning of self through the lived experience of curriculum can curriculum be truly experienced, enacted, and reconstructed. He continues, "the educational point of *currere* is, then, intensified engagement with classroom life, supported by the cultivation of a consciousness that remembers the past with an eye on the future while focused on the present" (Pinar, 2020, p. 52).

The method of *currere* becomes an accessible space for young and veteran teachers to engage in the complicated conversation and scholarship in a manner that introduces a path to question structures and systems, power and privilege and consider what knowledge and whose knowledge is of most worth. Moreover, I believe it provides an introspective beginning space to consider their authentic selves, revisit the notion of wonder and possibility in learning, and consider their own feelings within their lived educational experience. *Currere* becomes an invitation to an ongoing contemplative practice as well as an invitation to imagine otherwise.

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Crinoline: Systemic Racism Challenges Teacher Preparation

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The presence of African American teachers and professors benefits all students. Roughly 6% of African Americans in the United States have doctoral degrees (Hussar et al., 2020). Less than 3% teach in colleges and universities (Hussar et al., 2020). Many students never see African American teachers in their P-12 classrooms. Few university students have had the opportunity to learn from African American professors (Edwards & Ross, 2018). The low number of African American teachers and professors and their distribution across schools and communities helps to support the myth of white supremacy. But numbers and claims of lack of familiarity cannot account for the persistence of anti-black racism in U.S. classrooms. When numbers and distribution are coupled with racist misinformation about affirmative action and other mechanisms intended to mitigate historical injustice and injury, white university students readily challenge the credentials of African American women professors (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; McCoy-Wilson, 2020) and even verbally call on classmates in real time to question the value of learning from an African American woman professor (Parker & Neville, 2019).

Whether I physically walk onto campus or enter an electronic classroom, I know I'm entering a space where equity is ambiguous, flimsy. Being African American and being a woman teaching in university is hard and demanding. Teaching means entering terrain where at any moment I'll be morally compromised—a space where I will suffer moral injury for the sake of "the lie" (Glaude, 2020), another "face at the bottom of the well" (Bell, 1992). The notion that African American women professors are teaching in universities because we somehow forced our way into a place we do not belong, a place that rightfully belongs to a white person, is a real and powerful white supremacist narrative. In addition to teaching subject matter content, as an African American woman professor, I am burdened with the necessity of continually justifying my presence. It does not matter whether I wish to address racial injustice or not; my students make white supremacist narratives part of their learning content. Institutional structures, colleagues, administrators, and staff promulgate anti-black racism and enact it alongside students (Finley et al., 2018; King & Watts, 2004). On the first page of *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1903) states: "Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it … . How does it feel to be a problem?" *Currere* presupposes the process of learning from and through one's experiences. Following Pinar (1975b) I ask myself, "How does it feel to be uprooted from the geographical, social, and psychological ambiance in which I live my day-to-day life?" (p. 399).

Regression – Time and Distance to See

Some years ago, a university administrator entered my classroom and asked where she could set up her computer to write her unscheduled observation of my teaching. I wasn't entirely surprised, but I was disappointed. I was angered by the disrespect, the aggression, and the blatant amplification of institutional racism. I was also saddened to see smug grins on some students' faces and the confident side-glancing smirks they

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gave each other that seemed to affirm for them that they owned complete control of the classroom space—and me. Nothing quite like that had happened before. I felt a bit numb. And I realized that that was part of the point. As my classroom coalesced into a neoliberal, anti-democratic, anti-black, anti-woman arena for white supremist affirmation, I looked out a scarred dingy grey window that seemed to melt into an even drearier lifeless sky. I didn't know what to do. What to say? My mind momentarily drifted back and away. Moments of the past are always present (Pinar, 1975a).

I recalled that when I was about four or five years old my parents took us on a train trip up north. It was one of the very few holidays I would take with my family. My parents dressed me in better than my Sunday best. I remember how people looked at me and said, "What a pretty little lady." My mother made sure I sat up straight, that my crinoline and hoop didn't pop-up and show my underwear. My legs were crossed at my ankles; the lace trim of my socks rippled around them. The trip was like a dream. I had both my parents and two younger brothers, all of us together. It was rare to have both my mother's and my father's attention at the same time. My parents talked, laughed, and told family stories. As early evening came up, the train slowly pulled to a stop. People stretched, stood, and moved toward the doors. My parents talked about what they would do. My mother took hold of my brothers, one still a lap baby, the other two years old. My father took me to stretch my legs, get water, and use the bathroom. As we approached, my father was told that the facilities were for whites only, and: "No colored restroom at this stop." I really had to pee. My father asked if his little girl could use the restroom. He said, "She won't do any harm." He was yelled and cursed at by three white men. They told him I could pee along the tracks like all the other niggers. I was scared. I wanted to cry. My father led me to the far side of the train, away from the station, down a weedy gravel incline. He told me I could pee there. I said, "No." I begged, pleaded, and whined that I wanted to go to the bathroom. My father's face looked sad. He said there wasn't a bathroom. All the while he moved and shifted his body, trying to put himself between me and others who looked on. I didn't want him to hold my skirt and crinoline. I didn't want him to hold my hand. I had no recollection of having ever peed in front of my father, or my mother. People looking at me, my father holding the crinolated skirts of my dress, I peed, I cried. I peed on my socks, my shoes, my panties. I had not been taught how to pee in a ditch in front of an audience. The trauma must have been complete. I don't, and have never been able to, remember the remainder of that train trip. What kind of people force a four-year old to pee in a ditch?

My mother had been annoyed that my father hadn't known about what was available and what wasn't at that train stop. After all, wasn't he a black man who'd lived in the south for most of his life? Why didn't he know what places would be good for us and what places bad? As for my father, he had plaintively wondered aloud why the train would have made such a stop. There had been another stop that would have been more hospitable; it was bypassed. Had we taken the wrong train? Had the train schedule changed once we were boarded? We lived in a world where spaces were often deemed "white by default, unless otherwise designated" (Guffey, 2012, p. 50). Every action my parents took required careful decision making and planning. Colored and white signs and rules were a life-or-death issue (Sandoval-Strausz, 2005). Preparation for a long train trip would have been strategic and well-planned, especially when that trip included children. Such a trip was a gauntlet. The history of whiteness in America is filled with containment, restriction of blackness and black bodies. My mother and father were experienced wayfinders and wayfarers. My earliest lesson, perhaps my first, in racialized

space and the shredding of the black family had been complete. White supremacy calls into question every action African Americans take. The only aspect of even the simplest of plans that can be counted on with certainty is that white normativity will undermine even the most cautious and thoughtful maps and alternative routes along one's journey.

Progressive – Listening, Thinking, Speaking Living From Where I Am Into Possible Futures

There I was, a black person, caged in the crinoline and hoops of white supremacy. Exiled and unwelcome in my own classroom, neither with nor without authority. Once settled, students looked at the administrator, looked at me. I began a lecture/discussion. I asked questions. I offered information. I asked students to engage in an application activity I'd prepared. Some students refused to participate. Some were told by others not to participate. Some were responsive. At one point, I had the feeling that I was disappointing some of them. I had continued to teach, continued to patiently attempt to get students to engage. I had not given up in exasperation. And it seemed that, perhaps most disappointing of all, I had not simply stopped teaching, I had not ended the class. I had not packed up my materials and abruptly left the room. Instead, I had moved further onward into attempts to teach my students.

Even under attack I acknowledged to myself the historical cultural tug to shield and protect my students from their own racism. This is a familiar, expected, and sometimes demanded, African American woman "mammy" response (Wilson, 2012), wherein African American women are to defer to their white abusers. To do that meant that I would have to assume that my students do not know what they are doing and, further, that I was conscious of and fearful of the threat—that to challenge them would cause me more harm and solidify their belief that I am inferior and that they are superior. I wanted to, wished to help them reach a level of rationality that could permit them to think, rethink, perhaps to feel, that what they were doing was wrong. The other trap—to mollify, to assuage—would also verify, amplify, white supremacy. Which should I step into? Neither would help them, me, the administrator, or the university. Both would reverberate out into and touch and shape the learning experiences and lives of their future students.

Toward the end of our class, I asked students whether they had any questions. After a long pause, one student said she had a question, but it wasn't about the content of the class we were finishing. She looked to a student next to her to gather support for the attack she was about to launch. With that, she and a couple other students began an orchestrated barrage of assault questions. I had previously addressed all their questions, numerous times, in one-on-one meetings, in small groups, during whole class sessions. I responded calmly, patiently. But I showed my discomfort and disapproval of the way they wanted to conduct our class. I questioned their accusatory and aggressive manner. When they were wrong, I told them so and pointed out why, which some students, even those who claimed to be the most aggrieved, acknowledged, accepted, and agreed with. My students and the administrator had staged, rehearsed, and performed an imaginary situation. Their enactment, their performance, revealed the real situation—normative whiteness. They had expected me to play the role of black, inferior, fearful, incompetent. They did not take the opportunity to move beyond the imaginary situation they'd concocted to consider the real situation, their position in it, and, thereby, change their thinking, feeling, behavior. The moment seen correctly and accepted.

Descriptive Analysis – Racism Continues to Astonish Me

Initially, I wanted to break through; but as we progressed, I also began to wonder whether I should (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). I am grateful to titans like DuBois, who changed his mind a lot as he organized against, researched, taught, and wrote about the ills of anti-black racism in America. DuBois thought that anti-black racism could be put down by identifying the talented tenth and having them teach others. DuBois's agenda for countering white supremacy was admirable but mistaken. The problem or challenge isn't to show white supremacists that blacks are intelligent, are human beings, it's to convince blacks to take hold of and assert their humanity, their personness. So, asserting my learnedness, my authority, and expertise to my students would be of little use. Some already knew that. I know this. They wished for me not to believe it. They wished to convince others not to believe it. They were asserting their whiteness. Their belief in normative whiteness says that they must be right. No matter what they say or do, they must be right because they are white. Any person acting in the sphere of normative whiteness can of course question my authoritative knowledge, even when they have none themselves. This lie is the hallmark of the everyday life experience of living black in America. My students seemed intent on turning their class, our class, my class, into a kind of tortured, mutilated theatre that liberates no one. Did they enjoy participating in their own anti-black humiliation? I found myself alone in a theater of the absurd. No one else seemed to face the harsh, jarring fact of what we were doing. No one else seemed prepared to be fully and completely present in what they, we, had created. I asked myself whether I had the strength. I knew I had the responsibility. I knew I could marshal the grace required to move my students to a level of understanding, dignity, and respect for themselves, for where they were, for how they'd come to that moment in time, for what we were there to do together, for the students they could, might, teach, learn, and live with in the future. Why what they were doing was hurtful, painful for them, and for me. But as I spoke aloud, I also looked across the tracks at an opposite train of thought. I had to push back the desire to not have responsibility. To give into the ease of comforting them would have been to act in bad faith. The forces of racism have moved toward the same dead-end stop all my life, and I simply could not go along for another ride. Students had as much as told me that my teaching had no meaning or value for them, to them. Normative whiteness is irrational. There is no logical way to combat that kind of behavior.

I don't know whether university policy and practice explicitly called for an administrator to come to my classroom and make an observation in front of that specific group of students or to contact and question students in my other classes. But I do know that it perpetuated and reinforced white normativity and racial injustice. Blindly adhering to policies and practices exacerbates racist and oppressive practices (Ray, 2019).

Bracketing Analysis – Blackness in the White Gaze

I was conscious of being looked at. My sense was that the violent enactment of the gaze of white supremacy was not an unconscious act. Some students and the administrator appeared to exercise the white supremacist aesthetic as a power that they have always known to be theirs and to do so because they could. I resisted their attempt to "fix" me with their white gaze. bell hooks says that there is "power in looking" (hooks, 1992, p. 150). I looked back at them. I wanted to give them time to abandon their attack, to come to their senses. I offered them space to turn toward healing, toward understanding. I sought to bring their attention to their white gaze, to help them see and

understand the white gaze as an aesthetic white supremist act. The white gaze asserts that, as an African American woman, I am not allowed to attempt to teach whites what is good, what is beautiful, what is aesthetic, what is worthwhile in visual arts teaching and learning in P-12 schools. I walked toward my students' anger, aggression, fear, and hate. Initially, I wanted to break through, but I admit, I also wavered, wondered whether I should. *Currere* opens a space for me to ask myself, "How does it feel not to obscure the truth of the racism I experience?" I have no choice but to live the blackness whites cast upon me, sometimes more than others.

Existentially, white supremacists' notions of blackness are not a choice I make (Ngo, 2017). They had already existed when I was born. I started my life by living in this abject, objective blackness created by anti-black racism. I work to create how I will live subjectively in historical, cultural, social, economic, aesthetic, educational, medical, political, anti-black spaces. Anti-black racism situates my life experiences, saturates the contexts in which I make my life choices. That I am an African American woman is fixed. My black consciousness is not; it is created. I am not, cannot, and will not be who white supremacists wish me to be. There is no aspect of American life in which my identity as an African American woman does not become part of the terrain. The materiality of race locates me as a black woman professor in a position to account for my lived experience within the very places where I teach, live, and engage in scholarship. There is no place and no thing that I can do to avoid being situated within my work, even when I am not the subject. The *currere* method invites me to place myself in the work, in the context of the scholarship, to arrive at new and broader understandings of my practices as a teacher and a scholar. I want to draw attention to how black female presence is embodied—as teacher, artist, scholar—how it is accounted for within university teaching (McCoy-Wilson, 2020) and treated with disregard, disrespect, contempt, hostility, and aggression. *Currere* is a method that supports consideration of how my academic work informs my life (Pinar, 2004), how my life experiences shape my teaching and scholarship, and how both are enveloped in culture, society, economics, aesthetics, politics, and history. My hope is to discover lessons to be learned from interacting with a narrative generated from my teaching experiences and glean insights into how my reflective practice may advance my work in the preparation of future teachers.

Synthesis – "Tired of Talking about Racism"

While we had not discussed racism in my class, a couple of my students said that they were "tired of talking about racism." Others nodded in agreement. They may have been discussing racism in some of their other university courses but not in mine. And yet, it was in my class that they decided to voice their displeasure at having to learn about and discuss racism. They vocalized their anger at the topic. Their feelings of being put upon. My students behaved as though they had to defend themselves against me. My students were telling me I needed their consent to talk about racial injustices in teaching and learning, lest I hurt their feelings by discussing something, asking them to consider something, that could be painful for them (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020). Deference to normative whiteness is endemic in all areas of American life, including education. So, I had asked them, "What other social, cultural, economic, or political challenges facing P-12 students, parents, communities, and schools would you like to discuss?"

Sartre (1992) argues that strictly enacting institutionalized principles, ideals, practices is an evasion of responsibility to freedom. By continuing to teach, by continuing to focus on planned content, by asking students to participate in learning

disciplinary content, by not explicitly directing their/our attention to my students' normative white behavior, was I enacting a kind of "race neutrality"? Was I exacerbating oppression and domination? My writing, my speaking about the oppressiveness of racism in the university and its' classrooms is necessary (Hollis, 2017). My freedom, self-development, my self-determination require that I recognize and enact my freedom for myself and for others, including those who seek to oppress my freedom. *Currere* is acting in good faith—an embrace of freedom of self.

There is no subject matter or praxis that can be understood without consideration of race. My experiences in the 21st century university classroom highlight the history of anti-black racism in America and create a challenge to learning and engagement for students, administrators, and university staff who have not had to consider that history. While disconcerting and disturbing in many ways, what I experienced with my students, the administrator, the university, was instructive. Placing anti-black racism, at the center of my students' development of understanding and production of knowledge is necessary, is essential. Students will feel uncomfortable, they will feel intimidated, and, yes, some will be outright angry and speak and act in their anger. Asserting my agency as an African American woman professor and the ways in which my agency is treated in the very real context of white supremacy, including normative whiteness in higher education and visual art, and my efforts to resist undermining of my agency may help to make whiteness visible. My students, the administrator, and university were able to perform whiteness without having to verbally or otherwise say that that was what they were doing (Davis, 2019). Surely some of the goals of higher education and teacher preparation are to see whiteness, advance toward thinking beyond whiteness, and develop future teachers' capacities to resist learning and teaching through the lenses of whiteness.

University students who are planning to become teachers have as much freedom as most and more than many others. They have the freedom to choose whether they will accept institutional and systemic anti-black racism as fixed and unchangeable and, thus, continue to replicate white supremacy. They can choose not to choose and by such inaction maintain their status, their weak position in racial domination and oppression of other human beings. Or they can accept the full responsibility of being a human being, of having the responsibility to produce meaning and to see all human beings as human beings.

One of the goals of teacher education ought to be to dismantle the social ontology of whiteness. Like everyone else, future teachers are born into social environments, institutional structures, histories, cultures, that have shaped them and the world around them. And, like everyone else, they are responsible for their collective and individual actions. But I think their responsibility extends further. They are also responsible for examining and moving beyond the whiteness that pervades social and educational life so that they ably teach their students anti-racist behaviors and thinking. They have a duty to resist and to dismantle whiteness. All people do—but especially teachers.

We need teachers who can teach African American and white students to go beyond the limitations of negative historical portrayals and contemporary institutionalized discrimination of African Americans. The notion that they could transcend their preconceived beliefs about African Americans in general and female African American professors in particular, is a very high hurdle for some white university teacher education students to reach. They would first have to accept that they live, think, and act within, and have been shaped by, anti-black systems of racism. Yancy (2013) says that "whiteness in

its everyday performance within a white racist interstitial space, [is] a space where Black bodies negotiate ways of avoiding white racist micro-practices that are underwritten by whiteness as the transcendental norm" (p. 100). Teacher education students would have to accept that the system of white dominance that made them who they are also limited who African Americans could become—limited the actual being and becoming of all African Americans. That is a good destination. But a hard road to travel.

Perhaps a good first step, a step that will have to be repeated again and again, an enduring step, is to value the struggles of African Americans, to acknowledge and study the hundreds of years African Americans have struggled for good education, good life, and freedom in America. From preschool and elementary school (Kerner Commission Report, 1968) through colleges and universities (Harris, 2021), from pre- and post-slavery to Black Lives Matter, the education of African Americans continues to be thwarted. What other lessons do I want to take forward? Second, African American blackness must be explicit and situated in the development of teacher education students' knowledge, understanding, and knowledge production. This may make many students uncomfortable. Third, when I assume agency as an African American woman professor, when I reject and resist white supremacy, I change university teaching processes, methods, and pedagogical practices that perpetuate white domination. Moreover, I challenge students to think outside of white supremacy and support their efforts to do so. Fourth, visual art, teaching, and learning cannot be understood, nor can they be practiced, without my students understanding and deconstructing anti-black racism. Anti-black racism is incised into every aspect of American life. There is no refuge. It will take honest, genuine, collective, concerted, and persistent work to change that. Fifth, students who have never questioned white supremacy, may find it difficult to do so. They may become angry, resentful. They may feel guilt or shame, and these may be magnified in the classrooms of an African American woman professor. Challenging white supremacy may cause some students to verbally withdraw, as they may not have words for how they can begin to understand and deconstruct whiteness nor words for how they can begin to understand, construct, and affirm blackness as part of humanness.

The autobiographical aspect of *currere* allowed me to combine African American tradition and teacher preparation (Pinar, 2004). *Currere* methodology provided a space to consider the centrality of racial positionality in education (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999). I accept the facticity of being an African American woman in a white dominant university. But obviously that isn't enough. I question how the facticity of my blackness, and, therefore, my inherited powerlessness in the face of institutionalized whiteness and students' individual and collective historical, social, and cultural whiteness, could go beyond merely providing anticipated assault/entertainment and reaffirmation of the status quo. How can the facticity of my blackness and my gender and my attempt to draw students' attention to their enactment of white supremacy, lead students to question their whiteness? *Currere* offers me a way to acknowledge and understand my failure and see ways and take steps toward repairing the educational and societal destruction of racism. Through *currere,* I can attempt to image a way of healing through respectfully understanding the presence and persistence of white supremacist destruction and infliction of pain and suffering.

My *currere* is testament to the realities that institutional statements, policies, and limited practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion are not meant to and cannot substitute for positionalities, learning, policies, and actions that are explicitly anti-black in nature (Aniagolu, 2011; Cabrera, 2017; Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021). As an African

American, I've lived my whole life in a moment of perpetual urgency. It makes life very short. Heightened tension, expectation of attack, continuous daily aggression. In the anguish of adversity, we sometimes find that reverberations of the shock-moment ripple out and back into the past. Our personal past. And our collective past. Such calls to the past amplify and define the present. They signal a deep desire to make sense of the present in what is past. I am learning to pay attention to that holler, that call. I inhabit it for a while. I examine it, I interrogate, integrate it. I consider its significance for me and for the teacher preparation work I am doing with others in the present. I consider what I might learn from it to take into the future. Rather than being called to a crippling sadness about the state of the human condition; rather than spiraling into anguish over the persistent infliction of suffering upon African Americans, *currere* urges me on along a track toward thinking about how teacher preparation might be done better, how teacher education could lead to a new, equitable kind of human existence—a human existence beyond white supremacy.

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January 2021 (4 AM)

It's been so long since I
have slept

Almost a year

Instead—I stay up until my eyes fall closed
Like a toddler
Fighting until I become asleep
Wherever I am

Usually after dinner
Lights full on cozy on the couch
With a blanket
The old dog
Kids laughing or bickering or coloring

Safe

But when the house is quiet
And everyone but I
Breathing
Rhythmically

I can't coax myself past
Pandemic

I can't rest past the repetition
Knees on necks
Bullets in beds
Cross spurring coup

I'm old and I'm afraid I'm
Bitter

Because I wish I was
Surprised

Maybe I am standing watch?

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