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The More You Know
Arts Creation as Non-Representational Research

By Darshana Devarajan
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On Learning

I have rebelled against making rotis:
Round, soft, with ghee melting on top.
I have fought the joy of cooking sometimes.
For I have a brother and a desire
to be a fighting feminist forever.
But when my fingers feel the dough—
soft, sticky, and satisfying—
I wonder why I gave up
before I knew the joy of learning.

On Learning Anew

My finger, a tool,
runs through the crevices,
the cracks, and the corners
to mold clay like roti dough.
I am remembering and recalling
this motion, this movement,
this memory
of childhood
of learning this technique before
of knowing ceramics before
I took a university course.

On Learning Again

A character is round or flat,
A plot can be linear or not:
I hear my students echo familiar words,
as I teach children's literature tonight.
I remember how I once met these words,
these phrases, these concepts, these ideas
when we read Chaucer's Tales
and of Macbeth's death.

And even though you read
books that I've never before met—
This is *re*freshing, *re*peating, *re*membering
what I have always known.

On Learning Through Memory

In the dream, I was six
(maybe seven,
but not much older)
I held a yellow animal in my hand
wearing a grandma-woven red sweater
(or so I hope,
and so I remember.)
My brother, who was maybe eight
(or probably nine),
held an elephant.

In my dream, we had just painted
some clay animals that came out the oven.

The next morning, I stood
in my ceramics class, now 25,
but attracted to a similar yellow—
I saw it in a dream,
(I thought).

I called my mother
to tell her about
my dream and my yellow.

She chuckled, and told me
that my brother and I
learnt ceramics one summer
from a young aunty in her home.
And that my dream
is really a photograph.

On Being Home

Home, as I miss it, becomes something it hardly ever was. I put together pieces of memory—joyous echoes of laughter, warm silences, and a sense of peace. Home was hardly all of this. It was slow, though. It moved at a pace that didn't test time. It was here to stay. Almost permanent. It didn't change too much; it didn't evolve. It grew, but it never felt different. The walls repainted, the floor changed, the elevator made its way. But it was always six of us in the smell

of ginger garlic paste that lingered after we ate, in silent reading of our own poison, and the noiseless acknowledgement of each other's' presence.

Home, as I miss it, was whole. Not shattered through the trembling windows of anger. That wound us all up. But found us later at the same table, pretending like nothing ever happened. It was quiet, though. Enough to listen to my own head pound endlessly with things I could never share. Making memories from other times my companions and writing my only escape. It was always six of us fighting our own battles, in our own times, and letting each other be in our insecurities and inabilities.

Home, as I miss it, was growing. Despite seething with rage—a family tradition. It found us bound to each other by blood. No escape. Quite fatalist. But it was passionate, though. At least, as passionate as we wanted it to be. It made space for loud voices, cacophonic noises. To drown the rest of the world out. And to drown ourselves with it. It was always the six of us fixing our own problems, giving too much advice, and holding someone through the night.

Home, as I miss it, was full of art. Books. Poetry. Music. Games. Dance. Movies. Quizzes. TV. Sports. Festivals. Rituals. Food. With all its imperfections and damage, it shined through with hope and hospitality. For everyone who walked through the door. It made space for kids and adults, all the same. I think it made space for the six of us too. In its own way, home will always be the six of us with at least one thing that makes us grin, cheek-to-cheek.

Home, as I miss it, will always be the six of us. So, when you tell me Thatha passed away, why can't I picture home without him now? Why do I know that when you video call me, it is Thatha who sits in the pooja room reading mantra after mantra, in deep meditation? Why do I still think he's there … somewhere back home?

On Being Through Play/A Game For Two

There are twenty-five cards in this deck,
thirteen in the other,
and there are four coins—
from which we choose two.
You are doubled up
over the instruction manual,
and I, softly resting my neck,
think of Amma carrying boxes and bowls
nursing a family of four
with rasam sadam and games galore.

We just cleared the table
of Mucinex and multivitamins,
of cups empty but chai stained,
of three lip balms and a medicine pouch—
to make way for our fantastic escape.

You begin reading the manual for today,
and our eyes sparkle in a childish haze.
You—the Red Guard, and me—the Voidwarden,

You—a hypochondriac, and I—an anxious butterfly,
waddle our way through the game of life.

On Knowing

I know what silences sounds like:

ticking and tocking.

I know now what my mother means when she says
"oru chottu oil" for dishes we everyday eat.

I know how

to mix paint on a palette to make purple and cream.

I know how to run red lights safely. I have heard
my body creak after long walks, and
I know
these walks
make me write poetry.

I listen to the joy that Ross Gay seeks.

I cannot stand
the smell of guava, for the life of me.

I know the homely softness of hosiery, and I try everyday
to love more joyously. I briefly lend my ears to a sitarist's melody.

I know I cry tears of joy.

And that I learnt to share a remote with my brother.
I've grieved for the loss of another.
I know how to fold my clothes right out of the dryer.

I know what it feels like to have fresh food
three times a day. I know my family misses me.

I know home as a memory.

The First of Knowing

At 9, I live

in

an already identified body—
a policed body,
a recognized body,
a body with one name
and one number,
a body that is gendered,
and thus,
a body that is sexualized.

A body decided,
decoded,
deciphered.

A body laid bare:
I live in a time

and a space

In a body that is and will be known to the state.

At 9, I live in a body that is trained. A body that is strained.

And this is the first I know of how to behave.

On Knowing to Be a Girl

Do not
spread your legs on the sofa

Do not
sprawl or take up space

Do not
dress in your pajamas
or let your hair loose

Do not
almost say *fuck*

Do not
raise your voice

Do not
ask too many questions
or ask too few

Do not
scrape the food off your plate
with your bare fingers
and devour the raita

Do not
leave your sentences incomplete
or end on a critique
or botch up your grammar
and become a disgrace

Do not
forget to do your homework
or forget to nod politely
or forget your colonizer's lesson
or forget to *be* a woman

Do not forget what you've learnt

On days you almost forget to live.

On Unknowing

I am still scrubbing my arms

still soaking in a bath

still rinsing my mouth

still rubbing my wounds hard

still dusting off old thoughts

still wiping my words off

still soaping my movement

still cleansing my soul

still peeling off my dead skin

since I was ten.

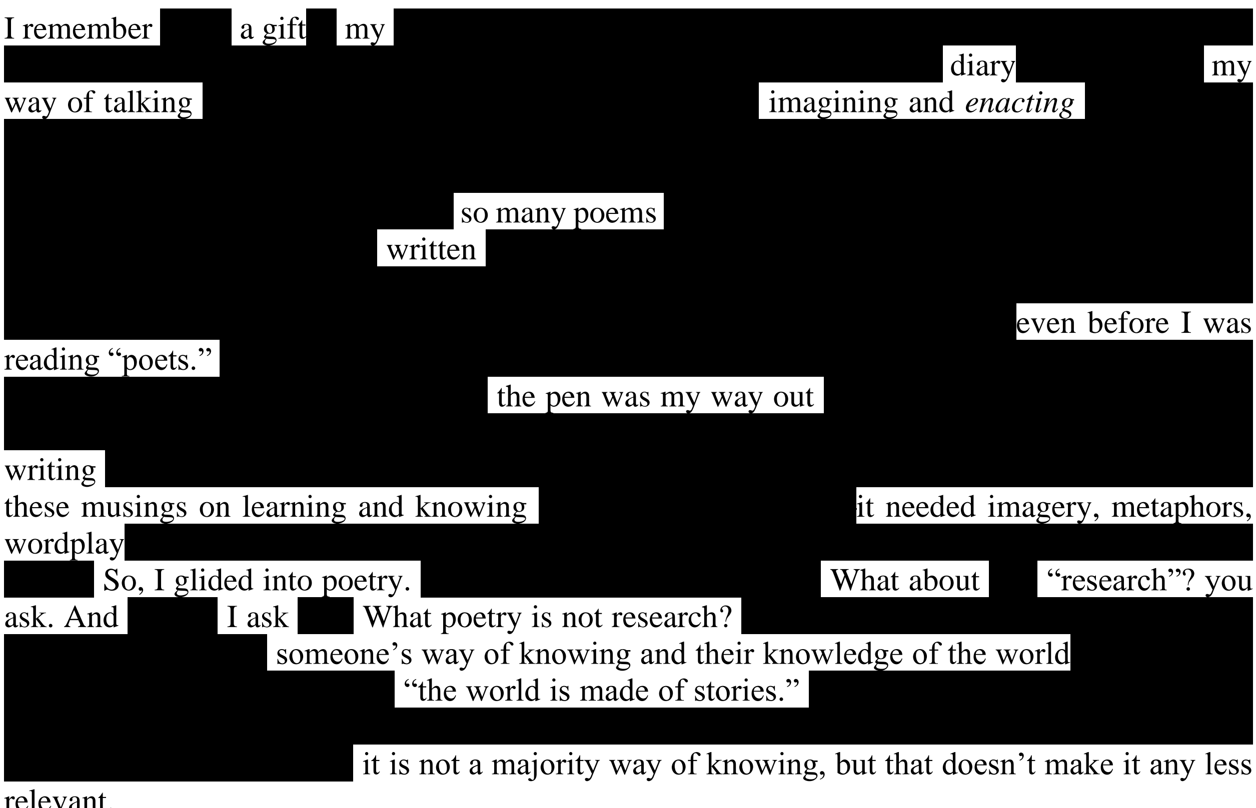
Of Amma, I Know

My mother, she would sleep,
at twenty past ten.
Groggy from the numbers job
on long Excel sheets,
after the intimate cooking
of two fresh meals,
begging my family
to shut up and eat.
My mother, she would groan,
of muscle pains unknown.
Walking miles to her job
on sultry mornings in Hyderabad.
My mother, we would laugh,
had no energy for us.
And when you said,
"I never thought of mother as a person,"
I was shocked.
All my life, I think I've learnt
of a woman's hard work,
and how it gets worse
with dreams of her own.
All my life, I think I've known
to pursue my interests alone,
in the minutes between
serving food and cleaning chores.
All my life, I think I've seen
my mother praying
for just one more night
of quiet and peace.

And now, my mother,
retired, and still tired,
making three fresh meals,
with ageing pains that won't heal,
paints in my bedroom
sings in a classroom,
learns a new language,
and cares for many …
And yet, for us in our luxury,
we still don't see
how exhausting
a woman's work can ever be.

On Knowing Through Writing

How did I come to poetry? A better question for me would be how did poetry come to me?



ARTS CREATION AS NON-REPRESENTATIONAL RESEARCH

Throughout my life, I have been drawn to artistic ways of being. Writing diary entries as a preteen provided me an escape from societal expectations. Painting classes gave me time to immerse myself in a sensory experience, away from all the chaos. Dancing with my schoolmates in front of an audience helped me claim space in the world.

My love for the arts, though "different" than others because it was not a *hobby*, has always been my way to represent things. Whether it was learning the melody of a song or reproducing an oil painting from an old newspaper cutout or writing a speech from the perspective of personal experience to move a crowd, I was on a journey to use the arts as a method to represent a life lived. While this is one way of sharing knowledge that already exists in the world, I have also used artistic methods to conduct research: a story *about* my learnings as a teacher, a poem *describing* hierarchies of subjects in schools in India, and a story *revealing* the language policies in India. And while the representational arts still put me in a different box than someone who is writing a paper, the learnings I was sharing felt stale. The research was not experimental or bordering the strange—these methods were tame ways of *including* the arts in my research and, in turn, resisting *arts as research*.

While my research for doctoral classes and academic conferences alluded to the arts, and made a case for artmaking in the classroom, I had never considered practicing artmaking as a form of researching. During my third year in the doctoral program, I took a pottery class because I was attracted to creating something substantial and real with my hands. My interest in that course changed everything. While I was in the pottery class, I wanted clay to be a part of my research. But how can a piece of ceramic art say something about educational systems? It could say *something* if I beat meaning out of the clay (Collins, 1988), but I did not want to *use* pottery, I wanted to create/make pottery. I had an itch, a desire to have clay mold my dissertation.

The more I thought about representational ceramics, i.e., ceramics that would re-present my research instead of offering something different to think about, the more I feared creating something. What if what I made was *too obvious*? What if my ideas were not relevant to the art world? What if I was not considered an artist but rather a researcher who adapts the arts to her own findings? I was mortified at the thought of being found out as a fraud ceramicist and, by extension, a fraud poet, a fraud painter, and a fraud writer. I needed to figure out how to be an artist who doesn't just reproduce, but creates, imagines, and conceptualizes.

Harman (2018) says that the problem with humans is that we only pursue "knowledge" (what a thing is) and practical know-how (what a thing can do), while ignoring other cognitive activities like arts creation—"since the *primary* role of art is not to communicate knowledge about its subject matter" (p. 44). I understood clay as just a medium to show a concept, instead of ceramics molding my conceptions itself. While these might sound similar, the difference is this: If a bowl that I make cracks, it can be interpreted as the brokenness that I observe in educational systems. Clay here is a medium to show a concept. On the other hand, experimenting with the material to observe the ways in which the clay body cracks and heals can become a conceptualization of crises and healing within educational systems. The "research"/conclusion does not come as an afterthought to the artmaking. Instead, the artmaking practice is the research. I realize that the reason I am attracted to learning and knowing in all spaces that I have been a part of, like presented in the poetry, is because of my artistic pursuits.

As I struggled with the questions of representational ceramics, I decided to spend the rest of my academic year away from clay—creating something that delved into my understanding of

education. I turned to poetry to find answers. Since poetry and creative writing had always been my way out of crises since I was a child, I wanted to immerse myself into understanding how I think about education.

I began the semester drawing from short journal entries that I wrote during the pandemic, which were making sense of the times that we were living in—amidst the Black Lives Matter movement protests, the inaccessibility to education for many students in the global south, and the rapidly increasing cases of domestic violence. The lockdown that we thought would last for a few weeks lasted for longer than a year, sending our lives into disarray. While I noticed my writing as social commentary that would inform my work as an educational researcher, I was still left wondering: What about this writing is "education"? How can this writing be considered "educational research"?

I realized that I needed to change the way I was thinking about, categorizing, and understanding education. My writing began to grapple with my position in the world as a woman, a scholar, a teacher, and a student. Having spent time within educational institutions my whole life, these reflections on the world portrayed *why* I wanted to research "education." I did not want to study teacher practices or classroom policies in my educational research. Rather, I wanted to pick apart and delve into the foundations of education: how we learn (and unlearn), how we know (and question), and how we live (and survive) in an unjust world. The poems in this paper present education, i.e., learning, knowing, and being that happens everywhere—within and beyond traditional educational spaces.

While I wrote some of these poems in a poetic inquiry class, in this rendition, I reimagine my work as research creation (Loveless, 2019) and/or arts as research. I added old poems to the manuscript from various folders on my computer, often titled terribly, ensuring that I ignored them. In combining the poems that I wrote *for* a poetic inquiry methods class in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education department and ones I had just written, I began to understand that poems written *for/as* research have similar research qualities to poems written *as poems*.

What are these research qualities?

AERA (2009) has recommended a framework to follow while conducting humanities-oriented research in education, which includes a similar research reporting structure to the social scientific standards: the requirements of conceptualization, substantiation, coherence, etc. In a broad sense, research in education can be considered *as research* once it follows a pattern of "reporting," i.e., "describing, understanding, and explaining an empirical reality" (Vannini, 2015, p. 1). However, in various presentations of art forms, we often notice that empirical reality can be elusive, indescribable, and unattainable. In that case, then, the creation of arts sits on murky grounds in terms of research. However, if we redefine research qualities to include discovering something new, to allow and welcome change, to changing the way we look at the world, then the creation of arts *is* research.

Loveless (2019) argues that research creation as "crucial to the development of new academic literacies that challenge traditional modes of knowing" (p. 53). To create a new academic literacy within the field of education, I want to think about this question: What makes research research? While documents like the AERA standards on reporting on humanities-oriented research offer legitimization and visibility in the broader field of education, making our lives easier as experimental researchers, I want to dig into the earth to find the roots of my insistence that arts creation *is* research. We need to begin to look beyond educational research to redefine educational research.

In college, I was struggling to find my footing in the philosophy department. After changing my major to English, I was first introduced to Gloria Anzaldua in the second year. I remember the joy while reading the paper, highlighting as I went along, memorizing "I carry home on my back" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 21). I had only moved from the south to the north of India, but it was such a different life up there.

After I moved to an entirely new continent, my ties with Anzaldua as a postcolonial scholar grew stronger. Her essays are made of remembrances of experiences, understandings, and theories of the times and spaces that are/were her own. It is written in a way that made it approachable—a writing style I would later find out resembled creative nonfiction, a kind of poetic inquiry, literary theory, and many others. Her artistic endeavor was the best academic work that I had encountered. Creative writing by Anzaldua is research. Paintings by my mother learning a new folk style each week is research. Photographic art by Teju Cole (2017) in *Blind Spot* is research. Creative nonfiction like Orhan Pamuk's (2003) *Istanbul* is research.

All this art is rich in theory, in an artistic philosophy, that is not apparent to the eye. It is not written out, nor explained in harrowing detail. The process of knowing is not condensed to present to the world. In other words, such artistic presentations of the world are unlike traditional methodologies like action research, case studies, field surveys, among others, that is "obsessed with control, prediction, and the will to explain and understand everything" (Vannini, 2015, p. 5). Instead, these artists focus on bringing back "a sense of wonder" (Vannini, 2015, p. 5) to discovering and researching the world. Such non-representational research "aims to rupture, unsettle, animate, and reverberate rather than report and represent" (Vannini, 2015, p. 5). Since my learning and understanding of the world comes from these artists, writers, poets, and theorists, I am often drawn towards the side of awe and wonder in the research world, rather than work that tries to pin down meaning.

Often pit against scientific research, methodologies like research creation are often expected to justify their necessity. Harman (2018) succinctly notes, "though the rapid advance of modern physics had been one of the most reassuring chapters of human history, I see it as a field that excludes far too much" (p. 23). The scientific methodology used in physics is good for *something*, i.e., knowing more about physics, and so, we can discover more about the universe that we live in. However, physics, and by extension the sciences, does not necessarily account for a lot beyond the physical world. There is much that is left out when one uses the scientific method.

Harman (2018) alludes/draws upon/invokes Spanish philosopher José Ortega's essay on metaphor to think through what gets left out by the scientific method. He highlights the Kantian division of phenomenological knowing (experiential) and *noumena*, which are things-in-themselves that we do not get to experience directly and unmediated by human presence (p. 68). The noumena that cannot be captured directly are often alluded to indirectly, and thus, Harman argues that "these things-in-themselves are of crucial importance to the arts" (p. 69). The noumena being "non-real," but also real in its existence as an essence, makes it a complicated subject to highlight and/or talk about. Since "reality is always radically different from our formulation of it" (p. 7), we need to turn to a means that does not only capture that which is apparent and visible but also attempts to play with things that cannot be represented. In other words, the arts provide a place of presentation for concepts, ideas, and things that cannot be directly approached.

I believe that the arts and Harman's concept of Object-Oriented Ontology, or OOO, helps us contact and play with things that cannot be represented because of one of the basic principles of this philosophy is that "all objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, non-human, natural, cultural, real or fictional" (p. 9). The objects are not necessarily physical, tangible

objects, but also things that are in the realm beyond the "real" like feelings, emotions, essences, etc. Similarly, the arts make space for all kinds of objects, and different kinds of art often deal with different objects and their properties. In OOO, the different objects are also not identical to their properties or components. In other words, the sum is *different* than its parts. Similarly, in the space of the arts, objects and their properties are often treated separately, but with similar importance. A painting, in and of itself, is one presentation. However, the technique used to create the painting is a different presentation. While they are related, the painting is not *only* the technique, and the technique is not *just* a part of the painting. Like non-representational research, where "material objects are to be given the same conceptual and empirical weight that is warranted to their human companions" (Vannini, 2015, p. 5), placing objects, sensations, natural, real, fictional, human, etc. on the same plane of eminence allows us to think of them in-tandem, and thus, non-hierarchically.

When I was first introduced to non-representational theory, I needed a concrete example of how to distinguish representational art from non-representational art, but the more I moved away from poetic inquiry that asked me to *use* my poetry to represent research, the more freedom I found with just presenting through my poetry. I realized that I was forcing my poetry to an uncomfortable place of representing my ideas on learning and knowing outside the classroom. My poetry was serving as a means to the same end as my academic prose. During this writing process, I noticed how I considered my poems that were not written as an academic project inferior and unacademic. Learning, knowing, and being had always been keystones in my writing. My older poetry already presented my research. Thus, I changed the way I crafted this project. I stopped forcing a message through my poems. Instead, the poems I write now flow through different emotions, objects (like clay and photographs), people (like my mother and my grandmother), and ideas and concepts (like childhood and memory and poetry) seamlessly—the subject of the poems is constantly shifting, and the different things in my poems have the same level of importance. I rejected the hierarchy and difference of poems *for* research and poems *for* myself.

The dilemma of representation has plagued the academic world. As Vannini (2015) says, we often stumble upon "the inevitable realization that our work is utterly inadequate at apprehending the intricate textures of the lifeworld subjects of our analysis and description" (p. 1). As we grapple with the expanse of reality around us that we cannot begin to capture as researchers in both the sciences and social sciences, the arts and humanities attempt to fill up the gaps in our understandings of the world. For instance, the arts give us a way to the unknown through imagination—offering up words to describe emotions through metaphors in poetry or abstract images in paintings. Harman (2018) also points us towards how the qualities of metaphor could help us get closer to *noumena*. He believes that the potential of metaphor is such that we are not given "thought-perceptions of an object" (p. 86); instead, we are given "something in its own right: the infamous thing-in-itself" (p. 86). From this, I gather that the importance of poetic renditions of the world is often metaphoric—not in a descriptive sense, but in an attempt to understand the essence of the world. Changing my own perspective of poetry helped me grapple with the "why" of arts creation as method.

Arts creation contributes something unique through its abstractions that social scientific and scientific methodology finds missing in their *representation* of the world. Arts creation as a research methodology brings forth ideas and concepts that have not been thought about or explored before. Creating art is the love of knowing and making something new, something that has not existed before.

As I continue my PhD journey in the importance of arts creation and as an untrained artist myself, I remind myself that "methodology is a lifestyle choice" (Vellanki, 2020, p. vi). This paper

would be incomplete if I did not highlight where this meditation on methodology comes from. If methodology—i.e., one's way of knowing—is a lifestyle choice—i.e., one's way of being—then the rigid categorization between epistemology and ontology cannot be held up. The poems above flow into one another in terms of the themes of knowing and being as I struggle to grasp knowing and being in non-dichotomist ways. To think of knowing for me is to think of being. Where do I know from? My being—a living of life. This paper is an embodiment of that belief, a playful staging of the merging of categories. Most of my learning has always been outside traditional academic spaces, where there were fewer expectations of me and more freedom of choice. These non-academic spaces, which are often depicted in my art creation, also become the ground upon which knowing, learning, and being overlap.

To understand this further, Vellanki (2020) asks us this question: "What do you want to do for nine hours a day, five or six days a week, in the limited time that we all have?" (p. 69). As I think about the nuances of the political and personal commitments that I hold in the world, I believe that I want to highlight the complexities within which we exist. This includes methodological complexities, which include both methodological pluralism and resistance of a singular methodology. I do not want to make a case for arts creation as the only methodology. In this "limited time" that we can do our work—work that reflects not just our scholarly identities, but also our home identities—I want to be able to constantly grapple with ideas and concepts through multiple lenses. I want to be able to pursue my multiple interests that include poetry, creative writing, ceramics, theoretical meditations, and so much more. I want to be able to create across boundaries and in liminal zones.

The creation of arts has the value of resonating with the world.: A way of reverberating; a way of presenting something new and undiscovered; a way of looking in new ways and at new things. These resonances with other people and their ideas and theories have taught me a lot of what I know through being in art spaces. And in creating more art, I resound the message of such innovation: there is more to learn, more to know, and more to be.

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WHAT IF …
CURRERE OF LEARNER-CENTERED IDEOLOGY

By Junghyun Min
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REGRESSIVE

What if …
Life throughout my school days had been completely a learner-centered ideology?

In a reimagined educational landscape, I would have been more than just a passive learner. Instead of sitting in uniform rows of desks, I would have experienced the freedom of flexible, collaborative spaces, where I chose my own learning paths and delved into subjects that truly captivated me. Teachers would have acted as guides, helping me to explore my passions and hone essential skills. This autonomy could have unlocked my potential earlier, allowing me to discover what I love and where my strengths lie.

Imagine a world where creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving were valued over memorization and standardized test scores. If this ideology had shaped my early education, I might now look back on my school days with fondness and nostalgia, eager to return to a time of discovery and growth. If this ideology had entered my life early on, I would have become a lifelong learner, capable of adapting and thriving in an ever-changing world.

PROGRESSIVE

What if …
This learner-centered ideology becomes dominant in the future education market?

As the world gradually undergoes a process of globalization and cooperation, more and more changes will occur in the educational environment. Imagine a future where classrooms are not confined by walls and learning is not limited to textbooks. In this new era, expressing ideas through frequent discussions and collaborative projects would be celebrated as a talent. The curriculum would be tailored to align with the subjects students are passionate about, and an educational setting would be established to nurture a culture of perpetual exploration and curiosity. With digital devices and virtual environments seamlessly integrated into daily life, traditional schools would coexist with immersive online learning spaces, providing access to a global repository of knowledge and experiences. Artificial intelligence and personalized learning algorithms could cater to individual learning styles and needs, ensuring that no student is left behind.

Assessments would shift focus from mere grades to holistic development, evaluating a student's ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. This learner-centered future has the

potential to usher in a new era of innovation and inclusivity, where education empowers every individual to reach their fullest potential.

ANALYTICAL

What if …
I continue my learning journey in the context of American education, which stands in stark contrast to my experiences in South Korea?

Starting my Ph.D. program in the United States has been an eye-opening experience. The difference in educational philosophies is immediately apparent in the physical environment alone—desks arranged for discussion, an atmosphere encouraging debate and dialogue. This contrasts sharply with the more rigid, lecture-focused format I was accustomed to in South Korea.

Here, the student-led classes are dynamic; students not only have a voice in what they learn but also in how they learn it. Compared to my educational experiences in South Korea, teachers in this environment function less as traditional instructors and more as facilitators or co-learners, actively guiding discussions and promoting critical thinking.

If this learner-centered approach were adopted in Korean middle and high schools, education could transform into a vibrant hub of discovery and growth. Flexible schedules, diverse learning spaces, and a focus on self-directed learning could nurture a generation of students who are not just knowledgeable but also curious, adaptable, and prepared for the challenges of the future.

SYNTHETICAL

What if …
We could innovate the learner-centered ideology to make it more robust for future education?

Imagine a future where technological advancements and pedagogical innovations converge to create a highly adaptable and personalized learning environment. Augmented reality and AI-driven systems could offer students immersive, interactive, and customized learning experiences, all tailored to their unique needs and interests. Education would evolve into a continuous journey, where the emphasis is on cultivating skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence.

In this vision, teachers would undergo specialized training to become facilitators and mentors, guiding students in their pursuit of knowledge. This does not diminish the role of educators; rather, it amplifies their importance in supporting students to craft their own educational journeys. The curriculum would be enriched with real-world projects and community engagement, making learning more practical and relevant.

This enhanced learner-centered approach could redefine education, empowering individuals to thrive in a rapidly changing world while fostering a deep passion for lifelong learning.

RE-WRITING OUR PLACE TOGETHER

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> I am reminded that all we need is to think about where we come from in order to know where we are going. For me, this journey is filled with actions and reflections that deepen my cultural knowledge.
>
> – Kress & Horn-Miller, 2023, p. 53

In this time of living out the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada (2015), we begin by acknowledging the historic and current forms of colonization on Syilx land, where our school is situated. We purposefully take up the call and above quote, to learn with our students, 110 future K-12 Canadian teachers—we will call preservice teachers—and provide them with learning opportunities from Syilx Educators, Storytellers, and Scholars to facilitate change from our university classroom into their future K-12 classrooms. Such goals align with the recently developed curriculum in British Columbia (BC), which provincially requires K-12 teachers to incorporate Indigenous knowledge as well as nurture and bring their students' knowledge (cultural, linguistic, etc.) alongside subject area content instruction, which is a paradigm shift (Government of British Columbia, 2024). Tasked with a focus on literacy and reshaping our institutional setting to facilitate this shift, we use both frameworks to create an impactful learning event—an all-day Literacy Symposium.

We, as three professors, a classroom teacher, and a preservice teacher, co-taught our 110 K-12 preservice teachers. We created the one-day Literacy Symposium to be a place to learn in experiential ways, exploring multiple literacies and wrestling in dialogue to unlearn a colonized literacy (Cervetti et al., 2006). The symposium was intended to interrupt a direct path to conceiving literacy in narrow and fixed ways, like the historic conception of skills-based reading and writing. Instead, the symposium was needed to bring the preservice teachers into one space to consolidate previous learning and recognize that multiple literacies are inherently situated in personal, historical, cultural, and communities; they vary across time and land (Cervetti et al., 2006). Central to this work was sharing the matriarchal knowledge and the land-based understandings passed down through millennia. In this way, the preservice teachers could understand being literate in multiple ways. They could awaken to the literacies they carried—a key part of decolonization. We aim for preservice teachers to understand how students' knowledge is made, found, and relayed. In the symposium space, we wanted them to see the vast number of knowledges that exist and are found in their K-12 classrooms through the embodied literacies living within their K-12 students. A critical understanding we foreground is to recognize that multiple literacies may remain or be lost in our K-12 classrooms unless we create discussion and space for it to emerge, be nurtured, and maintained. Such literacies contain precious knowledge and can be nourished by school alongside learning English, though literacy assimilationist history tells us this was not the norm. In so doing, we sought to make the TRC calls to action and the BC curriculum come alive. With these intentions in our hearts, we inquire into the practitioner question, "What did we learn from

co-teaching and co-composing this literacy symposium, and what will we do for our preservice teachers and the people-to-be with that learning?"

We come together to co-write and share our investigation. Our voices and perspectives are expressed as a collective, though we are individuals co-composing our work. We write in one voice as "we," though each of us has different roles and responsibilities. At times in the paper, we also acknowledge different perspectives; in those moments, we use our names.

We use the *currere* process through autobiographical and critical narrative reflection to explore the past (regressive), examining what we learned in the Literacy Symposium and what we gained (Baszile, 2015; Pinar, 1994; Poetter, 2015). Then, we shift into the future (progressive), dreaming together of what we hope candidates will have gained from the literacy symposium. Next, we explore our present (analytical) and thoughtfully consider where we are and explore what we need to do to grow (synthetic). In the following sections, we will explore each stage of the process, shifting in time from the past to the future and the present, then making sense of collective thoughts through plans for our upcoming course. This paper will impact our next academic year of courses and our future alongside preservice teachers and the people-to-be. Additionally, through our exploration, we also aim to reshape the academy to be a counterspace, a place where hearing diverse stories and ancient knowledges can be experienced and dialogue begins (Seiki et al., 2019).

CURRERE STAGES

REGRESSIVE (PAST)

We use vignettes—storied experiences—to explain critical moments in our Literacy Symposium. Each moment is in chronological sequence and provides a snapshot of each stage of the storied process, from our beginnings in the composing to the Literacy Symposium morning, afternoon, and wrap-up. Each vignette was selected because it reflects a learning or tension-filled moment, one we knew had more significant meaning and required more inquiry (Seiki, 2016). In sharing these vignettes, we invite the reader inside the experiences. The knowledge in these vignettes is influenced by ancient knowledge systems (Armstrong, 2009; Seiki, 2023). We reference and describe them in partial detail, but not enough for replication because of their complexity. We followed protocol because it is essential to connect with local knowledge keepers who can provide insights and information about the specific processes applicable to each specific land. We share this out of respect and honor to the people, their knowledge, and engaging in the process in a good way.

In this section, we have a specific flow. We set up the vignette, share it in indentation, and then follow it with an unpacking, a regressive reflection of that moment. There are four moments in total. In each reflection, we gain a greater understanding of what we learned as teacher educators.

MOMENT 1—PREPARATIONS: THE COMING TO LIFE OF THE SYMPOSIUM IS AN AWAKENING

> Sitting around the proverbial Zoom table are Jody, Bill, Kara, tum, and Sumer. We come together to co-plan the Literacy Symposium. Each of us brings their voice and their commitment to the work of seeing the knowledge each student brings into the classroom.

> As we worked together on this event, a couple of us would ask, “I don’t know where I fit into this symposium. Why did you ask me? What do you want me to share?” Inevitably, we would work to help each other through. Sometimes, we would have to think about how land-based knowledge from ancient China fit in with Syilx knowledge from Turtle Island. In moments that these heartfelt questions would arise, it felt like we were a zipper, being unzipped, and then through conversation, we would come together as one again.

Reflecting on this moment in planning the symposium, it is clear these questions and conversations shaped openings for relational shifts in understanding ourselves, our contexts, and one another (Dlouhy-Nelson & Hanson, 2023). These moments, gradual and often unplanned, created ongoing dialogue and attentiveness to decolonization among human beings in their complexities and multiplicities (Seiki et al., 2019). Our own questions—“Do I belong? Where do I fit? Does this knowledge belong? Where does it fit? Who really is a literacy instructor?”—are influenced by Western institutional frameworks and disciplinary compartmentalization constructions (Seiki, 2016). Such compartmentalization was deeply embedded in our thinking as educators from different backgrounds, and so, at times, we could not make explicit connections between ancient knowledges or embodied literacies. At times, we struggled to reconceptualize literacy beyond English Language Arts and the ongoing struggle to control Literacy across North America. Like our beginning teachers, we too can get caught in a Western discourse focused on gaining competencies in English Language mechanics and not on meaningful, embedded learning of literacies: local Indigenous (Syilx where we are) orality and orature, land-based language and story (captikʷɬ where we are) (Armstrong, 2000), and Knowledges of First peoples from many areas of Mother Earth, and another land-based knowledge, Hung Dee Moy (Seiki, 2023). To interrupt a direct path to conceiving Literacy, this one-day Literacy Symposium was needed to bring matriarchal knowledge and land-based understandings passed down through millennia into one space.

As we reflect, we can see the work we were doing in listening to each other in processing together. We were expanding our understanding of literacy and seeing connections between multiple literacies, not through Western literacy concepts, but through embodied cultural literacies. As we worked together through meetings and conversations, we came together with a more robust understanding of literacy and the complexities of co-writing.

Moment 2—The Morning: Making Embodied Knowledge Seen in Class

We split the day into two parts: the morning and the afternoon. The morning was to be an inspiration to understand the concept of multiple literacies and to be open to understanding where they can come from and how they impact K-12 classrooms.

> A buzz of chatter fills the room. Preservice teachers are sitting around 16 round tables that are covered and set up much like a wedding banquet. Some see a friendly face across the room, get up, and walk over to say hello. They are excited for the day. Yet, we feel the tension of our intentions, and hope fills our hearts for the day.
>
> We begin. Standing at the front, flanked by slide projectors, we open the symposium with an invitation for students. Jody says, “Today, we invite you to be open and think of literacy in new ways. We ask you to go on a proverbial walk alongside us. On

your walk, think with other thinkers you've read in this seminar: Paulo Freire, Ngugi Thiong O, Jeannette Armstrong, and Suzanne Simard. During your walk, consider if you will change the positionality of literacy teachers. Will you teach your students that their way of knowing and thinking is just as important and beautiful as the ones in textbooks? Also, take the time to think of the way that language is rooted in cultural, land-based knowledge. You will hear three teachers today share the ways they carry cultural, land-based knowledge into the classroom. Sumer will show how she carries matrilineal land-based knowledge into our class from Toisan, China. Kara and tum will share the wisdom from the local land-based Syilx Okanagan Nation. As you listen to each speaker today, consider how they carry local knowledge into the classroom. Finally, we ask you to know that you, as a K-12 teacher, impact the survival of these ancient languages, literacies, and cultural and embodied ways passed from sister to sister, adult to child, etc. We know you will impact them because each child that enters our class carries their literacy inside. In the past, we have taught children to abandon their language/knowledge; today, we ask you to teach children to nurture and carry what is alive, well, and embodied by them. Let's get started."

A slide depicts a harsh cityscape with elderly Toisan Chinese American ladies hanging laundry in Chinatown. Some may have wondered, how does this fit with literacy? Sumer's voice changes as the slides progress, "Today, I am not a professor; today, I am a granddaughter. You may hear my emotions because today, I teach from the knowledge I did not learn in school. My late pau pau (grandmother) taught me through her embodied knowledge over decades of lessons. My stories will stretch from Chinatown to Toisan, China—the original land the cultural practice of Hung Dee Moy was first created (Seiki, 2023). Hung Dee Moy is a sisterhood practice given by elder grandmothers to their daughters and other sisters. It is a relational wisdom tied to the land. Each story and photo illuminates the ways maternal knowledge was taught and the purposeful ways pau pau's teachings were always meant to live in her granddaughter's body, memory, and heart. Such Hung Dee Moy teachings could never be lost anywhere she traveled. As Sumer ends her presentation, she explains that each child who comes into a classroom has been gifted with embodied knowledge. "What knowledge do you carry with you today? How will you, as future teachers, nurture the knowledge you and each student carries into the classroom?" A preservice teacher's hand raises, "How will we know it's safe for one of our students to share their knowledge?"

A new slide appears. Kara, a local Syilx teacher, shares, "Syilxizing Classroom Practice." With each slide and new photo, our preservice teachers could see and hear how she uses her own embodied Syilx knowledge to access and nourish her students' knowledge, including language revitalization. Her students begin to see themselves in school, hearing their language and seeing their knowledge practices as valued. Our preservice teachers experience her Syilixizing with them while also encouraging them to think about decolonizing their practice and integrating Syilx knowledge into their classrooms in a culturally safe way.

Our final voice—the morning session concludes with tum, a preservice teacher, taking the podium before her peers, professors, and mentors. With a passion for syilx knowledge, she unfolds a narrative that illustrates the integration of nsyilxcn (syilx language), protocols, and land-based learning into the Western Eurocentric education

system. Using a document camera, tum showcases her hand-drawn and colored pencil crayon book, guiding everyone through a day of land-based learning.

In her story, the Four Food Chiefs, along with Coyote and Fox, take on the roles of students, with the playful coyote assuming the role of the teacher. The pages are rich with nsyilxcn, accompanied by phonetic and English translations. tum's narrative embraces the holistic nature of Syilx knowledge, emphasizing its profound connection to both the physical and spiritual aspects of life.

Recognizing storytelling as a means of passing down knowledge, tum highlights its importance in fostering a sense of identity and belonging among students. By incorporating her lived syilx worldview into education, she encourages students to see themselves reflected in these stories, strengthening their connection to their homelands.

Reflecting on these four distinctly unique presentations on diverse literacies, we see how intentionally shifting power dynamics brings diverse stories into our classroom. Dismantling hegemony, through purposefully asking for various literacies to be taught, brought forward identities and knowledges that were not valued in traditional instruction (Seiki et al., 2019). Each presenter shared a part of their non-Western embodied knowledge, fostering a classroom space where students' own diversity could come forth. Such dismantling also came forth in the writing of our stories into vignettes. Through each author composing a vignette, different perspectives on the capitalization of Syilx and their language, nsyilxcn, emerge. We note that each author chooses to use his/her/their own notation as each wrestle with how to use Western notation for non-Western language purposefully pushing against hierarchical frames and limits. We are becoming in our own way and time.

Additionally, we shifted power dynamics and content by asking a local emergent leader educator and preservice teacher to instruct at the Symposium (Seiki et al., 2019). We can see how their teachings brought forth shifts in the preservice teachers' understanding that students and teachers are always both teacher *and* student. We recognized this in the tone of the morning session. The room was one of engagement and curious energy. As a result, preservice teachers' questions emerged to contribute to the collective wisdom. One preservice teacher's question reflected the discussion: "How do we as educators ensure that we provide openings for our students' embodied cultural language and knowledge to surface and emerge?"

Moment 3: Introducing the Local Knowledge Process of Enowkinwixw as Literacy

In the afternoon, local Indigenous Syilx process was foregrounded so students could experience it as a path forward in transforming our classrooms and institutions.

Dr. Bill Cohen brings focus to start the afternoon, "Are you okay with Sumer being Hung Dee Moy?" The preservice teachers absorb this question. Silence. Bill continues, "And how about Kara, tum, and me being Syilx? Are you all okay with that?" Students continue to absorb the questions.

Reflecting on this moment, we see Bill thoughtfully renegotiate this relational space through questions. He engages in our collective work of humanization within the academy, for both professors and students, through naming our identities (Seiki et al., 2019). In so doing, Bill is

reshaping the academic space. The academy, not known for inclusion, often uses hierarchical power dynamics and hegemonic institutional policies; it has long been a place for dehumanizing practices, upholding white privilege and power, perpetuating stereotypes, and cultivating mistrust, disrespect, and exclusion (Charbeneau, 2009; DiAngelo, 2012; Yosso, 2006). These questions socialize all of us, allowing us to see each other as humans with multiple identities and diverse stories.

Sitting with and thinking with Bill's questions, some wonder if they cut to the heart of what we are trying to do. Does it simply ask each person, will you do the work of accepting diverse knowledge, or will you ask others to conform to the knowledge you uphold? We wonder if this is part of an ancient struggle of accepting diverse knowledge as just as necessary or allowing discomfort and arrogant perception to lead to assimilation (Lugones, 1987). This question prompts everyone in the room to inquire within, "Are we going to appear to be accepting of diverse knowledge or be comfortable and ask our students to conform once they're in their own classrooms?" This question powerfully cuts to the heart of the matter and opens this afternoon with keen precision. What will each student choose to do this afternoon? What positionality will that choice take, given the vestiges of colonial institutional performativity pressures (Seiki & Gray, 2020)?

Moment 4—Wrestling with Community and Consensus: Enowkinwixw Process

Bill leads the afternoon teaching session by setting the scene with captikʷł, a story of four very diverse food chief communities (water, earth, plant, and animal life forces of the territorial ecology) co-creating and sustaining a future for humans. This story metaphorically describes a Syilx process called enowkinwixw, a metaphor for drops of wisdom coming into the mind from the ancestors (Armstrong, 2009). Enowkinwixw is a way to ensure the diverse voices are heard and the process honors the ways all are interconnected and interdependent to maintain continuous life for all (Armstrong, 2000). In Syilx ways of knowing, all life forces, including the animals and the trees, have a purpose and a voice to be heard in community. The continual challenge for humans is to be a part of this diverse community applying knowledge and imagination collectively so we all have a future. As Bill teaches, he keeps in mind that settlers gaining literacy in Syilx ways of knowing requires deep reverence and concerted effort over time.

As one part of the process, Bill asks students to share their perspectives of their fellow students, asking students to identify one another as one of the four food chiefs to practice seeing gifts, talents, and purpose in each other. Students think intently about the characteristics of each other and each of the chiefs. Then, they share their perspectives with one another.

> Preservice teachers sit together at the round tables. Each sharing how they see each person at the table—naming which Chief: Ntityix (Salmon), Siya (Saskatoon Berry), Skemhist (Bear), or Spitlem (Bitterroot) they identify them as based on their consistent way of being with others. Following Syilx protocol, each person learns from everyone at the table. Quizzical looks, and nods, each person grapples with the Chief or Chiefs they were seen as; it is not always an easy process. Some preservice teachers are surprised that others see them in a way they do not see themselves. For others, it is a natural fit. As the process ends, one Chief group member stands in front of the entire class and says, "We can be both. We can be both who others see us as and also who we see ourselves to be."

Reflecting on this moment, we see many forms of wisdom. We see the wisdom of Syilx ancestors contributing to humanizing the academy by ritualizing appreciation for diversity and collective responsibilities, dismantling individualism (Armstrong, 2009), and opening ourselves to be with and in the community (DiAngelo, 2012). Such work is an essential part of decolonization. Unlearning is coming to see how others see us and how we see ourselves. Letting go of a calculated viewing of self through colonial hierarchies and grappling with the notion that how others see us is different from how we see ourselves may be freeing for some. This learning is brought to light in closing reflective comments of one of the preservice teachers; as noted in the vignette, "We can be both." In their comment, they insightfully share that we can be both who our community thinks we are and who we see ourselves to be. We can be both. This helps us to move toward a commitment to inclusion, internally and externally. The preservice teacher was a teacher to all at that moment. In a movement when power shifted, the preservice teachers' internal processing and insight allowed us all to gain from their shared wisdom externally. Shifts in power allow new voices and stories to emerge (Seiki et al., 2019). Additionally, this protocol facilitated this collective thinking process—each preservice teacher actively participated as both a listener and responder in community; this is collective co-meaning making (Dlouhy-Nelson & Hanson, 2023).

PROGRESSIVE (FUTURE)

In our progressive vignette, we imagine a future for one symbolic preservice teacher. We include what we hope will become of our teachings. We hope to see our preservice teachers embody and carry with them into their future K-12 classrooms an understanding and respect for multiple literacies, welcoming them into their classrooms and playing a role in the transformation of school practice by expanding the boundaries of what counts as literacy. Below, an imagined possibility is shared. The identity markers named are shared by some of the authors and are used to shed light on the discrimination, disadvantage, and harm experienced by some of those with these identity markers in classrooms and schools. We teach for a better reality.

> Mo, our former preservice teacher, stands at the front of their classroom door. As a Grade 1 teacher, they welcome their students, who are lined up wiggling and chattering, waiting for them to start the day. Mo spots their three new students looking worried at the very back. Mo smiles. Mo has read their cumulative records and knows that these new students come from other lands and languages. One is a recent immigrant, and the other two recent arrivals identify as Indigenous. Mo knows these students, and the institution will soon push them to choose to fit into this new school and community. Mo wants to work with them to maintain being a part of their new school and home, preserving their community's cultural wealth and languages. Mo has done a lot of work; Mo has got resources, lesson plans, and assignments to help these new students maintain their many literacies. Mo is energized to begin.

Reflecting upon this future dream, we know that as we composed this symposium and our lessons, we hope that our preservice teachers continue to value diverse knowledges that are not just their own, nor solely Western, but see the value in diverse knowing for the people-to-be. We hope that our work is part of a transformation where these and future preservice teachers have

classrooms where local knowledge is foundational to their ways of being with the land and life forces and where multiple knowledges from other places are seen, nourished, and grown (Dlouhy-Nelson, 2023; Seiki et al., 2021). We know this is a common hope within teacher education but not always a common reality, given the ways colonial practices remain within education (Paris & Akim, 2017; Yosso, 2006).

We also know this from our lived experiences, our families' school experiences, and our students' experiences. Over our long and short careers, in each class we have taught, we have seen the pressures of institutional cultural loss and assimilation, forms of colonial harm (Yosso, 2006). Children, especially immigrants and Indigenous, Black, and People of Color (IBPOC), experience assimilation pressures, and precious knowledge of primary language and community cultural wealth are not pervasively valued in maintenance and instruction. We have seen institutional policies cause harm if these children do not conform (DiAngelo, 2012). Invisibility, exclusion, resistance, silence, voice, and wakefulness shroud this loss (Seiki et al., 2019). We have struggled with knowing that our choices and our students' choices within a colonial institutional context have long-term consequences. We long for and work toward nurturing classrooms that support multiple literacies.

Analytical (Present)

In our analytical vignette, we use this *currere* to explore our present moment, the end of our academic year with our 110 preservice teachers. We reflect. We wonder. How can we bring in more Syilx knowledge keepers and Elders to teach our students to connect to the land through multiple literacies? Can we help them access and identify their own community's cultural wealth so they can see it in their students? Is it a focus on teaching settler-colonizers to learn how to be with and alongside others, and grow in relationships across cultures and languages? We asked an anonymous preservice teacher to give feedback on their experience over the year, which is included below. We read their reflection, the other students' reflections, and we sit with their words and insights.

> Preservice Teacher Reflection: As I drive home, I reflect on the program ending. Many chairs [were] empty [in our classroom] during Indigenous content, and I hear whispers asking, "Why this?"
>
> Growing up, we learned true wealth is in giving, which we do by sharing our culture. After witnessing these actions from my peers, I ask, "What's the point?"

Our hearts drop. The feedback describes the emotional labor and toll placed on Indigenous, Black, People of Color (IBPOC) as student and faculty take up the role of cultural content teachers—also documented in teacher education research (Leddy & O'Neil, 2021). The emotional labor and cost of this work is real—as the preservice teacher highlights the felt experience.

We know the work we did to teach about multiple literacies, but the feedback shows us that the lived reality on the landscape of required teacher education courses is fraught with complexity. Thinking with teacher educators teaching Indigenous content in a similar context, we see resistance as a common part of this work (Oskineegish & Berger, 2021) and a part of the learning process. Leddy and O'Neil (2021) describe teacher education class resistance as "nuanced

and flexible … it might hide deeply or in plain sight" (p. 348). They have documented disengagement and microaggressions, like that described in the above reflection (Leddy & O'Neil, 2021). Ultimately, we listen intently to these perspectives; it is clear that resistance to learning multiple literacies, namely Indigenous knowledge is seen and felt.

We see in this present moment that there is much work to be done to build the progressive (future) we seek. We enter the work of the synthetic with our analytic section on our hearts and minds.

SYNTHETIC

Reflecting on each stage—the regressive, the progressive, and the analytical—we use our practical inquiry question as a guide: "What did we learn from co-teaching and co-composing this literacy symposium, and what will we do with that learning for our preservice teachers and the people-to-be?"

First, we saw that, for some co-authors, we came to reconceptualize literacy as a social construct rather than solely an English read-write-skills-based one. Learning to define literacy in this way is nuanced; each of us holds a different understanding and aspects of knowing in many forms of communication. We each are evolving in our definition in our own way.

Second, in our *currere* analysis, we came to understand that resistance is a part of transformative learning; we saw it in our past, future, and present. Using the vignettes and reflections, we explore the next steps to take into our teaching. One practical step is to incorporate multiple literacies throughout all content areas to allow for more processing time with this concept and purposefully working with resistance through building relationships. Mirroring the work of this paper, we see including a relational dialogue space for preservice teachers to have critical friendships in small pods over the entire academic year as a critical step. In this way, we provide a relational space to think with others in agreement and disagreement to come to greater understandings. This is a way to address and work through the resistance named in the analytic step. Also, it is important we note that IBPOC students and faculty should not have to carry the weight of teaching through resistance; rather, it is key to include allies in this process who will address and navigate the resistance (Leddy & O'Neil, 2021).

Finally, we learned that collaboration will come with moments of disagreement. We have learned to acknowledge these differences in definitions of literacy, perceptions, and experiences within the academy. From doing this work together, we had the opportunity to learn of one another's personal histories, including embodied multiple literacies. We also had opportunities to think with our own opinions, which sometimes evolve. We discussed, but we did not necessarily always come to a consensus, rather we found moments of disagreement in which we needed space to think and become in our own ways and time. We find this process opens us to imagine, create, and live out new possibilities in the academy and the classrooms where we compose our lives (Seiki et al., 2019). We remain committed to fostering and entering local classrooms on this land in a new way.

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MATH, CONFINEMENT, AND BLACK GIRL TEARS

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As I completed the required core courses of my Ph.D. program, my attention shifted to taking the preliminary examination—in essence, a checkpoint for ensuring the ability to make an argument supported through concepts drawn from existing texts. From the list texts that are approved for the assignment, I chose *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique W. Morris (2016) to understand the educational, judicial, and societal disparities experienced by Black girls. Given the prevalence of stories in the media, instances of exclusionary discipline against Black girls have been observed in conversation with zero-tolerance policies. These policies are masked as attempts to hold all to the same standard but are rigid and lack cultural relevance, disproportionately punishing Black girls. For example, Tiana Parker [September 2013] was sent home and later switched schools after wearing dreadlocks, Mya and Deanna Cook [April 2017] were given detention and threatened with suspension for wearing braided hair extensions, and Kaia Rolle [September 2019], a first grader, was arrested and charged after throwing a temper tantrum due to a sleep disorder. Such policies and practices usher Black girls into the school-to-prison pipeline (Klein, 2013; Coleman, 2017; Onley, 2020). Morris (2016) introduces the expansive term "school-to-confinement pathways," accounting for the multitude of ways Black girls are surveilled, restricted, and confined (p. 12). This term resonated with me as I looked to make sense of my own disciplinary experience in K-12 schools.

The autobiographical method of *currere* constructed by Pinar (1975/1995) moves through the phases of regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (p. 19). In doing so the *currerian* engages in a journey of "critical self-reflection and contemplation, giving share to an internal dialogue" (Baszile, 2017, p. vi). As Baszile (2015) calls our attention to centering voices of Women of Color in academic spaces, I write this with voices that "have been absent, ignored, misconstructed, distorted, repressed in the curriculums that shape our lives, the curricula of schooling and media, in particular" (p. 2). In this paper, I provide a definition of the school-to-prison pipeline and utilize Pinar's (1975/1995) method of *currere* to explore Black girls and school-to-confinement pathways. Within this process, I will seek to understand my past experiences and envision and advocate for schooling for Students of Color, specifically for Black girls, that is safe, supportive and ultimately dismantles the school-to-prison pipeline.

SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) defines the school-to-prison pipeline as "school discipline practices, such as suspension and referrals to law enforcement, that funnel youth out of public education and into the juvenile and criminal legal systems" (n.p.), disproportionately affecting Students of Color. To be clear it is not that Students of Color are participating in delinquent acts at higher rates than white students, but rather that they are found responsible at higher rates. In the 2017–18 school year, 38.8% of students expelled with educational services and 33.3% of students expelled without educational services were Black, despite accounting for only

15.1% of total students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021). While data shows that Black boys comprise most suspensions and expulsions, Black girls have increasingly entered the mix (Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011). As Morris (2016) writes, despite Black girls being alongside Black boys, Black girls often go unnoticed (p. 2). The notion of invisibility is one that many Women of Color experience. For myself, instances of invisibility in education have presented in the classroom and the workforce.

BLACK GIRL TEARS

My middle school math teacher had just finished the day's lesson and had given us time to get started on the assigned homework. Confused, I sat in silence avoiding making any eye contact. Hearing the click clacks of my peers' pencils and calculators, mine remained fixed. My attempt to go unnoticed failed as the teacher began to make their rounds up and down the rows of desks. As they approached my desk, it was clear the only line I had completed was my name. They said, *"You need to do your work."* Unable to form a sentence to tell them I had no idea where to begin, tears began to flow like a faucet with a faulty seal. I could not stop them even if I wanted to. The teacher returned to their desk and after a few minutes summoned me to the front of the class. Still crying, they proceeded to say, *"Let's send an email to your mother about your behavior in class."* As they hunched over me, I stared at the screen, perplexed at the request but also without words. What was I supposed to say? *"Hey Mom, I'm in math class right now. I don't understand how to do the work, and because I've been crying at my desk, Mrs. Pearson told me to send you an email instead of helping me."* While this does indeed disclose my behavior in class and my math teacher's actions, I doubt this is what they had in mind. After a few minutes of sitting at their desk in front of the computer screen it was clear their frustration was mounting through my non-compliance with their request. I never sent an email, and soon I was escorted out of class with the packet of work to go to in-school-suspension.

As I walked into the room, I was given the three rules: (1) sign-in, (2) face forward, and (3) no talking. Signing my name on the sign-in sheet made my stay a real fixture—a record that I could not erase. The seating resembled an office cubicle. I could not see out, only they could see in. Remember rule three? No talking. I no longer had access to the teacher who was supposed to help me, and I was unable to seek assistance from others. Through this experience, I acquired a distaste for the subject of math. I declared that I was not "good" at it and internalized an unworthiness of receiving help. After all, my Black girl tears didn't say anything anyway (not to them).

PUSHED OUT

As I move to the progressive phase of currere, I pause my personal story and engage the imaginary in a way that weaves research and experiences of Black girls who have been pushed out. The following anecdote serves as an example of how in-school suspension may usher Black girls into carceral systems. Through this anecdote I not only paint a picture of instruction in a space of confinement that is not conducive to the process of learning but call attention to the complexities of obtaining an education without supportive structures and access to resources.

Eventually, there were no more Black girl tears to shed. I understood through the demonstration of my middle school math teacher that, even if I shed them, they'd be shed in silence. I stopped trying to "get It," and my teachers didn't seem to care, so why should I? It wouldn't be my last time sent to in-school suspension, and I guess you could say I elevated myself because instead of in-school-suspension, it was confinement in a juvenile detention center. Surrounded by chaos, isolation and bleakness, very little "learning" took place there.

When it came to teaching, there was no sense of a planned curriculum. The teacher (of the day) seemed to make up the lesson as they went, and that's if there actually was a lesson. I placed "of the day" in parentheses because it seemed as if there was an ever-revolving door of teachers. They did not seem prepared and certainly didn't seem as if they wanted to be there. It honestly felt like they were volun-told rather than volunteered, let alone had passion for teaching students like us. Similar to what I experienced in in-school-suspension, we frequently were given packets of worksheets to complete. Oftentimes the assigned work was clearly below my grade level, and the few times where the assignments appeared to be on par with my grade level, the teachers did not seem interested in explaining how to do the work. In spite of my effort to get something out of their teaching, or lack thereof, there were constant echoes of what I'd done, rather than what I could become. These remarks came not only from the facility teachers but correctional staff as well. I began to believe them and disengaged from facility education.

You would think that my release from juvenile detention would be a good thing, which was partially true. However, I was unable to return to public school, and the charter and private schools in the area wouldn't dare to take their chances. I was no longer in a restrictive environment that drummed inferiority into me, but I was left to navigate life without arguably one of the most important documents for engaging in society—a high school diploma. The other option was to successfully pass the GED (e.g., general education development) tests. Given the education received in juvenile detention, I did not feel confident and certainly did not have the money to pay for the tests. I was left to figure out my next steps on my own. Without a high school diploma or GED, opportunities to succeed were few and far between. To make ends meet I found myself engaging in illegal activities. These actions would catch up with me, and this time I would spend years in a prison.

Back to Reality

While entering juvenile detention and later prison was not my actual, lived experience, serving in-school-suspension significantly impacted my relationship with schooling and authority. Prior to the in-school suspensions, I enjoyed school, for the most part. Although comprehension of course material was difficult at times, I had felt comfortable enough to voice the need for assistance. From the time that I was first sent to in-school suspension onward, my inclination to ask for assistance diminished. This has not and should not be viewed as a badge of honor but rather should be recognized as a byproduct of exclusionary discipline. As I remember this experience and reflect on how it impacted my educational experiences, I am brought to a few deeper conversations: authority/student-teacher relationship, implications of absence from instruction, and inferiority.

First, the student-teacher relationship is a powerful aspect of pedagogy—pedagogy being the way in which a teacher chooses to enact curriculum. While teachers are often viewed as the people doing the teaching (in a traditional view of pedagogy) the student cannot be removed from

the equation. I did not share this earlier, but my middle school math teacher was also a teacher that I had in the past. While it is plausible that I may be suppressing previous memories with this teacher, I cannot recall any situations that stand out as being particularly upsetting. Not that I expected to receive any special treatment, but I was under the assumption that this teacher perhaps would be even more inclined to help given our history. I do not pretend to know why my middle school math teacher on that day demanded that I write an email to my mother and sent me to in-school-suspension instead of just providing assistance, but I do know that teaching is no easy feat. To be clear, I am not excusing their behavior; however, through teaching college level courses myself, I understand the challenges teaching may present. Perhaps my teacher thought I didn't care or didn't want to understand. In transparency, this thought is one that I myself have had internally when teaching, when I feel as though I have explained the material enough that an understanding should be possible for my students. I am reminded that we as educators and learners do not know when our understandings will come to fruition (Poetter, 2019, p. 111). How do we as educators learn to be ok with this? What is at stake when we allow our frustrations to overcome demonstrating empathy in the classroom? While I still do not claim to be a math expert, I understand a little more now.

Second, in-school-suspension resulted in an absence from instruction. At the rate that instruction took place, an absence from one class period held the power to greatly affect my performance in the class moving forward. Moreover, when it came to math specifically, the lessons continued to build off one another, further emphasizing the need to understand material as it is presented. In the case of being pushed out of school and being subject to learning within juvenile facilities, this compounds the situation. Not only does the student have minimal, if any, contact with their traditional teacher, they also are subject to the curriculum and pedagogy of the facility. While it is plausible that the student may be provided with the work that is being presented in their traditional classroom, the question remains whether the student would be able to complete the material without their traditional teacher and whether the facility teacher is willing to assist if needed. However, as demonstrated in the anecdote, the absence from instruction that I experienced from serving in-school suspension is rather miniscule in terms of what could be.

Third is the lingering sense of inferiority. In my middle school math class, it was demonstrated that my Black girl tears were not seen as a signal for assistance but rather a disruption. I feared that even if I did gain the courage to ask for help it would not be given, and the person would now know that I did not know how to do something or even worse I would be chastised. Despite continuing education and being a working professional, these fears are still so intense that I often fight an internal insistence to figure it out on my own at the cost of my peace.

DISCUSSION

This is a story that I have been reluctant to share. However, as an educator and advocate for dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline, processing what has happened alongside the work I hope to carry through is essential. The school-to-prison pipeline stands as a critically important issue within the realm of education and criminal justice, shedding light on systemic disparities that disproportionately affect Students of Color, and increasingly Black girls. Regardless of whether Black girls end up in confinement, the emotional burdens they carry from the experiences within the pipeline may be profound and lasting. The emotional burden is not confined to the moments of punitive action but can create a persistent sense of inferiority and a reluctance to seek help,

complicating the broader challenge of navigating an educational system that often fails to provide the necessary support and understanding. Addressing the school-to-prison pipeline requires a comprehensive approach that considers not only the immediate consequences of exclusionary disciplinary actions but also the long-term emotional and psychological effects on Black girls as they navigate their educational journeys.

In recognizing the impact of pedagogy that is dismissive, I urge educational leaders to practice culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). As explained by Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP centers three components, 1) students and their academic success, 2) development and/or maintenance of cultural competence, and 3) development of critical consciousness in a manner that challenges the social order (p. 160). The component of academic success recognizes that there are indisputable skills that students must learn to be successful and "requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs" (p. 160). The component of cultural competence links this academic success to intentionality around how teachers choose to teach course material. In this component, teachers are encouraged to "utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (p. 161). The use of music, parental involvement, and home language are examples of bridging to curriculum (p. 161). In the conceptualization of this component, ultimately, I refer back to whether a student can see their full selves reflected in the curriculum. The last component of critical consciousness highlights the need for "students to develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162). In order for students to develop this critical and analytical reflexivity, it is essential teachers practice this in the classroom.

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DEMANDING MORE
CURRERE AND DIS/ABILITY

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OUR BEGINNING

This article begins with three strangers gathering around a conference table along the northwest wall of the basement Hoelle conference room at Bergamo in 2015. Not knowing anything about one another except for names and paper titles in the program, we waited as about 20 other people gathered to hear us present individual papers about dis/Ability.[1] Thus began an almost decade-long friendship with joint scholarship and fellowship. Since that time, our personal experiences (of caring for children, of experiencing cancer treatments, of living with dis/Ability and chronic illnesses) have changed in ways we could not have anticipated. Our sharing of personal experiences and our theorizing of the systems impacting those experiences have affected each of our journeys. Sharing our experience in a place of care, love, and theory has been transformational.

After many years of engaging individually and together in *currere* as method, we turned our individual and collaborative work to specific intentionality using Pinar's (Pinar & Grumet, 2014) chapter to guide our writing for several years to engage our experiences with dis/Ability. We focused on how and whether dis/Ability justice is possible in the classroom. Our individual writing and reflection on our collective work complicate notions of justice in education. Dis/Abled people are oppressed psychologically, economically, educationally, and often placed at other social disadvantages (Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016). We assert that in considering issues of justice, there must be inclusion and acknowledgment of intersectional dis/Ability justice and that by carefully engagement in autobiographical work and our own experiences with dis/Ability, we can illuminate theoretical and practical ways to further the cause of freedom in purposefully educational spaces, the public sphere, and other social spaces.

Sandra is dis/Abled and lives with a life-threatening chronic illness that has led to the physical and social silencing of her voice in public and private places. She is also the mother of a child who is diagnosed with a developmental dis/Abilities, and her experiences of parenting have brought new insights and inspiration for a more just future. Kelly is the mother of a child with a dis/Ability who has advocated for and with her child. While she identifies as non-disabled, she lives with chronic illnesses caused by cancer treatments. Finally, Jamie's experiences with her moderate, congenital hearing loss have led her to identify as dis/Abled. The nature of her dis/Ability prompts her to explore how disablement can be contextually dependent and how that should impact the ways we think about dis/Ability.

To understand and define a dis/Ability justice framework, we turn to the work of Berne (2017) and Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), noting that dis/Ability justice is intersectional, centers leaders most impacted by disableism, is anti-capitalist, values coalition building across movements, recognizes the dignity and "wholeness" of dis/Abled people, is sustainable for individuals and bodies involved, is committed to cross-movement solidarity, values interdependence, ensures collective access, and is committed to collective liberation. With this in mind, we will explore possibilities for collective futurities by drawing on frameworks of dis/Ability justice, crip theory (McRuer, 2006), DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2016), and LatDisCrit (Padilla, 2022) to further our understanding of dis/Abled epistemology. As we have written in the past (Vaughan et al., 2019), this is an effort to radically name ourselves in the world around us, dream a more just world, and demand more than inclusion (Freire, 1968/2000).

For this article, we model the relational nature of our collective work. We began this intentional work several years ago by writing through the regressive and progressive, using Pinar's (Pinar & Grumet, 2014) chapter and guiding questions to "return to the past" (p. 71) and to embrace "the future as present" (p. 75). This led us to move to the analytical, revisiting this writing again and again over many months, as suggested by Pinar, so that we could begin and continue to make sense of the future, past, and present. Here, we welcome you into our ongoing iterative work through the four movements on our own and then a coming together in community to think and learn.

As we present understandings of what we have learned over time thematically, we engage our individual *currere* work and our interconnected sustained engagement as a collective with attention to threads of: despair and hope, reimagining dis/Ability, and theory and praxis. Our ongoing conversations within these themes come from this sustained fluidity from our individual contexts in three different geographies at different schools of education, our personal histories and experiences, *and* how we come back together regularly from our unique perspectives and thinking about our lived experiences, dis/Ability, care, curriculum, and praxis.

For me, Sandra, this began with initial writing through the *regressive*. I traced my life as an educator and activist from my experiences as a high school student all the way to my experiences today. With this writing, I moved into the *progressive* to dream of a world where children are able to develop into who they are with loving, supportive adults and ecologies that value difference. I dream of a world where schools would be spaces where a child like my son would be able to thrive and where there wouldn't be a need for interventions to help him fit into the ableist box required to be in the public school space.

This transitions me to the continued work of this back-and-forth movement in analyzing how I am making sense of my autobiographical material through writing, thinking, and being. For the past couple of years, I dove deeply into work on justice and ethics of care from a dis/Ability perspective, both critiquing and extending how scholars like Tronto (1994), Kittay (2001, 2011), and Engster (2007) bring care and justice together and critiquing feminist notions of ethics of care and reciprocity. I cannot separate this studying, writing, presenting, and the personal and intellectual work from what I am learning here as I work toward the bringing things together with greater awareness both in my careful individual tracing and my ongoing engagement with Kelly and Jamie.

It is important to note that this writing is not a linear process, and through years of preparing for collaborating with my coauthors and for conference presentations, I have moved fluidly between the movements and traced the ways I am writing at different times through different aspects of my autobiography focusing the *regressive*, on my personal and schooling experiences

with dis/Ability, and my experiences as a teacher, professor, and mother. I found this practiced return to the *progressive* and back-and-forth quite difficult as I moved through and within the four movements to the *synthetical*. It is through this collective work, as you will see in the following sections, that we have nurtured individual and collective capacity for observing, analyzing, and moving to greater awareness of how our experiences, scholarship, and collective engagement teach us about the world in which we find ourselves.

I, Kelly, through my recent writing and thinking with my friends here, have utilized the *currere* method to reflect upon moments of disorientation to envision more just futures for myself, my children, my students, and our larger community. My work included a reflection published in 2023 in *the Currere Exchange Journal* in which I shared how theorizing with disability studies (Kafer, 2013; Parrey, 2016) and parenting a child with a dis/Ability provided me alternative narratives while I was healing from cancer. In my 2023 reflection, I shared how I reimagined systems where services were not linked to labels and dis/Ability justice had a place in every classroom. In the analysis phase, I attempted to re-orient myself by examining how theory can help us move from the past to the imagined future through concrete actions and the will to create more inclusive spaces. Finally, I reacted to my learning in the *synthetic* phase and committed to "question previous unexamined assumptions and dream differently" (Vaughan, 2023, p. 4). Within this framing, I sought to move from recounting past experiences to imagining a future created in a spirit of dis/Ability justice. Moving from analysis to synthesis, I recognized that disorientation could provide opportunities to learn from individual and collective *currere* processes to a focus on praxis.

Within this synthetical phase, I have been more focused lately on the concept of praxis—concrete ways theory impacts practices to create more just systems (Vaughan & Nunez, 2023). Praxis can help us move beyond critique and toward building practices (and *hopefully*, someday, institutions) that center on care, belonging, and justice. I recognize that small actions inside our classrooms and communities often feel too small to mention when discussing intersecting systems of ableism, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Yet, when I see how Jamie impacts her students as an educational leader and Sandra builds community with young people, I find hope in acting (even on a limited scale) to move closer to those spaces we imagine.

I, Jamie, have often reflected that, on the way to death, most of us are likely to experience diminished capacities, or dis/Abilities, if you will. And so, in that sense, ableism is one manifestation of hegemony we all are likely to encounter, and dis/Ability is, in some ways, an easily misappropriated marker of identity. I also wonder to what extent ableism is actually our struggle with our own mortality warped into a twisted self-hatred. That our refusal to make space for different bodies and abilities is really an inability to accept with grace that we were always designed to falter, that normal is make-believe.

So, how do we reclaim the joy? Where do we locate hope? As I've written over these years and reflected on my own, with my friends here and in other academic spaces, I find a return to *love*. However, love is far from simple, and dis/Ability theorizing guides my developing understandings of this complex and hopeful part of who we are.

As each of us moves in and between the four movements of *currere*, we have collectively nurtured the *synthetical* moment as we gather our thoughts and look at who we are, what we have experienced, and how that teaches us in preparation for collaborative writing and conference activities. The following sections are a peek into our *synthetical* moments in this collective *currere*.

Despair and Hope

In our coming together, whether as a check-in or to collaborate on a scholarly project, we always discuss the most pressing matters of our hearts. We are quick to text updates of joy and celebration, and we support one another through life's sorrows. With our experiences of dis/Ability as women and mothers, it is often out of these conversations of despair that our collective sense-making about our experiences turns to hope.

I, Sandra, have often written about and shared with my friends, both formally for our projects and informally in the in-between moments that lead us to our collective work, feelings of anxiety about the ableist systems in schools and related fields with which my son interacts. My friends support me, as a mother, in advocating for something different despite the demands of the systems. As I move to the *progressive* movement in my own work, I hope for a future of creativity and freedom for teachers, students, and communities where schools and the people in them are not constrained by structures and systems that discriminate. Where children can be— develop, be loved, learn, and grow. This will take a dreamed society that values people for their inherent worth and not their economic productivity. Moving to the *analytical*, there is a lot of despair in my writing as I see my hopes for the future in context of what I've experienced as a dis/Abled person who has been silenced in intergenerational decision-making in my family and through my experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. There's a deep sorrow and hopelessness in a very dark present.

Hope comes in during the *synthetical* as theory and action open up space for me to breathe as I think about engagement in schools and communities, collaborating with people who will challenge and offer ways for me to think further "outside of the box," engagement with theory as a place of healing for myself and my family and hopefully healing beyond that. It is through friendship and support, conversations, recommendations, and collective work that I am able to come to the *synthetical*. As I collaborate with Kelly and Jamie, I am able to observe my experiences, consider what I believe can be possible, and reshape my consciousness, reentering the spaces I move in with a new, hopeful perspective.

I, Kelly, feel that, as a teacher educator, one of the ways I can help influence networks of care and inclusive practices in K12 spaces is to model care in my classroom community. I do this informally—by checking in with students, celebrating individual and collective successes, hosting poetry workshops and game nights during stressful weeks, intentionally building a sense of community and encouraging collaboration, meeting with students when they are free often on Zoom late in the evening or on weekend mornings—but also in more organized ways. I organize my classes to move beyond "special" pedagogical techniques and towards political, pedagogical, and curricular commitments to inclusive communities.

By changing what we read (and reading the work of dis/Abled scholars and teachers as opposed to only reading about dis/Ability within the context of services provided to students with dis/Ability), we can have different conversations about dis/Ability in schools. I also explicitly introduce words such as disableism, which includes "oppressive practices of contemporary society" that oppress those with disabilities (Goodley, 2014, p. xi), and ableism, similar in structure to heteronormativity or white supremacy, which positions non-disabled people as "normal" and disabled individuals as abnormal (Goodley, 2014, p. xii). And I can say that this is the best of days, co-creating spaces with students who are hopeful and committed to creating places of belonging. As I navigate other tensions in my professional life as a teacher-educator, my friends can attest that I often share feelings of sadness and anger, but not without hope. As I work with Sandra and

Jamie, we listen to each other with sympathy and empathy and the power of hope in our observations of one another's experiences. This allows me to reenter my classroom with an awareness of how we can bring the pain and joy of the past and new visions for the future as we think with dis/Ability frameworks and act in the present. They empower me to act with urgency in big and small ways.

I, Jamie, have experienced and witnessed ways people do not always love us in the ways we want them to. But sometimes, misdirected or misapplied love carries greater consequences. As women who have experienced dis/Ability across different professional and personal facets of our lives, we have witnessed love that limits, love that hinders, and love that underestimates potential. Love that maybe isn't received as love at all.

The trouble with these utterances, acts, or moments is the other messages they send or the underlying assumptions they reveal—assumptions about longevity, about dependence, about capacity; assumptions that underestimate us because of the perception that dis/Abilities must limit us; assumptions that, if met with action, have the potential to limit our agency; assumptions that can strip both parties of our humanity.

If people do not love us as we wish they would, the crux of dis/Ability justice (and perhaps many kinds of justice) (hooks, 2001) might reside in our answers to the question, "How would you like to be loved?" This is a sticky question. It resists essentialism. It defies a singular response. It takes Charlton's (1998), "*Nothing about us without us*," and insists instead, "Nothing about me without me," centering the voices and agency of those who experience dis/Ability in considering what justice looks like.

I am reminded that "love is in the details." As I engage with my friends, I am able to bring things together in a *synthetical* moment. And, while I am still struggling to see clearly how and where hope and joy will be reclaimed in the distant future, I know, in this moment, they are there in even the smallest acts of love and care we give each other. They are there when questions of "who is expendable and who is esteemed" are no longer entertained (Linton, 1998, p. 118). They are there as we find, claim, and create spaces where we are no longer inconveniences.

As we gather and often share our writing and daily experiences of despair, we are able to collectively move to the *synthetical* and point one another to hope. We intentionally engage relationally to allow space to express frustration and sorrow over ongoing injustices. And we think together with dis/Ability frameworks and what we learn from each other's experiences in the past and present and dreams for the future to continue to hold hope for a better future through radical imagination, our care community, and sustained action.

REIMAGINING DIS/ABILITY

In our work together, we turn to imagination and dreaming, often including joyful considerations of what it means to be dis/Abled, challenges to the normative, and gratitude for the ways thinking with dis/Ability opens up new possibilities.

I, Sandra, am learning, through these years of meandering yet purposeful writing, that the non-normative has to have the space to be—to develop, even if that's undesirable to some. With this, I have learned so much from Robert McRuer's (2006) *Crip Theory* in being able to write about what it means to not desire the normative and more fully embrace the value of the nonnormative. This collective *currere* cracks open the pain I see in the *analytical* movement, which can be quite dark. My work with Kelly and Jamie also leads me to think about the radical

action it will take to dismantle ableism and how despair over our collective future and the planetary future takes radical thinking. To remake/redream school, to remake/redream our conceptions of connectedness to other living and nonliving beings, will require a radical shift and a digging into and embracing the difficult work/action.

I, Kelly, in continuing to think about my actions in the classroom, carefully think with my students to expand what they read as college students and what texts they will bring to their future classrooms. In a project with preservice teachers preparing to be both general and special education teachers, we analyze children's literature and begin to find examples of dis/Abled protagonists from a variety of identities and experiences that are humanizing and just (see Vaughan, 2024). In this way, we not only discuss ways ableism, sexism, and racism intersect to impact the lived experiences of my students and their (future) students but also begin to think about curriculum in ways that can disrupt those systems. These actions in my classroom are enabled because of collective thinking with dis/Ability frameworks.

I, Jamie, see that, by causing us to be worried about what is or isn't "right" or what is or isn't "normal," ableism steals our capacity for finding joy in what simply is. In asserting this, I do not mean to make light of the real pain that often accompanies living with dis/Ability, but rather to highlight how ableism's ideals distract us from enjoying the moment that is ours, either through cycles of comparison, worries for the future, and/or grief.

What are the possibilities and potentials of dis/Ability? In my experience, they are many of the things encapsulated in the principles of dis/Ability justice laid out by members of Sins Invalid (2019), namely in my experience, however, manifested through interdependence. The power to accept the full humanity of each individual exactly as they are and to see in that not a list of ableist or capitalist-driven shortcomings but to center how their presence influences and illuminates the current moment.

Bringing our insights to one another allows us to rethink and enter the spaces we occupy as we leave our collective work with ways to live our shared commitment to examining disablement. Our stories, how we are learning through viewing our past experiences, and our visions for radically new futures allow us to make sense of what we are learning together and go back to our everyday lives and teaching with a new sense of ourselves, our classrooms, and the world around us.

THEORY AND PRAXIS

It is in the bringing together of theoretical frameworks, specifically dis/Ability justice and *currere* as curriculum scholars, that we are able to move to praxis. We take up hooks' (1994) definition of praxis as "action and reflection upon the world in order to change it" (p. 14). Through our sustained reflections together, we can move to action as a group and in our individual lives.

I, Sandra, write about how dis/Abled people know the world through their bodies that may be viewed as broken and devalued, with minds that are invaluable. For me, that has always been something I understand both materially and that has pointed me to something mystical. I have come to a *synthetical* moment, with Kelly and Jamie's insights and encouragements, in my journey thinking about *wonder.* Garland-Thomson (2019) writes about colonial pre-contact communities, stating that we see examples of "understandings of human variations to historicize current concepts and reach for alternative versions of disability as a mark of distinction in the tradition of the marvelous, prodigious, or supernatural" (p. 16).

I think this notion of wonder, of the supernatural, connects to what I have been writing and saying for a long time about how we need to listen and turn to dis/Abled people and the dis/Abled community as we consider material conditions of suffering, large-scale problems we face societally and globally, and in how we can manage to be in a world where we see and face suffering. There cannot be justice without care, and we learn about caring justice from dis/Abled communities. We learn about the coalition building needed to dismantle oppressive systems and how to return home and rest. We will learn to slow down, to appreciate beauty and the not-so-beautiful in our experiences. We will learn to listen and share in ways that embrace our interconnectedness with each other and our planet.

I, Kelly, in my work as a scholar and a teacher, recognize that disability studies give us theoretical tools to imagine new ways of conceptualizing schooling. This is the work of curriculum studies scholars, and we hope that our community will take the value of disability studies seriously in the struggle to challenge systems of intersecting ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression. In my teacher preparation courses, my students and I read theory and apply it to practical situations. Drawing from the work of scholars like Federico Waitoller, Nirmala Erevelles, and Subini Annamma, I seek to empower preservice teachers to understand and oppose ableism (as it intersects with racism and other oppressive forces) and embrace notions of inclusive education. My ongoing engagement with care communities and dis/Ability frameworks inform how I reenter my classroom, pushing my students and myself to new ways of seeking justice.

I, Jamie, as I continue my work with Sandra and Kelly, find I am also struck by queries surrounding hierarchies. The ways in which our education system works to marginalize multiple populations are well-documented, and individuals with dis/Abilities are no exception, as Charlton (1998) deftly illustrates. As a teacher educator, I've come to question how barring those with disabilities from entering the classroom to teach layers these specific hierarchies such that representations of disability on the other side of the desk are silenced or rare. What results is a system that erases dis/Ability in its adults while highlighting it in its children, a system that practices a sort of figurative eugenics? One of many things we have learned from K12 classroom studies framed by critical race theory, queer theory, and feminism, among others, is that representation matters. Students benefit from seeing themselves in the adults who serve as their teachers as well as through the curriculum they experience. Thus, through the erasure of dis/Abled adults in schools, we face a new kind of disablement—one that creates specific barriers to illuminating the scope of what it means to live with dis/Ability and the possibilities and potential of dis/Ability. Thus, in my own practice, I seek ways to open opportunities for teacher candidates deemed dis/Abled or inadequate and work diligently to create course activities and policies that honor multiple ways of knowing and being.

This brings me back to thinking about the ways people attempt to show love and our desires for being loved. I think, "but this is what it means to love people as they are and as they want to be loved." And so, I come to some degree full circle—to reject disablement on both sides of the desk—teacher to student—we must learn to love people in the ways they seek to be loved and provide space where their genius is not only discovered or acknowledged but illuminated.

We see our ongoing, relational, collective *currere* as both enabled and informed by dis/Ability thinking. It is through our work together that we are able to understand our autobiographies in new ways as we nurture collective moves to the *synthetical*. We assert that this is one reason curriculum studies students and scholars should learn and think with dis/Ability frameworks. Thinking with dis/Ability enables our sustained relational work and the ways we are able to arrive at the *synthetical* movement.

As we continue to work together in writing, we ourselves come to and are continually energized to understand dis/Ability in new ways and to confront unjust systems that oppress nonnormative bodies and minds. As we care for one another through embracing one another's beautiful, complex, intersectional identities, we foster spaces of justice-seeking care and move our reflections and provocations to praxis—we demand more for dis/Abled people and communities in our work within and outside of the academy, and we know this form of caring justice because of the continuity of our relationships and work together and our collective commitments.

CONCLUSION

As we have purposefully allowed ourselves enough distance to observe our experiences through writing and reflection, through *currere,* we have been able to return to our ongoing conversation to learn together and to encourage each other's development as interconnected beings. We have learned together and taught each other how understanding dis/Abled ways of knowing through our bodies and lives can shape the way we interact as three dear friends, as educators, and community members who hold a concern for people and our planet.

In continuing to model our scholarly practice from the past many years, this concluding section comes from a process of relationship and conversation. We recognize *collective currere* as transformative praxis. The *currere* process invites scholars to "bracket the educational aspects of our taken-for-granted worlds" (Pinar, 1975, p. 406). The process has been transformative individually in that we have been able to examine our past experiences with dis/Ability while also envisioning a different, more just future. The spaces in between those past memories and future imaginings can help provide the impetus for action. Yet, we also recognize that our collective work of sharing our memories, helping to solve current challenges, celebrating successes, and dreaming collectively has resulted in generative, empowering, affirming work. We have struggled with what to call our relationship—maybe a professional affinity group (Adams & Peterson-Veatch, 2012) or a care community (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018)—but we want to acknowledge that this relationship has strengthened our individual work. While academic scholarship is often presented as individualistic, our work together has opened new possibilities.

In 2019, Erevelles et al. argued that "disability studies scholarship embodies an epistemic space that not only demonstrates its difference from the normative curriculum, it also exceeds its confining boundaries" (p. 357). In our conversations about the value that disability studies brings to curriculum studies, we focused on the iterative, generative nature of dis/Ability epistemology. Dis/Ability must be included in curriculum studies not just because the erasure causes harm but because dis/Ability theorizing, especially at intersections of race, class, and gender, adds to how we conceptualize ways of knowing and being in academic and classroom spaces. As many disability studies scholars have described, dis/Abled epistemology can inform other modes of thinking and ways we consider knowledge, which is valuable. Dis/Abled epistemology allows us to experience the world differently, and such experience is needed.

When we entered that session at Bergamo in 2015, we were strangers. Each of us presented our grappling with our experiences with dis/Ability, our theorizing with disability studies, our questions, and our anger about the silences within our beloved curriculum studies community. As we reflected upon that session, we noted that we were surprised by the synergy of our individual scholarship and energized by the presenters and the audience in that space– there was a possibility and a necessity to continue this work. There was something revelatory about that session, and we

have viewed our work over the last decade as both provocation and invitation: a provocation to members of our field to re/consider understandings of dis/Ability and an invitation to engage with dis/Ability studies as a way to expand notions of education and justice (see appendix). Through our support of one another and relational engagement as we bring our individual observations of our pasts to conversation about our experiences, dream new futures together, and analyze how we might return to the world, we experience a lived synthetical movement, together.

Notes

1. A note on punctuation throughout this article: Following in traditions that "resist deficit thinking and language" as written about by Gallagher et al. (2023) you will see that when referring to dis/Ability we punctuate with a slash and capital A. This calls attention to the socially constructed nature of dis/Ability and is a way to resist socio, political, historical disabling oppressions and to emphasize an embracing of dis/Ability as identity. We also do note punctuate words like disabling or disablement. Like Sami Schalk (2018), we use this (lack of) punctuation to refer to what Goodley (2014) describes as oppressing those with impairments (p. 9). Schalk reminds us that "it's important to linguistically differentiate" (p. 6) as we consider disablism as constituted within systems of power and oppression as apart from dis/Ability, which here is used as identity, construct, analytic, and a way of being and knowing. We also chose not to punctuate the term used for the field "disability studies," since it is often not punctuated in common literature. Changing the punctuation throughout a piece, as we do here, is well established in critical dis/Ability work, as in the seminal edited volume by Connor et al. (2016, p. 7).

Appendix

In the spirit of provocation and invitation, we end with a poem and a list of texts that invite you, the reader, to learn more about dis/Ability theorizing. This poem is from Ursula K. Le Guin's (2023) *Collected Poems*. Her verse "Votum" speaks to our feelings of interconnectedness:

Let it be clear, a clear day
from the eastern ridge to the sea.
Let the oak be dropping
its long fragile flowers
onto the ground under the branches.
Let no cloud gather in the sky,
no wind disturb the fall of the flowers.
Let the shadow lie under the branches
silent on the ground.
Let the oak outlive me
by a hundred flowerings.

We also encourage curriculum studies scholars and students to consider the ways that dis/Ability theorizing has the potential to further curriculum theorizing.

Book List for Curriculum Studies Scholars Interested in Engaging with Disability Studies:

- Connor, D. J., Ferri, B .A., & Annamma, S. A. (2016). *DisCrit: Disability studies and critical race theory in education.* Teachers College Press.
- Erevelles, N. (2011). *Disability and difference in global contexts: Enabling a transformative body politic.* Palgrave Press.
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Remember Students

By Nicholas Hayes
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Remember Students

They tell me how they crashed their car on purpose because they were feeling overwhelmed.

They tell me they are dropping out of college to work with their mom's cleaning service because they don't have papers (even though their siblings do).

They are incensed that I, a Queer white man, was allowed to select the texts for the Queer Literature class I am teaching.

They tell me their husband hurts them if they talk about school at home because he thinks they are selfish.

They tell me their husband has said they have to choose between him and their elderly father with dementia.

They invite me to lunch at their corporate cafeteria to discuss the capstone project for their degree.

They are incredulous when I mention stories older than the bible.

They tell me they hope school works out because it's either this or going back to the streets.

They tell me they feel uncomfortable that other students talk about how straight, white men have oppressed BIPOC communities.

They tell me they feel uncomfortable that other students talk about how straight, white men have oppressed Queer, Trans, and Non-binary people.

They tell me they feel uncomfortable that other students talk about how straight, white men have oppressed Women.

They ask me to talk to Black, Latinx, Asian academics about diversifying my reading list.

They tell me they don't feel represented by the characters we are reading.

They tell me they feel this is the first time they feel represented by a character.

They insist on talking over me even when I ask them to be quiet. In week five of the term, I slam my travel mug down on my desk to get their attention. I dent my mug.

They can't wait to talk about the readings. Their conversation before class has so much depth I let it continue, abandoning my lesson plan.

They are tired and don't want to talk because it is a morning class.

They are tired and don't want to talk because it is an evening class.

They are tired and don't want to talk because it is an afternoon class.

They ask me if I can teach a class on Queer New Wave Cinema.

They thank me for working with them even though they were angry they had to take the class.

They thank me for helping them see their experiences in a more complicated way.

They complain because I didn't edit their work for them.

They complain because English 101 is a degree requirement.

They don't understand how they could have been in AP English in high school and placed Remedial English in junior college.

They are gone for two-thirds of the class and ask for an incomplete the day final grades are due.

They are lined up before class waiting for me to unlock the door.

They say there aren't enough white people in the reading list.

They are lethargic until the department chair comes to observe me; then, they shine.

They walk out of my lecture while the program director is observing me.

They want to know if they can bring their kids to class.

They don't feel comfortable since someone has brought their kids to class.

They are confused why I don't want them to bring their kids to class even though the reading we are discussing depicts sex and violence.

They are upset they have to complete a diversity requirement.

They are happy Queer Literature fulfills the diversity requirement.

They take a class project and turn it into a self-sustaining nonprofit.

They tell me they have never read an entire book. I have assigned multiple.

They call me after midnight to tell me they think I am "cool." I can smell the alcohol through the receiver.

They call me five times while I am in the shower demanding I answer the phone. I stop giving out my home phone number.

They thank me for being available to them, even during the pandemic when I have Zoom meetings.

They say they could never get ahold of me.

They give me low scores on my Online Teaching Evaluation and leave a comment that they just don't like the sound of my voice.

They pull out their phones to look up an obscure reference I make. I love that they do.

They invite me for end-of-term beers.

They tell me they have come out to their parents and friends because they were inspired by the class.

They thank me for teaching even though they hated being in my class.

They walk out of the classroom, and I never see them again.

They email me to tell me they are going back to school.

They ask me to write a letter of recommendation even though I haven't heard from them in six years.

They tell me they are looking at doctoral programs. They want to pay me to edit their application.

They tell me they are fine and don't want to talk about their job.

They murder several people before committing suicide years after they were in my class.

They complete their degree online and travel half way across the country to walk across the graduation stage.

They ask me to write them a letter of recommendation for a school that discriminates against Queer people.

They tell me they are hungry.

They won't eat the Dunkin Donuts Munchkins I bring.

They write final papers that make me ecstatic.

They won't respond to me when I send them emails begging them to submit anything so I can justify passing them.

They don't know why I have to take attendance.

They don't know why I have to keep the class going the entire session.

They call me professor even though I am contingent faculty.

They complain to me about tuition not realizing that one student's tuition more than covers my fee for teaching a 16-week class.

Commentary

Between 2005 and 2016, my primary employment was part-time contingent faculty at various two- and four-year institutions of higher education around Chicago. As someone who was hired by the term, I had tenuous relationships to the institutions that employed me. Although I might be hired regularly, I was just as regularly reminded that each teaching assignment I took did not indicate a relationship to an institution that lasted longer than the assigned term. The tenuous relationships did not prevent meaningful encounters with students I worked with. However, it did underscore my ephemeral relationship with them. In one term, I might be teaching Queer Literature. In another, I might be teaching a curriculum based in U.S. civics. This experience provided the vignettes and encounters depicted in the above poem, *Remember Students*.

The structure of the poem is modeled on Shane Allison's (2020) poem, *Remember Men*. But the intellectual impetus began with a *currerean* regressive step and practices described in Diamond and Mullen's (1999), *The Postmodern Educator*, which posits, "As readers, we are more affected by the repeated images and metaphors of a poem than we are by the propositions and statements of prose" (p. 25). Artistic form can open meanings academic forms cannot. A poem can capture the messiness of vulnerability in education that prose tends to resist in favor of concise narrative or discrete argument. The messiness can be full of possibilities of meaning. These possibilities are complicated and unresolved. In this commentary on *Remember Students*, I explore the implication of the poetic structure and its resonance with the concept's ephemerality and vulnerability.

STRUCTURE

Structure and form are never neutral decisions. When shaping a text, structure and form provide as much information and meaning as what they contain. Or as Marshal McLuhan (1995) more pithily declares, “the medium is the message” (p. 151). While the litany (or repeated list) is a historic poetic technique, an impulse led me to use Allison’s work as a model. This impulse was a sense of similarity between Allison’s depictions of encounters with men and my reflections on classroom encounters with students. Vulnerability and ephemerality of relations ground the similarity.

Allison’s work is boldly and beautifully erotic. It allows the reader to share what feels like actual experience. His single line vignettes form a pattern. Each line had a similar structure with a different incident. His lines uncover complicated and temporary relationships that happened in ephemeral spaces (cars, rest rooms, etc.). His ephemeral relationships hinge on forms of intimacy that disrupt social patterns. Even instability can become balanced through repetition and pattern. Although there are many examples of this in Allison’s poem, one stands out in my mind. In this passage, the speaker is made to promise not to tell Dustin about an encounter. The reader is never told more about Dustin and is left with only an understanding of a violation of some understanding that is to be kept secret. The relationships are between the speaker, the partner, and Dustin are left unresolved. The only thing to know is that speaker and partner have a complicated and temporary relationship.

As a contingent faculty member who worked at multiple institutions, my relationships with students have been complicated and temporary in different ways. My relationships were bound by a single academic term (in rare cases two) and the ephemeral space of the classroom. For students, I represented an institution with which I was only loosely affiliated. Even sequential employment contracts came with the caveat that there was no guarantee of future employment. The tenuous ties to institutions belie the poignancy of ties between instructor and student. The content of *Remember Students* builds on various emotional encounters. In drawing on Allison’s poetic form, I hope to resist depicting resolution in relationships and encounters that were never actually resolved because of their ephemerality.

EPHEMERALITY

The ephemerality of human relationships resonates between Allison’s and my experiences. The association of the ephemeral with the human is nothing novel. The Ancient Greek term *ephemeroi* (or creature of a day), which can be translated as *men*, is offered is a close etymological cousin to the English word ephemera. Hauskeller (2019) invokes the term *ephemeroi* to highlight the inherent vulnerability of being human. Vulnerability is not potential damage but the experience of potential damage (pp. 11–12). As humans, our relationships, even the temporary, leave us vulnerable. The vulnerability within these relationships remains even in memory.

Often in my strongest relations with students, I felt like Lisa Simpson’s substitute teacher Mr. Bergstrom. The episode of *The Simpson* aired in the second season (Groening et al., 1991) but still feels relevant. This substitute teacher and student bond through learning in the classroom. Lisa feels a deep affection for him. Eventually, Mr. Bergstrom had to explain to Lisa that the nature of his employment designation (substitute teacher) requires him to move on. All

he can do to acknowledge their bond is to hand her a note that says, "You are Lisa Simpson" (n.p.). The note emphasizes that what matters is her own identity and not their relationship. Their relationship cannot overcome its essential ephemerality. While acknowledging the ephemerality of the teacher-student relationship, Mr. Bergstrom allows himself to become vulnerable. Lisa's vulnerability is revealed in her loss of a teacher who understands and can cultivate her talents. Mr. Bergstrom's vulnerability is in acknowledging that he sees himself as a fraud since he adjusts his professional identity based on his contract, sometimes a gym teacher, or a French teacher, or a shop teacher but never with a class or pupil of his own. Adjusting identity to fit a temporary contract is behavior I recognize in myself when I reflect on transitioning from teaching Queer literature to American civics to remedial writing.

Returning to *Remember Men*, Allison displays vulnerability by describing a lover who ends their relationship to be with his pregnant girlfriend. It is easy to understand the speaker's vulnerability, the wound of rejection. But the lover also reveals his vulnerability, the wound of sacrificing one love for another. In *Remember Students*, I recall many students who displayed their vulnerability to me. But I feel that they could be vulnerable with me because I was vulnerable with them.

VULNERABILITY

Many of these events and relationships in my poem happened before I was thinking about curriculum and teaching in a reflective way. Perhaps my tacit aspirations reflected the vulnerability envisioned by Brantmeier (2013) when he discussed the pedagogy of vulnerability: "Vulnerability is an act of courage. An attitude of not knowing, of discovery, and of critical self-dialogue steer a pedagogy of vulnerability" (p. 96). *Remember Students* inadvertently reflects a key process in Brantmeier's (2013) pedagogy of vulnerability: "self and mutual disclosure on the part of co-learners in the classroom" (p. 97)

My poem relies on many disclosures, including those about my identity. After a few years of teaching, I realized that, since I am a white, cis, male, many students presumed I was heterosexual. This assumption gifted me a full range of social privilege. My visible and assumed identity characteristics gave me a lot of authority in the classroom. But this assumption was alienating since I could not mention my most important relationships in class. This constellation of identity characteristics could also alienate students since it could be difficult for some to relate to someone who was reaching out from a privileged place. I felt I needed to be vulnerable to circumvent the disequilibrium. My decision to openly acknowledge my Queerness, my partner, and loved ones arose from this reflection.

Acknowledging this aspect of my identity was not a matter of announcing it. Instead, acknowledgement was a decision to no longer edit anecdotes or comments to make them neutral so that heterosexuality could be projected on me. I understood that this vulnerability was easier for me because of my other social privilege. At the same time, I was allowing myself to be vulnerable by surfacing my invisible identifications. A friend confided in me that he had decided he could not acknowledge his homosexuality to students because they already challenged him because he was Black. The different decisions my friend and I made are consistent with Brantmeier's (2013) assumptions about "privilege and power in vulnerability" and that in some contexts "the risks of vulnerability outweigh the benefits" (p. 102).

My vulnerability was not appreciated universally. Some students let me know they felt discomfort since I was the first non-heterosexual they had knowingly engaged with. Alternatively in some classes like my sections of Queer Literature, a few students questioned the legitimacy of my Queerness—whether I was queer enough. However, many of my students recognized a kinship with me even if we shared few other demographic characteristics. In allowing myself to be vulnerable, I opened up the possibility of being wounded as well as building relationships. The tensions between these positions are threaded through *Remember Students*.

Conclusion

Remember Students reminds me of the complicated and ephemeral relationships I have had with students as contingent faculty. There has been joy. There has been frustration. And there have been gradients and shades of many other emotions for both my students and myself. A willingness to be vulnerable has allowed for the complexity to be experienced in ephemeral encounters. Poetic repetition allowed me the opportunity to exhibit complexity while not trying to resolve it. As a creature of the day, I hope to remember that recognizing ephemerality and cultivating vulnerability can be poignant entry points to actual relationships.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION
EXPLORING *CURRERE* AS A CATALYST FOR CURRICULUM CHANGE IN WALES

By Thomas S. Poetter
Miami University

I have known Dr. Kevin Smith, Reader at Cardiff University, Wales, for at least 15 years. Kevin took an elective class in our doctoral program at Miami University with me in 2010 and wrote a very strong chapter about the curricula of a present-day, one-room schoolhouse that appeared in our course project, a book I entitled, *10 Great Curricula* (Poetter et al., 2011), that explored 10 manifestations of progressive, if not critical, curricula in schools and society. I had a strong feeling then that Kevin, a successful high school teacher at the time, always pushing the envelope with his students toward experiential, real-world projects and learning, would become a tremendous scholar and now a curriculum leader in Wales. And that has happened.

Possessing dual U.S. and Welsh citizenship, Kevin has experience teaching in domestic and international contexts, including Tonga, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands, and took a position in higher education at Cardiff University after a stint working as the Fellow in Curriculum at the Institute of Education with the University of the South Pacific in 'Atele, Tonga. In all of his educational experience, he had never encountered the kind of cutting-edge push toward a more student-centered, local curriculum as the one Wales had been envisioning and was attempting to implement.

Over the intervening years, we have stayed in touch, and in 2019, when I was chairing our department, I invited Kevin to give a talk for students regarding his thinking about the implications of the new national curriculum in Wales, a decentered curriculum that would give broad implementation powers over several significant focal concepts for the curricula in schools (Welsh Government, n.d.). He shared some background with us in that talk on the new curriculum in Wales while expressing concern about the degree to which school teachers and administrators were equipped to manage and lead through the significant shift of curriculum responsibility to local personnel. I thought the situation and his talk were fascinating, especially his premise that he thought *currere* could be a key aspect of curriculum leadership and scholarship to aid local teachers and administrators in exploring the possibilities for creating and delivering a new national curriculum on a local scale.

In 2023, after many conversations on email and over the phone following the 2019 event at Miami and our connection at the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*'s annual Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice in Dayton, Ohio, in 2022, Kevin invited me to give a keynote talk at the first *currere* retreat in Wales in July 2023 with teams of teachers and higher education faculty from all over the country, an event sponsored by the Curriculum and Pedagogy Collaborative Research Network, chaired by Professor Gary Beauchamp from Cardiff Metropolitan University. I really enjoyed preparing for that talk, given that I was in the middle of writing my new book, *Curriculum Fragments: A Currere Journey through Life Processes* (Poetter, 2024), and trying on new ideas and possibilities for the work myself.

I had already had some successes leading collaborative *currere* projects with doctoral students on books that emerged from course experiences centering the *currere* method on a topic

of interest primed for deep, reflective inquiry including *Was Someone Mean to You Today? The Impact of Standardization, Corporatization, and High Stakes Testing on Students, Teachers, Communities, Schools, and Democracy* (Poetter & Googins, 2015) and *Vouch for This! Defunding Private Interests, Funding Public Schools* (Poetter, 2023). So, I had some footing, and as I homed in on the potential for using and developing curriculum fragments, which I defined as stories of experience that held power and momentum for personal and broader shifts in thought and action (Poetter, 2024), I felt that the scholars on hand from Wales possessed a keen energy and commitment to taking the next steps forward. They especially seemed poised to help school personnel break the chains of doubt about their roles and actions as curriculum leaders and to deal with the workload that the new curriculum format and expectations brought to bear.

What I was especially impressed by were the reflective conversations retreat participants had following the talk and the excellent warm-up work run by Kevin and the leadership team. I listened to participants talk and share and inquire all afternoon and see threads of those conversations in the articles they produced from that work in the finished pieces included here. That continuum of inquiry—from surfacing ideas to writing them down—reveals how delving into *currere* helps educators share and reflect honestly and powerfully and allows them to take stock of the personal power of their life experiences to shape the way they think of curriculum and teaching and students on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis.

I have said out loud in my own university context that the way to get to "What's next?" is to talk, and share, and reflect, and dream together. We have the power and know-how to do that generative work within us and as a community, and our colleagues in Wales are taking steps to operationalize that personal and communal power on a broader scale. At the 2023 retreat, the participants worked in teams of 3-5 school teachers/administrators and university personnel as they learned and reflected together on the project at hand. Over the past year, Dr. Smith has been working with the *currere* retreat participants to complete their writing and to get it in shape to offer up to the world in print. Four teams participated in the retreat: the Open University Team, the Aberystwyth University Team, the Cardiff Metropolitan University Team, and the Cardiff University team. Their papers/projects/reports appear in this special section in this order.

We are pleased to publish their work and hope that, as their project grows, they and others will build on their work and consider pursuing further inquiries that center *currere* as a transformational, scholarly approach to reflect on, address, and understand the curriculum work at hand. I hope that readers will appreciate the insights and possibilities that their work reveals here and take steps in their own settings to build their own inquiries together on a scale that works for them, with the hopes of building better, stronger, more viable, humane, experiential, and learning-filled educational settings through the kind of emerging curriculum and pedagogical work embodied in the pieces of this special section.

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Curriculum Reform and Reconceptualization in Welsh Education

By Kevin Smith
Cardiff University

Over the past decade, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been supporting significant and ongoing educational reform in many countries throughout the world. These initiatives have included a focus on schools as learning organizations, enhanced and ongoing professional development for teachers, and the creation and implementation of national curricula (OECD, 2025). As one of the countries currently grappling with such reforms, Wales—which has been criticized for its tumultuous and disruptive approach to educational policymaking (Smith, 2024)—must now manage the lasting effects of policy-upheaval while also navigating a new era of comprehensive educational reform centered on the development, implementation and evaluation of a new, national curriculum framework that is a radical departure from the heavily prescribed national curriculum introduced in 1988.

The origins of this new era of Welsh education can be traced to a 20-point educational improvement plan produced by the Welsh Government to respond to substantial criticisms of its educational system and to introduce more stability and direction in educational policy (Andrews, 2011; Evans, 2022; Power et al., 2020). The most significant impetus of these reforms was the report, *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales* (Donaldson, 2015). The findings of this review were accompanied by 65 recommendations on how the Welsh Government could achieve its lofty aims for educational renewal. The Government accepted all 65 recommendations, and as a result, a new curriculum for Wales was born.

In 2018, during the *Future of Educational Research in Wales* conference, the Welsh Government introduced the National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE), which prioritized bridging the gap between research and practice as an additional avenue of support for schools as they create curricula using the new curriculum framework. A cornerstone of this strategy was the establishment of four Collaborative Research Networks (CRNs), each focused on addressing key educational themes: Equity and Inclusion, Leadership and Professional Learning, Curriculum and Pedagogy, and Bilingual Education and Welsh Language. These networks were envisioned as dynamic spaces where researchers, educators, and policymakers could engage in dialogue, share insights, and co-produce research that would directly inform educational practice and policy in Wales. The CRNs reflect a commitment to promoting collaboration and building research capacity, enabling stakeholders to navigate the complexities of educational reform while addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within the Welsh educational landscape.

The New Curriculum for Wales

In short, the Curriculum for Wales is a framework designed to provide teachers with the agency necessary to develop bespoke (i.e., school-level), purpose-driven (Priestley et al., 2021), process-model (Donaldson, 2015), place-based curricula (Welsh Government 2023). Compulsory

curriculum content is organized into six multidisciplinary faculties called Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). These include Expressive Arts, Health and Well-being, Humanities, Languages, Literacy and Communication, Mathematics and Numeracy, and Science and Technology. Additionally, each AoLE is supported by a collection of "statements of what matters" (Welsh Government, 2022, n.p.) that represent and organize the compulsory content of the curriculum.

While reading the initial guidance for the curriculum published by the Welsh Government (2020), one word stood out to me from the rest: *Experience*. The use of the term "experience" in this document is a clear indication of the shift from a strict, subject-based curriculum that explicitly told teachers what to teach, when, and how to a more progressive and multidisciplinary framework that is intended to support teachers in exercising their educational expertise and professional agency in creating and curating educational experiences for their pupils. In the new Curriculum for Wales, "experience" is used to define curriculum: the curriculum is all of the *experiences* a child goes through at school (Welsh Government, 2020, n.p.). It is also used to organize curriculum content (e.g., Areas of Learning and *Experience*) and to identify educational priorities: "Nothing is so essential as universal access to, and acquisition of, the *experiences*, knowledge and skills that our young people need for employment, lifelong learning and active citizenship" (Welsh Government, 2020, p. 5). As a result, the Welsh Government has situated *experience* as a central component to the curriculum alongside topics such as learning, knowledge, and skills. With this experiential shift, teachers and their pupils can benefit from reconceptualist approaches to curriculum due to emphases on curricular critique, critical reflection, and experience that have come to define reconceptualist perspectives. Specifically, I argue that, with this new emphasis on educational experience, teachers in Wales can particularly benefit from *currere*, an autobiographical approach to curriculum theorizing that is specifically designed for the analysis of educational experience, with the outcomes of these analyses being greater curricular understanding, higher quality educative experiences, and the "safe-return" of teachers' professional and pedagogical voice (Grumet, 2016, p. 31).

CURRERE CYMRU

The Curriculum and Pedagogy CRN, one of the four thematic networks alongside Equity and Inclusion, Leadership and Professional Learning, and Bilingual Education and Welsh Language, created the Currere Cymru (Cymru is name for Wales in the Welsh language) project with an aim to support teachers in recollecting, reclaiming, analysing, and reconstructing their educational experiences as narratives using the *currere* method.

As part of the project, educational practitioners and researchers from across Wales were organised into research teams and invited to a weekend *currere* retreat. The retreat was designed to promote a general sense of well-being, reflection, understanding, and dialogue, using strategies like guided meditation, walks in nature, preparing and eating communal meals, and circles for discussion. During the retreat, attendees engaged in the four steps of *currere*—regressive, progressive, analytic and synthetic, producing curriculum fragments that captured insightful vignettes from their educational experiences, aspirations and current practice.

In the months following the retreat, the collaboration continued as the teams continued to develop their narratives. This approach aligns with a "close-to-practice" research ethos (Wyse et al., 2021), which encourages reciprocal learning between educators and researchers while building

the research capacity of teachers. By prioritising reflection, co-creation and dialogue, the project facilitated attendees' praxis, nurtured professional and personal relationships, and as evidenced in the following articles, deepened their understanding of curriculum as a lived experience.

THE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

As an educator and researcher, I have sought to develop my understanding of experience as a vital component to my own academic praxis, and this has led me to a definition of experience grounded in Dewey's philosophy of education and complemented by critical and existentialist perspectives. For me, educative experience is the process in which human beings are enriched, through a transactional relationship with their environment and/or sociocultural *milieu*, with energy that leads to growth. This growth is the result of learning that occurs through various forms of doing and undergoing (Dewey, 1934). To be educative, these experiences are continuous, transactional, and intersected by critical reflection anchored in our subjective understanding of past and current experiences that orient us towards future aspirations.

From this perspective, while the Curriculum for Wales has taken an experiential turn, there is little explicit support for teachers to grapple with the concept of experience (Smith, 2024), let alone provide opportunities for them to understand curriculum as a *lived* experience (Marsh & Willis, 2007; Pinar, 2019). Often, experience is reduced to terms like "tacit knowledge" or is perceived as a kind of mental residue from practical undertakings. But, for me, experience is a much more encompassing concept. It is an embodied, situated, temporal, cognitive, relational, emergent, socio-cultural phenomenon, and teachers' engagement with curricula that emphasize experience would do well to engage with *currere* and reconceptualist curriculum theorizing if they are to not only consider how concepts of experience relate to teaching and learning but also how experiences of curriculum can inform their curriculum work.

CURRERE, *AMBULARE*, AND FRAGMENTS

In approaching this project, we relied heavily on writings from Grumet (2016), Pinar (2019), Schubert (2009), Schwab (1969), Smith (2022), and Poetter (2024). First, we delved into the Latin origins of curriculum as "a running, or course," which suggests that the main priority in curriculum should be the models, processes, and definitions that emphasize plans, content, objectives, outcomes, and assessment. We then discussed Schwab's (1969) provocative declaration that the field of curriculum was moribund and other criticisms suggesting the field had been infiltrated, undermined, and even colonized by various academic traditions, theoretical perspectives, industrial and managerial influences, and other perspectives that promote positivistic, scientistic, and technocratic approaches to creating, organizing, experiencing, and evaluating curriculum (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1981; Kincheloe, 2008; MacDonald, 1971). We then turned to Pinar's (2019) call for a reconceptualization of curriculum that rejects the fascination with documents, objectives, outcomes, and assessments, with an emphasis on understanding curriculum as *lived experience*. As an alternative to curriculum, or "course to be run," Pinar mobilized the term *currere*, the infinitive-verb root of curriculum that simply means "to run." In short, the emphasis shifts from the "course" to the "running," or in the context of Wales, the shift is away from the *experiences* a child goes through at school and toward the child *experiencing* school.

We then examined other reconceptualist perspectives and new insights into the *currere* method, including my own interpretation of the method that I call *Ambulare*. Although still in development, *Ambulare* signals a new-materialist and pragmatic interpretation of *currere*. Over the years, several authors have called for an embodiment of *currere* (Ohito & Nyachae, 2019; Radina et al., 2022; Snowber, 2016), which caused me to reconsider a privileging of mind over body in *currere* research. In response, I wanted to get *currere* out of the mind and into the body. To do this, I use walking in nature as a central component of my reconceptualization of *currere*, not only to better address concerns over embodiment, placement, and my general pragmatic orientation towards doing and undergoing (Dewey, 1934), but also as a means to indicate a temporal and semantic shift from the running of the course. In short, *Ambulare* seeks to offer a philosophical alternative to *currere*:

> It rejects "the race" and "running" in favor of more valuable concerns than speed, competition, and ranking. It emphasizes health and wellbeing, in both an individual and socio-cultural sense. Walking, unlike racing, is conducive to other activities that nourish us—eating, drinking, laughing, listening, and more. *Ambulare* also acknowledges alternative routes, choices, opportunities, avenues, and trajectories. There is no fixation on the course, finish line, or stopwatch. We can accelerate, decelerate, veer, turn, or simply stop—whatever is needed. Finally, *Ambulare* argues that it is better to walk than run, in most situations, and that it is better to take time when engaging in complicated conversations. (Smith, 2022, p. 112)

Finally, Poetter's (2024) concept of "curriculum fragments" was a particularly useful construct for introducing people to *currere* and curriculum theorizing. Poetter writes that fragments represent the raw and often disjointed aspects of curriculum knowledge, theory, and lived experience that educators encounter in their practice. These fragments are not deficiencies or problems; rather they are opportunities for reflection, reclamation, and meaning-making. The process of engaging with fragments involves embracing their incompleteness and leveraging them as entry points for deeper inquiry, creativity, and curricular understanding. By working with curriculum fragments, educators can resist the urge to impose artificial coherence and linearity in their understanding of self and curriculum intersected through experience and instead honor the complexity and diversity of their various socio-cultural and political contexts, theoretical understandings, philosophical orientations, and educational practice(s).

From this perspective, fragments emerge from both personal and professional spheres, bridging autobiographical experiences with theoretical constructs. Although these reflections are incomplete, they are not isolated; their meaning is developed through relational and contextual interpretation, which echoes the hermeneutic and existential dimensions of curriculum theorizing. These fragments, when critically examined, serve as catalysts for dialogue and transformation.

For me, curriculum fragments strongly resonate with Freire's culture circles and specifically his concepts of "codifications" and "generative themes." In Freire's (1968/2018) work, culture circles are pedagogical experiences focused on the critical examination of lived experience, with the intention of these analyses being the development of a more sophisticated, nuanced, and complex view of our lives, complemented by a critical understanding of the contradictions and proposed limits that obfuscate perception and narrow interpretation and, ultimately, our participation in-and-with the world.

From these discussions, codifications—or representations of these experiences—are shared and decoded through dialogue. From this deliberative analysis, generative themes central to the participants' lives and realities are then constructed and analysed. This investigation is an example of what Freire calls *praxis*, or the cyclical process of action, reflection, and theory that nurtures our critical consciousness. From this perspective, I believe fragments operate similarly to codifications, as they are representations of lived experience that are recollected, reclaimed, and restoried. As one reflects on indelible educational experiences, future aspirations, and the reality of their current educational practice, they construct generative themes that guide them through their narrative.

Conclusion

Education in Wales is undergoing a profound transformation, as researchers and practitioners navigate the shift from a prescriptive, subject-focused curriculum to one rooted in experience, agency, and co-construction. Anchored in the Curriculum for Wales framework and supported by initiatives like NSERE and the Collaborative Research Networks, these reforms represent a bold ambition to bridge the gap between theory and practice, empower professional agency, and enhance educational experiences for pupils across Wales.

However, the success of these reforms hinges on a deep engagement with the complexity and centrality of experience in curriculum work. Through critical reflection on formative educational moments, future aspirations, and present realities, the articles in the Currere Cymru section of this issue illustrate the profound potential of reconceptualist approaches—specifically *currere*—to empower educators as they navigate the intersecting challenges of professional practice, identity, and activism.

The Currere Cymru project exemplifies how *currere* can provide educators with transformative opportunities to reflect critically, share narratives of experience, and engage in meaningful dialogue with peers. This praxis nurtures renewal, affirming and invigorating educators' scholarship, teaching, and advocacy. Ultimately, the articles included here demonstrate how reconceptualist perspectives and the *currere* method can provide educators who are navigating significant curriculum change across the world with profound insights into their educational identity and practice that can further enhance, define, and amplify their professional voice.

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CONTEXT
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE OPEN UNIVERSITY SUBMISSIONS

By Rachel Wallis
Open University Team

Curriculum, as noted by the creator of *currere*, "*is a complicated conversation*" (Pinar, 2011, p.1). Indeed, Pinar (2011) notes in his introduction to *currere* that it focuses on the lived experience of curriculum, privileging individual experiences whilst also recognising the importance of action and interaction in thinking about the curriculum.

Curriculum development has been a key focus of action and interaction for educators in Wales for the last ten years, and in many ways, Welsh Government (WG) has embraced complicated conversations around curriculum development, through involving all stakeholders in discussions of the development and implementation of a national curriculum framework. The notion of subsidiarity of curriculum, proposed by Donaldson (2015), was embraced in the design of the national curriculum framework for Wales, which was developed by teachers and key stakeholders. The resulting Curriculum for Wales framework (WG, 2019), driven by four key purposes, is to act as a guide for schools to develop their own school level curricula, with pupil voice and pupil experiences key drivers for the resulting school level curriculum. Hence, teachers, and arguably to some extent pupils in Wales, have become curriculum developers. Pinar (2011) implies that lived experiences of teachers shapes their curriculum enactment, and the timely *Currere* Cymru project (e.g., Smith, 2024) focuses on exploring how *currere* might support teachers' understanding and engagement with curriculum development.

Our Open University in Wales *currere* team, as part of the *Currere* Cymru project, consists of four educators: two teacher educators on the PGCE programme at the Open University in Wales (Jonathan and Rachel W.) and two teachers, also student-teacher mentors, from Open University in Wales partner schools (Anthony and Rachel T.). Collectively, we reflected on our own lived experiences of curriculum, as pupils, as teachers, and as teacher educators. Engaging in the regressive stage of *currere* (Pinar, 1975/1994) showed us that we all had, unsurprisingly, different experiences of curriculum. Following this regressive stage, we had complicated but very enjoyable and thought-provoking conversations about what a curriculum should and could be, reflecting Pinar's (1975/1994) progressive stage of *currere*.

To provide some context to our collection of work, our lived experiences and how this has influenced our views on curriculum are briefly summarised below:

Anthony noted how he did not understand what school was for, especially when remembering experiences like being told he was no good at something he loved. Totally switched off by school, Anthony left school with one qualification yet clearly he had a curiosity for learning, and a love of images and art initiated learning about so much, developing his own curriculum through his own interests. As a teacher, he aims to inclusively inspire curiosity and self-fulfilment with learners.

Rachel T. recalled being viewed a daydreamer and developing a feeling that her passion for art and creativity were seen as "soft," less important than more "serious" subjects like language. Yet as a teacher, Rachel T. draws on creativity as a teacher and sees this a real strength in her profession, and she argues that daydreaming could be viewed as spending time deep in thought.

Rachel T. considered that her experiences of curriculum led her believe certain subjects or skills were more valuable than others and that she still sees this view now. She noted that the development of technology, and particularly artificial intelligence (AI), will affect what might be valuable skills and knowledge in the future and argued that a focus on employability in a curriculum cannot be successful when jobs are likely to change. Rachel T. sees well-being and readiness to learn as key drivers for curriculum.

Jonathan discussed his school experiences as mundane. He recalled experiences such as music lessons that involved little more than copying from an overhead projector, and only later he became aware that for others music was something to be enjoyed through active experiences such as experimenting with musical instruments. He spoke of learning in this way as a loss of cultural experience. As a scientist, he applied his study of evolution to reflect on whether education systems and their curricula should be like stable biological systems, favouring the average, or whether they should be more complex and dynamic, favouring adaptation and divergence.

I, Rachel W., noted I was a conformist who experienced what might be seen as a very traditional curriculum. I sought subjects that gave security, which were logical and structured, and this is what led me to an interest in mathematics. I could be seen as the "average" learner in Jonathan's biological analogy, experiencing a stable system and being successful in it. I also embrace complexity, not just in mathematics, but in schools and educational systems, and I envision a broad and balanced curriculum that provides accessible pathways in an inclusive way.

It is perhaps unsurprising that as a mathematician, I am drawn to seeking connections and to using mathematical terms to discuss our work. For example, what connected all of our curriculum experiences is the recognition of individual passions and strengths, which we used as lenses for our experiences. We could not determine whether these strengths are innate abilities or whether our curricular experiences have developed them, intentionally (through conforming) or unintentionally (through not wanting to conform). Trying to do so would only result in a circular argument.

Divergence and convergence were key features of our collective conversations. Our very diverse experiences and subsequent conversations in which we analysed and synthesised our experiences did allow us to converge because we all agreed that a curriculum should be inclusive and engaging and should provide experiences that inspire, challenge, and encourage active experimentation and curiosity. To apply another mathematical analogy, we wondered whether this was something that might never be truly possible, but nevertheless something that we could possibly tend, and certainly aim, towards.

Divergence and convergence also figures in the way we have presented our *currere* work. The work is collected into three pieces: the reflections from the regressive stage of *currere* allowed us to consider the progressive, and an analysis and synthesis of the divergences and convergence has been presented by Anthony Lewis in his wonderful artwork. Rachel Thomas in "Are We Ready to Build a Successful Future?" and Jonathan Giddy in "Ordinary Joe" have developed their regressive work further in their own *currere* pieces.

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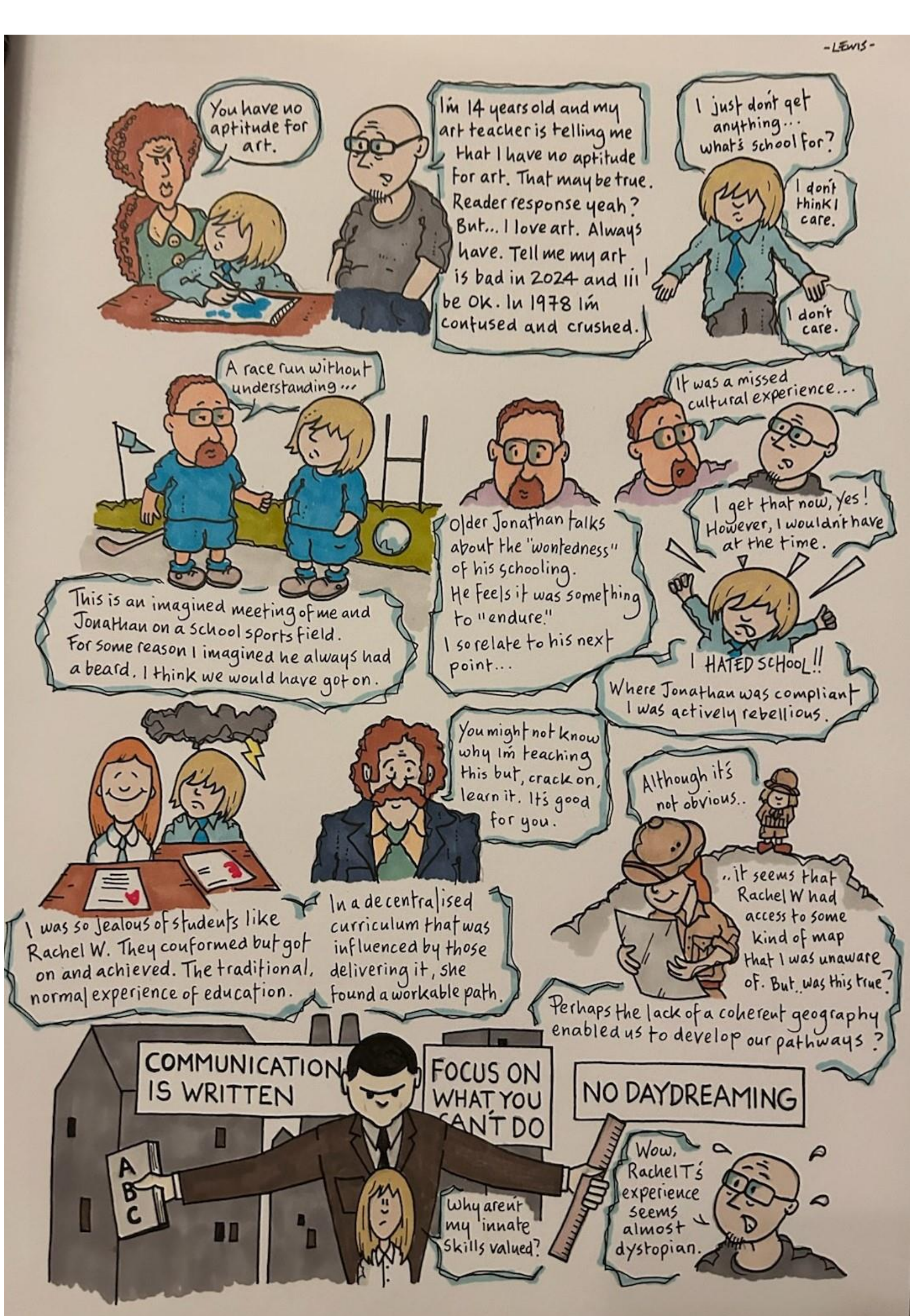
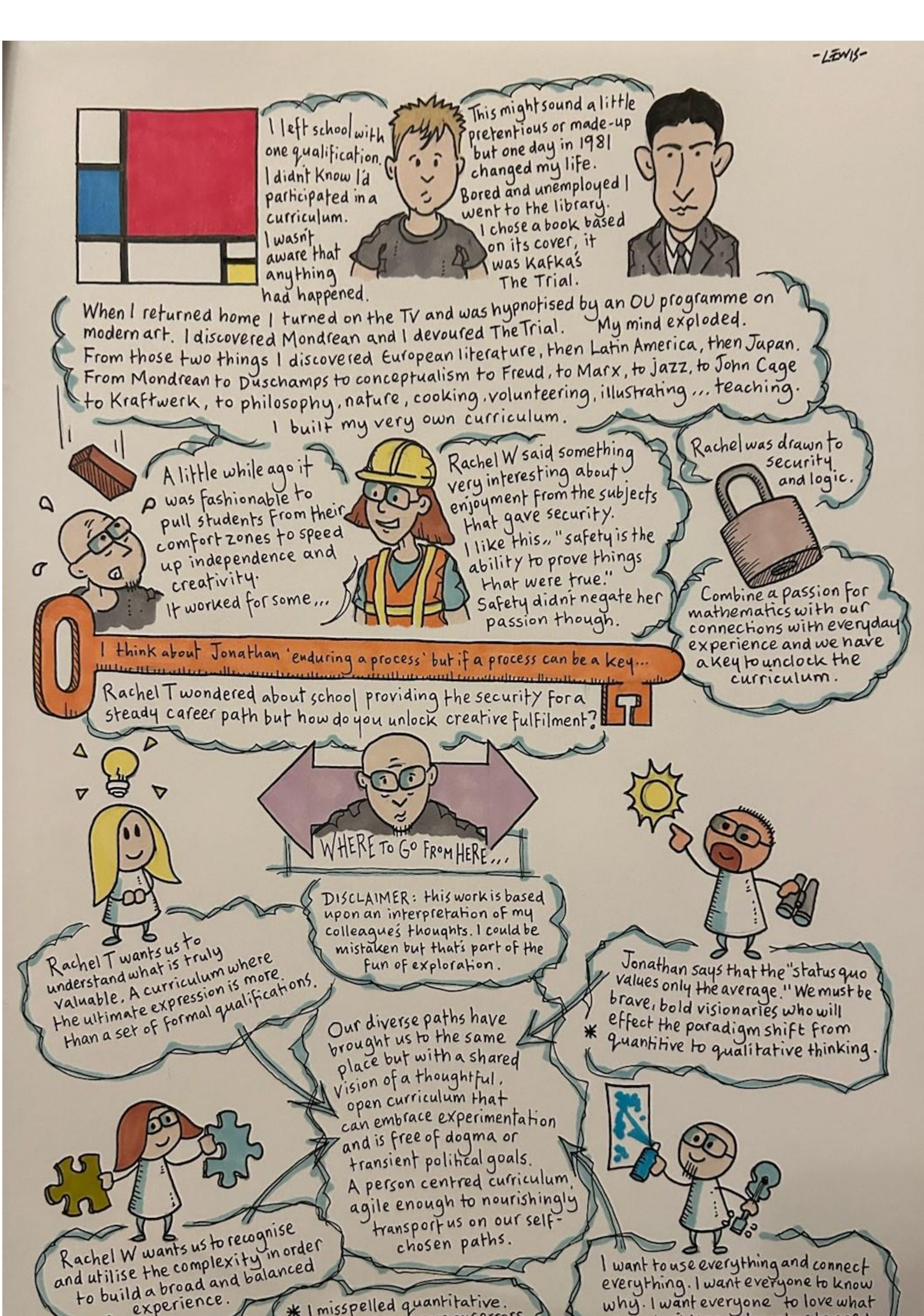

-LEWIS-
You have no aptitude for art.
I'm 14 years old and my art teacher is telling me that I have no aptitude for art. That may be true. Reader response yeah? But... I love art. Always have. Tell me my art is bad in 2024 and I'll be OK. In 1978 I'm confused and crushed.
I just don't get anything... what's school for?
I don't think I care.
I don't care.
A race run without understanding...
This is an imagined meeting of me and Jonathan on a school sports field. For some reason I imagined he always had a beard. I think we would have got on.
Older Jonathan talks about the "wontedness" of his schooling. He feels it was something to "endure." I so relate to his next point...
It was a missed cultural experience...
I get that now, yes! However, I wouldn't have at the time.
I HATED SCHOOL!!
Where Jonathan was compliant I was actively rebellious.
I was so jealous of students like Rachel W. They conformed but got on and achieved. The traditional, normal experience of education.
You might not know why I'm teaching this but, crack on, learn it. It's good for you.
In a decentralised curriculum that was influenced by those delivering it, she found a workable path.
Although it's not obvious..
..it seems that Rachel W had access to some kind of map that I was unaware of. But.. was this true?
Perhaps the lack of a coherent geography enabled us to develop our pathways?
COMMUNICATION IS WRITTEN
FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN'T DO
NO DAYDREAMING
A B C
Why aren't my innate skills valued?
Wow, Rachel T's experience seems almost dystopian.



-LEWIS-
I left school with one qualification. I didn't know I'd participated in a curriculum. I wasn't aware that anything had happened.
This might sound a little pretentious or made-up but one day in 1981 changed my life. Bored and unemployed I went to the library. I chose a book based on its cover, it was Kafka's The Trial.
When I returned home I turned on the TV and was hypnotised by an OU programme on modern art. I discovered Mondrean and I devoured The Trial. My mind exploded. From those two things I discovered European literature, then Latin America, then Japan. From Mondrean to Duschamps to conceptualism to Freud, to Marx, to Jazz, to John Cage to Kraftwerk, to philosophy, nature, cooking, volunteering, illustrating ... teaching. I built my very own curriculum.
A little while ago it was fashionable to pull students from their comfort zones to speed up independence and creativity. It worked for some...
Rachel W said something very interesting about enjoyment from the subjects that gave security. I like this, "safety is the ability to prove things that were true." Safety didn't negate her passion though.
Rachel was drawn to security and logic.
Combine a passion for mathematics with our connections with everyday experience and we have a key to unclock the curriculum.
I think about Jonathan 'enduring a process' but if a process can be a key...
Rachel T wondered about school providing the security for a steady career path but how do you unlock creative fulfilment?
WHERE TO GO FROM HERE...
DISCLAIMER: this work is based upon an interpretation of my colleague's thoughts. I could be mistaken but that's part of the fun of exploration.
Rachel T wants us to understand what is truly valuable. A curriculum where the ultimate expression is more than a set of formal qualifications.
Jonathan says that the "status quo values only the average." We must be brave, bold visionaries who will effect the paradigm shift from * quantitive to qualitative thinking.
Our diverse paths have brought us to the same place but with a shared vision of a thoughtful, open curriculum that can embrace experimentation and is free of dogma or transient political goals. A person centred curriculum agile enough to nourishingly transport us on our self-chosen paths.
Rachel W wants us to recognise and utilise the complexity in order to build a broad and balanced experience.
* I misspelled quantitative. We should embrace our errors without Tippex.
I want to use everything and connect everything. I want everyone to know why. I want everyone to love what they don't know. I want us to need to know.

ARE WE READY TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE?

By Rachel Thomas
Open University Team

Since 2015, Wales has been in the process of significant education reform aimed at raising standards and reducing inequality; this has been termed "the national mission" by the Welsh Government. The educational reforms, set out in response to the curriculum review, *Successful Futures*, completed by Graham Donaldson in 2015, include a new and ambitious, purpose-led curriculum and a commitment to greater autonomy for schools. I believe educators in Wales now have a timely opportunity to pause, reflect, and transform the education system in our country. Having recently been introduced to *currere* as a form of research, I—like many others—can see the real potential for this to help teachers to reflect on their role and their readiness to become curriculum designers. Without the proper reflection and deep conversation that processes like *currere* encourage. There is a danger that teachers like me could just adjust the way we already work, no meaningful change will occur, and the new curriculum will not lead to the successful futures we hope to build.

"History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future" (Warren, 1961). Teachers cannot be separated from the personal and collective histories that have shaped them, the present that dictates how they work, or their view of the future that drives not only their own aspirations but their hopes for learners. *Currere* provides a framework within which to deconstruct our intertwined past, present, and future and analyse how this is shaping our approach to curriculum design, for better or worse.

Donaldson noted in *Successful Futures* that, "there is a real desire among the profession for schools and teachers to have more (but not complete) autonomy to make their own decisions within a national curriculum framework" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 15). Enhanced teacher agency has been one of the main concerns for current curriculum reforms in Wales. The system of "Pioneer Schools" (schools selected to help lead the development of the new curriculum) was aimed at "encouraging appropriate ownership and decision making by those closest to the teaching and learning process" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 14). Through the "National Professional Learning Entitlement" (Welsh Government, 2019) for teachers, which focuses on professional learning as being collaborative and enquiry based, the Welsh Government is seeking to reinvigorate the professional standing of teachers and is encouraging them to engage with the wider research community. Furthermore, the *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020) and the *National Mission* (Welsh Government, 2023), clearly outline schools' and teachers' agency to develop their school level curricula to support all learners.

Priestley et al. (2015) discusses how the move to put teachers at the forefront of curriculum design in many education systems has been frequently undermined by accountability measures and a performance-driven culture that disable teachers from acting autonomously. They explain that teacher agency is only achievable within the systems and circumstances that support it.

Teacher agency is not about acting upon the priorities of others, implementing frameworks or strategies that have been handed down, or picking and choosing from different pedagogies or bodies of knowledge. The education system, as a whole, needs to move beyond the approach where

wave after wave of new initiatives are cascaded in a top-down approach, and priorities set by governments seem only to generate more and more words on paper rather than actual change on the ground. Teacher agency is about the power to question the whole system and our way of working—asking the questions that challenge pre-existing assumptions about how education should look and how it is held accountable. True teacher agency can be achieved when "teachers become more than tools of others ... they begin to understand that they have the power within the system to transform rather than simply adjusting" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 113).

Teachers are shaped by their personal experiences of and beliefs about the education system, their cumulative knowledge of educating, and their past successes and failures when working in the system. Priestly et al. (2015) observes that "the achievement of agency is always informed by past experience—and in the particular case of teacher agency this concerns both professional and personal experience" (p. 30).

If we want to achieve true teacher agency in the development of the new curriculum in Wales, teachers not only need to work in a system that allows them the freedom, power, and support to make decisions and take ownership, but they also need to be encouraged to explore their beliefs, values, and aspirations relating to education and reflect on how these have been formed.

> If the focus is to be on developing agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum, then programmes of professional development should focus on interrupting habitual and socially reinforced ways of thinking about schooling and to encourage a reflective mind set. Arguably, this should include a thorough engagement with the question of educational purpose and with the principles of curriculum development and enactment. (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 30)

"Reflective Practitioner" is a well-used term in education, but I would suggest this is widely understood to refer to a practitioner who continually reflects on their lessons and teaching sequences and uses this to improve (Avilés, 2021; Mathew & Peechattu, 2017). Reflection is a core component of teacher training programmes and often takes the form of daily lesson evaluations and weekly mentor meetings to identify what has been learnt from that week's experiences. "Reflection-on-action involves professionals reflecting on an experience, for example what happened, what they did and what they might do differently in the future. Such reflection-on-action is part of professional learning and can contribute to improving professional knowledge and practices" (Campbell & Ceau, 2023, p. 6).

Whilst these traditional forms of reflective practice are very familiar to teachers, *currere* offers new opportunities for teachers to become reflective practitioners in the widest sense; reflecting on how they have arrived at their teacher identity; how their current practice is shaped by their personal beliefs and past experiences, the impact of wider societal views, and the potential futures we need to prepare for.

"Learning by doing or even learning from doing is insufficient, a more advanced meta-cognitive process of reflecting on thoughts, feelings, assumptions, decisions, and actions is needed to inform professional learning, knowledge, and practice" (Campbell & Ceau, 2023, p. 8).

As *currere* is an autobiographical study, I will begin by exploring the educational experiences that I feel have shaped my current practice and consider how this is reflective of the wider system before considering future aspirations and possibilities. I will analyse these explorations to determine what is important within the present educational context in Wales and how *currere* could support deeper teacher reflection to inform curriculum development.

MY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

When I begin to reflect on my childhood experiences of education, the regressive phase of *currere* approach, one question sticks in my mind: Who decided that the written word was the highest form of communication? Did anyone decide this, or was this just my perception as a learner whose innate skillset did not seem to be as valued as the skills of those who could confidently and neatly express themselves through the written word?

I was never expressly told my skillset was inferior, but this was subtly and perhaps subconsciously displayed to me throughout my education and through the interactions with the adults around me. I was always encouraged to do art activities and praised for my work, but this was very much seen as a hobby, and yes, I could take Art at A level (Advanced Level qualifications - UK)—as long as I took some more serious subjects as well—to balance out the "soft stuff." I could even consider a Fine Art degree … if I didn't get the grades to do teaching.

I was told I was good at Art, but I was also told that what I really should be focusing on was my spelling, because that was poor, and my handwriting, which really wasn't neat enough; this focus on what I couldn't do only made me more anxious and eroded my enjoyment of creative writing. I don't have a spelling problem, and I enjoy writing, but I still lack confidence in these areas because I was made very aware at a young age that I wasn't where the system expected me to be.

In my childhood school reports, a common theme seems to be my propensity for "daydreaming"—this was always seen as a negative. If we rephrase this as "your child spends too much time thinking" would this be perceived the same way? There seemed to be an accepted view of how a productive learner should be spending their time—thinking their own thoughts did not seem to have been one of them! I obviously can't remember what I spent so much time thinking about, but I know that I am still a very active thinker, whose imagination often runs away, but I view this as a strength and part of my creativity rather than a waste of my time.

Questions of what is valuable, desirable, or of importance are central to questions about curriculum. Discussions of curriculum reform in the late 19th century asked, "What knowledge is of most worth?' (Butler, 1895), and in recent guidance from the Welsh Government (2020), the specific content of the curriculum is presented as "statements of what matters" (n.p.). For me, it was not just in the choices I was presented with, but in the whole way the curriculum was presented that established my understanding of what was valuable or of most worth. As my education progressed, there was more and more focus on written responses to learning and less and less time and encouragement to respond in other ways—the ultimate expression of this being taking exams for formal qualifications, where the written word was the primary tool for assessing learning in most subject areas.

I believe that the adults that surrounded me had my best interests at heart. They held the widely accepted view of what success looked like, and they wanted that for me, so they guided and supported me to achieve it.

> Assumptions and practices about what the fundamentals of good education should be can become so established over time that they form an almost unchallengeable bedrock of belief. Society—and especially parents and carers—often expects to recognise what children are doing at school in terms of their own past experiences. (Donaldson, 2015, p. 6)

At the time I was in education, the widely accepted view seemed to be that excelling in English, Maths, or the Sciences was preferred, and the main aim of education was to secure a place in a good university so you could achieve a well-paid job.

As a compliant child, I was easily moulded, and I also came to see that what mattered was a steady job and financial security—these extrinsic motivations became my primary drivers. So, I followed the path set out for me and would probably be seen as a successful product of the system: I graduated from university, something neither of my parents had achieved; I have a steady job and experience success in my career. I enjoy my job, and at times I love it, but I do often wonder where I would be if I was truly given the confidence and freedom to pursue what I loved in a system that showed me all the possibilities and was focused on me achieving personal fulfilment instead of just "getting a good job." Self-determination theory (Ryan et al., 2017) would suggest this lack of personal fulfilment was a result of simply following a path based on the expectations of others, instead of being fully autonomous and setting my own course.

As an educator I have always drawn heavily on my creative skills and I believe these are some of my key strengths—allowing me to effectively problem solve, think flexibly, and present ideas and information in an engaging way. However, I have found that my attitudes towards what really matters in education have not strayed far from those expressed to me as a child. I would say my practice is heavily focused on the development of Literacy and Numeracy, and I use the written word as the primary way for learners to respond across the curriculum. Whilst I recognise the importance of secure basic skills, I also see that the over reliance on a single way to respond does not allow all learners to fully express the depth of their understanding and in some cases actively disengages them from learning. I am creative, I value creativity, yet I have not always reflected this in my practice and have slotted into the same pattern of education through which I was taught. "Teachers' own schooling must be significant in the development of the capacity to question and innovate" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 5).

Before my children were born, I had very firm ideas about what kind of parent I would be and how I would like to educate my children. However, once they arrived my views completely changed—I, like many parents, became less concerned about their academic achievement and more focused on allowing them to develop as well-rounded individuals who have their unique talents recognised and nurtured. As a family, we spend hardly any time on homework and lots of time on sports clubs. I don't spend time fixating on my children's weaknesses, passing on insecurities, but instead I try to emphasise their strengths. I favour time outdoors, trips to museums, travel, and baking instead of extra tuition and paper-based practice. We love the library and read every night for pleasure. My children achieve well at school, but there is no doubt they could be seen as "more successful" and advance even faster if we spent time pushing the widely accepted "right skills." However, I have chosen to play the long game, hoping that providing a variety of experiences will allow them to flourish in their own time and that the confidence they are developing by doing what they love will help them address any weaker areas later. Their childhood is short—I want them to enjoy it.

As a member of society, I have met many people for whom the traditional model of education was not a good fit—people who left the system at various stages feeling undervalued or even worse, unsuited to learning. Many of these people have gone on to be successful anyway, despite their formal education, not because of it. This has led me to believe that it is not learners who are unsuited to education but methods of education that are unsuited to learners.

In *Curriculum for Wales*, the Welsh Government (2023) has stated that, "Pedagogy is at the heart of curriculum" (n.p.). Wales has introduced 12 "Pedagogical Principles," research-backed

concepts that underpin highly effective teaching and learning. The government seeks to make clear that the principles are not a tick list and that effective teachers will move between these approaches in response to learner needs. As an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Mentor, I have regularly observed student teachers, and I am often frustrated that teaching methods do not seem to have changed much despite the introduction of the *Curriculum for Wales*. When I speak to students about creative approaches, learners leading learning and real-life authentic contexts, the theoretical knowledge is there, but they often lack experience of seeing this in practice. Often students are still observing traditional, teacher-led teaching methods in schools, and they end up recreating this in their own practice. The model of teacher education seems to have always been that of an apprenticeship, where new teachers learn their craft by watching existing teachers, and their success is judged by how well they can maintain the status quo in their placement classroom.

> The problem with this has been that, when new entrants trained up in the new pedagogical approaches enter their first posts, new methods are often swamped by the more traditional approaches, entrenched attitudes or requirements for assessment that already exist in these schools. (Braund, 2010, p. 19)

I often wonder how anything new and excellent can really flourish in this way.

As I prepare for the new school year, I am struck by how education has started to feel like a conveyor belt system. At times it feels like school has become a process for children and teachers to go through rather than an experience to be enjoyed—it feels like the education system has lost its soul. So much of my time at the start of the year will be spent in meetings, going through policies and procedures to make sure that everyone does everything in exactly the same way; consistency is key. Education seems to fear the maverick instead of questioning what could be if we did things differently—we seem to stifle creativity at every turn and seek out standardisation.

Reflecting on these experiences leads me to consider how prepared teachers are to be curriculum designers. It seems to me that we are somewhat bound to recreate the systems and processes we have experienced. “Teachers granted autonomy may simply fail to achieve agency as they, for example, habitually reproduce past patterns of behaviour” (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 8).

The Future of Curriculum Design in the Age of AI

In the progressive stage of *currere* (Pinar, 1975/1994), we are encouraged to look to the future and understand how this is part of our present. In the next section I will explore how one of the most pressing developments on the horizon could impact teacher readiness to become curriculum designers.

As a society and a profession, we seem to have an accepted view of what education should look like and a vision of the most successful outcomes measured by what has been in the past. But we are now facing a radically different future. A quick flick through any news channel will make it very clear that we are about to enter a rapidly changing phase of existence where our relationship with technology and the world of work is about to change unimaginably as a result of advancements in Artificial Intelligence.

When we consider education in an AI world, naturally there will be much attention on how these new tools will shape the classroom experience, reduce workload, and provide learners more personalised education experiences. Following the move to remote learning as a result of Covid

19, we already have some evidence to suggest further automation of education requires caution—but we will quickly need to prepare learners to work effectively with and alongside AI. The impact and experience of living through a pandemic made it clear that education is essentially a social, human-rooted process. When we tried to replace this with the use of technology and independent study, the outcomes were disastrous, affecting wellbeing, mental and physical health, academic performance and social and emotional skills. "While remote education is better than nothing, it's no substitute for the classroom" (Amanda Spielman, as quoted in Ofsted, 2020, n.p.). The scale of the damage is only just becoming clear as more and more studies are released. This unintentional "experiment" with education gave time for reflection on how we learn and what matters in the development of young learners.

However, whether to use AI to support teaching and learning should not be the most significant consideration for educators; what we really need to begin to understand is how the use of Generative AI in the workplace will cause a significant shift in the skills that are seen as valuable in the future. As many of the mundane roles that humans do now become automated, human skills will need to adapt accordingly, with human cognitive abilities like decision making, critical thinking and analysis, creativity and innovation becoming highly prized. This will obviously have significant implications for what and how we teach in schools and should be one of the leading considerations when we are designing our new curriculum.

Specific human skills, such as human connectivity, emotional intelligence, and social communication, could be essential future skills. I would argue that the development of these already sits firmly at the heart of early education but would question if the development of these remains a priority as learning progresses. The ethical considerations relating to the uses of AI will become paramount for mitigating against harm, promoting the "good" and developing trust in the systems that will become increasingly integrated into our lives.

> As artificial intelligence is increasingly involved in decision-making that affects individuals and society, an AI-enabled workforce needs ethical awareness. Employees must be able to navigate ethical dilemmas and make moral judgments when working with AI—things like privacy and data protection. (Corporate English Solutions, 2023, n.p.)

The development of ethically informed citizens, one of the 4 Core Purposes that are the foundation of the *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020), will be essential so our learners can recognise and challenge bias within the systems we create and use.

The rise of AI and automation of many tasks could cause an even greater shift than many of us could begin to imagine. In an interview with Rishi Sunak, the UK Prime Minister at the time, Elon Musk (as quoted in Henshall, 2023) stated that "I think we are seeing the most disruptive force in history; we will have something that for the first time is smarter than the smartest human … . There will come a point where no job is needed" (n.p.). Whilst this is only one opinion, it does cause us to ponder what a world with reduced work might look like—one where we have more time to engage with personal passions and hobbies. How will we derive a sense of purpose and achievement when not defined by our employment ,and how will we frame our new ambitions?

In a future where there is the possibility of less work and a reliance on systems such as Universal Basic Income, we may need to consider what schools will be preparing our learners for. An education system founded on achieving employability in a traditional sense may be obsolete. In an AI world, the development of human intelligence that is broad, unique, and adaptable will become the new goal, and we will need to redefine what success looks like and consider how will

we "measure" the success of a learner in acquiring social and emotional intelligence, critical thinking, creativity, and ethical awareness. In a world where the written word is perhaps composed more efficiently by AI tools, will we still see this as the highest form of communication? Crucially, such questions call us to consider how well-prepared teachers are to create a curriculum that enables learners to flourish in this new world and if the government is doing enough to support them. Training courses around the implications of an AI future are thin on the ground. Some training around simple AI tools that may reduce workload are starting to make their way through to mainstream education platforms, but deeper theoretical discussion about the profound implications of the technology are not commonplace. Without this deeper understanding and reflection, how can teachers begin to identify what might really matter and build curricula that appropriately prepare our learners? If we want teachers to be curriculum designers of the future, they need to be given the necessary knowledge and understanding.

Ready or Not: Curriculum Development for the Present Moment

Having explored my past experiences of education and how they have shaped my present and having considered the impact of the potential future on how we act in the here and now, I will move on to exploring the present. Through the analytical phase (Pinar, 1975/1994), I try to capture where we stand in our readiness to become curriculum designers and make connections with the previous steps to see how we have arrived here.

As discussed, we are at a point of rapid change. In Wales, we are at a pivotal moment in education: we are in the early stages of the rollout of a new curriculum when teachers are being actively encouraged to focus on why we teach the way we do and consider what really matters in the lives and potential futures of our learners. At the same moment, AI is propelling us towards a new world we can't imagine, and teachers are being told to create a curriculum that will allow learners to thrive in this ever-changing environment. The timing of the implementation of the *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2020) should create ideal conditions for true curriculum reform—educators and wider society recognise the need for change, and with the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales, we have been given permission to change the system and are encouraged to have agency in building our own curriculum. So why, when faced with the right conditions for change and the opportunity to build our own curriculum, are so many teachers feeling paralysed, unsure of what is expected and seeking clarification from above about what "good" looks like.

> Put simply, policy demands that teachers exercise agency in their working practices, then simultaneously denies them the means to do so, effectively disabling them; such policy overtly focuses on the individual dimensions of what it means to be an effective teacher, while ignoring or subverting the cultural and structural conditions which play an important role in enabling this to happen. (Priestly et al., 2015, p. 2)

Evans (2023) notes that curriculum design has not historically been part of teacher education in Wales and the the use of "Pioneer Schools" to drive curriculum development may have left many teachers behind, feeling "de-skilled" (p. 5). I don't really remember ever having any real training on curriculum design in my early career; there was plenty on planning and creating schemes of work, but I don't remember being given any theoretical understanding of what

drives curriculum development or being asked to reflect on how my experiences as a learner may impact what happens in my classroom. There has been more training lately on implementing *Curriculum for Wales*, but this is still focused on coming to grips with the curriculum guidance rather than developing teachers who can transform a curriculum. “Teachers, after all, know only what they know and what their formative training and subsequent professional development have allowed” (Evans, 2023, p. 5).

The supporting guidance accompanying the curriculum is lengthy, and I would suggest poorly understood by many. Evans (2023) highlights that the guidance itself has caused confusion and anxiety by seemingly seeking standardisation in a system that is designed to allow freedom of approach.

The unfortunate timing of the introduction of *Curriculum for Wales* during the pandemic has exacerbated problems. Educators were already grappling with a move to online learning and a raft of new health and safety procedures, meaning there has been insufficient time or energy to fully engage with the theory behind its implementation and construction, and in many cases, it has become a job to get done rather than an invaluable opportunity for reform. Training to help implement the curriculum was in many cases delivered too late and has often seemed more focused on the procedural side of completing the task rather than seeking to truly develop teachers' understanding of curriculum development: “Teachers are not supported well enough to develop the skills they need to design a curriculum” (Estyn, 2022, p. 20).

It is clear that previous approaches to curricular reform have eroded teacher agency (Donaldson, 2015; Evans, 2023; Priestly et al., 2015). Previous curricula have been handed down from above as a ready-made product to be delivered to learners. Many teachers in the system, me included, have never known any other way. Never before have we been given the freedom that we have now to create and offer a bespoke curriculum that meets the needs of our individual learners and prepares them for a rapidly changing future.

> The high degree of prescription and detail in the national curriculum, allied to increasingly powerful accountability mechanisms, has tended to create a culture within which the creative role of the school has become diminished, and the professional contribution of the workforce underdeveloped. (Donaldson, 2015, p. 10)

As Donaldson alludes to, the impact of the school inspection system on the innovative potential of schools is huge and, in many cases, could be seen as having a highly restrictive effect in the past. School inspections create a high stakes situation, which is the enemy of creative experimentation. When you know a public judgement will be made about how your school is led, it is far safer to fit in with tried and tested practices than encourage staff to be experimental in their pedagogical approaches. Again, Wales has taken steps in the right direction with a move away from one-word judgements, data-driven accountability, and unnecessary comparisons of schools and towards a system based on securing improvement through the sharing of effective practice. However, it will be some time before all new inspection measures are implemented, and in the meantime, schools are still bound to err on the side of caution when it comes to curriculum development.

REFLECTING ON THE PAST TO FACILITATE TEACHER AGENCY

In the synthetical stage of my *currere* (Pinar, 1975/1994), I hope to pull together what has been learnt from reflecting on the past and from considering the future and from analysing the current position. I will draw out what I see as important when considering teacher readiness for curriculum design and try to identify possible ways forward.

What has become clear to me is that teacher agency will be key to realising the change needed and for *Curriculum for Wales* to be a success. Teacher agency cannot be achieved by just telling teachers to create a curriculum, as many lack the experience and understanding needed to do this as a result of years of working in a system that dictated every aspect of their work. Teachers will need to be supported and empowered in a system that genuinely respects their professionalism and provides a clear blueprint of what needs to be achieved. Teacher agency is reliant on a strong teacher identity formed from reflection of how your beliefs, values and aspirations have been formed: "We know that each of us has a past, a present, and a future not yet lived" (Pinar, 1975, p. 14)—teachers need opportunity and encouragement to explore these stages of their development and become aware of what is driving their practice and how they can develop their capacity to build a new curriculum.

Deep reflection will take time and will require space away from the day-to-day distractions of school life. "Current theorisations of reflective practice stress that it should be unsettling and include critical inquiry and questioning of the status quo, of established norms and routines, of power structures, and of the consequences of biases and assumptions" (Campbell & Ceau, 2023, p. 9). Teachers are successful products of the existing system, and without this reflection, we will recreate what we have experienced. Processes like *currere* offer a way to engage with the experiences that shaped us and identify what matters going forward.

If we accept that teachers are products of their previous experiences, values, and beliefs relating to education and are likely in some respects to recreate the image of the education system they have experienced, then we need to consider how we could begin to counteract this by opening the system to wider perspectives. Schools are constantly told to look outwards, but we tend to do this within our own education bubble—working as a local consortium, perhaps seeking advice from a private educational consultancy business or working with a university partner. Everyone has a vested interest in education—it impacts the whole of society, but how often do teachers really engage with the wider community to identify how we can make the system work for everyone? The education system has become so "busy" that there is little time for people on the ground to reflect. Teachers are successful products of the existing system, many have never worked outside the current system—they may not have the experiences, knowledge, and skills to build an innovative bespoke model that is not built in their own likeness and is not founded on existing presumptions of what matters. We could learn so much if we had time to engage with outside views on education—a conversation with a failed school leader or the leader of a future tech company, conversations with our community about how we would like to see our schools move forward over the next year, or sharing our memories from the best lessons at school. "As educators we need to understand that stories are the essence of what our art is about" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 109).

In addition to broadening access to perspectives from outside the system, the Welsh Government needs to recognise that previous experiences of curriculum reform have left many teachers feeling "de-skilled" (Evans, 2023, p. 5), and current professional learning opportunities

are not sufficient to give them the confidence needed to develop something radically different to that which has gone before.

> The lack of a detailed implementation plan specifically linked to professional learning, setting out roles and responsibilities, and how the different "tiers" of Wales' education system should interact to support schools, appears in hindsight to have impacted negatively on teachers' capacity to meaningfully engage with CfW. (Evans, 2023, p. 6)

Teachers need to be supported to develop a deeper theoretical understanding of curriculum design and the threats to true curriculum reform—including their own perceptions of a "good education" based on their past experiences. They need time for deep reflective thinking and discussion on what matters in education and opportunity to work with experts from different fields—particularly future technologies—to expand their thinking and foster new perspectives. Furthermore, teachers need to find their voices again, to fully recognise that we are the professionals within the system and, with the right social and political support in place, are best placed to create a transformative system from the child up. "It is widely accepted that professional learning should be about having the confidence and time to experiment, take risks, make mistakes, reflect, evaluate and modify behaviour" (Egan & Grigg, 2017, p. 8).

It will not just be experienced teachers who will need support. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) needs to foster the development of strong teacher identity by encouraging student teachers to reflect on their own experiences of education and how these have shaped their current ideas. ITE providers must ensure in-school mentors are open and supportive of new practices and guide with experience whilst being mindful about how the past has shaped the present and what is important for the future. We need to encourage school-based partners to take part in joint research projects with student teachers that allow us to explore new approaches together and learn from each other.

Today's learners need an education system that develops them holistically and prepares them for a dramatically different future. A tweaking of existing practices or surface level reform will not be sufficient. "Greater freedom will offer opportunities for creative decision making about the kind of curriculum that will best meet the needs of the children and young people in the school" (Donaldson, 2015, p. 97). In the past, employment has been the successful outcome of education and national economic and technical needs one of the main drivers for various reforms (Greene, 1995, p. 9). The future requires us to reimagine the aims and successful outcomes of education. The true success of a future curriculum should be observed in the personal fulfilment of individuals within society. Wherever the learner wants to go, whatever they envisage for their future, they should have confidence that their choice is recognised and respected and that education will support them in striving to achieve their goals.

> Our children and young people only have a relatively short time at school. We must use that time judiciously and productively to help each one of them to grow as a capable, healthy, well-rounded individual who can thrive in the face of unknown future challenges. (Donaldson, 2015, p. 5)

This redesign will require creativity and innovation from practitioners, who recognise the unique circumstances and opportunities presented by their own cohorts in their own communities. Practitioners need to be encouraged to experiment and take risks with new approaches to

curriculum design and seeking out a standard approach should be avoided. "Creativity is possible wherever human intelligence is actively engaged and is a vital part of an effective education: it includes all areas of understanding and all children, teachers and others working in primary education" (Cremin & Barnes, 2015, p. 359). The way we judge the success of any new curriculum will also need to change. If the aim is to develop lifelong learners who are confident and adaptable in the face of rapid change, we need to recognise that this is a long-term goal and cannot easily be measured. If we want to see success, we may have to have courage in our convictions and stop measuring everything on academic outcomes at set points in the short term—surely this will only lead to constant curriculum replacement and disengagement from the teaching profession.

Education affects us all—how we feel about ourselves and our achievements, how we value others, and how successful we are as a society. We all hold beliefs, values, and aspirations regarding education and what the successful outcomes should look like, but it is unlikely these are all still relevant in our ever-changing world. Education has a past, a present, and a future that continually intertwine to create the teachers and learners of today. "The future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences, in complicated ways, the present; It forms the present" (Pinar, 1975/1994, p. 9). To enact change, we need to be mindful of where we have been and where we are so we can go forward with clarity and conviction. Processes like *currere*, which support deep reflection, may hold the key to empowering teachers to achieve this kind of agency. Teachers who are empowered within a system that allows them to be creative and innovative without fear of failure will be able to deliver the transformative education system needed for the rapidly changing future.

> In moving to a higher-performing education system, the message for Wales is for the Welsh government to set the direction and place trust in the vast majority of schools and teachers to follow that lead in ways that will serve their children and young people well. (Donaldson, 2015, p. 99)

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ORDINARY JOE

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By their very nature, transformative curricula seek to challenge established paradigms, nurture critical thinking, and advocate for social justice. The long-established paradigm of Welsh education that I have witnessed largely followed a teacher-centred approach, which advocated an emphasis on the traditional subject areas, focused on examinations and assessment, placed limits on curriculum flexibility, and deemphasised skills and experiences. This characterisation of the difference between the two types of curricula is simplistic yet reflects a snapshot of the discourse around curriculum development in Wales in 2024. Nevertheless, the success of the Welsh curriculum is contingent upon navigating multifaceted challenges, including political and ideological opposition, resistance to change, the fear of freedom (Freire, 1971), institutional support deficits, resource limitations, educator readiness and resistance, and the complex landscape of assessment and accountability (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). This article intertwines my personal journey from past experiences to present reflections, contemplating my future as a teacher educator. Positioned within the educational context of Wales, my subjectivity strengthens this scholarly inquiry. As such, this autoethnographic research authentically and transparently acknowledges, explores, and contextualises the biases, perspectives, and identities shaping my professional life.

In outlining the method of *currere*, I attempt to capture the experiences that have defined my identity. This *currere* is unapologetically a self-realisation, a longing to be comfortable in my skin, an acceptance of self—the pursuit of authenticity. First, I define the concepts of *currere*, agency, and self as I understand and use them in this paper. I then outline the method using my own experience as an example of how *currere* can be applied to (re)kindle one's agency and (re)write one's self. I end by exploring some themes relevant to the method that situate, both figuratively and literally, my ongoing encounter with *currere*.

THE CONCEPTS & AN INTRODUCTION

I begin by introducing a definition that sits well with me: *currere* is "an act of self-interrogation in which one reclaims one's self from one's self as one unpacks and repacks the meanings that one holds" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). Searching between the fragments of my life, I am reluctant to ascribe meaning to subjective memories and events and the introspection that activates emotions from relationships in the past. If "time changes everything except memories," then "memories are timeless treasures of the heart." Rather than paralysis in doubt of these memories, I attempt to accept them as my biography. It feels less of an indulgence when there is, on the face of it, more meaningful work I could be doing, less of an over-imaginative and unrealistic fanciful jaunt. Why. when I spend hours every day in my own head, occupied by problems and dilemmas, do I find justifying spending time on this *currere* so hard. Maybe it is hard. Introspection requires honesty and vulnerability, which can be daunting. Introspection on an ordinary life can seem so underwhelming.

This paper reflects my ongoing *currere* as a science teacher educator, following the approach Pinar (1975) defined as one examining their educational experiences to understand what shapes their identity and professional practice as an adult. Deriving from the Latin word meaning "to run" or "the course to be run," *currere* outlines the process of educational experience as the journey I have lived, "the race I ran" and counters the notion that curriculum is a static set of content to be delivered. Rather, this *currere* presents as a corollary to this.

I composed this *currere* to free myself of the doubt of not knowing myself, what formed my views, and where they came from. What frightens me most is this introspection comes after my professional life as a teacher trainer has finished, and I sit at a time in hindsight knowing what I know now. The "tyranny of the urgent" mentality of one's professional life rarely allows or warrants someone to do *currere* work. For that reason, it is valuable to me because I have been given this time. At the heart of this are the that the values and ideas I espouse and behaviours I exhibit that are contradictory. *Currere* for me has become about understanding my emotions and the patterns in my life, both positive and negative so I can make better decisions in my job, my life, and my research. Rather than disappear or withdraw, I want to "get myself out of the way." I want to know my own mind yet wonder if everyone feels the need to do this.

Holland et al. (1998) describes how the identity of a teacher and teacher educator are formed and are enacted within the social and cultural context they have inhabited. What fascinates me most is untangling the *currere* of my own education from this figured world.

LIVING ON YOUR INSTINCTS

I often feel like I'm guided by my instincts, and I deeply value and embrace this approach to life—the adventure of setting off on a trip, walking through the woods, the joy of exploring a mase. That is how I try to live my life, and my professional identity is also framed by this. When you are relatively ordinary, lived and ordinary life in an ordinary place, these things tend to work quite well. Any risk associated generally pays off, you achieve satisfaction and strong sense of trust in yourself. At heart, I am a risk-taker, a gambler well aware of the odds.

Richard Branson was said to behave in business in this way. It is said he started Virgin Atlantic because he had a "gut feeling" the airline industry needed a more customer-friendly approach, despite having no prior experience in aviation. Virgin is now one of the world's most recognisable brands, spanning industries from music and airlines to space travel and telecommunications. Conversely, the same instinct-driven approach led him to take significant risks, such as unsuccessfully launching Virgin Cola to compete with giants like Coca-Cola.

Similarly lauded is Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple. Jobs was undeniably an innovative and ultimately successful person living on his instincts and building his company against the views of market research and focus groups. His instinct was focusing on aesthetics and user experience, rather than just functionality, something that seems pretty obvious to us today. The other side of this risk taking was his initial decision, based on his belief in alternative medicine, to unsuccessfully treat his cancer with non-traditional methods.

What strikes me is how I, like many, read the autobiographies of Branson and Jobs in awe and use them in similar ways as manuals to aspire to. They feed my inner risk-taker. A more practical book along the lines of "being more realistic and thinking a bit more about taking risks" might not make the best sellers list.

GETTING MYSELF OUT OF THE WAY

This is my problem with the regressive—that it is natural to look for causal reasons to connect the dots between now and then, almost as if what happened and what resulted were inevitable. Ignoring circumstance, serendipity, and practicality, I get the sense that I was always destined for this life. It strikes me that is how teachers think or at least are encouraged to think.

Whether believing I was destined to be a teacher makes me a good or bad teacher is intriguing to consider. I espouse the student-centred curriculum the way I do to my students, from an ethical standpoint of do no harm. I don't believe I woke up one morning with these beliefs, but *currere* carved them into my psyche through my personal experiences, values, and perspectives. Maybe it has come with age, position, or engaging in *currere* as a process of self-realisation—the desire to peel away the fabricated layers of my personality and understand what I have become. I get the sense that is what people do when they get older. Why I am not friends with this or that person anymore, what happened, to what extent were these decisions conscious? Why did these seemingly innocuous things happen? What does it say about who I am and what I do today?

FAR FROM A LIFE "LESS ORDINARY"

Reflecting on my school days of the 1980s, I remember a time marked by simplicity and a certain unspoken acceptance of life's flow. My experience, like that of many of my peers, was fairly typical. We enjoyed happy childhoods without major aspirations or fears of failure. Back then, a clear sense of direction was a concept that seemed foreign, a stark contrast to the structured goals and ambitions that shape my life today.

Football was a central part of my childhood, with memories of endless games etched warmly in my mind. I would often find myself on the substitutes' bench during weekend matches, a situation that, surprisingly, never left me feeling particularly disappointed or upset. Reflecting on it now, I find that rather strange. As an adult and a coach for my son's football team, my sense of fairness is much more heightened. I am determined never to let a child come and not get any playing time, and I doubt their parents would tolerate it either. Looking back, I realise those early experiences shaped who I am today. Perhaps that acceptance of my situation was a reflection of the societal attitudes of the time—maybe it was influenced by the values of Thatcherism (strangely to me someone my parents adored), which emphasised individualism and self-reliance, leaving little room for questioning one's circumstances. Perhaps I didn't feel frustrated simply because I held no power. We might call that lack of control "agency" now. I grew up without much agency or even an awareness of its importance. I wonder if my life is reactionary. It would make sense and help me make sense of my life.

I question to what extent my early schooling influenced my upbringing. The Alumni page for my secondary school details only one notable former pupil—a right-wing UKIP (UK Independence Party) and now REFORM UK politician from around the 1960's. The connection between the type of education and the notable success of its pupils is a foundational principle of the history of schooling around the world. Why do some schools in some places produce a wealth of innovation and others don't? Many people frequently rise up from extreme poverty with resilience, determination, with a willingness to take risks and work hard. These driven people dedicated to pursue opportunities and overcome obstacles. JK Rowling (*Harry Potter*), Chris Gardner (*The Pursuit of Happyness*), Lebron James (*ML Basketball*) and many others have

overcome challenging upbringings, often without social and governmental support programmes, to create remarkable lives for themselves. It seems remiss to discount the trauma associated with these life stories, and I am positive if given the choice anyone would want similar for themselves. What I take from these life stories is that they were far from ordinary, bland, or uninspired.

Death Valley

I often wonder why certain ideas resonate so deeply with me or others. Though I know it's a bit of a cliché, I was particularly moved by Ken Robinson's (2013) thought-provoking lecture, "How to Escape Education's Death Valley." In it, he draws a powerful analogy between the impact of rain on the flora and fauna of Death Valley and the effect of nurturing opportunities on students in our schools.

Although I have not personally visited this arid landscape, Robinson's metaphor profoundly resonates with me, symbolising the immense potential for growth in the face of adversity when the right conditions are provided. Death Valley, known for its extreme temperatures and minimal rainfall, serves as a powerful metaphor for the formidable challenges within struggling educational systems. The rare but life-giving rain in this harsh environment mirrors the infrequent yet crucial opportunities for nurturing in these educational contexts. Robinson's comparison highlights the transformative power of resilience and determination when even small amounts of support and resources are available—just as a single rain shower can bring forth vibrant blooms and sustain life in the desert.

What surprises me most isn't the initial reaction to this idea but rather the rejection of it within practitioners' own teaching practices. I understand the reasons behind this rejection all too well, as they reflect the neo-liberal nature of my own education. Through Robinson's metaphor, I perceive a powerful message about resilience and optimism in education—qualities that drive me as an educator and that I strive to instil in my teachers. The metaphor underscores the inherent potential of individuals and institutions to thrive and evolve, even in environments where educational resources and opportunities are scarce. By embracing this metaphor, I recognise my own *currere*. I can't help but feel a sense of unease when I think of words like "average," "lukewarm," and "lacklustre"—terms I now use in teaching science. Ironically, these scientific terms mirror the very lack of inspiration I felt as a student. I find myself wishing that someone or something—perhaps a more enriching curriculum—had rained on me during my adolescence.

Similar to many other average people, I go to work, try to please, ultimately fear for my job, and do my best. In a mathematical sense, the "curse of the mean" implies the limitations of relying on the mean to understand a dataset. This number summarises the data and fails to capture the variability or distribution of values around the mean. I am reminded by my comprehensive school music lessons here with a sense of revelation now rather than any sense of bitterness. These music lessons performed (not in any dramatic sense) by an uninspired teacher consisted of copying text about the great musicians of any age (Bach, Beethoven, Mozart) from acetates projected at the front of the class. If someone had asked a question about Beethoven during those school days, not a single person in that class would have been able to give an answer. To this day, I have never learnt to appreciate the genius of Beethoven, ironic given the pleasure many people get from his music.

What I find most profound is how little anyone in that class actually cared. Moments of unrest did occur when the most adept at this skill copying had finished and insisted the acetate be

"moved on." The slower copiers amongst us complained that we were not ready or let out sighs of "just one more minute" before the page was replaced and we were consigned to missing four lines that would never be captured. This was abject compliance, and it seemed to have no limits. I think it is plain for many to see how this might affect someone's later love of music, culture, even opera. Given the chance, I may have developed such a love of opera. I don't know. But an accumulation of experiences like these shape people they shaped me and continue to do so.

A second cliché that can be levelled at me is the impact Friere's (1970) work had when I read it and the reaction of others who find it irrelevant in particular contexts. Critical pedagogy (something I profess to having only a surface understanding of) speaks to the idea that, to have some agency—to make choices and act independently and have some influence and see yourself in the world—you have to know your own identity. Not having any clear sense of identity can lead to uncertainty and passivity. Mirrored here is the story of my *currere*, a nagging sense of a lack of identity crafted in the curriculum.

Maybe growing up is about finding an identity. Maybe that is naturally what everyone does—we grow into ourselves. You go looking for an identity. Maybe a symptom of the secondary schooling at least is that feeling (whether manufactured by teachers and the system) that somehow that is the end, that time and those grades represent your lot in life. My memories of that time seem to tell me so.

Cultural Identity

Many people leave their hometowns; equally many people never do. What is relevant for this *currere* it is why I left and, for the same subjective reason, why it springs to mind. Introspection leads me to believe I left Wales to find an identity, something I felt I was lacking. Maybe that is what travel does to people; it changes them. I think I like others do these things in the blind faith or hope of change. The impact on my "self" of living in different places clouds those memories and makes those memories. What I have learnt is that what the Welsh call *Cynefin*—culture, society, history, roots—does matter and matters a great deal.

I question what happened in my schooling, as a student and as a teacher, that sanitised it. How did I come to feel excluded by my own cultural identity, its language, customs, festivals, music, art, mythology, history and politics by virtue of my schooling. In the book, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, Richard Dawkins speaks of evolutionary dead ends from which species are unable to adapt when conditions change. The fossil record catalogues these species as falling victim to circumstance through no fault of their own. It is fair to say that alienation, marginalisation, and disenfranchisement is an improbable peak from which it is not possible to return. How is it that I can live at the foot of the Rhondda Valley and possess the sociocultural and political identity, history, community, and geography and feel completely untouched by it? This makes me Welsh but not a Welshman.

How I Became a Teacher

Richard Dawkins coined the term Meme in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, to describe how cultural information spreads and evolves in a manner analogous to the way genes propagate biological information. On multiple scales of success, one of the most impactful measures can be

how a message influences opinions. George Bernard Shaw (1903), in his play, "Man and Superman," coined the maxim, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches" (p. 230), as a statement to revolutionists to be provocative and challenge conventional wisdom. This phrase has "evolved" and been taken out of the original context to form a more cynical interpretation: "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." This meme is something of a taboo among the teachers and students with whom I have worked. When brought up in conversation, it is difficult to decipher whether the listener is angered, aggrieved or experiencing some other emotion. It divides and demeans. It grates with teachers and can be discomforting. It has been so successful as a meme partly because it speaks much truth and speaks to the heart of the emotions around personal *currere*. Facing such a meme requires "knowing a bit about yourself," having the authenticity to move beyond what your CV happens to say, confront your true motivations, and be happy in your skin. For me that is what *currere* has become. Can I confront uncomfortable truths, recognise biases and blind spots, and do I have the courage to do so? Two recollections that stick in my mind on the road to such self-awareness relate to my time training to become a teacher and my time after teaching.

Teachers say so much during the course of their work that there is always something that sticks with certain people. Whilst I enjoyed people reminding me of my amusing analogies and revelling in our successes, it almost inevitably is those not-so-positive recollections that students feel liberated to tell and that make a mark. I was motivated by the unintended lessons of those music classes, the passivity at the heart of my schooling, and my identity to become a teacher, and like many teachers I wear it like a badge of honour. Still I was not immune from student anecdotes about the teacher who told them they would amount to nothing and how they "*showed em*." It wasn't until a few years after graduating that one of my former students sought me out to share their success story, directly challenging my earlier assertions of their likely failure. They wanted me to understand the impact of their achievement. I am almost sure I never said they would fail, partly because I know I didn't think that, but maybe that is the signal I really was giving off.

My PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) tutor once remarked that I was "the type of guy who would write a lesson plan on the back of a cigarette packet." Aside from my frequent trips outside for a smoke, which I suspect annoyed him endlessly, I fully understood the deeper meaning behind his words. I think to his annoyance I became quite proud of that statement, not for the slapdash sort of work he meant, but because I had learnt to improvise in the classroom, whether that showed or not. Still, my recollection of that time was largely negative, sad, and full of tension. I wonder if the cigarette packet story really did hold the meaning it did for my tutor, like it did for myself. Perhaps it is just another case of needing to prove someone, anyone wrong. Nonetheless, it is serendipitous, considering my views now and my interpretation of the curriculum in Wales at this time, that I trained when lessons were so tightly controlled, lesson schema so ingrained in teachers and their pupils. Without that, would I have such an apparent objection to the imposition of prescribed content and its memory retention, the continual demonstration of progress (real or artificial) that was demanded, and an obvious sign of teacher quality as the strategy dictated?

Searching for identity, tackling the problems of the past, proving people wrong could be considered corrective measures towards a life less ordinary. When I interview prospective student teachers, in contrast to some others in education, they see the idea of correcting the education of the past as almost arrogant, immature, or naive. Not so with me. It chimes with the history that is part of me—my story and my *currere*.

Like the peaks of "mount improbable," maybe there is no going back. My schooling and subsequent experiences have shaped me. Maybe it is time to wear that badge, whether I truly

understand it or not. My university profile has remained blank through the fear of projecting bias, attracting criticism. Maybe the time to own that badge has come, warts and all. If you are reading this, you are free to visit my profile and reflect upon the extent this *currere* has impacted how I see the future of curriculum in Wales. I think it will allude to a somewhat romantic notion of the wind of change sweeping through the education system in Wales, of a progressive student-centred pedagogy contributing whole-heartedly to performance. If anything, this *currere* has given me the moral standing to push forward, the confidence to cut through much of the knowledge-rich vs. skills noise that dominates the discourse on curriculum in Wales. Moreover, it has deepened my conviction that true educational reform must embrace both knowledge and skills, not as opposing forces, but as complementary pillars that support the holistic development of students.

The glimmers of clarity that shine through are not those professed in my obsession with the manuals of Richard Branson and Steve Jobs but a pragmatic reflection of me and the evolving landscape of Welsh education. Perhaps the most important message I can leave for myself is that not every code is meant to be cracked. It's possible that no one can solve it, and maybe I'm not the right person to do so. I should stop searching for the answer and focus on side stepping the social media feeds that generate this angst. Perhaps taking risks is an antidote to taking yourself too seriously. After all you are what you are. This is what they might call "getting out of your own way."

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NOT TALKING, TALKING, AND TELLING A TALE
FOUR REFLECTIONS ON FINDING A VOICE

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The data that forms the basis of this paper was generated at a *currere* retreat where the participants explored the approach to curriculum theorising. All the participants in the group had experience of working in schools, but some worked in a university at the time of the retreat. The data generation process was simple: after some discussion about what we wanted to achieve in terms of using our own experience to explore curriculum, each person in the group wrote a short narrative about a significant incident from their own experience, either as a pupil or a practitioner. In terms of the *currere* process, we were engaged in the regressive and analytical phases (Pinar, 1975/1994). Both phases operated in tandem because, as well as reflecting on past experience, the participants were analysing the experience to share with colleagues. During the retreat, the writing was presented orally to the group; subsequently, each participant went on to develop their narrative further. Two of the participants initially wrote their narrative in Welsh, and two wrote in English with one of the latter two later choosing to share the piece in Welsh rather than English.

Although the writing was independent and not finalised during the retreat phase of the project, common themes quickly emerged about the power of talk and the power to silence talk. In developing the analytic phase of the project further, it was agreed that we would use extracts from each piece, illuminating two main themes: the silencing of talk and the power of talk. The extracts were chosen in collaboration with the fifth author who conducted the analysis as representing a common thread in the independent writing of four individuals. The translations of the extract used in this paper were provided by the authors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The narratives created by the participants are built from language, but they also concern experiences of language use. The double focus on language led us to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical tool: focusing on what the participants said about their language experience but also on how they said it. The simplest definition of discourse is that it is "language in use" (Gee, 2014, p. 8), but Gee starts from the fundamental position that language is action—that "it allows us to do things and to be things" (Gee, 2014, p. 2). The discussion draws on two main approaches to CDA: Fairclough's (2013, 2015) analysis of power and Gee's (2014) D/discourse approach. Fairclough (2015) states that the distinctive feature of CDA is that it combines both the analysis of discourse and of its contribution to social practice and social reality. The texts analysed here are all rooted in the social reality and social practice of schooling. Another aspect of Fairclough's (2015) approach is the analysis of power relations, which "define the character of an existing social order" (p. 26). The extracts demonstrate the ways in which the power to allow speech or to silence it can operate in school settings where teachers are positioned as more powerful than pupils, in addition to the power that society confers on adults over children. Gee's

(2014) approach also focuses on language in use (discourse) as active engagement with social practices (Discourse) and on the positioning of participants and recipients. It has much in common with Fairclough but also offers a variety of questions (building tasks) through which to explore what participants are doing with language. In the following analysis of extracts, aspects of both Fairclough's (CDA) and Gee's (D/discourse) are used to explore the "non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social life, including power/domination" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 418). A feature of both approaches is the focus on language at the level of word and syntax, allowing for a close analysis of linguistic choices. The detailed analysis of language in use is shaped by social and institutional factors that frame discursive formations and determine how language is used in given contexts (Fairclough, 2013). Another shared feature of the two approaches is that both emphasise the "critical'" element of the analysis as an intervention in social practice. In the project, the social practice under scrutiny is the control of language in schooling.

CDA is subject to challenge on several grounds, for example that the data are fragmentary and selective and that the approach is too qualitative in comparison with other methods of linguistic analysis (Statham, 2022). While there is validity in these critiques, they must be weighed against the insights that discourse analysis can offer into social practice and relations encoded in individual language encounters.

Outline of Method

Following the retreat, the authors revised their reflections and shared them with the whole group. There was no particular target for length, but all were between 400 and 500 words. The five authors collectively identified the themes of speech/silence, and the extracts were selected by the fifth member of the team, who conducted the analysis, in collaboration with the individual authors. This approach ensured that each author retained control over their own work while the fifth person provided the overview and analytical framework. The authors' positioning in the texts is complex. Each controls their own narrative, where sometimes they are active agents while at other times they are acted upon by others. Ultimately, each reflects on the incident(s) from the perspective of an experienced practitioner. The analyst's position is different in that they had no part in the narratives other than a role in the selection of the extract. This is not to claim, however, that the analyst is objective. Like the other participants, they are an experienced practitioner with a particular interest in language and literacy, especially the ways in which schools control or enable children's and young people's language.

The project adopts a novel approach in combining discourse analysis with *currere* in that the text producers were participants in the analysis of their language. While this feature of the project is a limitation, consistent with critiques of CDA that it is neither robust nor objective (Statham, 2022), it draws on the practice of *currere* through systematic reflection on and analysis of experience. In the following sections, each extract is discussed separately using tools of analysis from Fairclough and Gee, together with other relevant research for context. The themes are then brought together to create a synthesis (Pinar, 1975/1994) showing how discourse analysis can be integrated with *currere*.

The project overall received ethical approval from Cardiff University. The data for the project were generated by participants; nevertheless, our ethical responsibility towards those who played a part in our reflections was a focus of our discussion. The final versions of the reflections were shaped to respect those responsibilities.

It should be noted that the analysis offered here refers to the English text for the convenience of readers but is informed by the original Welsh. When using Fairclough's analytical questions of vocabulary and syntax (Fairclough, 2015) both languages inform the analysis.

ANALYSIS OF EXTRACTS

NOT TALKING

One participant provided the title "Talks a Lot" for her writing.

> *Aged four and deskbound in a 1990's classroom, staring ahead at my teacher in a starched white shirt and pleated skirt, I was certainly dressed to be present, but when I showed my presence, it wasn't received with the sentiment I had hoped for… . I had so much to share about the recital we had received from our teacher, I either knew something about it, or had pressing questions; these were questions that I was urgently keen to voice. I was hushed two or more times, but I knew my words were important, and I wanted my teacher to know that I wasn't being awkward. I had something to contribute, so I remained self-assured and put my hand up. My hand was waved down. I raised my hand again; I was determined to be heard. Snappily it was waved down a second time, so I turned to my friend to deliberate instead. To my dismay, this was promptly responded to with a grimace, a huff, and a loud thud on the table in front of me. Once more, I was told off for talking … . This wasn't an isolated incident; this was a common occurrence. I learnt by asking and discussing; this was how I would consolidate my learning. However, this was not welcomed, and my end of year report always read in the same way: "Talks a lot," "******* talks too much," "Chatty!," "Always talking!".*

Conflicting discourses of learning are present in this fragment. From the child's perspective, learning is sharing and questioning: "so much to share"; "keen to voice"; "turned to my friend to deliberate." Working with Gee's (2014) tool of significance, what matters most to the child is the interaction; the urge to communicate is powerful and bursts out in unsanctioned ways. The repeated use of the infinitive suggests the purposeful nature of the communication, indeed Simpson and Mayr (2010) use the term 'purposive' to describe one function of infinitives (p. 10). The teacher's perspective is that learning must be silent and compliant: "I was hushed"; "my hand was waved down"; "snappily … waved down a second time"; "a grimace, a huff and a loud thud"; "I was told off for talking." The teacher's use of gesture and paralinguistics shows the child learning the social semiotic (Kress, 2010) of those silencing gestures, which will be used to control them throughout their school life. The teacher asserts their identity as a controlling presence and at the same time imposes an identity (Gee, 2014) of a compliant child whose voice must be controlled. The language at first suggests a gentleness, "hushed," "waved down," but this soon wears thin; the child is told off. None of these communicative actions by the teacher invites interaction. The teacher is using their institutional power to control the child's environment, silencing the child—what Shultz (2010) refers to as "silence as compliance" (p. 2834). That the child's agency is denied is demonstrated by the syntactical choice of passive voice in this part of the narrative, in contrast to the active voice earlier in the piece (Fairclough, 2015). The teacher's role here is to control communication, an institutional rather than an individual action, shown in

the end of year reports. This fragment provides the child's perspective on having channels of communication closed down by a powerful adult who can impose the institutional norms simply through gesture. The teacher's gestures do more, however; they also model silence as a denial of speech. The wider classroom semiotics of uniform and classroom behaviours such as "hands-up" and "deskbound" also support the compliance discourse, one in which teachers exercise individual power over children's voices and bodies, supported by the power of the institution through formal reporting (Fairclough, 2015).

A Different Silence

In this extract, the impact of a teacher's choice of shared reading is the focus.

Mae llais fy athrawes gynradd yn atseinio trwy'r degawdau: ei hymroddiad cadarn i dreulio amser sylweddol ar ddiwedd pob dydd i'n cludo o fyd ein cymuned gwledig, cyfyng yng Nghymru i ganol helbulion cyffrous a diarth plant mewn nofelau fel Emil and the Detectives, The Silver Sword, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Hi fu'n gyfrifol am danio fy niddordeb mewn rhythmau a soniaredd ieithoedd estron trwy storïau, a hyn osododd sylfeini i fy nealltwriaeth i o werth amhrisadwy ffuglen a llenyddiaeth yn natblygiad iaith a dychymyg plentyn.

[My primary teacher's voice resonates through the decades: her sound commitment to spend significant time at the end of each day to transport us from the narrow confines of our rural community in Wales to the heart of exciting and exotic adventures in novels like *Emil and the Detectives*, *The Silver Sword*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. She was responsible for sparking my delight in the rhythms and resonance of foreign languages through stories, and this laid the foundations for my understanding of the priceless value of fiction and literature in the development of children's language and imagination.]

Er fy mod wedi fy magu yng Nghymru, nid oedd lle i mi glywed fy llais fy hun yn yr ysgol. Roeddwn yn ddiarth ac yn od, yn wahanol ac arwahân, gan mai Cymraeg oedd iaith ein haelwyd.

[Even though I was brought up in Wales, there was no place for me to hear my own voice at school. I was strange and odd, different, and apart, because Cymraeg was the language of our home.]

In this extract, language both includes and excludes. In the first part of the extract, the value of reading with children is celebrated as "transporting" (*cludo*) the child to the "exciting adventures" (*helbulion cyffrous*) recounted in children's books. The teacher here has the power, through her own choice of text, to expand the children's worlds by sharing a novel at the end of each day. Her choice makes significant (Gee, 2014) both the act of reading and the canon of classic children's literature. There is more, however, to this experience than an exciting story; there is the fascination of the language itself, its "rhythms and resonance" (*rhythmau a soniaredd*), which provided further invitations, to language study and an understanding of the role of children's literature in learning and development. This is a complex and multilayered discourse, where the teacher's power opens doors for the child in terms of imagination, narrative, empathy, and language. The magnitude of teachers' power has been discussed in the exploration of a lack of

diversity in children's books as far back as Rudine Sims Bishop's work on "mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors" (McNair & Edwards, 2021). Sulzer (2022) discusses the institutional silencing that occurs in the reading of canonical literature, and in this case, the silencing is the result of the difference in language, and the child's perception is that she and her language are "strange, odd, different. and apart" (*yn ddiarth ac yn od, yn wahanol ac arwahân*). The rich stories that led to so many imaginary adventures did not lead home. The experience of curriculum for the child is fractured by the disparity between the discourses of schooled and home literacies. The identity (Gee, 2014) that the child brought from home was not recognised by the literacy activities of school (Little, 2017).

The difference between home and school language, also underpinned a specific identity assigned to the author by school authority (Gee, 2014):

> *Yr unig adeg cefais fy annog i ddefnyddio iaith fy mebyd oedd er mwyn cysuro fy chwaer fach yn wythnosau cynnar ei gyrfa ysgol hithau.*
>
> *"She's crying again – will you sort her out?" oedd cri di-amynedd goruchwylwyr yr iard amser cinio. Roedd iaith ddiarth Saesneg ar ben hiraeth am goflaid mam yn drech na'r un fach. Ystyr "sorting her out" oedd ei darbwyllo bod angen geiriau a chystrawen estron i fynegi ei hofnau a'i phryder pedair oed. Cofio teimlo'n flin am wacter eu dealltwriaeth sylfaenol am gefndir ein hiaith.*
>
> [The only time I was encouraged to use my childhood language was to comfort my little sister in the early weeks of her school career.
>
> "She's crying again – will you sort her out?" was the impatient call of school yard supervisors. The unfamiliarity and otherness of English, added to her longing for her mother's embrace, was too much for the little one. "Sorting her out" meant counselling her to use alien words and syntax to express her four-year-old fears and anxiety. Memories of feeling angry at their empty ignorance about our language background.]

The tension between home and schooled languages is more acute in this extract. Welsh is positioned as belonging to the domestic sphere rather than the academic. At school, its value is limited to the necessity—"the only time I was encouraged" (*Yr unig adeg cefais fy annog*)—of comforting a little sister who did not speak English yet. The encouragement to use the language is for purely practical purposes; Welsh is positioned as the language of the nursery; comforting a distressed child was beyond the capacity of the supervisors with whom she had no shared language. The Welsh-speaker, the older child, is positioned as a carer simply because of the language, rather than because an older sister might be a comfort to a child in an unfamiliar environment. The expressive values (Fairclough, 2015) of the vocabulary of the supervisors, "sort her out," positions the child and her language as problematic rather than acknowledging the limitations of the environment where staff could not understand her language. The language itself is valued only for its utility in solving a practical problem.

Talking in Class

This extract reflects on the impact of classroom talk in developing the learners' experience of and interest in language and language varieties. The author of the extract offers their own commentary by way of introduction:

> *"[The extract] reflects on how classroom talk influenced learners' confidence to participate in discussions and how the teacher's pedagogy encouraged learners to accept feedback constructively. Rather than bringing a negative judgemental approach, this teacher used humour and language varieties and provided learners with greater autonomy and ownership of their learning*."
>
> *Doedd y gwersi byth yn teimlo ar ruthr. Roedd pob gwers yn dechrau gyda sgwrs hamddenol hwyliog a llaer o dynnu coes . Fel disgyblion roedd hyn yn golygu llai o amser ar ffocws y wers! Ond wrth edrych nôl, drwy'r sgyrsiau roedd yr athro'n dod i'n hadnabod, yn dangos diddordeb ynom a'n bywydau ac yn magu perthynas a pharch. Mae'n siwr ei fod hefyd yn 'asesu' safon ein llefaredd yn ystod y sgyrsiau hamddenol.*
>
> *Cyflwynai iaith raenus gan wau tafodiaith yr ardal yn gelfydd i'r sgwrs, a hyn yn hwyluso'r sgwrsio gan greu naws ac ethos cartrefol i'n denu i gyfrannu a theimlo'n gyfforddus. O ganlyniad, rhannwyd hynt a helynt penwythnosau a straeon aelwydydd. Yn hytrach na'n ceryddu, byddai'n rhoi hanner gwên a chynnig ambell sylw, gan ysgogi'r sgwrs yn hytrach na'i ddiffodd.*
>
> [The lessons never felt rushed. Each lesson started with a fun relaxed conversation and lots of leg-pulling. As pupils, this meant less time on the lesson focus! But looking back, through the conversations, the teacher was getting to know us, showing an interest in us and our lives and cultivating a relationship of respect. I'm sure he was also "assessing" the quality of our oracy during the relaxed conversations.
>
> Whilst conversing with us in this way, he modelled a high standard of language, artfully weaving our local dialect into the conversation, and this facilitated further conversation, creating a comfortable, relaxed, familiar, and homely atmosphere and ethos. As a result, the ups and downs of weekend stories in our lives were shared. Instead of reprimanding us, he would give us a half smile and offer the occasional comment, stimulating rather than silencing further conversation.]

Classroom dialogue in a variety of forms is recognised as a powerful tool for learning and teaching (Alexander, 2020; Muhonen et al., 2018). Effective talk is located in the wider norms of the community (Hudiyono et al., 2021), and effective teachers recognise that "Dialogue has social and emotional as well as cognitive dimensions. Everyone's contributions need to be valued, and learners need to feel safe to take risks" (Hennessy et al., 2023, p. 187). The author of this extract positions (Fairclough, 2015) the teacher as an interactional partner in the classroom, interested in and appreciative of his students' language use. To the students, he appeared to be relaxed in his approach: as pupils this meant less time on the lesson focus (*Fel disgyblion roedd hyn yn golygu llai o amser ar ffocws y wers*!). Did this appear to the pupils to be a relinquishing of pedagogical

power? The reflection by the experienced practitioner shows that this was not the case; he was taking the opportunity both to build relationships and to notice the pupils' natural language use. The vocabulary choices in the extract denoting speech lean towards interaction and community: "fun, relaxed conversation and lots of leg-pulling" (*sgwrs hamddenol hwyliog a llawer o dynnu coes*); "cultivating a relationship and respect" (*yn magu perthynas a pharch*); "artfully weaving our local dialect into the conversations" (g*wau tafodiaith yr ardal yn gelfydd i'r sgwrs*); "homely ethos" (*ethos cartrefol*). In Gee's (2014) terms, the knowledge that was privileged in these conversations was the knowledge of the students as individuals, but at the same time, for the teacher, the sign systems of formal and colloquial Welsh provided him with vital knowledge about his students' language use. The metaphor of weaving represents classroom talk as a co-operative endeavour, the spoken text woven by all participants. The extract is dense with reference to rich and relaxed speech strengthening and validating the students' identities through acceptance of their language choices. On the other hand, "*asesu*" ("assessment") is placed in quotation marks, signalling that, for the students at least, this aspect of the teacher's practice faded into the background. This is in contrast to the contemporary discourse and practice of language policing that exists in some contexts (Cushing, 2022). Here classroom language and literacy are part of the continuum of language use and literacies that span home, school, and leisure activities.

Talking as a Community

In this reflection, there is a direct link between the practitioner's experience as a child and their provision of a similar experience to the children they now teach.

> *Pan oeddwn tua 11 aeth taith o'r ardal i Sain Ffagan. Roedd yn cynnwys plant, eu rhieni ac aelodau hyn o'r gymuned. Rwy'n cofio'r chwilfrydedd o fod yno a'r trafodaethau gyda'r rhai hyn na mi.*
>
> *Ar ddiwedd tymor yr ysgol trefnais ymweliad â Sain Ffagan ac estynias wahoddiad i rieni, neiniau a theidiau i ddod hefyd er mwyn sbarduno trafodaethau.*
>
> *Mewn un tŷ, Hendre'r Ywydd, eisteddodd y disgyblion o amgylch y lle tân a darllenodd un o bob grŵp eu gwaith, sef gwaith creadigol yn disgirfio cartref Heulyn Goch o Freuddwyd Rhonabwy.*
>
> *Ar ôl darllen eu gwaith penderfynodd y disgyblion osod pren yn y ffenestri, fel petai'n nos, ac i gadw'r gwynt a'r glaw allan, (roedd hi'n noson stormus yn y stori) yna aethant i gyd i orwedd a y llwyfan pren lle byddai'r criw wedi cysgu yn y stori. Roedd hyn i gyd heb arweiniad yr athro. Roedd darllen y stori yn y lleoliad wedi tanio eu dychymyg ac am gyfnod byr yn Hendre'r Ywydd roeddent yn ôl yn y cyfnod ac yn rhan o'r stori.*
>
> *Yr oedd un disgybl eisiau gofyn i gymydog dros ei 80 oed i ddod ar y daith. Yn anffodus ni fedrai ddod. Dywedodd ei fam nad oedd wedi stopio siarad am y daith ar ôl dod adre. Rwy'n siwr byddai sgwrs rhyng-genedlaethol wedi digwydd ar ôl yr ymweliad.*

> *Roedd yr ymweliad yn crynhoi pwysigrwydd dysgu cymdeithasol, dysgu yn y cartref a'r profiadau sy'n cael eu llunio ar y cyd. Hefyd y ffaith fod y dysgu cymaint yn fwy perthnasol a byw i'r disgyblion os ydynt yn cael cyfleoedd i lywio'r dysgu.*
>
> [When I was about 11, a trip was arranged from my home area to St Fagans [National Museum of History]. It involved children, their parents, and older members of the community. I remember the curiosity of being there and the discussions with those older than me.
>
> At the end of the school term, I arranged a visit to St Fagans and invited parents and grandparents to join us, so as to aid discussion.
>
> In one house, Hendre'r Ywydd, pupils sat around the fireplace and one of each group read their creative writing, describing the home of Heulyn Goch of Rhonabwy's Dream.
>
> After reading their work, the pupils decided to place the shutters in the windows, as if it were night, and to keep out the wind and rain, (it was a stormy night in the tale); then, they all went to lie down on the wooden platform where the travellers in the story would have slept. All of this was without the teacher's guidance. Reading the story in the setting had fired their imaginations, and for a short time in Hendre'r Ywydd, they had gone back in time and were part of the story.
>
> One pupil wanted to ask a neighbour over the age of 80 to join us. Unfortunately, he could not come. His mother said he hadn't stopped talking about the trip after coming home. I'm sure an inter-generational conversation would have taken place after the visit.
>
> The visit summed up the importance of the social and home-based learning and the experiences that are collectively shaped. It was also obvious that learning is so much more relevant and engaging for the pupils if they have opportunities to guide the learning journey.]

In this extract, community stands out as a significant discourse (Gee, 2014), with shared experience and talk a vital element in sustaining community. An additional dimension is the representation of community across generations and across time. Not only do the participants in the trip share the experience with their families and neighbours, but the children enter imaginatively into the experience of characters in a medieval story. The teacher's own childhood visit to St Fagans and the school trip described both demonstrate the children's agency in the experience. The recollection of the original trip, "I remember the curiosity of being there and the discussions with these people older than me" (*Rwy'n cofio'r chwilfrydedd o fod yno a'r trafodaethau gyda'r rhai hyn na mi*), suggests shared experience and exploration. The vocabulary choice, "discussions" (*trafodaeth*'), suggests an equality in the conversation between the child and their older neighbours (Fairclough, 2015). The children in the more recent visit, take control of their own learning: "they decided" (*penderfynnodd*) to transform the space to represent the setting of the story. Furthermore, the children took ownership of a medieval Welsh story, extending even further the connections between present and past (Gee, 2014). And the child whose neighbour was unable to join the trip returned full of tales to tell. Drawing on community resources in this way

opens the channel between home and schooled literacies (Heath, 1982; Street, 1984) so that home and school share experiences and linguistic resources, empowering children to develop language skills in all aspects of their lives. The form of this extract, with a coherent narrative stretching back into the past and forward into the future, makes the act of storytelling significant and acknowledges children's identities as storytellers (Gee, 2014).

SYNTHESIS

The four practitioners worked independently on their *currere* pieces, but when we read them as a group, themes emerged revealing the powerful impact of language experiences in school and their echoes into practice. The tools of discourse analysis provide a framework for discerning patterns in social reality. Its significance across all four pieces is testimony to how fundamental language and communication are to these practitioners. The pieces demonstrate the importance of children and young people having opportunities to speak and be heard in ways that they choose. The choices may be of language or language varieties, and they may be choices of form such as narrative or dialogue. These reflections show that the choices themselves are significant. Language is not a transparent channel; it carries its own significance, identity, and sign systems.

The salience of language and speech in these reflections suggested that a theoretical model with a focus on language was most appropriate. Discourse analysis has enabled a detailed exploration of the authors' conscious language choices but also of the "non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social life, including power/domination" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 418) across four independently produced texts.

Practice can be influenced by a commitment to ensuring that children and young people are given similar rich experiences to those that made a strong impression on us as pupils. At the same time, there is a recognition that the limitations and missed opportunities in our own experience form us into the practitioners we are. Curriculum making is the weaving of experience including a number of languages, language varieties, and languages for different purposes to enable all children and young people to find a voice.

CODA

To ensure that the voices of the participants are heard alongside the analysis, each reflects here on their own experience of participating in a *currere* project. The project was informed by the *currere* process described by Pinar (1975/1994), and although it does not follow the structure closely, this section partially fulfils the progressive function. Like the original reflections, each is distinctive, but together they demonstrate the impact of the collective process. In finding voices, the participants also found listeners who recognised the significance of their reflection on experience and positioned personal narratives in an academic space.

VOICE 1

Profoundly, the process of *currere* reminded me that I too have faced the same pressures as my former educators throughout my professional career. Collectively, what we as participants

have in common is that our experiences were real to us—we were each influenced by positive and negative encounters.

Reviewing and scrutinising this process has reacquainted me with my personal scholarship. My experiences as a learner and educator have been wide-ranging; from past to present, dominant conventional compliance has been like a fly I have wanted to swat. The continuous reflective cycle we engage in as educators allows us to also consider ethics and values and highlights a culture of character that accompanies the formal and structural nature of education. Pertinently, the tacit knowledge and skills amassed through interactions and opportunities have become my toolkit to navigate instances of dutiful and submissive social conformity.

Relatability and sharing the nature of our experiences is how we understand and help others to understand. My agency and assumptions continue to be challenged, and generational trends remain; nevertheless, today, I get paid to talk.

VOICE 2

I embarked upon an invitation to consider what curriculum means to me with trepidation. Allowing myself to explore the subjective, to value myself as an academic researcher, was both exciting and unsettling. What would I reveal to myself and others about key moments and people that shaped my understanding of what matters? I questioned the wisdom of seeking clarity from my seven-year-old self.

Exploring the complex textures of our memories cannot be an objective process. Sharing these snippets of childhood with supportive and empathetic colleagues was invaluable. I remembered precious people who instilled confidence to embrace the "other" and to feed my hungry imagination and curiosity. *Currere* deepened my understanding of *why* I chose specific themes and texts for my pupils. The collective nature of our reflections gave me confidence to say: Yes, being silenced from speaking my own language, either directly or indirectly, through arrogance or ignorance, both hurt and emboldened me.

Currere was a process of unexpected affirmation. Reading our deeply personal fragments was a privilege. Sharing our memories enhanced my appreciation of the depth and richness of our collective experience as teachers and will always be a source of inspiration.

VOICE 3

Initially the *currere* process led me to reflect upon my early career experiences and the varied subsequent influences. Throughout these experiences, I thrived on opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue, which very often ended in more questions than answers. During the retreat, my thoughts turned to my experiences as a pupil, in particular, one teacher's approach, and how this became a way I approached my learning. It was only during our group dialogue, following our individual reflective writing, that I realised how influential this had been and how it changed my response to my learning throughout university and beyond.

Whilst listening to others' experiences and reflections, I started to unpick threads of thought and look at the process through a different lens, now from within. I initially struggled to identify a strong link with themes from others' reflections, but interestingly, this was not the case for other members of the group. I could hear echoes of different pedagogies and values in their

writing entwined with empowering learner autonomy and voice. This brought me back full circle to what initially drew me to *currere*, the drive for co-constructive ownership of a Curriculum for all our learners in Wales.

VOICE 4

The *currere* experience for me was inspirational. As a class teacher and headteacher, I rarely get time set aside for thinking and reflecting. Discussing with colleagues from other sectors was a refreshing change. It was surprising how similar were the challenges we faced. Our shared stories highlighted the importance of respecting the learner and engaging their curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Where this is done effectively the learning develops a life of its own; pupils' learning can be more and more self-directed.

Placing myself in the role of learner was important, this was made easier as I was completely out of my comfort zone at the writing retreat, working with higher education colleagues. The normal rules of enquiry were set aside. The process was simple, reflecting on past learning experiences. As our words can be interpreted differently by others, so looking back at our own actions and experiences was a valuable tool to identify what was important to us as individuals and as a group. I believe the *currere* process gave me the insight to reflect on my values and what is important. Following the *currere* project, I felt empowerment and enthusiasm to create positive learning experiences for our pupils.

VOICE 5

The four voices speak of insights into their own practice gained through the *currere* process. Juxtaposing the extracts, using critical discourse analysis, and placing them in the context of wider scholarship on classroom talk adds further dimensions to the work. Scholarship on classroom talk often links the quality of talk to academic achievement (e.g., Muhonen et al., 2018), but in these extracts, the social and emotional dimensions of the curriculum take priority for the participants. Silence is more difficult to discuss. While there is a corpus of academic literature on talk, that on silence is rarer. Recently, however, there has been greater interest**;** Sulzer's (2022) paper was part of a special edition of the journal, *Linguistics and Education*. Often work on silence has focused on the silence/ing of marginalised groups (Cushing, 2022). The four voices in this paper experienced silence in different ways: the deliberate silencing for compliance and the silencing of a language. But as Shultz (2010) argues, silence can also be an invitation. The teacher in "Talking in Class" gave his pupils the opportunity to talk (or not) by being silent himself, and in "Talking as a Community," the children lay down to "sleep" in silence as part of their re-creation of the story. The foundation of this paper is a group of fragments that were produced in the collaborative silence of a *currere* retreat where practitioners had the space to listen to themselves and to colleagues. Silence is a part of the curriculum, but we need to listen and take the opportunities it offers.

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OUR *CURRERE* JOURNEY
THE IMPACT OF CURRICULUM MEMORIES ON IDENTITY

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Our *currere* journey started at a residential Welsh summer retreat. The three-day retreat took place in Aberystwyth, north Wales, with academic researchers, teachers, and *currere* experts in attendance. This created a unique opportunity for researchers and educators from across Wales to come together to discuss and reflect on the impact of curriculum on us and on education generally. The retreat provided a space for connection, reflection and analysis.

The *currere* process has allowed us to learn from looking inwards, helping us piece together our own diverse biographies, whilst exploring connections to and development of curriculum inquiry. Although this research has been based on three very unique personal narratives, we hope that the message is clear: we must acknowledge the power of our educational and curriculum experiences on our identities, sense of belonging, and futures.

STARTING WITH THE SPIDERS

Each attendee had their own room, with far-reaching views of the Welsh countryside. On the first morning, I found myself waking up to find that my private room wasn't so private. As my eyes opened, I saw a spider (!!). A spider sat still and calm on the other bed pillow. Although I had expected a weekend of connection and meeting new people, I hadn't quite prepared myself for this moment of surprise. Perhaps both in shock, the spider and I, both, remained still. I started to think to myself (as admittedly someone not too fond of spiders) "Ahhh, A SPIDER! What is that doing here? A spider should never be on a pillow! This is my room, Ahhh!" I swiftly hopped up and moved the pillow to the front door, hoping the spider would enjoy the outdoors more than my room. The spider didn't move, and it was in that moment that I first thought,

> I wonder what that spider is thinking about me? (if they do that). If they do think, I bet it's asking the same questions as I did "Ahhh, A HUMAN! What is that doing here? A human should never be on my pillows! This is my room Ahhh!"

Perhaps I was the one who didn't belong there. I had labelled spiders as a negative thing, something that didn't belong in my space. As I walked back to "my" room, I started to feel out of place. I wondered who really belonged in that room more—me or the spider?

At breakfast I shared the story of my spider wakeup call with laughter, coffee, and croissants. Little did I know that my spider encounter would represent our *currere* journey and exploration of identity and belonging.

OUR CURRERE JOURNEY AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The *currere* approach encourages autobiographical reflection on individual and unique lived experiences to engage with curriculum inquiry. This *currere* piece provide insight into how past educational and curriculum experiences shape one's identity and sense of belonging, both in the moment and beyond. In this piece, we suggest that the *currere* process allows for deep reflection, critical thinking, and exploration of how our personal experiences can connect and provide insight into broader educational and curriculum conversations. This research process recognises the value of being experts by experience. As educators, we felt it was important to develop our self-awareness and understanding of our identities, exploring how our past educational experiences may have shaped our life purposes and careers. Pinar (1994) stated that this approach encourages exploration of "the complex relation between the temporal and conceptual" in relation "to the self and its evolution and education" (p. 19). We engaged in the *currere* process because we believe, "Education will transform the world. Self-education will transform education" (Abundantlee, 2016, as quoted in Baszile, 2017, p. vi).

THE PROCESS

Our interpretation of *currere* acknowledges Pinar's (1994) four steps but does not adopt a linear interpretation. Within each step we took an opportunity to deeply reflect and analyse our personal educational experiences. Our reflections specifically focus on the regressive and analytical steps and weave the progressive and synthetic elements throughout.

During our initial discussions about the curriculum and *currere*, we worked as a group to think of different potential focuses or themes that we wanted to explore. We decided that we would simply *look back* and write down any memories from our time at school that had stuck with us. We each worked individually to write down the first memories that came to our attention with the broad prompt being *memories of past school experiences*. We decided we would only record the first three memories that popped into our heads, with no specific focus on what type of memories/reflections they should be and no guidelines on how the memory should be presented (e.g., prose, poem, and no word limit). This was, however, contextualised by Baszile's (2009), recognition of the value of exploring our past stories as

> All work is autobiographical. That is, we all bring our sorted histories, hopes, and desires to the project of curriculum theory, hooking onto familiar stories and creating new ones. And to the extent we are in dialogue, in conversation about these stories and the histories in which they are forever entangled, we produce, perform, and engage the "complicated conversations" that are curriculum theory. (p. 483)

At this point, you may be asking yourself, "Why do these memories matter?' or, "Why start there?" Truthfully, at the beginning of our journey, we asked the same questions. We did not know why it felt important to begin as we did; the reasoning felt cloudy, and we, as researchers, felt out of our depth. However, we all responded to the pull of our stories, to soak in these memories. A Poetter (2018) summarised, we felt we were "far removed from some of these occurrences now, the actual events," yet the memories stayed with us. We resonated with Poetter's assertion that his currere "fragments keep chipping at me. They won't go away, they comfort and gnaw" (p. 3).

Our first recognition of the significance and so-what of all this was simply that these memories had stood the test of time, that our bodies and minds had held on to these moments. We started to feel excited to explore why, and so we ignored the present and started in the past. We hope you enjoy the journey to the so-what just as much as we have.

Significant Moments

Researcher 1

I Don't Belong Here

School hasn't ever been easy for me. At a young age, it became very clear that I was not where I should have been. My big wow moment looking back is at a parents' evening in Year 4 (age 8-9) when my teacher told my mum, "She doesn't even know the difference between the spelling of God and good." I can still remember sitting there and silently protesting that there was absolutely no difference! I can remember my exact thoughts; "There is no difference. Why is everyone tricking me? This doesn't feel good." I remember the feeling of sitting in the chair, staring at the blue folder tray as my teacher continued to explain how far behind I was. I remember the way my insides churned with feelings of frustration and embarrassment. My self-esteem was impacted by this moment, as I felt like a failure and that I would not achieve anything moving forward.

Last Day—First Day: The Power of a Teacher

On my last day of primary (elementary) school, my teacher told me and my parents that I should be sent to a Special Educational Needs School, as she said it was unrealistic for me to get many, if any GCSEs (high school qualifications). To illustrate her point, she pulled out a file that contained pieces of my work dating all the way back to Year 2. One example that stood out was a monster (see the synthetic reflection in the conclusion for illustration) I had drawn in my maths book in Year 3. My teacher stated that this showed my lack of concentration and understanding (While I had been drawing, I was supposed to have completed the time-tables test). This meeting is a distinct memory for me, because I remember feeling deeply ashamed and confused. It left me feeling like I had no hope for the future, especially within a school. My parents were unable to find a SEN school for me and thankfully were able to get me into a local high school and decided to see how things went. One school transformed my whole life. I cannot explain the pride and surprise I felt when, at the end of the first day of high school, my form teacher told me I had been put into the top set, for everything (including English and maths!). I told her it must be a mistake, that I couldn't possibly be in top set. She sat me down, looked me in eyes and told me that I was worthy of being in that class and that thinking differently deserved to be celebrated. After having spent all my time previously in education with a Teaching Assistant working with me, extra support classes, being viewed and feeling like I wasn't good enough, I finally felt like I had hope. I finally felt like a positive educational future wasn't unrealistic.

MOMENT OF BELONGING

Throughout my turbulent educational journey, I craved the feeling of belonging, yet I never felt like I belonged when I walked into a classroom. I always felt uncomfortable, itching to get out. So, when I think of positive school moments, I think of sport. My most significant memory was sports try-out day. Throughout the school day, they had taster/try-out sessions for the schools' sports teams. I quickly signed up for every session offered to girls (not just because it meant that I would miss lessons—ok, maybe a little—but also because I loved it). I spent the whole day engaged in netball, hockey, athletics, and basketball. I remember feeling so at peace, and for one of the first times ever, I enjoyed an entire day at school. That day, I found my safe space within education and the curriculum. I finally felt like I belonged.

RESEARCHER 2

NOT BEING SEEN

At the age of eight, I was diagnosed with Perthes Disease—disease most commonly developed between the ages of 3 and 11, whereby an inadequate supply of blood can lead to the deterioration of the femoral head. This can result in misalignment between the femoral head and the hip joint. After countless hospital visits and doctor's appointments, it was decided that I would require surgery to ensure the femur and hip meet correctly, as well as having supporting screws and plates in place. Unfortunately, I had developed this disease in both hips, and therefore, required major surgery and a cast that would cover both legs and incorporate braces to keep the legs in place.

Spending the entire school year in a wheelchair was a daunting experience. I was afraid to be seen as different or noticed because of my disability. These feelings were magnified by the fact that I had missed the final month of the previous school year due to my diagnosis and surgery. Many of my friends and teachers were supportive throughout the first week of school, which did not feel as scary as I first thought it might. Then came a day that left me feeling very upset and not seen at all. On the Friday morning of my first week back at school, we made our way to the sports hall for a shared assembly.

I can still feel the sense of panic and dread set in when I realised my teacher had taken us out of the classroom to the staircase exit. I sat alone, speechless, and unable to comprehend the feeling of being forgotten. I began to cry. It was a simple mistake by the teacher, but it foreshadowed the battle I was going to face in the coming year. Reflecting back, I now see the irony of not wanting to be seen as different, whilst not having my different needs met by someone I saw as a source of care.

PERFORMATIVE BELONGING

Growing up slightly unpopular and overweight due to my time spent in a wheelchair and physical therapy, I never felt like I belonged. This was until a scheme of work in Drama exploring the Italian theatrical style *Commedia dell'arte*. The first time performing as "Zanni" (a funny, foolish character), I suddenly felt like I had found my place. My classmates laughed during my

performance and encouraged me to keep improvising. This freedom allowed me to take on a class clown role, whilst not disrupting the flow of the lesson. I felt myself become free and approved of. Whilst I did not wear a literal mask for the performance, I felt as though a metaphorical one had been placed on my face. I was suddenly given an opportunity to make others laugh and, through doing so, find my place where I belonged in school. It is easy to say in hindsight, but I genuinely believe that, without this moment, it would be difficult to say whether I would have continued to study Drama for so long into my time in education.

Frozen in Time

I have always felt a drive to do well in school. However, I have always felt a longing to lean on past accomplishments out of fear of failure. This has remained throughout my time in education, and I can most closely place the first time I felt this fear to finishing A-Level (final high school exams) Drama. I had just finished my final performance and was walking home from a shared celebration with all of my peers. What should have been a happy moment quickly turned into panic and dread for what was to come next. I felt a sense of anxiety around leaving this experience behind and not being able to do a performance again (even though I knew that I would be doing just that on my undergraduate degree!).

Reflecting back, the belonging I had found in Drama was challenged in the face of my journey into Higher Education. I found myself thinking this over and over again during the summer months, almost saying to myself "I was good at this thing, so why would I want to stop doing this thing?!" Even now, I find myself confronting this anxiety. My most recent encounter was completing my PhD in July 2023. Immediately the focus was on *what next* when all I wanted was to focus on the accomplishment and stay frozen in that moment. Of course, this has not prevented me from making progress and continuing to experience new things. Instead, it feels like I have anxiety until I find my new place of belonging. I have taken on numerous identities through curriculum and school—disabled, class clown, high achiever. What memory does not account for is the gaps between these labels, and those are the moments I am afraid of. My anxiety of moving on from previous achievements is a fear of not finding another subject, institution, or identity to call home.

Researcher 3

(Un)natural Selection Time

At the age of 10, the four children in my year at our small, rural, primary school were taken to the room where we had lunch (driven from the nearby city to allow the custard to develop a really thick skin!) to sit a test. There were only about 30 children in the whole school, which later caused my daughter confusion as she asked why we had such an age range in my class and was shocked when I told her it was the whole school. I was not really sure what the test was for, but a few weeks later, two of us (why not the other two was not clear to me) did another test in the same room. It turned out these papers, known as the 11+, affected the rest of my life, as I then received a letter telling me I had passed and would be attending the very traditional all-boys grammar school in the nearby city, with over 800 pupils. On the first day, this was a big shock itself (although not

quite as big as the first session in the outdoor pool), but so was being called by my surname for the first time in my life. But, from the first year, I started playing rugby for the school—being fast and scared of bigger players proved a winning combination as they stopped chasing me if I scored.

SPORT OR MUSIC?

At age 17, in the first year of sixth form at school, I had been an established member of the school chapel choir and the first team in rugby for some time. There had never been any tenson between the two subjects. But, the moment arose where the choir were going on a tour in France and the rugby team on a tour in Wales on the same dates. At the time, it seemed an easy decision, and France won (perhaps planting a predisposition for red wines that I have nurtured assiduously ever since), but the consequences had short- and long-term impact. Short term, I was selected less for the first team in rugby! But, I had to let one side down. Longer-term, music grew in importance. Singing continued to be a significant part of my life, both within school and after. It even got me my first teaching job as a professional singer in a cathedral choir and associated teaching job—serendipity in action? Music as a subject also became my professional context, as a music specialist primary teacher—instead of a secondary school sports teacher as I thought while at school. After leaving school, sport continued to occupy my time for a few years, until my knees signalled that music was the right choice. The apparently simple, curriculum-focused choice at 17 resulted in a career direction I had not expected.

THE RE-UNION AND CURRICULUM

Over 40 years after leaving school, I went to a reunion of my school year groups, which included a school tour (of which more later), drink (I enjoyed the red wine, so thank you choir tour), and meal. At the inevitable 'who are you?' early stage of the day, I was struck by two things: one, that they remembered me at all (was I actually slightly insecure about those years?); and two, how they remembered me—athletics and rugby—aspects of the curriculum again. "You were really fast," "You played rugby didn't you," "I dislocated my finger trying to tackle you" (for which belated apologies were offered!), and so on. This resonated with a reunion with my own class some 20 years earlier, where the curriculum labels of music and sport were the labels attached, echoing the dilemma between the two described above.

FINDING MEANING IN THE WHY

After we had individually written the *currere* pieces, we came together as a group to share and discuss our past educational experiences. During this process, each person highlighted key themes and connections that they felt were evident from each of the reflections, whilst engaging in continuous conversations to ensure correct interpretation and understanding. As we were analysing personal past lived experiences, it was critical to support the authenticity of the reflection and allow each researcher to control their own regressive narrative. With varying ages and different genders, we assumed that we may not have many similarities in our experiences. However, as we moved to the analytical phase of our *currere* journey, we soon realised that the key part was that

we all had random, but significant, memories immediately come to our minds. So, we began to ask the questions: Why are these memories significant? Have these experiences impacted who we are? Are these significant memories actually random after all?

Our *Currere* Take-Away: The So-What

Our experiences within school and curriculum spaces have shaped who we are. These significant moments have stayed with us, even after leaving the classroom or school grounds. They have become a deeply ingrained part of who we are. As highlighted by Weisbrodt (2023), school spaces hold these significant moments:

> 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. (p. 83)

Engaging with the *currere* process has allowed us to stop and reflect on our own baggage and explore how this has shaped our lives. Even though all three of us attended different schools at different times and had very different memories, each of our significant moments centred around two key themes: belonging and identity.

Our reflections suggest that education and curriculum experiences are critical in shaping identities, impacting both how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. These experiences significantly influence our sense of belonging, as well as our future aspirations and opportunities. Schools and the curriculum are not neutral spaces; they play fundamental roles in identity formation. This is particularly influenced through interactions with others (Goffman, 1959), such as peers, teachers, and the curriculum itself. Understanding this complex connection highlights the importance of creating inclusive and reflective educational environments that nurture positive self-perception and feelings of belonging and foster long-term identity development (Lithari, 2019).

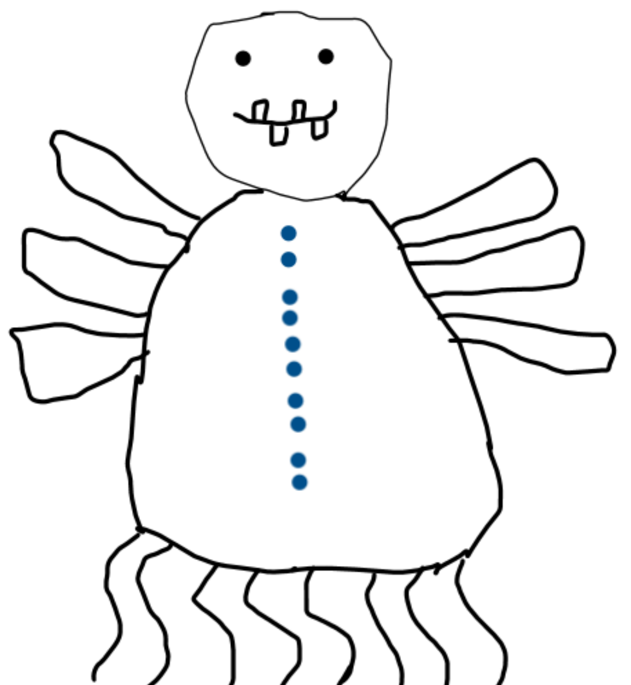
Synthetic Reflections

In this section, we provide small narrative reflections that highlight what we have discovered about how our past educational and curriculum experiences have touched our identities and life trajectories. The *currere* process has allowed us to learn from looking inwards, helping us piece together our own stories whilst exploring connections to and development of curriculum inquiry. Although this research has been based on three very unique personal narratives, we hope that the message is clear: we must acknowledge the power of our educational and curriculum experiences on our identities, sense of belonging, and futures.

RESEARCHER 1

I found the *currere* process to be deeply valuable, as it gave me the opportunity to connect my past with my present and my hopes for the future. It allowed me the space to pause and truly reflect on how my curriculum experiences have shaped who I am and my life path. This process reconnected me with my career ambitions and reignited my passion for creating more inclusive curriculum spaces. As highlighted in my reflections and the discussion, my experiences have been shaped by two key elements: the perceptions of others (especially teachers) and feeling a sense of belonging within a curriculum space (specifically in physical education/sport). It wasn't until I sat with these memories and engaged with my fellow researchers that I realised how much these moments had influenced my life. Considering I spent much of my life disliking education, it always seemed strange to me that I chose this career path, and now I think I know why. My motivations and passions in research and teaching tend centre around the importance of inclusion and celebrating differences. While teaching undergraduate students, I have often used an old friend to explore these issues; I would like you to meet my monster.

I have drawn my monster in numerous undergraduate classes. When doing so, I ask the future teachers, educators, educational psychologists, etc., the question, "What do you see?" We laugh and talk about my awful drawing abilities, and then I tell them the story of my monster: *I drew this in a Year 3 class, when we were supposed to be writing down our 2 times tables. My teacher came around and sent me out of the classroom as soon as they saw the monster. This then came back to haunt me on my last day in Year 6, when my teacher used it as an example of my lack concentration and of my poor performance over the years.*

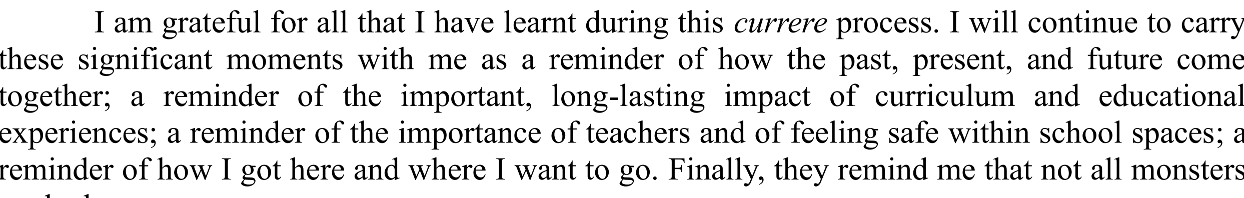


Then I ask the question again: "What do you see?" The answer: 2 eyes *(2x1= 2)*, 4 teeth *(2x2= 4)*, 6 arms *(2x3= 6)*, 8 legs *(2x4= 8)*, and 10 buttons *(2x5= 10)*.

The students probably thought, "What is she on about?!" (I would probably think the same thing) at first, but it has often led to valuable conversations about the curriculum, belonging, and inclusion.

I have carried my monster around with me since I was 7 years old. For a long time, I thought my monster was a bad thing, something to be ashamed of, something to hide away. It represented all the moments when I felt like I was a failure, that I did not understand school, and it didn't understand me. Just like my monster, I did not belong in a classroom.

Over time, without ever truly realising it, my "monster" began to guide my educational and career choices. These significant moments have fuelled my passion for creating a more inclusive and safe education system, with the hope that, one day, I can help other children feel seen and celebrated. It took a kind and caring teacher and finding my safe space within the curriculum (sport) to build my confidence, instil hope for the future, and help me see the beauty in my monster.



I am grateful for all that I have learnt during this *currere* process. I will continue to carry these significant moments with me as a reminder of how the past, present, and future come together; a reminder of the important, long-lasting impact of curriculum and educational experiences; a reminder of the importance of teachers and of feeling safe within school spaces; a reminder of how I got here and where I want to go. Finally, they remind me that not all monsters are bad.

RESEARCHER 2

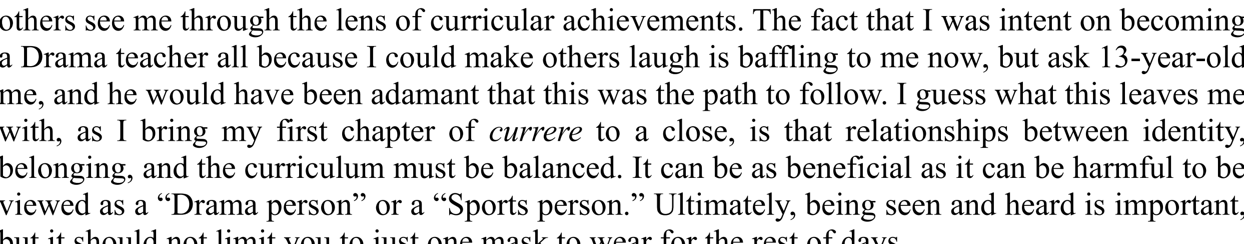
I look back at that initial retreat and being introduced to *currere* as a method. Sat on a balcony overlooking the landscape of Aberystwyth, gathered with academics, researchers, and practitioners, I felt uncomfortable with the thought of reflecting back on my own experiences. Ironically, I always considered myself to be good at reflection and making links between my past and present experiences. I now deem these reflections to have been influenced by my need to reflect and what outcomes I wanted to achieve based on the reflective process, thus, not true reflection.

Currere has allowed me to spontaneously purge my brain—I use the word purge in the sense of getting rid of thoughts from my head and putting them into words on a page. Now, I come to reflecting on my reflections, putting greater clarity on what I may have been realising that sunny day (shocker I know given the typical weather in Wales) in Aberystwyth. I arrive at two main take-aways, how others see me through curriculum and finding my own sense of belonging within the curriculum.

Let's start with how others see me through the curriculum. My initial reflections demonstrated how sometimes I may not feel seen at all. Being bound to a wheelchair, although fortunately temporarily, and having my needs not considered left me feeling invisible. This contrasts with not wanting to be seen as different due to my disability. I can already identify a carefully balanced relationship that I hold with identity and curriculum.

I then bring these reflections to the subject of Drama and that Year 8 class on Italian comedic theatre. Being Zanni and having a mask to wear for others, I felt like I belonged. Making others laugh and having the approval of hearing their enjoyment as I made a fool of myself, I truly felt like I had found a place in the curriculum where I could be free. This sense of belonging, coupled with academic achievements in the subject of Drama, led me on a future career path that I later found to be misplaced. In hindsight, I do not know if I ever felt true belonging in the parameters of Drama. I have never been an avid theatregoer; this is usually an activity others would expect me to enjoy as someone who studied Drama until the age of 21. I now believe this sense of belonging to be the way that it made others view me. Being able to make others laugh brought popularity and a sense of accomplishment that I did not get from other areas of the curriculum.

To now this all seems like a slight dampener on the *currere* process—I reassure you that I found it extremely valuable and insightful! However, I must attempt to understand this everchanging relationship that I have with curriculum and my own identity. If we take the belonging I felt in the mask of Zanni, could it be that being good at something was enough to make me feel attached to it in some way? This brings me to the third of my significant reflections. Being good at something leaves me wishing I could remain frozen in time. This is a feeling I am still tackling and trying to understand. However, I feel that this perhaps demonstrates the dangers of curriculum and how others view us. I placed (and still to this day place) too much attention to how



others see me through the lens of curricular achievements. The fact that I was intent on becoming a Drama teacher all because I could make others laugh is baffling to me now, but ask 13-year-old me, and he would have been adamant that this was the path to follow. I guess what this leaves me with, as I bring my first chapter of *currere* to a close, is that relationships between identity, belonging, and the curriculum must be balanced. It can be as beneficial as it can be harmful to be viewed as a "Drama person" or a "Sports person." Ultimately, being seen and heard is important, but it should not limit you to just one mask to wear for the rest of days.

RESEARCHER 3

The *currere* process has changed the way I look at things and think about research, especially what constitutes data. It has also made me look at things in a different way and reflect on how identity is formed, shaped, and remembered, including by the curriculum. It even changed the way I viewed and thought about a visit to my old school for the reunion mentioned above. Although much-changed, each person has specific memories evoked by visiting the different subject teaching rooms (e.g., the science labs), which even transcended the changed use of many—the sports hall is now two rooms for art, but many remembered sitting on the floor for assemblies and climbing wall bars. The visit made me consider how much I, and indeed the others, actually still *belong* there and how much that time and the curriculum shaped our identities.

It also made me consider the temporality of our curriculum memories. Are they frozen in time or still influential? None of these memories were apparent in myself or others on the reunion until revealed by the stimulus of a building or a person, just as our own memories were hidden from each other (and others) until revealed by the *currere* process. As we walked around the school, one small part of it remined hidden to those attending the school now but was vivid for all of us (perhaps because of the iced buns and chocolate—the school "tuck shop"—very small (hence the queue) and run by older pupils selling sweets and buns amongst other things. It was "hidden" because it no longer existed, but as the picture below shows, the sloping roofline remains (top rectangle in picture), revealing it to us. What I would have missed (I think, as *currere* was in my mind as we were writing this piece at the time) was the potential of the holes in the wall, concentrated in places but widely spread underneath the window (lower rectangle). A teacher from that time accompanied us and reminded us that these were formed by pupils queueing for breaktime treats and twisting coins (themselves something that future generations will not recognise) into the wall while waiting.

Although the building had gone (rather like any sporting excellence and ability to run fast I may have had), the holes in the wall remain as an embodiment of a memory, but is also a trigger to recall, or as a warrant to retrieve, individual memories. As such, they are seen by those who know but are unseen and unrecognised by others, such as current pupils who pass every day and do not even look at the holes, let alone realise what they are and represent—even the coin size has changed since that time!

The End of the Journey – Before We Start Another One!

We suggest that, without the *currere* retreat, our memories, like the holes in the wall, would have remained present but hidden and unacknowledged. By looking inwards during our *currere* journey, they have been brought to the surface, and their influence recognised as significant influences on our lives then, now, and in the future.

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A *CURRERE* OF ACCEPTANCE
RE-STORYING PUNISHMENT AND TRANSFORMING CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

By Andy Williams
Cardiff University Team

I rushed it! Life. Until recently anyway. Now, finally, semi-retired, I've slowed down. Now, I'm dwelling in the space between idleness and busy-ness, a space of growth still, of still growth perhaps. More authentic, more real, more "me" than ever before. Now with the time, I can reflect on my educative experiences in a way I have never been able to whilst teaching full time, so here goes...

CURRICULUM FRAGMENT: THE CARETAKERS TEARS

On a wet, windy Wednesday afternoon in a south Wales secondary school, Jack, a 14-year-old school boy who was looked after by social services and had a history of behavioural "issues" took a mug from the school canteen and decided it would be great fun to practise his rugby skills (this is Wales after all!) using the mug in place of a ball. Jack's friend, Rob, was not so sure but went along with it, and the two boys threw the mug to each other in the staff car park, out of sight of teacher, and with increasing vigour.

As is often the case, things got out of hand when Jack threw the mug too hard and the mug smashed through the back window of the Caretaker's car. Both boys ran away. The Caretaker came to my office spitting feathers! His anger was palpable—he nearly took my office door off its hinges as he entered and insisted that these boys, and particularly Jack who had a "history of offences," be excluded forthwith, as severe a punishment as possible, and that if I didn't do as he suggested, he would be taking advice from the Workers Union. In his mind, his only thoughts were of revenge and retribution for what had happened. This, he said, must never happen again!

I listened. I told him I agreed that it shouldn't happen again, and when the time was right, I asked his permission to take a different approach—an approach based on a paradigm shift in thinking, a changed mindset and language, but one that would help to ensure that this indeed did not happen again. I suggested we hold a restorative conference in which Jack would be held accountable for his actions and take responsibility for his (behavioural) learning.

I prepared well for the conference. During preparation interviews, I asked both the Caretaker and Jack to share their experience with me—not just the details of what happened that day, but I asked them to share their inner experience of how the event had affected them. When they were ready and willing to proceed, we set a date.

The conference was attended by the police liaison officer, Jack, the Caretaker, and a teacher advocate for Jack (his guardians did not want to attend), and I facilitated the conference. We met in a circle so that we could see one another, not just hear each other's words but see body language and emotional states. The circle enhanced the hearing and healing potential of the restorative process. Teachers had worked with Jack to help him, too. I used the five open questions known by

anyone familiar with a restorative approach. What happened? What were you thinking, and how were you feeling? Who has been affected and how? What is needed to repair the harm? And so, what's the plan?

I made sure I held the restorative mindset of openness, curiosity, and compassion. We heard Jack's story first, his voice breaking as he spoke about the incident—what led up to it and how he felt during and since, how he had run away from school when it happened, frightened and upset, and how he had been walking the streets and staying away from home and school for fear of what might happen. He feared the reaction of his carers and how he might be "re-placed" with a different family. Then, we heard from the Caretaker who told us that his car was his pride and joy and how he had saved up for it and how it was a lifeline for his wife who needed regular hospital appointments. He told us that seeing the cracked window had made him angry and that he thought the car had been deliberately attacked.

Then, I asked Jack what he thought should happen next to resolve the issue. By the time he had finished speaking there wasn't a dry eye in the room. He had, with the help of his teachers, written a letter to the Caretaker's wife to apologise for what had happened, he told his form tutor that he wanted help to raise the money to pay for the excess on the Caretaker's car insurance (£75), and he wanted to say sorry in person at that meeting to the Caretaker, which he did. Later that week, one of Jack's teachers arranged for Jack to help out in a fish and chip shop so that he could raise the money required for the insurance excess. And he paid every penny of that £75!

Suffice to say, the Caretaker and Jack are good friends to this day, some 10 years hence. Their humanity was connected. At that conference, their stories were told, their "biographic present" (Pinar, 1975, p. 7) shared. The process of estrangement halted. They share the same community, and now, they speak with pride about each other. Jack completed his school term with full attendance. Jack had taken accountability and responsibility for his actions; he further developed the lifelong skill of empathy, and he came out of what was a significant episode in his young life knowing he was a worthwhile and valuable member of a school community. Conflict transformed. He was throughout the process an accepted and acceptable member of the school community. He was learning to lead his life.

Of course, not all stories end this way. Some young people take longer to learn the skills of appropriate behaviour. For some pupils, the highly complex needs they have are not met in a mainstream school. However, as we explore the reconceptualising of the curriculum, we must also reconceptualise behaviour as an integral part of the lived curriculum for harmed and harmer—ensuring that relationships are valued and nurtured and responses to behavioural mistakes are values-based and needs led. And like all lived experiences that make up a reconceptualised curriculum, behavioural mistakes can be seen as wonderful opportunities for deep learning.

Reflective Interlude: Jack's Tears are My Tears Too!

Regressive Movement

Nobody was surprised when I was excluded from school in my mid-teens.

I enjoyed school overall but mainly for the wrong reasons. My abiding memory of school was of being punished—weekly if not daily. It led to me being excluded from school and attending three different secondary schools in as many years. In the process, I positioned myself as an outsider, and my behaviour reflected my unmet need for acceptance and belonging. My father was

at least kind enough to call me to say he didn't want to see me ever again (I remember that day like it was yesterday) despite being just 11 years old at the time. Throughout my childhood, I had a visceral feeling of being unacceptable to others, a feeling exacerbated by being gay and growing up in the 1980s (the time of HIV and AIDS), trying desperately to hide my sexuality and deny it both to myself and to others. My punishments added to my shame and isolation.

Despite my behaviour, I manged to attend college and obtain my degree. I became of all things a teacher!! Ironically, some years later I considered applying for the headship of the school from which I was excluded—can you imagine? I started teaching in 1990 at the age of 22. I still hadn't come out as gay. I was still trying to come to terms with it. It preoccupied me. My feelings of confusion and "unacceptability" were reenforced by UK law and in particular Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 that prohibited the "promotion of homosexuality" in schools or the "acceptance of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Local Government Act 1988, n.p.). I started my teaching career under a law— Education Reform Act, 1988—that told me I was unacceptable along with a highly prescribed and very "new" National Curriculum that told me what to teach, when to teach it, how to teach it, and how to assess learning. I was tied and bound to other people's norms and ideas of acceptability. I was a conflicted soul in a nightmarish culture of schooling (Pinar, 2004). To paraphrase Maxine Green (1973), I was subsumed and unsighted, consenting to being defined by others' views of what I was supposed to be; I had given up my freedom to see, to understand, and to be.

Progressive Movement

Fast forward 30 years and now as a retired, Deputy Headteacher, I am keen to revisit some recurring, "sticky" fragments (Poetter, 2024, p. 1) of experience that have remained with me all through my life, to explore the *currere* of how my past lived experiences of being at school as a pupil had informed my aspiration to reform approaches to behaviour management in the UK and seek a more nuanced and sophisticated approach that aligned behavioural learning to a reconceptualised view of curriculum.

So I guess this is the story of how of how autobiographical reflection (using a *currere* frame) supported by mindfulness meditation alongside having the space and time gave me the confidence to access my past, to seek clarity and understanding in the "biographic present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 7), to be clear eyed about my hopes and dreams for the future, and to gain the confidence I needed to challenge the UK schools' approach to conflict and discipline.

It's undoubtedly true that the reflective capacity to change my own life began when I was introduced to mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness allowed me to see more clearly how I had been a slave to my emotions—acting on impulse according to the vagaries of my mood, tossing about like a bottle on a sea of competing anger and frustration, harming myself and those about me. Mindfulness allowed me to explore the fleeting nature of my thoughts and feelings and allowed me to experience being in control through awareness and acceptance. It allowed me to see more clearly the difference between a human "being" and human "doing."

My educative experiences as a pupil and as a teacher had led me to challenge the one-size-fits-all behaviouristic approach to behaviour change—put simply, getting compliance through reward and punishment. And it starts with the end in mind. John Dewey (1899) says it beautifully,

> If you have the end in view of … children learning certain set lessons to be recited to a teacher, your discipline must be devoted to securing that result. But if the end in view is the development of a spirit of social cooperation and community life, discipline must grow out of and be relative to that aim. (p. 26)

Kliebard's (2004) work similarly highlighted that schooling through an unreflective emphasis on efficiency, productivity moulded schools to the be mirrors of factories, that same "unreflective" approach that I would argue moulded our schools to be mirrors of the criminal justice system. This symmetry in mindset, language, and approach, a one-size-fits-all approach, caused exclusions and suspensions from school in England go up by more than a fifth in the 2022-2023 school year with a record of 787,000 fixed term exclusions—the equivalent of 1 in 10 pupils in England being sent home and 9,400 permanently excluded. Up 44% compared to 2021-2022 (UK Department of Education as cited by Standley, 2024),

It's an approach to behaviour that makes detectives of teachers and their assistants as they seek to establish what happened, who's to blame, and what the requisite punishment might be. Schools mirror the language of "offender" and "victim," isolation and detention, sanctions and privileges, red cards and yellow cards, three strikes and you're out!

A Restorative Lens for Transforming Conflict and Reconceptualising Behaviour

In broad terms, restorative approaches in schools are an innovative approach to inappropriate behaviour. They put repairing harm done to relationships and people over the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment. Even more simply it's about asking the following questions:

- What happened?
- Who has been affected and how?
- How can we repair the harm?
- What have we learnt so as to make different choices next time?

This approach allows people, when they have been harmed, and their harmer to have their story listened to. Ensuring the needs of the harmed person are understood. A restorative approach allows conflict to lead to deeper understanding—an understanding that draws on a pupil's life stories and personal subjectivities; understanding is only understanding when it evolves in the context of an individual's life story (Pinar, 2004). A restorative approach acknowledges that behaviour is learnt and, like any academic learning, mistakes are common and can be an opportunity for support and guidance to correct the mistake and ensure repeated mistakes are avoided.

Behaviour learning takes time and skill to master, and for some pupils, for many different and often complex reasons, it takes longer than others. Behaviour (alongside all learning processes) is impacted and influenced by affect. Schools need consistency between a teacher's responses when young people get things wrong in terms of their academic work and their responses when young people get things wrong with their behaviours (Hopkins, 2003).

Perhaps the most important dimension of restorative conferencing like the one Jack engaged with was how his feeling of guilt was understood and accepted through the conferencing process. Helen Block pr (1971, as cited in George, 2014) proposed the most useful and commonly accepted distinction between the emotions of shame and guilt:

> It is proposed that a person is more likely to feel the emotional state of shame when they evaluate the *whole self* against a particular standard, but they would be more likely to experience the emotional state of guilt when they are able to evaluate *their behaviour* against the standard. (p. 204, emphasis mine)

When people feel shame, they feel bad about themselves; whereas, when they feel guilt, they feel bad about a specific behaviour.

When schools align their approaches to academic and behavioural learning and align the five key questions of a restorative approach alongside a compassionate mindset, then there is congruence. Conflict, which is inevitable in schools and in all life, can be seen as an opportunity to augment and develop learning as part of the planned, enacted, and lived curriculum for life. The relationship between the cognitive and affective alongside life story and experience is articulated and builds self-acceptance, making possible a new synthesis of primary and secondary experience from the self-alienating to the self-knowing engaged person in the world (Pinar, 2004).

A Synthesis

I have a dream, clarified and synthesised through my *currere*. My dream focuses on the need for acceptance and belonging. It is a fantasy of the future in which conflict in schools can be seen through a different lens. It is a paradigm shift in thinking that sees conflict at school as an opportunity for learning—a natural part of running the race. It is a future where the time and energy and resources are deployed to support and develop young people who accept themselves and who learn the skills of behaviour regulation as part of the reconceptualised curriculum.

Through our approach to learning in the classroom we can model what is required for transforming conflict in schools. This approach can encourage young people and adults to share their experiences of life including those of conflict—both inner and outer conflict—and, supported by this affirmation, feel good about themselves. Yes, sometimes they might feel guilty about their specific behaviours but never ashamed of themselves, never shamed in their "self." In my dream, the restorative questions asked by a curious caring professional reinforce learning through developing a reflective student who makes sense of their actions and the actions of others and develops that most import of all skills, empathy—empathy that is developed in classroom approaches and further developed when conflict occurs.

Post pandemic, as we support pupils' return to school, we need this different paradigm more than ever, so my dream alongside that of some likeminded professionals from across a range of settings will support schools as they continue to support pupils post pandemic. The web site can be found at www.restoreourschools.com.

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LIFE AND UNLIFE

By Kevin Smith
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EDUCATION AS LIFE

In *Democracy & Education*, Dewey (1916) argues that the distinction between living and inanimate things is the capacity for renewal. Living things renew themselves through a continuous, transactional relationship with their material environment and socio-cultural *milieu* that generates energy. If the energy derived is in ample supply, we grow. If it is equal to our needs, we subsist, and if it is insufficient, we begin to die. In school, this energetic exchange is articulated through curriculum. Whether one understands curriculum as a course, or as the running or walking of the course, curriculum is the central, organisational medium through which educational experiences are planned, enacted, and lived (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Dewey writes that such experiences can be educative or mis-educative. Educative experiences promote growth, while mis-educative experiences distort it, causing the "wrong kind" of growth or growth in the wrong direction (Dewey, 1938, p. 26). Regardless of the type or direction, educative and mis-educative experiences share a *biophilic* quality (Fromm, 1964) because they reflect an intrinsic orientation toward life, renewal, and growth that is achieved through the doings and undergoings (Dewey, 1925) of experience.

DOING AND UNDERGOING

For Dewey, doings and undergoings encapsulate the rhythm and structure of experience itself. At its core, experience arises through the dynamic, reciprocal interaction between what an individual does—their actions, impulses, and engagements with the world—and what they undergo in return, the consequences and feedback of those actions. Dewey (1934) writes that these actions are driven by "impulsions" (p. 64), or the innate tendencies or drives that prompt action. While there are theoretical tensions between Dewey's and Freire's philosophies, Freire's (1994) conceptualisation of hope as an "ontological need" (p. 2) and existential necessity adds an important dimension to these motivations. Impulsions refer to a need to be satisfied through a transaction with one's environment, but hope is the *belief* that this need can be met. If impulsions guide our education (and life), then hope motivates, mediates, and makes education manifest.

Dewey argues that meaningful experiences are those in which this rhythm achieves balance and harmony. This interplay is not merely sequential but transactional, where doing and undergoing form a unified whole, mutually informing and shaping each other in a continuous process (Pappas, 2016). In education, this process underpins how curriculum mediates the relationship between learners and their environment. When the organism engages with its environment, it temporarily falls out of alignment with it, encountering tension or imbalance. Through effort or adaptation, however, equilibrium is restored—not passively, but through active participation in a process that generates energy and promotes further possibilities for action. This

rhythm, Dewey suggests, mirrors the fundamental processes of life itself: growth, change, and the restoration of unity.

Importantly, Dewey's notion of doings and undergoings rejects the idea of experience as either entirely subjective or objective. Instead, it emphasises the continuity between the individual and their environment, where actions and consequences are inseparably linked. For Dewey, this integration is essential to any experience that is educative, as it connects activity to reflection and grounds learning in a relational, lived context (Dixon, 2020).

But what if experiences prohibit growth and, therefore, education? Drawing on Fromm (1964), such curricula shift from being biophilic (i.e., curricula that affirm, enhance, and promote life) to *necrophilic* (e.g., curricula that thrive-on, but ultimately oppose, life), rendering even mis-educative experiences *ineducative*. They lack an educative capacity, power, or effect. Put simply, curricula that provide ineducative experiences are necrophilic in that they mimic the vitality of life but lack its transformative potential.

In the following article, I draw upon Dewey (1916, 1925, 1933, 1938), Fromm (1956, 1964, 1968), and Freire (1994, 1968/2018) in theorising necrophilic, or undead, curricula. Rather than serving as a medium for continual, transactional, and educative experiences that promote growth through renewal, necrophilic curricula prohibit these outcomes by drawing energy from living creatures to justify and perpetuate their own, lifeless existence.

Ambulare

I discovered this connection between life and unlife through critical reflection and reflexive, hermeneutic, and iterative analysis using *Ambulare* (Smith, 2022), my rearticulation of the *Currere* method developed by William Pinar (2011). *Currere* is a four-stage process of critical self-reflection informed by existentialist and phenomenological philosophy and psycho-analytic technique. The aim of the method is to investigate the subjective and personal dimensions of curriculum as an active, lived experience rather than a static product. This enables individuals to engage with and interpret their educational identities, practices, and voices in transformative and emancipatory ways that deepen self-understanding, challenge traditional norms and assumptions, and that advocate and promote creativity, criticality, and agency.

Ambulare is a reconceptualisation of *Currere*, developed in response to calls for greater embodiment and emplacement in curriculum studies (Ohito & Nyachae 2019; Radina et al. 2022; Snowber 2021). While *Currere* is rooted in existentialist and phenomenological traditions focusing on reflective engagement with educational experiences, *Ambulare* seeks to take *Currere* out of the mind and into the body by grounding reflective practices in the sensory and physical experiences of movement and emplacement. This embodied perspective expands the relational interplay between self, environment, and others, deepening the reflective process through incorporating critical-pragmatist perspectives, including Freire's (1968/2018) emphasis on conscientization and Dewey's (1925) doing and undergoing with considerations of new-materialist and posthumanist philosophy (Abram 1996; Alaimo 2010; Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013; Massumi 2002). *Ambulare* uses walking in natural spaces as a central practice for fostering embodied reflection. However, while walking is a key component, the method broadly emphasises various forms of embodied reflection, where physical engagement—whether walking, gardening, or collaborative activity—grounds the transactional relationship between body, movement, environment, self, and other(s).

This embodied approach shifts the focus from "running" (as implied by the Latin root of *Currere*) to "walking" (i.e., *Ambulare*). For example, by slowing the pace, we resist the normative assumptions of running the race and can engage deeply in an integration of our surroundings, bodies, and thoughts as sites for meaningful, transformative reflection. With its focus on relationality, *Ambulare* promotes concepts like communitas (Turner, 1969), which emphasizes our interconnectedness with human and other-than-human communities, as explored in Alaimo's (2010) trans-corporeality and Bennett's (2010) vibrant materiality. Finally, *Ambulare* represents a shift toward agency in our research, practice, scholarship, and activism. Unlike racing, walking allows for choices that can lead to alternative routes, pauses, and deviations, opportunities to consider and select new experiences for growth.

CURRICULUM FRAGMENTS

The subject of my reflection and analysis were a handful of curriculum fragments I generated during the Currere Cymru retreat in Aberystwyth, Wales, in June 2024. Curriculum fragments Poetter (2024) represent the unfinished, disjointed, and varied aspects of curriculum knowledge, theory, and experience that erupt through narrative accounts generated from critical reflection. Rather than inert, experiential accounts, fragments are pregnant with opportunities for inquiry, reflection, and meaning-making. Engaging with fragments involves embracing their incompleteness, recognising them as entry points for deeper exploration of the intersection between self, curriculum, and experience.

Fragments emerge from both personal and professional contexts, bridging autobiographical experiences with theoretical constructs. Their meaning is developed relationally and contextually, aligning with hermeneutic and existential dimensions of curriculum theorising. By resisting the impulse to impose artificial coherence or linearity, educators working with fragments honour the complexity and diversity of socio-cultural, political, and philosophical contexts. Through critical examination, fragments become catalysts for creativity, dialogue, and transformative curricular understanding.

In the months following the retreat, I employed *Ambulare* to recollect, record, and restory these fragments of my curricular history. In regard to *Currere*, this is representative of the regressive phase (Pinar, 2011), where individuals examine past experiences, memories, and educational encounters to better understand how they have shaped their present identity, beliefs, and practices. This is not a passive recollection but an active, reflective engagement with the past, interrogating how socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts have influenced one's development. The regressive phase illuminates the emotional, existential, and narrative dimensions of experience, allowing individuals to critique the norms and assumptions that shaped their educational journey. Over time, my understanding of each vignette increased, and certain stories and their narrative components became of greater import and significance. Eventually, my efforts focused entirely on one instance from my educational past that led me to the following conclusion: If education is life, and life is growth through renewal, then necrophilic curricula consume life and promote alienation, compliance, and, ultimately, hopelessness.

Dawn of the Dead

It was a warm, late-summer afternoon in Ohio, 2005, when I first entered the classroom where I would begin my career as a teacher. The room was filled with furniture—too much furniture, to be precise. Desks were neatly arranged, end-to-end, in tight, lengthy rows where students would eventually have to twist and wriggle their bodies as they sidled between them and each other before settling into their seats. A few, pitiful decorations hung on the wall. You know the kind I'm talking about—a chimpanzee reading a book while scratching its head as if deep in thought or, better yet, an image of a small, orange kitten with "Hang in there!" written in bright, bubbled text along the bottom of the picture. They had been there for some time, based on their faded appearance and the discoloration of the paint on the wall behind them, there but not there—hung and then forgotten.

On each desk was a new computer and monitor, each already obsolete. Toward the back of the room, in front of a wide array of slightly tinted windows overlooking the relentless traffic thrumming down the freeway below was an oversized desk, a well-padded, high-backed chair with wheels, and a dilapidated HON 501 file cabinet. This was a small, Title I school in a deprived neighborhood, with a close community and passionate educators, but sometimes the challenges of education in difficult circumstances, coupled with the anachronistic design and features of the classroom, made teaching there feel more like working in a mausoleum than a school.

During my first visit, the principal—a gruff and grizzled veteran and football enthusiast—handed me a thick, white book called *Learning Microsoft Office*. "Here!" he said abruptly, "See what you can do with this." He then wished me luck, turned toward the door, and disappeared down the hall.

Over the next few weeks, I cleaned the desks, computers, monitors, and keyboards, rearranged the furniture, and redecorated the room. In between sessions, I read the textbook and began planning my lessons. It was all very neat and tidy. Every decision about what to teach, when, and how had already been made for me—all I needed to do was to "go by the book," and everything would be OK. Or so it seemed.

School began, and weeks went by without a problem. I had been warned by my new colleagues that many of these students were "unteachable" and that I'd spend most of my time "managing behavior" rather than "actually teaching." I braced myself for conflict, but apart from one incident, it never really happened. In fact, there were times when I wished things would get a little more lively! In many situations with my students, there was precious little conversation—very little interaction with each other or anything else beyond the computers on their desks. Were they tired? Were they hungry? Were they all in a bad mood? I didn't know, and the unknowingness of it all consumed me. "This isn't what I signed up for!" I thought to myself. But what, then, should I do?

Westrup (2015), in discussing assessment practices in higher education, describes a similar phenomenon as students existing in a "zombie" state. In my case, the issue didn't sit solely with the students but rather with the broader systemic and environmental factors, from the seemingly all-encompassing social deprivation experienced by the community to the rigid curricula and lifeless environments that undermined the dynamic interplay of doing and undergoing that are essential for meaningful education. Bumiller (2022), in writing about her experience shadowing a student to see school through their perspective, also recognized a form of zombification. Initially, she suspected teachers were the source of unlife. However, after reflecting on Dewey's (1902)

work, she realized that the absence of life stemmed from how the curriculum was organized, not solely from students or teachers.

In reflecting on this experience, I realised it wasn't just my students who felt bereft and empty. I found myself unmotivated and dejected. The clearly written, highly detailed *Learning Microsoft Office* textbook was lifeless but not dead. It was undead.

Necrophilic Curricula and Ineducation

The curriculum I was asked to employ with my students demonstrated the characteristics of necrophilia as theorised by Fromm (1964): a fixation on control, rigidity, and destruction, and an attachment to what is lifeless, mechanical, and predictable (Braune, 2011). These qualities are further reflected in curricula that prioritise compliance, standardisation, and efficiency, imposing a mechanistic order that mimics vitality but lacks the dynamism Dewey and Freire argue are essential to learning. Such curricula are animated by external forces, such as bureaucratic mandates (Dewey, 1938), technocratic designs (Giroux, 2011), and discourses of accountability (Polikoff, 2021), which consume the energy of teachers and students without offering renewal or growth.

This necrophilic orientation, as Fromm (1964) describes, is not merely an absence of life but an active preference for stasis and control. In education, this manifests as alienation (Fromm, 1955; Giroux, 1983)—a profound disconnection and estrangement of both teachers and students from the meaningful, creative, and relational dimensions of education that promote growth. Alienation occurs when schooling prioritises technocratic and standardised approaches that reduce education to pointless procedures, mechanical compliance, and the inability to connect what happens in school to the realities of our lived experience.

Alienation severs the dynamic interplay of doing and undergoing that Dewey (1925) identifies as vital for growth. By stifling curiosity, spontaneity, and reflection, necrophilic curricula impose inauthentic aims, objectives, and activities that effectively disenfranchise learners and teachers from the achievement and expression of their agency, creativity, and freedom. When this occurs, teachers and learners are confronted with the futility of ineducative experiences. As a result, hope is lost, life (e.g., education) becomes unlife, and the potential, transformative quality of education is destroyed.

Necrophilic curricula undermine the very conditions necessary for education as life. Experiences terminate with the completion of tasks, rather than reflecting previous experience and indicating new opportunities and trajectories for growth. Fromm's (1964) critique of necrophilia as a parasitic force is particularly apt here: these curricula drain the vitality of teachers and students, sustaining themselves through external mandates and metrics while replacing the possibilities of growth and renewal with cycles of compliance and alienation. Restoring life (e.g., education) requires a radical approach to identifying the root causes of alienation by reimagining curricula that promote biophilia—a love of life sustained by hope and committed to the transformative possibilities of education.

Restoring Life

Where necrophilic curricula drain vitality and alienate learners and teachers, biophilic curricula affirm life through their orientation toward renewal, unity, and growth. Fromm (1964)

describes biophilia as “a passionate love of life and all that is alive” (p. 45). It is a force that sustains growth and enables connection. At their core, biophilic curricula integrate the dynamic interplay of doing and undergoing (Dewey, 1925). They are characterized by openness and creativity, resisting rigid structures and instead creating environments where learners can experience, reflect, and grow. As Fromm (1964) emphasizes, the biophilic person “wants to mold and to influence by love, reason, and example; not by force” (p. 365). Similarly, biophilic curricula prioritize relationality, engaging learners in dialogical, collaborative processes that honor their voices and perspectives.

Perhaps most crucially, biophilic curricula are animated by hope. This hope sustains the vitality of doing and undergoing, with a need for integrating experience to larger processes of renewal and growth. In contrast to the stasis and lifelessness of necrophilic curricula, biophilic curricula embody the possibilities of life itself, affirming the fundamental human capacity for connection, creativity, and transformation. Biophilic curricula align to Dewey’s declaration that education is not preparation for life but life itself, and it is through the dyadic relationships of continuity and transaction and experience and reflection that individuals are roused from routine, exercise their intellectual freedom (Dewey, 1938), and achieve the agency through which they meaningfully engage with their world. Furthermore, biophilic curricula capture Freire’s admonition that such engagements are predicated upon radical hope, the intrinsic desire to transform ourselves and the world as we seek to achieve a fuller sense of our humanity.

I didn’t want to feel animated as an educator; I wanted to *live*. For me, *Learning Microsoft Office* was a corpse-curriculum intended to be “brought to life,” but I couldn’t summon enough necromancy in my pedagogy to achieve such a feat. In order to break free from the necrophilic grip of the zombie curriculum, I decided to talk to my students—“real talk” (as they would say) about my frustrations. It wasn’t easy. They were suspicious and hesitant at first, but I realised that only when I shared my struggles—my dissatisfaction with teaching, the school, and *Learning Microsoft Office*—things began to shift.

In retrospect, I believe I had started to develop what hooks (1994) calls “engaged pedagogy,” where educators recognise and respond to the lived experiences of their students in ways that honor the vulnerability inherent in teaching and learning. Sharing my vulnerability as a teacher dispossessed of creativity, agency, and meaningful interaction was an essential step toward rehumanising our classroom. Most important, through a critical and engaged pedagogy, I recognised the value of a radical, pedagogical love as a motivational force in my pedagogy and an organisational feature of the experiences I shared with my students founded upon an irreducible hope that we could restore life to our necrophilic curriculum. This hope was a vitalizing force, a vibrant quality of our experiences together that nurtured curiosity, communication, understanding, and unity.

Through the perspective of engaged pedagogy, we took advantage of opportunities to resurrect our undead curriculum and imbue it with vitality. In the days and weeks that followed, my students and I discussed their interests, aims, and current circumstances. We considered how our individual experiences and understanding could be interpreted through a broader sociological and critical perspective (Smith, 2013), and we deliberated over how to organise educative experiences through these new perspectives in ways that recognised and responded to opportunities for growth. Rather than relying on *Learning Microsoft Office*, we co-created learning opportunities that met the curriculum requirements of the school and state that were grounded in the immediate realities of my students’ lives with an aim to enhance and widen their experience. They wrote and formatted business letters to local politicians, created posters expressing their

political views and values, and were open to useful, effective, and creative ways of using Microsoft Office (for example) as a tool to engage in, understand, and learn from their lives.

As I was navigating these challenges with my students, I *sensed* these connections, but it is only through *Ambulare*, through a purposeful, systematic, and critical reflection on this experience, coupled with an application of theoretical perspectives from hooks, Dewey, Freire, and Fromm, and undertaken through frequent, prolonged, and embodied reflection that my instinctive understanding was analysed, reconstructed, and understood. In order to explicate and elucidate this understanding into a what I hoped was a cogent and sophisticated articulation of curriculum understanding, I came to the following conclusion: If education is life and we must love life, then we must also love education.

Love Begins with Hope

To counteract necrophilic curricula, we must restore not only life but also the hope that sustains it and gives it vitality. Hope is the "psychic concomitant to life and growth" (Fromm, 1968) and, by extension, education and transformation. Both Freire (1994, 1968/2018) and Fromm (1968) argue that hope is not a passive state but an active orientation toward possibility. For Freire, hope emerges from our incompleteness, the recognition that we are always becoming, always striving toward something more. It is through this striving—grounded in the belief that change is possible—that education acts as an emancipatory and transformative practice.

For Fromm (1968), hope is the energy that sustains biophilic actions, imbuing them with purpose and direction. Hope fuels the creative and life-affirming acts that counteract necrophilia's stasis and rigidity. It is the underlying force that allows us to see beyond the present constraints, imagining and working toward a future where growth and renewal are possible. Without hope, Fromm suggests, biophilia collapses into despair, and the potential for love, creativity, and transformation vanishes.

Hope is the foundation for meaningful transaction. The interplay of doing and undergoing is sustained by a hope that our actions will yield growth and/or connection. Without hope, this transactional rhythm is disrupted; actions become mechanical, and experiences become lifeless. Necrophilic curricula, by severing the connection between action and renewal, frustrate hope at every turn. They replace the open-ended possibilities of growth with rigid objectives, pointless exercises, and a promise of an education unfulfilled.

Conversely, biophilic curricula affirm the centrality of hope by fostering conditions where learners can enhance self-understanding and work toward meaningful futures. These curricula engage education as a hopeful, dynamic process of being-and-becoming that seeks to enlarge and fulfil one's humanity (Freire, 1968/2018). As Fromm (1964) writes, hope is not simply an expectation but a commitment to life's possibilities, a poised and ready desire for active engagement with the world.

Conclusion

Freire (1968/2018) reminds us that hope is rooted in praxis—the critical interplay of theory, reflection, and action. It is through this praxis that educators and learners alike resist despair and reimagine what education can be. To restore life to necrophilic curricula, we must cultivate hope

as a generative force, reconnecting the dynamic rhythm of doing and undergoing to the conditions that foster renewal, growth, and love.

A love of life and education is predicated upon the belief that our doings and undergoings will lead to renewal and growth. As such, hope is the root from which all transformative action grows (Freire, 1968/2018). It sustains the possibility of renewal, enlivens reflection and imbues action with vitality and direction. It is the excitement of, expression of, and response to, hope that ensures education remains a living, dynamic force for growth and change, rather than a lifeless endeavour that dominates, isolates, and destroys.

Both Freire (1994, 1968/2018) and Fromm (1964) assert that love and hope are intrinsically intertwined. In *The Art of Loving*, Fromm (1956) describes love as an art that requires discipline, practice, and dedication, with hope as its sustaining foundation. Hope is not passive; it is an active, essential energy that imbues our humanistic state with a transformative and connective potential that affirms life and resists despair (Fromm, 1968). In a radical sense (Beauchamp et al., 2022), Freire (1994) similarly frames love and hope as the very roots of education, the genesis of critical consciousness, and as necessary qualities for transformation. Hope is an ontological necessity, an existential imperative that compels educators and learners to act critically and creatively in the world. Like Fromm, Freire (1994) sees hope as active, persistent, and grounded in relational understanding, critical reflection, and intentional action.

If education is to remain a living, transformative process, it must be rooted in hope. Without hope, education becomes static, lifeless, and alienating—a necrophilic force that denies life and love. With hope, education flourishes as a biophilic practice, affirming life, nurturing growth, and inspiring transformation.

For if hope cannot endure, how can love, or life, exist?

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