Table of Contents

Volume 3 Issue 2 January 2020

Editorial Staff

Cover design by Olu Oyedare

A Reflection on White-Seeming Privilege Through the Process of *Currere*

By Adrian M. Downey[1]
University of New Brunswick

In 2017, I wrote my master's thesis as an arts-informed autobiography examining the intersection of my own white privilege and Indigenous identity (Downey, 2017). Since that time, I've had many opportunities to continue reflecting on my Indigenous identity as my band, the Qalipu Mi'kmaw First Nation (QMFN), has gone through the process of removing me from its founding member list, and consequently, my name has been removed from the Federal Indian Registry.[2] I have also, more than once, come face to face with my own white privilege. In this article, I continue the process of examining the intersection of my white privilege and my Indigenous identity or, what I have called elsewhere, my white-seeming privilege (Downey, 2017, 2018a).[3]

White-seeming privilege is the term I give the privilege to which I have access. It is, for me, a way of complicating the commonly held binary construction of a white/non-white spectrum of privilege. *It is in no way a tempering of my privilege*, but rather a contextualization of the privilege to which I have access in my particular lived and ancestral history. This ultimately stems from the belief that we are more than the labels that society ascribes to us (i.e., "privileged" or "marginalized"). My white privilege is complicated by my contested and erased Indigenous identity: the privilege to which I have access is a direct result of my ancestors' assimilation and erasure; the privilege to which I have access comes with 20 years of not knowing myself as an Indigenous person; the privilege to which I have access comes with language and culture loss; the privilege to which I have access comes with a tenuous hold on a federally recognized Indigenous identity (See Footnote 2). A colleague recently asked, "what kind of privilege is that?" with reference to Indigenous peoples who have white privilege. My answer? A real but complicated one.

In this article, I revisit the intersection of my Indigenous identity and my white privilege through a form of *currere* (Pinar, 1994, 2012). I understand *currere* as a method of autobiography divided into four stages: the regressive, the progressive, the analytic, and the synthetic (Pinar, 1994, 2012). Each of these stages or moments has a particular task in helping one make sense of the self. The regressive looks to the past and the progressive to the future. The analytic and synthetic attempt to understand the present. Furthermore, *currere*, "provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relationship between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (Pinar, 2012, p. 44). For me, when we engage in reflective analysis and/or autobiography, we are ultimately attempting to make sense of who we are, where we come from, why we are here, and where we are going—four questions often posed by Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers to encourage folk to place their own lives within a larger context (Marshall, 2018; see also Talaga, 2018). To me, there is considerable similarity between Pinar's *currere* and these questions. Thus, below, I frame my reflective autobiography dualistically as *currere* informed by Indigenous (Mi'kmaw) knowledge.

This method was chosen as a way to communicate, reflect on, and situate the concept of white-seeming privilege within the disciplinary context of curriculum studies while still maintaining the influence of Indigenous thought. There are two reasons for

Downey, A. (2020). A reflection on white-seeming privilege through the process of *currere. Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 1-10.

this methodological choice. First, the field of curriculum studies has been criticized as being complacent with settler-colonialism through the replacement (and erasure) of Indigenous bodies, voices, identities, and thought within the field by those of settler "experts" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). There is, thus, a need to (re)assert Indigenous presence within the field, something to which I hope this paper implicitly contributes. Second, on a more personal note, though I have always framed my work as situated in curriculum studies, the theoretical connection has been tenuous at best (see Downey, 2017). This article is my attempt to make explicit the connection between white-seeming privilege and curriculum studies through Pinar's autobiographical method, *currere*.

Toward methodological clarity, I have divided the remainder of this text into four sections corresponding to each of the four moments of *currere*. I will begin each section by describing the intent of the moment according to Pinar. Then, I will share the key insights that emerged as I engaged in free-writing for each of the four moments. Finally, I will conclude this paper by explicitly addressing white-seeming privilege in the context of curriculum studies, as well as summarizing and unifying the divergent threads of my reflection.

Regressive—Where Do You Come From?

In the regressive moment, one attempts to re-experience the past (Pinar, 2012). Through free association, one dwells within the experiences that were, ultimately enlarging them and understanding them anew. Through regression, we seek out not simply that which is conscious in our memories, but also that which is buried in the haze of our subconscious minds (Pinar, 2012). Here, I share two memories from the past two years, emergent from free-writing and selected for their relevance to my privilege and Indigeneity.

The most obvious memory that calls out to me to be shared is when my mother, my sister, and I received our letters informing us that our names would be removed from the Federal Indian Registry. There is a long history leading to this moment which I have described elsewhere (Downey, 2017, 2018a). Here, it is sufficient to say that the QMFN, of which my maternal family have been members since its formation, has undergone a membership review because of the high number of applicants to the band. This membership review resulted in, among other things, 10,512 Indians losing their status[4] and band memberships for failure to meet the new criteria for membership. Debates, legal challenges, and community protests addressing these changes are still ongoing in Newfoundland and throughout Canada. Here, I am more interested in the human moments arising from the loss of Indian status in my own memory.

I have a standing phone call scheduled with my parents every Sunday night around 6:00 pm. Sometimes we talk throughout the week but, more often than not, whatever we have to say waits until Sunday night. One Sunday in May 2018, my mother mentioned that our letters from the band had come. We had been awaiting them for a long time. Although we had written appeal letters and provided as much documentation as possible, we had heard of other people in similar situations who had lost status, so we expected the worst. My mother told me that we had all been rejected, and though she had expected it, it did make her sad. My father, who is of settler descent, had much more to say about it—calling it a slap in the face (which it was), illegal (which it was), and stupid (which it was). Dad always had a way with words, but it was my mother's simple statement of sadness that stayed with me. Throughout the life-long process of trying to prove our

Indigeneity, my mother had been the one who pushed us. To hear the sadness—*almost* defeat—in her voice was jarring.

Having shared experiences of my conflicted Indigenous identity, I would be remiss were I not to also share memories of my white privilege. There have been many. I could think about being named valedictorian when I graduated with my master's degree, receiving a doctoral fellowship to pursue my research, or more mundane instances of tacit acceptance at the grocery store, my apartment building, or the gym—often communicated with a smile or a nod of approval. Perhaps the clearest way I see my privilege, however, is when I am the only Indigenous person in a room where Indigenous people are being discussed. This happens frequently in classes, research presentations, and dissertation defenses, but regardless of the venue, there is a familiar feeling of discomfort that accompanies the conversation—a lingering unnamable feeling replete with uncommunicated expectations from others and from myself.

That unnamable feeling reared its head recently at a dissertation proposal, which I attended as an interested member of the public.[5] It was a hot summer day, and as I walked into the room, I looked from face to face. I was surprised by the number of people, almost none of whom were familiar to me, and all of whom looked white. A few people nodded approvingly as I sat down, a few others smiled and chatted softly. Despite the calm in the room, a wave of anxiety washed over me. There was a striking absence here: no smudge, no Elder, no language keepers, no symbols of our culture—and perhaps most importantly, no familiar faces.

In my thesis defense—the culminating moment of a lifetime of internal work and a year's worth of reflective writing—I made it clear that as a white-seeming Mi'kmaw man, I needed to use my privilege to help my community. One way I have tried to do that is through challenging unethical research involving Indigenous people, particularly when I am the only Indigenous person present. A full discussion of ethical research involving Indigenous peoples is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it is worth noting that, historically, Indigenous people have been one of the most researched groups in the world, and much of that research has objectified, exotified, and directly worked against the best interests of Indigenous people (Kovach, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Wilson, 2008). The current movement in research involving Indigenous people is toward research "with" or "by" rather than research "on" or "about" Indigenous people. The preposition test, as I call it, is a simple principle for assessing the involvement of Indigenous people in a particular project and works from the assumption that, if a researcher is researching Indigenous people, the Indigenous people need to be present at every point of the research process from inception to dissemination (see The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014).

When I walked into that room filled with faces like mine for the dissertation proposal, I carried all of that with me. I also carried the obligation to speak back to research that works "on" Indigenous people. On that day, however, I swallowed my doubts and opened my ears and heart to listen to the presenter. As they spoke, my anxiety quickly returned, and the more I heard, the more my anxiety shifted to anger. After the presentation was over, I knew I had to say something. I tried to be as open as possible and asked about the ethical implications of the presenter's work and whether they considered their work to be on, about, or with Indigenous peoples. I also made it clear that I thought they were working "on" Indigenous people and that I thought that was problematic. As the presenter responded to me, they did so in a tone I felt was rather reminiscent of some of the teachers I had in school—derogatory and paternalistic, as though "teacher knows

best." It made me as uncomfortable then as it did when I was a student. I commented on the presenter's tone, but this did nothing to change the situation. I waited for them to finished talking at me, and then I got up and left the room. Apparently, a few people from the 20 or so white faces also got up and left.

Afterward, I reflected on all the Indigenous children and adults who have been lectured, without possibility of escape, by a teacher who "knew best." The fact that I could leave that situation at my choosing is an example of my white privilege. The fact that I was in that room in the first place is an example of my white privilege. The fact that I've been on the delivering end of similar "teacher knows best" lectures with First Nations students who didn't look like me is also an example of my white privilege.

These experiences highlight the tensions involved in looking white and being Indigenous. They highlight the tensions of my contested, policed, and erased Indigenous identity and the privilege of being able to walk away. In my history, for every story of profound privilege, there is also a story of attempted erasure.

Progressive—Where Are You Going?

In the progressive moment, we look toward the future. Pinar (2012) says, "contemplatively, the student of *currere* imagines possible futures, including fears as well as fulfillments" (p. 46). He goes on to discuss the importance of articulating one's vision of the future in understanding oneself in the present. Here, I share some of my thinking about the future of my Indigenous identity and my privilege.

My future is not with *The Indian Act*.[6] I have been given a letter that states that my name will be removed from the Federal Indian Registry. Even as I write these words there is some bitterness in my heart, but it is simply a reality I must accept. My parents and the Elders with whom I've spoken about this have been helpful. They remind me, "They can't tell you who you are," and they encourage me to keep paddling my canoe. For me, the future of my Indigenous identity is in ceremony, language, and relationships—not an arbitrary distinction made by The Canadian State. The future I wish for is one in which I can own that as my choice and not a decision that was forced upon me. In the future, I would rather look at my invalid status card[7] with contempt than with remorse.

There are tensions within my vision of how I will use my privilege in the future. In the case of my colleague's dissertation proposal, the critical scholar in me believes that I should be relentless in my critique of their work. I should write rejoinders when they publish, attend their conference presentations to ask difficult questions, and encourage my colleagues to do the same. Another part of me, however, knows that everyone has their path and that this researcher is, hopefully, working with the best of intentions. Asking difficult questions in the ways I have done invites negativity into my life through the form of damaged relationships and hurt pride; to this day, I carry some hurt with me from the moment I walked out of that presentation. Many of the Elders from whom I've had the great privilege of learning are careful with their criticisms, often opting to encourage someone rather than criticize. The negativity just isn't worth it. In envisioning my future, I see conflict. I see moments of successfully challenging people to think through the implications of their work for Indigenous people through the tough questions that are sometimes required, but I also see asking those questions in more respectful and gentle tones than have marked my past. Ultimately, I have two hopes for the future. One is that there will be more Indigenous people attending these presentations with me, asking the questions I had written down as well as others I had not considered. The second is that Indigenous people—myself included—won't always need to be the ones to ask hard questions or walk out of presentations, but rather that

settler-allies, supervision committees, and supervisors will be willing to do so on our behalf and in conjunction with us.[8]

Where the future is concerned, I mostly maintain what Jonathan Lear (2006) has called radical hope. This notion of radical hope is marked by the ability to creatively (re)imagine and reform one's life after everything that one knows has ceased to exist. North American Indigenous peoples have been existing in radical hope for at least the last 500 years. Almost every generation has had to creatively reimagine their life because the life they have known has been changed irreversibly. Here, I think of children being abducted and brought to residential schools and the 60s and millennial scoops (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). How do we go on when nothing is as we've known? We just do—as we have always done (Simpson, 2017). Generally, when I envision my future, it is marked by a simple acceptance of whatever might happen. This comes from attempts at a grounding in Mi'kmaw tradition: if I keep walking the good path, keep paddling my canoe, I will end up where I need to be. Being grounded in tradition is also a way of asserting presence and resisting erasure, and asserting Indigenous presence in the present serves as a way of displacing visions of the future that do not include Indigenous people (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). For me, trying to be grounded in Mi'kmaw culture, language, and spirituality is what allows me to accept the chaos, conflict, and contentions of my identity.

Analytic—Why Are You Here?

As I understand it, the analytic moment is about analyzing the present in relation to the past and the future (Pinar, 1994, 2012). In the analytic moment, "we attempt to discern how the past inheres in the present and in our fantasies of the future (Pinar, 2012, p. 46). Pinar's directive for this moment is to "describe the biographical present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them" (Pinar, 1994, p. 25). In this analytic stage, I share insights into why I am here through where I come from and where I am going.

I am Mi'kmaw. I learn the language of my ancestors so that it can become the language through which I express my heart-thoughts.[9] This process of learning is, for me, a way of speaking back to the past, especially the people who told my mother, my sister, and myself that we were not "Indians." This kind of learning is always a future-oriented, hopeful process, but it also lives in the present—it is one of the things I do that connects me to who I am.

Though initially the idea of being removed from the Federal Registry was an insulting, painful, and frightening prospect that caused me to question the core of my being, it no longer fills me with the same sense of dread and existential angst. I know who I am. *The Indian Act* is a relic of the assimilatory mandate of the foreign occupying state known as Canada (Palmater, 2011). It was designed with the expressed intent of absorbing the Indigenous population into the body politic and has historically proven the most detrimental to women (Palmater, 2011). It is a perfect distillation of the heteronormative, capitalistic, assimilative, settler-colonial thinking of The Canadian State (Simpson, 2017) and something I want nothing to do with. In fact, many Indigenous people in Canada are now trying to get out of the Indian Act (Palmater, 2015). The case of the Qalipu is somewhat different. Because we never had federal recognition, it became a priority. As I've learned from my Indigenous brothers and sisters outside of Newfoundland, the real issue is not recognition, but sovereignty (Palmater, 2015). The Mi'kmaw nation as a whole has a strong case for sovereignty, and the case in Newfoundland is no weaker (see Wetzel, 1995). We never ceded, surrendered, or sold

our territory; we never gave up our Land. We have been occupied for the last 500 years, but we are still sovereign, and sovereign nations do not negotiate citizenship with foreign, occupying forces. Now, in the present, I can say I am Mi'kmaw because I know the history of my people, as well as my own personal history. I also know that, in the future, this dimension of my identity will be unchanged.

Pinar (1994) suggests that, "for many, the present is woven into the fabric of institutional life" (p. 25). This is both a source and manifestation of my privilege. My present reality is that I am writing an article on a computer loaned to me by my university, free of charge. I do not have to work in order to pay for my tuition because I have been sufficiently *schooled* in grant and publication writing and western ways of knowing, resulting in funding for my doctoral research. I have an office in which I can keep my books and in which I can feel secure. Needless to say, my present reality is possible in large part because of who I am and where I come from—specifically the educational advantages I received as someone perceived as white and male. These facts of my history and the tensions within my vision of the future are what led me, and lead me in this moment, to challenge my peers' research. The research being done and the conversations being had in universities across Canada and in other counties affect the lives of Indigenous peoples, and the people who are affected by that research are rarely present at proposal presentations, conferences, or meetings.[10] The present reality for me, and one reason why I am here, is that I am one who asks hard questions of my peers. This is because of my history of privilege—I am one who has the privilege of being there to hear when our people are being talked *about*. Thus, for the time being, disruption is an ethical imperative informed by my past and manifest in my future—though I personally and spiritual maintain hope that someday that may not be the case.

Synthetic—Who Are You?

The synthetic moment is about piecing or placing together. It is a moment in which "listening carefully to one's own inner voice in the historical and natural world, one asks, 'what is the meaning of the present'" (Pinar, 2012, pp. 46-47). It is, by my reading, a more holistic iteration of the present moment in all its complexity. This is the reality and wholeness of "who you are." Below, I attempt to share my synthetic insights on Indigenous identity and privilege.

My privilege and my Indigenous identity are intimately intertwined. I am Mi'kmaw, and I am white. This means I walk in two worlds (Lovern & Locust, 2013) and see with two eyes (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012): one Western, filled with empirical, rational, and critical ways of knowing, the other Mi'kmaw marked by an intuitive knowledge of and appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things (Henderson, 2016; see also Cajete, 2000; Graveline, 1998; Wilson, 2008). Sometimes this is of great benefit, like in writing a reflective article such as this or in helping settler students make sense of their privilege and guiding them along the path to allyship. Other times, it can be jarring and difficult, such as when I'm trying to explain my research to my aunts, uncles, and parents or being challenged by an Indigenous person who doesn't see/recognize me as Indigenous. Sometimes these two worldviews conflict and clash, as in my discussion of how to ask critical questions or even in thinking about whether to write this article, where questions always linger (What does it mean for me to write from an Indigenous perspective? How "authentic" is my voice? Does it matter? Is this article in the best interests of Indigenous people?). Walking in two worlds and seeing with two eyes helps me to see the ways in which Canada polices my identity; it also shows me

the path toward resistance. Walking this way lets me understand my privilege and my identity in the context of my lived reality, and that gives me the power to speak when I need to and the humility to listen the rest of the time.

I've come to think of my privilege and my identity as a talking circle (Downey, 2018b). For me, my Indigenous identity and my privilege are ongoing negotiations between myself, my family, my community, my nation, the natural world, and the cosmos (see Graveline, 1998; Stonechild, 2016). We are all speaking and listening to one another; slowly, things are changing, growing, and shifting; categories are not so static as they once were because we can see the conversations that inform them. In short, by seeing myself through the lens of a talking circle and ongoing negotiation, I notice the absence of black and white and begin to appreciate the myriad shades and colours between. Privilege is no longer an "either/or," but rather a "yes/and."

Conclusion

Here, I have attempted to reflect on some recent experiences that have furthered my thinking about white-seeming privilege, a concept discussed thoroughly in my previous writing (Downey, 2017, 2018a). I have attempted to frame this reflective thinking through Pinar's framework of *currere* both to assert Indigenous presence within the field of curriculum studies (see Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) and in an effort to make more explicit the theoretical connection I see between curriculum studies and white-seeming privilege. Below, I comment more directly on the latter connection.

Kumar (2013) identifies four meanings of the word awareness in curriculum studies: the scientific, the critical, the autobiographical, and the meditative. For me, these distinctions serve as a useful way of thinking about the diversity of perspectives that exist within curriculum studies. Awareness from the scientific perspective might refer to awareness of objectives and would be rooted in the work of Tyler and Bobbit. A critical understanding of awareness might refer to conscientization, Freire's (1996) name for the process of gaining a critical understanding of the world with particular reference to the ideologies at work within it. The meditative understanding of awareness is Kumar's own contribution to the literature and is, according to Kumar, a more holistic and spiritual engagement with one's inner conflicts than that presented in the autobiographical meaning of awareness.

Autobiographical awareness is an awareness of one's lived experience and the way one's life can be historically, culturally, politically, and socially situated and is informed by the work of Pinar (1994, 2012; Pinar & Grumet, 1976). This autobiographical way of thinking is where I see my work fitting within the broader study of curriculum. The basic axiom from which all my work as an academic, teacher, artist, and activist stems is that *personal narrative disrupts dominant narrative*. My thesis, which was framed as personal storytelling or arts-informed autobiography, was my attempt at presenting my own story in hopes of disrupting and complicating the dominant narrative around privilege as dichotomous and/or binary. I wanted to give voice to the "racial shadow zones that are created for us and that we create for ourselves" (King, 2003, p. 92). Writing my thesis allowed me to create a space—perhaps a third space (Wang, 2004)—where I didn't see one before; it gave me the platform from which to acknowledge my privilege and my familial history of Indigenous erasure in the same breath. In the moment of my writing, that was the knowledge of most worth. I think that in every moment we all ought to be able to answer the question of what knowledge is of most worth for ourselves. I claimed my right to do that through my thesis, and I see Pinar

and those who take up autobiographical curriculum theory as doing the same. It is, thus, through the autobiographical that I see my work around white-seeming privilege as curriculum theory.

Revisiting the conceptual space of my thesis in this article has provided new insight into my own lived reality and study of curriculum. Through this re-visitation, the connection between my work and curriculum studies—which was something that was always intended, but never came to fruition in the actual thesis writing process—has been more fully theorized. My hope is, however, that my work here has also provided others some insight into the complexity of lived Indigenous experience. Specifically, I hope that settlers doing work on or about Indigenous people know that the reason they haven't been challenged by Indigenous people is because we aren't always present or emotionally capable of doing that work. Second, I hope that those not previously aware of the ways in which the foreign occupying state known as Canada continues to police Indigenous identity have seen one example of the phenomenon. Third, I hope that I have highlighted the complexities of privilege. Finally, I hope that readers of this work will remember that the white privilege to which we of translucent identity have access comes as the result of generations of forced assimilation, denied recognition, and erasure (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). As my colleague asked, "What kind of privilege is that?"

References

Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences, 2*(4), 331-340.

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light.

Downey, A. (2017). *Speaking in circles: White privilege and Indigenous identity* (unpublished master's thesis). Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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

Downey, A. (2018b). *Writing my privilege as talking circle: White privilege and Indigenous identity*. Roundtable presentation at CSSE Annual Conference, University of Regina, Regina, SK.

Ellingburg, M. L. (2015). *I am a Native American woman with white privilege.* Retrieved January 26, 2016, from https://mfaconfessions.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/i-am-a-native-american-woman-with-white-privilege/

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (new rev. ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Graveline, F. (1998). *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.

Henderson, J. S. Y. (2016). L'nu humanities. In M. Battiste (ed.), *Visioning a Mi'kmaw humanities: Indigenizing the academy* (pp. 29-55). Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press.

King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A native narrative*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Kroeger, B. (2003). *Passing: When people can't be who they are*. Cambridge, MA: PublicAffairs.

Kumar, A. (2013). *Curriculum as meditative inquiry*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lear, J. (2006). *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lovern, L., & Locust, C. (2013). *Native American communities on health and disability: A borderland dialogue*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marshall, A. (2018, January 18). *Kisutmi': How do we move forward in a co-learning journey*. Lecture delivered at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, Canada.

Palmater, P. (2011). *Beyond blood: Rethinking Indigenous identity*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing.

Palmater, P. (2015). *Indigenous nationhood: Empowering grassroots citizens*. Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing.

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

Pinar, W. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Pinar, W., & Grumet, M. R. (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/ Hunt Pub. Co.

Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Stonechild, B. (2016). *The knowledge seeker: Embracing Indigenous spirituality*. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

Talaga, T. (2018). *All our relations: Finding the path forward*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.

The First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2014, May). *Ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP™): The path to First Nations information governance.* Ottawa, ON: The First Nations Information Governance Centre.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. *Volume one, summary: Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future*. Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company.

Tuck, E., & Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2013). Curriculum, replacement, and settler futurity. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 29*(1), 72-89.

Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2015). *Place in research: Theory, methodology, and methods*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

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

Wetzel, M. G. (1995). *Decolonizing Ktaqmkuk Mi'kmaw history* (Unpublished master's thesis). Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Pub.

Endnotes

[1]Adrian M. Downey is Mi'kmaw PhD candidate at the university of New Brunswick in the faculty of education. He can be reached at adowney3@unb.Ca

[2]In Canada, indigenous people are given federal recognition through the status system. The legislation that created this system is called the Indian aAct (see footnote 5). The Indian Act was not enacted in Newfoundland when the province joined Canada in

1949, which left the indigenous people there without federal recognition. Indigenous people have been fighting ever since to correct this. In 2008, my mother, my sister, and I were all accepted as members of the Qalipu Mi'kmaw First Nation—a band set up to encompass all previously unrecognized indigenous people of Newfoundland. We gained federal recognition, or "status" as Indians, in 2012. In 2013, because of a huge influx of applications, the federal government and Mi'kmaw leadership in Newfoundland established a membership review that reassessed all of the original members (n= ~22,000) and all of the remaining applicants (n= ~70,000) by a new set of criteria, which strongly emphasized one's presence in Newfoundland. The results of the membership review were made public last January, where 10,512 Indians lost their status. Despite successful court actions against the appeal process, those 10,512 people lost their status as of august 31, 2018. My mother, my sister, and I were among the 10,512, while my mother's brothers and sisters and their children have mostly retained their status because of their continued presence in Newfoundland.

[3]Some people may be more familiar with the term white-passing privilege (Ellignberg, 2015). I use white-seeming for two reasons. First, the term "passing" is used in some Mi'kmaw communities to refer to one's journey to the spirit world; using "seeming" is one small way of honouring my tribal epistemology or traditional knowledge system (Kovach, 2009). The second reason is that passing semantically implies an intentionality of deception, which is inconsistent with the way I experience the phenomenon (see Kreoger, 2003 for a definition of passing). I make no attempt to present myself as other than I understand myself to be, yet sometimes I am perceived that way. I do not pass; I seem.

[4]Status is the legal designation for someone who is of Indigenous ancestry within Canada. See footnote 2 for more details.

[5]My description of this event has been left purposefully vague in certain areas in order to preserve the anonymity of presenter. Unfortunately, my discussion here could apply to any number of proposal presentations I have attended.

[6]The Indian Act is the piece of Canadian legislation that lays out the laws regarding the federal governments' relationship with Indigenous peoples. It determines who is and who is not an Indian through the status system and has historically been aimed at assimilation (Palmater, 2011). It can be viewed online at http://laws-lois.Justice.Gc.Ca/eng/acts/i-5/

[7]A status card is a government issued id for status holding indians.

[8]This shouldn't take anything away from those elders, knowledge keepers, and scholars who do challenge unethical work. The point here is that it shouldn't always have to be our responsibility, not that we shouldn't do it.

[9]There is no word in English that really captures those things that you know in your heart but not in your mind. I call them heart-thoughts.

[10]It is becoming more common within particular paradigms of thinking but is still far from the norm.

The Village Boy's Rude Awakening: My Academic *Currere*

By Lovemore Sibanda
University of North Texas

The daily walk to school and back to my village was the beginning of my "long walk" to education. Every morning, with other children from our village, barefooted, I walked and ran to attend classes at the nearest mission school. The mission school, the beacon of Western education ten miles away from our village, was to us a light set upon a hill dispelling darkness, ignorance, and backwardness. Indeed, it symbolized the white man's burden to "civilize" us. I was to spend the first five years of my academic journey at this mission school. I did not have the luxury of pre-schooling. My parents were convinced, and so was I, that education was the great escape from perpetual poverty. They impressed upon me that a bright and fulfilling life was dependent upon my success in school. My parents and I were oblivious to the perilous pathway of my academic road. The challenges and problems that were littered along my academic journey were not at first apparent and manifest.

My Encounter with Colonial Education and Western Epistemology

Unbeknownst to me and my parents, the school and my home environment were like oil and water. In colonial Zimbabwe, the school and the home were two unrelated entities. There was no congruency. The chasms between school and society and between child and curriculum were very wide, breaking the "essential continuity of educational concepts and practices across the spectrum of human development" (Dewey, 2013, p. xx). The school was isolated from my being and my experience. In the village, I was an African, but at school, I was taught to despise who I was and to be a white man in "taste, habits, dress, opinions, morals and intellect" (Macaulay, 1835/1995, p. 249). For me to assimilate to the European lifestyle and values was an admission that my culture was inferior to white culture. My identity and self-awareness as an African were continuously assaulted and pounded upon. School alienated me from my culture. This psycho-cultural alienation intensified at each further stage of my education. No doubt, as an African, I was being miseducated.

I had the misfortune of beginning my education in 1965, the year the Rhodesian government led by Ian Douglas Smith declared unilateral independence from Britain, to thwart British intentions of granting independence to the African majority in Rhodesia. This event and the 1966 Education Act, along with the 1969 constitution that introduced the concept of separate development for blacks and whites, would shape my academic trajectory. For years, various colonial settler governments in Rhodesia sought to limit African access to education and frustrated Christian missionary efforts to educate Africans. The concept of separate development forced all African chiefs to set up Councils to govern areas under their control. Subsequently, the Rhodesian government transferred primary schools from missionary control to the control of local Councils, which were under-resourced and under-funded. The under-funding and under-resourcing of schools greatly impacted our academic achievements and widened the achievement gaps between Africans and Europeans. In a segregated school system, the government spent more on a white child than on a black child. The curriculum was foreign, and rote learning was the dominant pedagogical practice. The foreignness of the curriculum and

Sibanda, L. (2020). The village boy's rude awakening: My academic *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 11-18.

the hidden curriculum thoroughly socialized us to English middle-class values and behaviors (Kanu, 2006). In most instances, I regurgitated words without understanding what I was saying or writing. My indigenous ways of knowing (IWK) and the notions of learning relevant to my social and cultural context were swept aside. IWK is the recognition of the traditional knowledge systems that were historically suppressed by Western aggression and colonialism.

I was denied the advantage of early vernacular instruction. Prior to 1966, learners were taught in their mother tongue in grades one and two. Beginning from 1966, English was made the medium of instruction from first grade to foster a rapid acquisition of the Queen's language by children at an impressionable age. An incident that demonstrates the importance of teaching learners in their home language occurred when I was a first grader. My first grade teacher, who was male and was well-known for his dedication and commitment to educating African children, flashed a picture of a rabbit on a chart. The teacher then asked the question "What is this"? For a long time, the teacher waited for an answer. I raised my hand and said, "That is a *shuro*." *Shuro* is "rabbit" in Shona—one of the native languages in Zimbabwe. The whole class erupted into laughter. The village boy had just received a rude awakening and had seen a harbinger of things to come. It was apparent that my educational destiny hinged on my mastery of English. English was to be not only a vehicle of communication, but a tool for cultural dominance. Speaking in my mother tongue at school was unacceptable and was rewarded with punishment in the form of manual labor after school. The message was loud and clear—English was superior to my native language.

This seemingly innocuous incident (the *shuro* event) was my introduction to the colonization agenda of colonial education. The "*shuro* incident" denied me the opportunity to think, reflect, and to shape and mold my thoughts in my own language. Going forward, my mother tongue was rendered irrelevant and worthless. I began to value speaking in English. Competence in English was at the expense of my competence in my mother tongue. The devaluation of my language lives with me to date and is demonstrated in my speaking to my friends, children, and spouse in English. Code-switching dominates my communication pattern whenever I attempt to speak in my mother tongue. Furthermore, learning and being taught in English as early as grade one stifled my thinking and imagination. The articulation and expression of my thoughts were severely curtailed. I thought in my mother tongue and then translated my thoughts to English. The effectiveness of colonial education as an ideological tool and its capacity to colonize the mind is demonstrated by my grade one teacher's unawareness of the role of culture and language in learning. My teacher was oblivious to the broader implications of using English as a medium of instruction—the annihilation of a "people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment [and] in their capacities and ultimately themselves" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). I began to appreciate my English name, Lovemore, and ridiculed and despised my friends who had African names. My failure to correctly answer my teacher's question and the subsequent humiliation I suffered "annihilated" the belief in myself and my capacity to know and to be in my language—the fundamental objective of the colonial education project.

Gripped with the fear that I might not proceed beyond primary education, my parents transferred me to a boarding school. Unbeknownst to my parents, they were doing what the missionaries wanted: isolating and insulating African children from their culture. My parents' fears were not misplaced because the bottleneck or pyramid system introduced by the Education Act of 1966 drastically reduced transition rates and increased dropout rates (Shizha, 2006). Only 12.5% of students who sat for the seventh-grade examination proceeded to secondary education (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011).

The remaining students were channeled to four-year secondary vocational schools or to the informal sector (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). After two more years, I passed the examination that further reduced the number of students making the transition to the next level. However, by sending me to a boarding school, my parents isolated and insulated me from the influence of my culture and intellectual traditions (Ogunnaike, 2018). Away from my village and my cultural environment and exposed to the Christian religion that consistently and persistently battered and butchered my traditional African religion and cultural norms and traditions, I internalized western values and ideas and appropriated them as my own.

At the secondary level, the curriculum continued to ruthlessly and relentlessly attack my African culture, persona, and history. For example, I could not see myself in history taught in schools. The history curriculum was foreign. I was taught European history and the history of Europeans in Africa and not African history. The denigration and vilification of African historical figures and the glorification of European history characters was palpable. Everything about Africans was negative. As an African, I was portrayed as having no past. My African past was considered "darkness" and, therefore, not history worth studying. The effect was that I despised African history, identified and mimicked European historical figures like Bismarck, Winston Churchill, Lenin, etc. I knew more about Europe and the USA than I did about African anthropology, religion, ethics, music, art, etc. My colonized mind was evidenced by my glorification of European historical figures' achievements and my expression of self-denigration, self-hate, and love for everything that was not me. My imagination was colonized as, indeed, was the way I thought about reality and the world. Colonial education bonded, imprisoned, and shackled me.

Furthermore, I studied English literature, not African literature. The Shona language as a subject was taught in English, and I was required to translate English into Shona as one of the final examination questions. This further buttressed the inferiority of my mother tongue and created a feeling of psychological insubordination and a subservient mentality. Because of the internalization of my mother tongue as an inferior and worthless language, as students at the University of Zimbabwe, we despised and belittled our compatriots who majored in indigenous languages.

Moreover, subject delivery practices (pedagogy) promoted rote learning and stifled creativity and thinking. As a student, I had no voice in the classroom—was supposed to be seen but not heard. Teachers wielded unquestioned authority, and the classroom environment was undemocratic. Colonial pedagogy violated my indigenous ways of being and knowing. It failed to appreciate that my indigenous worldview was holistic and connected to the sacred, to piety and virtue (Kincheloe, 2006; Ogunnaike, 2018). Stories, idioms, and proverbs as an indigenous way of knowing had no place in colonial pedagogy. Colonial pedagogy taught me about myself from the Other—the British perspective. Ultimately, I developed what Du Bois correctly calls a "double consciousness"—a knowledge of self as other. Du Bois (1903/1994) poignantly observed that double consciousness is the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 5). The knowledge of the self as the other was that I and my ancestors were barbarians, lacking culture, civilization, and knowledge. In a nutshell, I became a "Black skin with a white mask." I was an African in skin color only and internalized the belief that nothing good could come out of the dark continent—the heart of darkness. My experiences and background knowledge did not matter in my instruction. The school curriculum and pedagogical practices accomplished their goal of creating a darker Briton, "English in taste, opinions, in morals, and in intellect"

(Macaulay, 1835/1995, p. 249). I lost my self-pride and self-assertion, as I doubted my African humanity and knowledge. Every school holiday, I preferred living in the city with my brother instead of going to the village.

After two years of secondary education, I took what was then called Junior Certificate Examinations in order to proceed to high school. Taking examinations in Rhodesia was mental torture. It meant sleepless nights of studying and cramming information from textbooks and notes from the teachers, undoubtedly enhancing docility and stifling critical thinking. The village boy passed all of the subjects and proceeded to high school. By the time I was in high school, the liberation war in Zimbabwe had intensified. Some schools were closed. Economic sanctions imposed upon Rhodesia by the United Nations were forcing industries and factories to close or relocate to other countries. Disaster struck at the end of my time in high school. I passed all of the subjects except English Language and Shona (my mother tongue). Interestingly, I passed English Literature with an A but failed English Language. I was a victim of what Ogunnaike (2018) calls necrolinguisics. Due to the demonization of my mother tongue, I was not fluent in any language, European or African. Colonial education failed to use my language as a springboard to learn English as a second language as evidenced by the *shuro* incident. Because my transition to the English language was not properly managed, it interfered with my learning of the English language.

I could not proceed with my education. The only option was to look for a job. Unknowingly, I was fulfilling the agenda of colonial education: to work for the white man or colonial government and not create a job for myself or others. Job searching without work experience and trade or profession was like searching for a needle in a haystack. Job opportunities for Africans in racist and colonial Rhodesia were few and far between. The combined effect of the liberation war and economic sanctions meant that jobs had become scarce as industry and commerce had suffered. In any case, colonial education was meant to channel Africans as hewers of wood and drawers of waters. However, the gods smiled on me, and I was employed by the Rhodesia Prison Service as a prison guard. Only whites could be employed as prison officers. While working as a prison guard, I studied and wrote the English language examination set by the University of London. Fortunately, this time around, I passed.

The Village Boy as a Rural Teacher

After almost five years of service as a guard, I resigned to train as a primary school teacher at one of the teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. At that point, the liberation war had ended, and Zimbabwe had attained its independence and sovereignty. At the teacher training college, I was subjected to psychology, sociology, and philosophy of education. Most, if not all, of the psychology, sociology, and philosophy in the education books I read had been written by authors outside of Africa and referred to experiences not relevant to the students I was going to teach. The teaching and learning methods I was taught still mirrored the ones I had been exposed to as a student. Although we read Paulo Freire's (1968/1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, instructors were neither enthusiastic nor competent enough to teach Freire's pedagogical practices. At independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government had vowed to radically transform the colonial educational system, especially the curriculum and pedagogy. The reality on the ground proved otherwise. It was "new wine in old wineskins."

As a teacher in rural schools, I found myself on many occasions teaching as my former teachers had taught me. The village boy, now a village teacher, was miseducating students in the same way I had been miseducated. Colonialism had ended, but its effects, legacies, and vestiges lingered on. I continued to use colonial pedagogy: rote learning

and drill. I realized that I was a bad and poor educator. I desired to be better. On my own, I studied two Advanced Level subjects so that I could pursue my education at the University of Zimbabwe. After teaching for seven years, I enrolled for a Bachelor of Education Degree at the University of Zimbabwe. My major was history, with a curriculum studies minor.

It was at the University of Zimbabwe that I was exposed to the richness of the African past. African history came alive for me. I discovered that I had learned a distorted and largely false history at the primary and secondary levels of my studies. Educational and curriculum theory demonstrated to me the evils and limitations of colonial educational practices. It became clear to me that education can be an instrument for liberation or for indoctrination and mental enslavement (Freire, 1968/1972). The dire and urgent need for a decolonized curriculum to decolonize the African mind was thrust upon me. I graduated and was assigned to teach in an urban school. The school was considered one of the best schools in the country. Most of the teachers at the school were highly qualified and experienced, and yet they failed to disengage from colonial pedagogy.

My passion for curriculum changes and reconstruction in postcolonial Zimbabwe compelled me to study for a master's degree in curriculum studies with an emphasis in history education. After graduating, I managed to land an instructor job in the Teacher Education department at Solusi University. I was part of a team of instructors who trained both pre-service and in-service teachers. The in-service teachers complained that the school curriculum was still not relevant to the needs and aspirations of the students. They bemoaned the fact that school curricula in Zimbabwe were dominated by "Eurocentric knowledge and epistemologies" and that "indigenous ontologies and epistemologies" were relegated to the periphery (Shizha & Kariwo, 2012, p. 74). The teachers claimed that school subject curricula developed since the end of colonialism merely tinkered with the colonial curricula, leaving colonial "fundamentals intact" and rendering them "irrelevant to the needs" of their users (Mavhunga, 2006, p. 446). In a nutshell, school curricula in Zimbabwe failed to cater to the "concrete existential needs" of the African students (Makuvaza, 2008, p. 375). Teachers who taught history specifically highlighted the problem that textbook narratives of the liberation war downplayed the role and contribution of ZAPU and its armed wing ZIPRA. Unknown to me, my research agenda was unfolding before my eyes. My mind began to grapple with the question of how we could put an end to the continuity of the colonizers' curricula and make school curricula meet the existential needs of the African learner. As fate would have it, my wife relocated to the USA. I resigned from my instructor position and followed her.

The Village Boy Comes to America

My present is complicated. It cannot be adequately explained by the "that is a *shuro*" event. My present thoughts are a product of a collision and interplay of forces. The analysis of one's *currere* requires one to reflect on the past, gaze into the future, and "then slowly…analyze one's experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one's submergence in the present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). As Pinar accurately predicts, the reactivation of my past and contemplation of the future complicates my presence. My past is troubled and my future problematized while I am submerged in the present.

My present existence as a doctoral candidate is a complicated and complex mixture of competing forces and events. The "that is a *shuro*" incident and the colonial education project, in general, is not an event of my own making. Like many other of my educational and teaching experiences, it is a variable outside of my control. My educational journey

has not been dependent solely on what I did, but on a host of other factors beyond my control.

My present circumstances, with the benefit of hindsight, help me to explain my educational and teaching trajectory. This analytical phase of *currere* is my critical self-examination of the past and present to understand the multiple facets of my educational experiences (Pinar, 2004). My present offers the opportunity to engage in a "complicated conversation" with my doctoral courses, my fellow students, myself, and the colonial education project. Ironically, this "complicated conversation" is happening in a Western academic institution, in a citadel of Eurocentric epistemology and ontology. I keep wondering whether at the end of my doctoral study the village boy will have found solutions to end the continuity of the colonizers' curricula in Zimbabwe.

The method of *currere* has enabled me to become aware of the multitude of curricula at play in my own academic path: past, present, and future. Looking back at my past educational experiences, I now see how they were shaped by colonial society, politics, and culture. Education was more than an escape from poverty. It was much more. The colonial curriculum uprooted me from my culture and created in me an identity crisis and double consciousness. My African worldview was replaced by a European worldview that denigrated and rubbished my being and self-worth as an African. I was internally and externally colonized (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Taking pride in speaking the language of the oppressor encapsulated my mental slavery and inferiority complex. As a teacher, I struggled to break free from colonial pedagogy. I was stuck in a colonial pedagogy that fit the way I had been taught and had learned. It dawned on me that my pedagogy did not match the socio-cultural realities the learners brought to school and was, therefore, incompatible with the life-worlds and lived experiences of students (Shizha, 2006).

Looking towards the future, I see that my research interests and agenda have been carved out for me—the necessity and desirability to decolonize the curriculum. My doctoral program has provided me with an opportunity to analyze assumptions, biases, values, and beliefs in education in general and in the curriculum. It has given me a new pair of eyes to look at my own past and current educational experiences. I interrogate, examine, and question the relevance of some of my doctoral courses to me as an international student. The feeling of being trapped forever in Western epistemology and ontology grips me occasionally. I have taken courses outside my department in order to "decolonize" my mind, free myself from Western epistemological hegemony, and find solutions to end the continuity of the colonizers' curricula. I have convinced myself that postcolonial curricular perspectives and decoloniality as a political and epistemological movement may provide guidance to reconstruct and re-imagine school subject curricula in Zimbabwe. Postcolonial and decoloniality theories, along with a critique of the current situation, support a way of thinking about the curriculum to make it context-specific and relevant to learner experiences. I am not the only one who has been a victim of oppressive and prescribing curricula. Hopefully, my work and my life can inspire someone to press on in their own academic path/journey.

The Village Boy's Hope

Unfortunately, I did not see all my past educational experiences as they unfolded right in front of my eyes. How do I hope to see what is coming? What does the future hold for me as a scholar and researcher? As a scholar and researcher, the village boy hopes to transform the colonial school curriculum. I am determined to end the cognitive injustice perpetrated by the legacies and vestiges of the colonial curriculum and its failure to incorporate indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing, and learning. It is my hope that

my doctoral training has equipped me to give hope professionally and personally as I work to make an impact on my students and society. No child should experience the embarrassment I suffered from the "that is a *shuro*" incident and the epistemic violence of the colonial education project.

The method of *currere* "slows me down" so that I "re-enter the past" to "meditatively imagine the future" (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). I envision a future not determined by my past, but my experience of the past improving the learning of my students and making my teaching student-centered and contextual. Reconceptualizing the curriculum will close the distance between me and my students and deeply engage us in complicated conversations about the curriculum and how it impacts all of us. I have learned that the nature and character of the curriculum determine the success or failure of students. Any curriculum I will craft will be rooted in this fact. For teaching and learning to be meaningful, it cannot be divorced from the world-view of the learner. This calls for a new discourse to change the course of education for our students. It is my sincere hope that I will take the risk of taking the lead in these "complicated conversations" and the reconceptualization of the curriculum. This is a must for the sake of social justice and equity in education.

The village boy's hope is a decolonized curriculum, which in turn will decolonize and emancipate the African mind. How shall knowledge be produced, represented, and disseminated in the post-colonial dispensation? What should an authentic postcolonial curriculum and pedagogy look like? These difficult questions need to be answered in order to re-imagine a decolonized education system. A decolonized curriculum and a liberatory pedagogy should be "anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-classist [and] against the ubiquitous and parasitic action of power itself" (De Lissovoy, 2014, p. 81). It must dispense with and discard disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical practices used to suppress creativity and critical thinking to serve the agenda of the colonial state of producing pliant and subservient students (Kanu, 2006; Kincheloe, 2006). A decolonized curriculum must intentionally promote the cultural self-determination and political agency that were repressed by the colonial education project.

In a nutshell, decolonized education must fundamentally address the "coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being" (Sentime, 2013, p. 344). The master-servant relationship in the classroom must be replaced by the solidarity and dialogue between the teacher and students on the pedestal of equality. Together, teachers and students are producers and disseminators of knowledge. In contradistinction to colonial education, which was enmeshed and rooted in the notion that some people are advanced and others primitive, decolonized education must decenter Western epistemology and consider it as one of the global family of knowledges (De Lissovoy, 2014). Oral traditions, stories, proverbs, folktales, etc. should be re-appropriated in postcolonial curricular imagining, as these indigenous ways of knowing provoke reflection and reflexivity (Kanu, 2006).

Moreover, decolonized curricula must expose students to other knowledge in order to understand the world and to extricate them from the hegemony and dominance of Western knowledge and ontology. The incorporation of indigenous intellectual traditions and knowledge systems in postcolonial curricula is imperative to counter Western hegemonic knowledge and ways of knowing and being (Kincheloe, 2006). To this end, decolonized curricula not only create space for the marginalized peoples but reconstruct knowledge and oppose the supremacy of Eurocentric thought and its universality (De Lissovoy, 2014). Because culture shapes our ways of seeing, the decolonized curriculum should place culture at the center of postcolonial curriculum reform and analysis. Ultimately, students would not develop a singular worldview, but would be exposed

to "epistemological pluriversality," i.e., not only make postcolonial school curricula culturally relevant but responsive to different histories, sciences, and ways of learning and teaching. Colonial education was a dehumanizing force that took away the African humanity of the learners and produced a "mimic men." Decolonized education should reclaim African humanity, epistemology, and ontology to discontinue mimicry. In a nutshell, decolonized education should be an instrument of liberation and emancipation from a colonized mind, self-denial and denigration, epistemological racism, and cultural devaluation and degradation. Fundamentally, the people it is supposed to serve must define it for themselves.

References

De Lissovoy, N. (2014). *Education and emancipation in the neoliberal era: Being, teaching, and power*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (2013). *The school and society and the child and the curriculum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The souls of black folk*. Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg. (Original work published 1903)

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Herder. (Original work published 1968)

Kanu, Y. (2006). Reappropriating traditions in the postcolonial curricular imagination. In Y. Kanu (Ed.). *Curriculum as cultural practice. Postcolonial imaginations* (pp. 203-222). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

Kincheloe, J. R. (2006). *Critical ontology and indigenous ways of being*. In Y. Kanu (Ed.), *Curriculum as cultural practice. Postcolonial imaginations* (pp. 181-202). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

Macaulay, T. B. (1995). Minute on Indian education. In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin (Eds.), *The post-colonial studies reader* (1st ed., pp. 428-430). New York, NY: Routledge. (Original work published 1835)

Makuvaza, N. (2008). Conquest, colonial education and cultural uprootedness in Africa: The role of education for hunhu/ubuntu in de-rooting the African in Zimbabwe. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research, 20*(3), 371-388.

Mavhunga, P. J. (2006). Africanizing the school curriculum: A case for Zimbabwe. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, *20*(1), 30-48.

Ogunnaike, O. (2018). Of cannons and canons. The promise and perils of postcolonial education. *Renovatio. The Journal of Zaytuna College, 2*(2), 1-10.

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

Shizha, E. (2006). Legitimizing indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe: A theoretical analysis of postcolonial school knowledge and its colonial legacy. *Youth and Children Studies, 2,* 20-35.

Shizha, E., & Kariwo, M. T. (2011). *Education and development in Zimbabwe*. Boston, MA: Sense Publishers.

Sentime, K. (2013). Pan-African unity as a pre-requisite for pro-active response to climate change. In M. Muchie, P. Lukhele-Olorunju, & O. Akpor (Eds.) *The African union ten years after* (pp. 343-363). Pretoria, SA: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Wa Thiong'o, N. (1992). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Accidentally Relevant

By Stacy Johnson
The University of Texas at San Antonio

> With "mis-educated Negros" in control themselves…it is doubtful that the system would be very much different from what it is or that it would rapidly undergo change. The Negroes thus placed in charge would be the products of the same system and would show no more conception of the task at hand than do Whites who have educated them and shaped their minds as they would have them function. Negro educators of today may have more sympathy and interest in the race than the Whites now exploiting Negro institutions as educators, but the former have no more vision than their competitors. Taught from books of the same bias, trained by Caucasians of the same prejudices or by Negroes of enslaved minds, one generation of Negro teachers after another have served for no higher purpose than to do what they are told to do. (Woodson, 1933/2016, p. 12)

I thought I was a good teacher. In fact, I thought I was a great teacher. Everyone said so. I have almost thirty years of plaques and stuffed animals, teary good-bye cards, and LinkedIn requests from students. It is hard to fathom that I am, in actuality, Carter G. Woodson's poster child for a poor teacher. Woodson's (1993/2016) seminal book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, critiques the common model of education for African Americans in the United States, arguing that it creates a population of educated Blacks who lack a proper commitment to the needs of the African American community; perpetuates class differences and mistrust that divide the African American community politically and socially; and most damaging to my self-image as an educator, creates an African American teacher who is, "nothing more than a symbol of inclusion, lacking the cultural knowledge, history, and vision necessary to uplift the race" (Brown, Brown, & Grant, 2015, p. 80).

I began my teaching career as a result of a request from the Black Action Society at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) for a tutor to help inner city high school students who were struggling with math. Years earlier, my uncle's activism at Pitt resulted in the formation of the Black Action Society, along with several other African American programs of interest. I felt that it was my duty to my family legacy to accept the invitation; it was an opportunity for me to finally give back to my community and continue to break down doors for people of color. The request came during my final semester in a dual major of Business and Spanish Language and Culture, which I had chosen after having spent three years studying and hating Electrical Engineering. Upon graduation, I was to finalize my employment with CIGNA corporation with the expectation that I would soon continue my education and plans for economic prosperity via an MBA program. My life abruptly skipped paths once I began to work with those high school students. I experienced a profound sense of purpose and joy as they progressed from sitting deflated before me, without making eye contact, to looking directly at me and smiling with confidence. I had found my reason for being and immediately applied for Pitt's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program.

I could not have been better prepared for a career in teaching than I was at Pitt, nor could I have possibly had more love or good intention for my students over the years. What I was completely unprepared for was to realize at the end of my career that my exemplary education may have been a detriment to the development of some

Johnson, S. (2020). Accidentally relevant. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 19-29.

of my Black and Brown students. The only saving grace may have been that my own experience being marginalized as a woman, and one of many colors, accidentally developed my pedagogy into a culturally relevant one.

Deliberately Irrelevant

Until sixth grade, I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My family was well seated in the middle to upper class African American community. It was hard to go anywhere where my family had not been known for generations. My maternal grandmother, the product of a bi-racial father and a Blackfoot and Cuban mother, grew up in extreme wealth—as wealthy as blackness permitted in those days. My other grandparents followed a similar racial makeup, although their socio-economic experiences varied. Regardless, by the time I was born, my family members were mostly college educated via historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) or Pitt and kept company among the Black socially elite of Pittsburgh. With high visibility and status came high expectations.

My father was part of the great wave of Affirmative Action in the 1960s that opened doors for African Americans in education, housing, and corporate jobs. Already living in the Upper Hill District of Pittsburgh, close to the area where my mother also lived, which was called Sugar Top due to its reputation of wealth (Dyer, 2005), and the product of majority White schools, the quest for continued socio-economic and educational growth was a natural pursuit. Black families saw opportunities and wanted to capture them. The hypocrisy of living where he lived and the feel of high society was that, in that same setting, my grandfather possessing a master's degree in education could only get a job at his alma mater as a janitor. The Pittsburgh Public Schools would never hire a Black man in an administrative role, nor would the University of Pittsburgh. My father was among the first in the family to experience the crack in the glass ceiling. I grew up in my father's shadow, a princess among Black and Brown queens and heir to a throne of upward mobility and higher education, ensconced in a culture of fraternity brothers and college mates who clung together in order to survive the door of opportunity that, in actuality, often opened only to knock them down.

My parents and many of their siblings and peers took advantage of the new access to the American dream; my uncles and other friends of my parents adopted a more militant approach to equity. The opportunity door for women of any racial background had not yet opened to the same degree as for Black and Brown men. This generation of mostly men became the shoulders I learned to stand on and the mentors I was blessed to rely on. Men at Pitt, then in their 40s when I attended, knew who I was—if not by face, by name. I knew a few from the crib, but most I didn't know at all. Nevertheless, they took great care to honor their relationships with the men who helped them fight against the hegemony that sought to keep them in their marginalized places—and they opened doors for me. What I never fully understood until adulthood was the extent of their fight, nor the extent of my own, which would have explained why these people were so interested in me.

Privilege is the only thing I knew. My parents' struggles resulted in my world of promise and ease. I went to the best schools and lived in the best neighborhoods that supported those schools. My family members and their friends were highly educated and socially placed. They had access to a new brand of cultural capital and passed to my generation a savvy that would ensure my academic and economic advancement in a White man's world. I enjoyed the benefits of upper class living, although most of the advantages of consumerism that my peers enjoyed were disallowed for me. My parents

preferred that I earn that kind of advantage on my own—I was fourteen when I began working. Although I lived an outer appearance of equity, I clearly understood that racist people were unfortunate contributors to a person's life story. I had my own stories to tell but did not understand the depth to which systemic racism had skewed my sense of who I was, my identity as a female and scholar with European American, African American, Native American, and Latin American ancestry.

Although my heritage was a multiracial one, I knew that I was only permitted to identify as Black—it's just what one did and, for reasons that I would never understand, was the only culture with which I had familiarity. I knew that our neighbors signed a petition to keep us from buying a house in Squirrel Hill and that something called, "blockbusting" (Ouazad, 2015, p. 811) was a bad thing in Penn Hills. By sixth grade, after moving to the suburbs of Philadelphia, I knew that I did not belong in the White Methodist church with my school mates—my parents suddenly joined the Black Episcopal church; I knew when we re-established my membership in Jack and Jill of Philadelphia that my White school mates would never really be friends. I knew when White people belittled Black people in my presence and told me they weren't talking about me because I was different, that I wasn't really different. The fact that I wasn't so different caused my guidance counselor at Lower Merion High School, a majority White wealthy school, to attempt to prevent me from enrolling in the honors class and from graduating early to attend Pitt. When I successfully completed the first year's requirement of my Early Admittance to college, I knew why my accomplishment, the first in the history of Lower Merion High School, was held in silence, unrecognized as if invisible. In the midst of all of my knowing and with each abuse, I became increasingly angry, never understanding that what I was experiencing was a familiar and deliberate systematic attempt to devalue my life and reduce it to one of cultural irrelevance. Although I seemed to have met the socioeconomic and academic standards that America values, America was not America to me (Hughes, 1935). Who I was culturally, racially, meant that I didn't count within the Eurocentric landscape.

Despite the love and encouragement that I received from home or the successes accredited to me, deliberate cultural irrelevance left me questioning whether I was truly intelligent, truly acceptable in society, truly Black. My early educational and cultural experience left me tortured, in between races and genders, living the very double consciousness that W. E. B. DuBois (1903/2009) spoke of. Multiracial was not a mainstream term when I was young. A person who was multiracial was Black. The One Drop Rule (Khanna, 2010) secured that identity for us all, as did any official form for school or a job. Perhaps it was for this reason that any cultural threads of my European American, Native American, or Latin American ancestry were silenced within my family. Regardless of the reason, I knew I was more complex than a single identity, and members of my own race were quick and unmerciful in reminding me that I didn't belong, as were my White peers. Friendships and dating were both a confusing mess, vacillating between being someone's trophy or experiment or simply being untouchable. I swung from one emotionally abusive and/or physically abusive experience to another, all confirming my irrelevance in society. Cognitively, I was a complex blend of creativity and linear thinking, but the only Black, Brown, or female contribution of either in my education came from the sports arena or Hollywood. I was unrepresented in literature, in math, in science, and in art, and the only place I was represented in history was among the conquered. I was Black, but I had to think White, and I was a female who had to learn to think like a man. Thankfully, I was surrounded by Black and Brown professionals: my father was an electrical engineer and my mother

was a writer. Both had high expectations for me and kicked doors open for me, pushing me through whether I had the self-confidence to go through them or not. Despite the open doors, I was often devalued down to an Affirmative Action statistic—educators and corporate staff rarely saw me; they saw the advantage of a double minority who checked two boxes in one—Black and female.

Accidentally Irrelevant

In 1983, I entered The University of Pittsburgh, College of Electrical Engineering, as an Early Admittance student. I was seventeen years old and worn down by the racial tension in my high school, which left me much like a court jester, performing a constant juggling act of masks to appeal to my peers, my teachers, and myself. It was quite a risk to leave high school a year early, without a diploma, completely reliant on a successful first year in order to simultaneously fulfill my high school senior and college freshman requirements. I accomplished the task and continued in Electrical Engineering until my junior year when I admitted to myself that I was unhappy in my major. I consulted one of my father's close friends, who was also a mentor to me and who was one of the few, if not only, African Americans to be promoted to Vice Provost at the time. I abruptly changed from Engineering to a Business Dual major and continued on towards graduation.

I graduated in 1988 after having been bitten by the teaching bug and began my masters at Pitt. I was offered a full scholarship and a full-time teaching position at the university's laboratory school, Falk School. In one calendar year, I would be certified to teach K-12 Foreign Language, with a concentration in Spanish. In keeping with my experience in the Engineering Department and the Business Department, the first remark my Education Department advisor made upon meeting me was, "Fountain? You're a Fountain? As in Hiawatha Fountain?" Hiawatha Fountain was my cousin—they called him, Hi, as his name was a traditional honor among Native Americans but quite a mouthful for anyone outside of that culture. Once again, those strong men of color took all the risk and struggle upon themselves to make my path easier and to provide opportunities for Black and Brown students of the future. My advisor had become good friends with my cousin, respected him, and welcomed me.

Each of my departments welcomed me openly, and I cannot think of a single instructor whom I would categorize as mediocre in my time at Pitt. Ironically, the only overt racism that I experienced, aside from being aware of the constant protesting against racist investments directed towards the Chancellor's office, was as a graduate student. The offender was a young African man who deliberately assisted every White newcomer to the help desk while ignoring me completely. If it had not been for my White colleague and cohort friend, I might still be standing at the microfiche desk awaiting help with my master's thesis. Although I had escaped the overt racial bias and tension of my high school and felt certainly more liberated to be wholly myself, my educational culture had not changed. My elementary teachers were White; my high school teachers were White; and my college instructors, both undergraduate and graduate, were White, with few exceptions. I was welcomed by all of my instructors, but Rosario Camineras, a professor of Cuban descent in the Spanish department, was one of a few who made me feel at home. She taught Latin American and Spanish history—I hated history, but I loved her and, therefore, loved history for the first time.

My instructors at Pitt were knowledgeable, effective, and supportive; Falk School even had a close, homey culture that was so unique it became part of my own pedagogical practice, yet there was something about Dr. Camineras' style that felt less academic and

more familial. She was loud and exciting—we had to close the door when she taught. She was also engaging and personal. One of my other professors, whose name escapes me but who was also Cuban, called me "Nena" or "Cariña," which in English means "baby" or "my love." I never had a teacher or instructor address me in such close terms nor take such an interest in me as a student. He was not sexist in his word choice. He was connecting his culture with mine; he was a warm demander (Kleinfeld, 1975), as was Dr. Camineras. They were also the first instructors to introduce the concept of racism and social justice into my learning. The year I retired from classroom teaching, 2017, was the year I stopped teaching the historical and literary works that they had introduced to me in 1987.

Unfortunately, the conversation around criticality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McKinley & Brayboy, 2005; Valdes, 1997; Wing, 1997) was not a part of the academic discourse in the late 80s where education was concerned. My instructors taught me what they felt was most important and from their positionality, which no one would have challenged as racially or culturally biased. The mantra of education in the 80s was, "Make meaningful connections." As educators, we were taught that learning occurs when information is meaningful to the student and can be connected with previous knowledge. If I could name this concept today, in keeping with educational discourse in 2018, I would call it culturally relevant scaffolding. The limitation of my new term is in the word, culture. Culture back then would have related to a student's preconceived status-quo experience, a "color-blind" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7) expectation of common American lifestyle: all children have experienced a yellow school bus, all children have been to a museum, all children sit down to dinner with mom and dad around 6:30pm, etc. It was never the expectation that you would seek to understand your students' personal cultural values or that one might consider a student population to provide a vast network of cultural capital from which to draw in forming lesson plans and class discussions. The student was not seen as a teacher in his/her own right, a co-laborer in learning. The student was a recipient of tried and true best practices, well drawn out and practiced in a pre-service teaching program. Had I grown up in this current era, my brother may not have been sent home with a reprimand from his teacher for insisting that we ate dinner at 6:30am, not pm. In fact, we did eat our heaviest meal in the morning because we were not able to come home for lunch to have it then. My mother subscribed to a non-traditional eating pattern, understanding that it supported proper metabolism.

Wonderful as they were, my instructors came to their own pedagogy by way of White, male-dominated, hegemonic curriculum and instruction. They were caring, well-meaning educators whose goals were grounded in student success, never realizing that their best intentions were surreptitiously sabotaged by a White supremist educational system that was designed to be relevant only to White males and to negate women and people of color. Without a prevalent counter discourse to lead their own praxis in a more equitable direction, they passed their very best broken pedagogy on to me. They were accidentally irrelevant instructors, and naturally, I began my first year of teaching as an accidentally irrelevant instructor as well. This cycle of accidental irrelevance is reminiscent of Paulo Friere's banking model of education (Friere, 1993), a deliberate system based on the goals of social and economic dominance that neuters the agency of Black and Brown students so subtlety as to covertly maintain their marginalized status. It is a mis-education that is reproducible and self-sustaining. I realize looking back that I had been mis-educated and was, upon graduation, a state certified weapon against the progress of my own people.

Accidentally Relevant

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 of The New International Version of the Bible contains a line of scripture that best sums up my approach to teaching:

> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

I considered my life lessons to be weapons of survival, wisdom from which to draw precaution, empathy, courage, and resiliency. It was my mission to never allow one of my students to suffer in silence through the same miseries I had suffered. I strove to be a vigilant teacher, so as to not leave a student alone, without a voice or comfort. It was from this standpoint that I formed my pedagogy. By the end of my teaching career, the first piece of knowledge my students explored—day-one of the school year—was the word, "love." I needed my students to know that I loved them, not in a romantic sense, but in an unconditional sense of the word. They could expect me to be patient with them socially, emotionally, and cognitively. They could count on a culture of kindness where humility reigned. I put them first, forgiving them their shortcomings, supporting them and encouraging them, always protecting them, trusting them, and hoping for their success. When I blew it, which I did of course, I wanted them to have the freedom to correct me, and I tried my best to stay openly self-corrective. Whether my students recognized these promises as coming from I Corinthians 13 of the Bible or not, they did know that I wanted my classroom to be a safe one, where those same promises were expected of them in return. This approach and subsequent pedagogical praxis were accidental, unfortunately born not out of my pre-service education, but my personal pain of feeling irrelevant as a young student.

My positionality as a woman of color, whose life was Biblically driven, whether in suffering or in joy, and whose experiences of privilege were gained both inside and outside of the United States, seemed to inform as much my sense of what needed to be taught as how it needed to be taught. Without realizing it at the time, Africanisms that influenced my upbringing and the value of extended family, self-pride and community, as well as the interconnectedness of spirituality and the understanding of our physical world, came through my teaching in the form of our interpersonal classroom culture (Hale, 1982; Irvine, 2003). We were a family in my classroom and pulled each other through the school year as one body (Delpit, 1995; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Murrell, 2002; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Terms of endearment were normal in my classroom, perhaps because they were a natural part of value and connectedness in my own culture. My two Cuban professors inadvertently taught me that the classroom did not have to define our culture and that our culture may define our classrooms, and it may do so without sacrificing professionalism. I called my students, "my love," "ladybug," "baby" in English, Spanish, Arabic, and French. My students called me "Ms. J" or "Mama J."

Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 1997), TribalCrit (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005), and LatCrit (Valdes, 1997) explain the rationale for an accidental default that positioned me as a warm demander (Kleinfeld, 1975)—a motherly personality with rigorous high expectations—and this default is likely what inspired the same in my two Cuban professors. My positionality, as earlier stated, includes a Vygotskian aspect of a socio-historical intersectionality of marginalization

among my many identities, current and ancestral. Every aspect of who I am has included the reality that racism, sexism, and colonization are a part of my everyday experience and serve to perpetuate White male supremacy in America. Liberalism that claims to protect my interests as a woman and a person of color is insufficient in that its stance of color blindness seeks only to identify gross legal infractions; small micro-aggressions, often equally damaging, go unnoticed and unchecked. Even my socio-economic privilege has been watered down by limp liberalism and the abuses of a White supremist agenda. This being my "lived experience" (Hall, 2018, p. 40) and having an innate sense of Multiplicative Praxis (Wing, 1997), I felt bound to push back against any hegemonic oppression that might stereotype, devalue, and marginalize my students. My being aware of my own conflict disallowed me to remain neutral regarding my students' prosperity. I had to act on their behalves, which meant challenging them to know their own strengths, resiliency, and agency. I had to force them to confront their own racist and sexist ideologies by exposing some of their hidden mis-education and reorienting their sense of respect and admiration for other people and other ways of knowing.

My teaching career spanned several states and included rural, suburban, and urban populations of students, from kindergarten to adult education in public, private, charter, and post-secondary educational arenas. Over my career, I have had the privilege of teaching students from diverse backgrounds and the honor of being invited to know them for who they are in their private cultural spaces. Each teaching year gave me a deeper understanding of the importance of valorizing who the student is and how that valorization contributes to the expansion of knowledge and a culture of democracy within the classroom. From this standpoint, all students find a place of belonging, encouragement, and engagement. The evolution of my classroom fostered an environment of openness and vulnerability of thinking and being that I found myself inhabiting alongside my students, as I was each year becoming more self-reflective, more attuned to global issues of social justice and the need for my students to share a safe space for their own self-reflection. It was a classroom that had become relevant to the students and to me as we grew together academically and socially, as citizens of America and as human beings. Still, the accidental nature of a curriculum and pedagogy that was completely reliant on the chance that I would effectively draw a culturally relevant praxis out of my historical and current self to meet the needs of a diverse student body made it a risky one at best.

Culturally Relevant Teacher was not a term with which I had any familiarity. It did not exist in teacher preparation programs when I came through my certification program. It was an undefined pedagogical stance that I accidentally tripped upon in response to my own life experience and out of love and dedication to duty for my students. I saw every student as a gift from God, for whom I was responsible and would one day give account. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23, New International Version), would inspire the need to revolutionize my teaching praxis to assure my best contribution to the development of my students. I did not know what to call my seemingly eccentric teaching practices, nor to what theoretical framework they were attached. In the same vein, my administrators, most of whom were White, often did not understand my positionality or my pedagogy. Thankfully, my administrators maintained a quirky balance of respect, trust, admiration, and cluelessness, coming mostly from their own dysconscious racism, that allowed me to push the envelope of status-quo curriculum and pedagogy. If it had not been for my own intersectional battle with American racism and sexism, which seemed to intensify

post-911, a worldview that transcended western thinking, and a series of providential relationships with my administrators over the years, I may have been hemmed into a mis-educated career, unwittingly having done more harm than good for any student outside of the dominant culture.

Deliberately Relevant

The pursuit of my PhD, with a concentration in curriculum and instruction, provided me with theoretical concepts and labels to assign to my life experiences. Finally, what I intuitively understood to be true had a name. The study of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995, 1998, 2006, 2009) concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and its foundation in Critical Race Theory led me to understand my historical experiences and the soil from which my own pedagogical stance was grown. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy identifies a praxis in which educators respond to the demand for social justice reform in America, specifically related to the persistent deficit in academic achievement among Black and Brown students (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), "students must experience academic success; they must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and they must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). I saw my own teaching praxis through her work and was shattered to know that my teaching style, approach, and methodology were not unique to other Black and Brown teachers. I could not understand how I spent so many years alone, an outlier of a teacher, fighting in the dark for what I felt made equitable sense in the classroom. The first book given to me by my advisor left me crying by a public poolside. The biographical narrative of the Black female teacher in the book was also my own. It was my first realization that I was not alone.

As I continued in my doctoral program and one research effort led to another, my grief over my loneliness and feeling odd in my teaching practice turned to anger. With all the available information—from books to research articles—citing the necessity for an ethnocentric, culturally relevant revision of pedagogy, if we are to meet the diverse needs of our student population, the challenge in my mind formed. Why was a critical praxis not ingrained in our pre-service teachers? Why was I, and many more young teachers after me, left to chance? Our Black and Brown children struggle to persevere in American schools. From state and national policy to pre-service teacher preparation, our educational system has invoked every kind of empty remedy to appear to fix the disproportionate failure in educating our nation's Black and Brown students (Delpit, 2013; Gatto, 2010, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ogbu, 1978). I would argue that a historically majority White system has ignored researchers and field experts of color all the way back to DuBois and Woodson whose conclusions continue to support one another over time and space and concretely provide wisdom—cultural incongruence derails academic achievement (Grossman et al., 1999; Gutiérrez, 2002; Irvine, 2002, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Tate, 1994). I see evidence of my argument in my teaching career as well as in my parenting.

I have been married for almost 30 years to an African American man whose life has afforded him many of the same insults and inner conflicts as my own. We provided every safeguard expecting that our two boys, now grown, would not have to repeat our experiences. Their generation appeared to have evolved and healed beyond the racism my older family members endured for more than three generations. It has been devastating to be so wrong. Not much has changed across the timeline from my grandparents' struggle to my children's. The overt racism that kept my grandfather out of educational leadership in the public schools or in higher academia has simply shape-shifted into the

dismantling of Affirmative Action, rampant police brutality, over- incarceration, a loss of voting power, and subversive zoning tactics that ensure segregation and inequitable education and opportunity. Subtle microaggressions have challenged yet another generation to navigate the confusion and self-doubt of double consciousness, leaving my sons' senses of identity fragile at best. Twenty-first century integration, civil rights laws, and political correctness have perhaps only masked a thriving racism that exists in our American churches, schools, economics, and politics.

Given my personal and professional experiences, I am hard pressed to conclude that the White-over-color voice has muted the invaluable and effective expertise to properly solve the problem of inequitable education in America. That being the case, it is incumbent upon those who recognize this inequity to integrate a working understanding of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into pre-service and in-service education. I refuse to accept that I am deliberately or accidentally irrelevant, with my identity and self-determination willfully or unintentionally subjugated by those who perpetuate the supremacy of Whiteness. As a leader in education, I refuse to allow our nation's students to continue to be mis-educated in that same way. Therefore, I cannot afford to be accidentally relevant anymore, inasmuch as the focus of my career is reoriented towards the education of teachers. I approach cultural relevance with an attitude and praxis of deliberateness, as I should have throughout my career. All teacher education programs and professional development programs need to do the same, particularly in light of the fact that over 80% of our teaching force is White (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). Many of these teachers suffer their own brand of mis-education due to their lack of awareness of White privilege (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2004; Milner, 2006; Milner & Howard, 2004). It is unfair to assume that these teachers would ignore their dysconscious racism if they became aware of their own deep biases and the harm that they might cause their students. Racism will always be with us, according to Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), but I would like to believe that, with intentionality and vigilance at the hand of an enlightened teaching force, a conscious and deliberate effort to dismantle its effects will ultimately bring America closer to being America.

References

Albert Shanker Institute. (2015). *The state of teacher diversity in American education*. Retrieved from http://www.shankerinstitute.org/sites/shanker/files/The%20State%20of%20Teacher%20Diversity_0.pdf

Allen, R. L. (2004). Whiteness and critical pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36*(2), 121-136. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00056.x

Bourdieu, P. (2011). The forms of capital. *Cultural theory: An anthology, 1,* 81-93.

Brown, K. D., Brown, A. L., & Grant, C. A. (2015). *Black intellectual thought in education: The missing traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke*. London, UK; Taylor and Francis.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.

Delpit, L. (2013). *"Multiplication is for White people": Raising expectations for other people's children*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2009). *The souls of Black folk*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1903)

Dyer, E. (2005, July 17). Decades haven't dimmed the allure of the Hill District's Sugar Top. *The Pittsburg Post Gazette*. Retrieved from http://www.post-gazette.com/life/lifestyle/2005/07/17/Decades-haven-t-dimmed-the-allure-of-the-Hill-District-s-Sugar-Top/stories/200507170152

Friere, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New Revised 20th-Anniversary ed.): New York, NY: Continuum.

Gatto, J. T. (2010). *Weapons of mass instruction: A schoolteacher's journey through the dark world of compulsory schooling*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Gatto, J. T. (2017). *Dumbing us down: The hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Grossman, P. L., Smagorinsky, P., & Valencia, S. (1999). Appropriating tools for teaching English: A theoretical framework for research on learning to teach. *American Journal of Education, 108*(1), 1-29.

Gutiérrez, K. D. (2002). Studying cultural practices in urban learning communities. *Human Development, 45*(4), 312-321. doi:10.1159/000064995

Hale, J. E. (1982). *Black children, their roots, culture, and learning styles*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.

Hall, S. (2018). *Essential essays, Volume 1: Foundations of cultural studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hughes, L. (1935). *Let America be America again.* Retrieved from https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/let-america-be-america-again

Irvine, J. J. (2002). *In search of wholeness: African American teachers and their culturally specific classroom practices* (1st ed.). New York, N.Y: Palgrave.

Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Khanna, N. (2010). "If you're half Black, you're just Black": Reflected appraisals and the persistence of the one-drop rule. *The Sociological Quarterly, 51*(1), 96-121.

King, J. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60*(2), 133-146.

Kleinfeld, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *The School Review, 83*(2), 301-344.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165. doi:10.1080/00405849509543675

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7-24. doi:10.1080/095183998236863

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lee, C. D., & Smagorinsky, P. (2000). *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 36*(2), 137-152. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00057.x

McKinley, B., & Brayboy, J. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *Urban Review, 37*(5), 425-446. doi:10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y

Milner, R. (2006). The promise of Black teachers' success with Black students. *Educational Foundations, 20*(3-4), 89.

Milner, R., & Howard, T. (2004). Black teachers, Black students, Black communities, and Brown: Perspectives and insights from experts. *The Journal of Negro Education, 73*(3), 285-297.

Murrell P. C., Jr. (2002). *African-centered pedagogy: Developing schools of achievement for African American children*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Ogbu, J. U. (1978). *Minority education and caste: The American system in cross-cultural perspective*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Ouazad, A. (2015). Blockbusting: Brokers and the dynamics of segregation. *Journal of Economic Theory, 157,* 811-841. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jet.2015.02.006

Tate, W. F. (1994). Race, retrenchment, and the reform of school mathematics. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(6), 477-484.

Valdes, F. (1997). Foreword: Under construction. Latcrit consciousness, community, and theory. *California Law Review, 85,* 1087-1142. doi:10.2307/3481057

Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Wing, A. K. (1997). *Critical race feminism: A reader*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Woodson, C. G. (2016). *The mis-education of the Negro*. [place of publication not identified]: Value Classic Reprints.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91. doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006

Won't You Be My Neighbor?
Stories of Keeping the City Out of the Suburbs

By Kurtz K. Miller
Miami University

My intent in writing this article is to practice using Pinar's *currere* method of autobiographical storytelling (Pinar, 1975, p. 474) to merge my educational experience with a handful of "curriculum fragments" (Poetter, 2017, p. 1) into a coherent counternarrative to challenge the traditional Whiteness of the suburbs. My "curriculum fragments," which will serve as a phenomenological data source, will be acquired by flashing back to my educational experiences as a young person living in a primarily White, yet demographically-shifting suburb (called Central Crossing[1]), which is adjacent to a large Midwestern city (called Principal City). Another layer of data will be attained via my current "lived experiences" of residing in a relatively diverse (a much higher percentage of African-Americans compared to adjacent areas) suburb (called Northfield) adjacent to a "hypersegregated" (Massey & Denton, 1989) Midwestern city (called Golden City). Two final layers of data were obtained through conversations with former colleagues who have conducted consulting work in two neighboring school districts to Central Crossing (called Western Station and Thriftville). These layers of data will hopefully help me to paint a picture of why African-American students are supposedly "underachieving" in our public schools across the country—the result of historical as well as contemporary structural, systemic, subtle racism (Sue et al., 2007).

Positionality

This manuscript was written as an ongoing project for me as a privileged, White male to come to terms with the nature of race, racism, and power in America. Growing up, as I was raised in neoconservative, White, suburbia, conversations of race were neither necessary nor profitable. I now fully realize race is salient more than ever in the age of expanding White nationalism. Over the course of the past twenty years, I have become aware that I possess significant White privilege as well as various forms of implicit bias. Having studied science in college and graduate school, I was trained to intuitively think within the positivist, scientific-realist paradigms, so it has been more difficult for me to fully leap into autobiographical storytelling than perhaps scholars with other forms of training. My early academic training in the sciences rendered the usage of the first person off limits. More recent explorations with using first person storytelling resulted in one of my submitted manuscripts receiving harsh criticism for "self-promotion" due to fact that I used the word "I" in my writing. This manuscript may appear to contain evidence of scientific storytelling through data, references, dictionary-like flow, and a subdued writing style; please bear with my steep learning curve as I figure out how to personalize my academic voice in the first-person. Readers with more advanced skills in autobiographical, creative writing, I invite your criticism, feedback, and help in further developing my storytelling abilities.

Stories of Racism

After looking for signs of subtle racism (implicit bias) for one school year at Northfield High School, which will be introduced later in this manuscript, many instances

Miller, K. M. (2020). Won't you be my neighbor? Stories of keeping the city out of the suburbs. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 30-37.

surfaced. One of my African-American teaching colleagues, Donna, who I interviewed as a study participant, described the blatant and subtle racism (implicit bias) in public schools as making her "angry" and "tired." After hearing a White colleague angrily berate an African-American student in the teachers' lounge, the words "insensitive" and "mean" came to my mind after thinking about the dialogue that took place. A student (Betsy) told me that one of my colleagues, who I will call Mrs. Stevenson, does not like her because of the color of her skin. Betsy pointed at her skin during the conversation to indicate racism instead of speaking it out loud. In the month of June, at an unexpected place, a White parent told me about a "loud" African-American woman with whom she argued during the recent graduation ceremony; after telling me the story, she said, "[Northfield High School] has *changed* [emphasis added]." Later, I thought to myself, "How has Northfield High School changed?" The parent must have been lamenting the fact that more and more African-Americans are moving into the City of Northfield; however, she would likely argue that her use of the word *changed* certainly does not have any racial connotations, because she does not see race. Much like many Whites, "colorblind" is a "trump card" that can be used to shut down authentic conversations about race, racism, and power. There is neither time nor space for me to detail all of the instances of implicit bias observed in and around Northfield High School, as well as other nearby school districts. My year of looking for implicit bias in multiple school districts left me with a notebook full of examples.

Just Imagine

Having grown up in a suburb with limited racial diversity, specifically few African-Americans, I want my son to experience the full range of possibilities America has to offer. I hope my son will be a proud Filipino-American someday; somebody who hopefully speaks multiple languages. I imagine a future for my son where public school teachers are fully committed to authentically celebrating diversity in every form. I envision public schools as places where families can congregate together to openly discuss issues of race, racism, and power via interracial dialogue. In the future, I sincerely hope that White people in America, of all socioeconomic backgrounds, will humbly acknowledge and discuss how our public education system has historically discriminated against African-Americans and other people of color. Without honesty and racial humility, the racial domination and oppression will indefinitely continue. Also, I hope that our educational researchers in America will change the school improvement/reform paradigm from a so-called value-free, implementation-based, scientific, systems-centered version to one more subjective, tentative, holistic, humanistic, and reflexive. This new research paradigm will empower those in government, higher education, and public policy to disclose (and research) the real reasons for African-American "underachievement" in our public schools. The nature of school reform and new lines of academic inquiry will eventually open as the result of this imagined future. I feel truly blessed to have had this opportunity through dialogue, education, interaction, life experiences, and reflection to realize that White privilege and systemic racism has caused and continues to drive the "racial achievement gaps" in our country. As activist, practitioner-scholars we must work beyond writing about these issues and confront them in the public square.

Research

In what has been called the "Great Migration," between 1916 and 1970, African-Americans moved from the South to Northern cities to secure stable employment and

pursue a better way of life (Tolnay, 2003). Between 1940 and 1970 approximately 4 million African-Americans left the South for Northern cities (Boustan, 2010), including Gold City and Principal City. After World War II (in the period roughly between 1945-1970), the expansion of roads and the construction of houses in the suburbs as well as the "exurbs" (prosperous areas beyond the principle suburbs) in many Midwest cities was followed by Whites moving far from the urban cores, which has often been referred to as "White flight" (Bogue & Seim, 1956). Research suggests there appears to be a quantitative relationship between the arrival of African-Americans from the South and the movement of Whites into the suburbs, much like a cause-and-effect type of association (Boustan, 2010). The suburbs were once considered to be a mostly White phenomenon, but African-Americans as well as other underrepresented peoples have since moved away from the city into the suburbs. Studies have shown that Whites now live in more racially diverse suburbs than ever (Lee, Iceland, & Farrell, 2014); however, Whites are becoming segregated within these diverse suburbs in new ways, limiting the usefulness of viewing racial integration through a traditional binary lens (Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2017). For example, Whites are more likely to be concentrated in higher-value neighborhoods within diverse suburbs (Lichter et al., 2017). In a sense, African-Americans and Whites live "together but apart" (Lichter et al., 2017, p. 229) in modern diverse suburbs.

The Early Years

During the first eighteen years of my life, I lived in the same village to which my grandfather returned in 1937. Since my grandfather relocated from Principal City to the village of Central Crossing, my entire extended family has considered this village as our home, as well as a "regular" place to live. Central Crossing was an almost entirely White suburb of Principal City, with essentially no African-American diversity for the first 50 to 60 years of my family's narrative.[2] To me, what made Central Crossing such as special place to live was the fact that my grandfather was the mayor for 25 years. My grandfather worked tireless hours above and beyond two primary jobs, first as a street commissioner, then a councilman, followed by mayor, to make Central Crossing a hospitable and safe place to call home. My grandfather worked in a factory about 35 minutes away in Principal City, which was likely considered quite a long commute back in the 1930s through the 1950s. He must have had a strong desire to raise a family and live far from the city to make this commute every day. The factory where he worked was such an important place for bolt production during World War II that he escaped the draft more than once. His metalworking skills were exceptional enough that his boss could not replace him without wartime operations at the plant being seriously impacted.

As I understand the history, Central Crossing was separated from Principal City by thousands of acres of farmland between the 1930s and the 1980s before suburbanization began to consume the countryside, much like how a clearcutting effort in a forest devours trees. There were no major highways connecting Principal City and Central Crossing even into my father's high school years in the early 1960s. As a child, I can remember when stores, houses, restaurants, and businesses began being built in proximity to Central Crossing as the city "encroached" upon the village. The small shop and store owners in the village center began to complain about losing customers because places like Kroger and Home Depot offered greater selection and lower prices than they could ever replicate. Eventually, the IGA supermarket in town closed followed by the True Value hardware store as well as other locally-owned businesses. Many people in the village were upset about the changes taking place, especially those who had resided

there for many decades. Looking back, I was upset because my family was unhappy about the situation. I did not truly understand what the community was fighting against.

As I recall, grandpa, and perhaps other local politicians, wanted to use municipal policies to try to "contain" Principal City from annexing land around Central Crossing. The most discussed option was to annex land in two directions to "landlock" Principal City from consuming more farmland. The problem with this approach was that state law required local villages to offer utility services to residential dwellings within annexed areas. Since Central Crossing, at the time, was an underfunded village, there was not enough immediate funding to offer utility services to hundreds of new residents, so the annexation plan never materialized. (It is interesting to note that Principal City is still not a landlocked city, and this status has resulted in the City growing at an unprecedented rate compared to other large cities in the country.) Principal City eventually annexed enough farmland to border Central Crossing on one side, thereby, having a direct impact upon the local school district through its zoning approvals and designations. This "border zone" between Principal City and Central Crossing is marked by a two-lane road, much like a major artery connects two important parts of the human body. The "border zone" will be called Connector Road, because it has served like a passageway gluing the big city to the irritated village residents of Central Crossing.

Although a wide swath of land on Connector Road is within the Central Crossing School District, most of this area now resides within the incorporated limits of Principal City. Back in the 1970s or 1980s Principal City reached a "win-win" agreement with the Central Crossing Board of Education about future housing developments being proposed along Connector Road. The agreement basically stated that the new residents along Connector Road would attend Central Crossing School District, but Principal City would provide the water and sewer services. The village of Central Crossing benefited through the agreement because they would not have to expand utility services with a limited budget. The school district would benefit because there would be an increase in the number of students, which would boost available funding.

Despite the apparent "wins" for Central Crossing, many people in the community were outraged with the "win-win" agreement, because of the assumption that "low income" kids from the City would eventually enroll in the local schools. There was a community uproar to say the least. Some residents viewed the incoming students as those who were moving from the City because they were in trouble there. Unfortunately, what reinforced this discriminatory, even racist, viewpoint was the fact that developers did build some low-income housing units along Connector Road. As I recall, residents claimed to have heard gunshots as well as other disturbances in the new housing units on Connector Road, which fueled further complaints from residents. Although the housing units may have been under construction in the 1990s, there was not a significant increase in the size of the school district, including the number of African-American students, until perhaps the 2000s, well after I left the village for college. The number of African-American residents in the village of Central Crossing grew modestly between 1990 (20 residents) and 2010 (365 residents). There is likely a greater level of African-American diversity on Connector Road, which is actually within the incorporated limits of Principal City, so this is not truly reflected in that data.

Discussions of Race

Growing up in Central Crossing, I don't ever recall discussing race with my family or at school, in any real depth. I do remember my parents taking my brother and me to an African-American comedic play at an historical theater in Principal City. My family

members and I were the only White people in the entire place. I suppose my parents wanted me to feel what it would be like to be in a "minority," although such an experience is temporary and a privileged way to be a "minority." Central Crossing seemed to be a "regular" place to live where discussing race was not necessary or relevant for our lives. Looking back now, I realize that the residents of Central Crossing, including my family members, were isolated from African-Americans by choice. I can honestly only remember one African-American student, perhaps two, at Central Crossing High School, a young man named France and a female whose name I am unable to recall. There was an absence of ideas and understandings of culture. Once Central Crossing began to grow, new people began to move into the community, including African-American families and students. The African-American population gradually grew in the mid-1990s to late-1990s.

As I recall, White students would sometimes inquire between one another, "Why do the African-American students sit together?," without ever thinking about the opposite version of the same question, "Why do all of those White students sit [live] together?" At times, students would also ask, "Why are the African-Americans walking down [moving down] Connector Road?," which again could be reframed as, "Why are Whites not moving up Connector Road toward Principal City?" Unfortunately, I didn't learn the power of dialectical questioning and reasoning until much later in life. Dialectical questioning, I believe, can be a useful technique to reframe new starting points for counter-narratives about racial interactions as well as the lack of racial connections.

In retrospect, the apparent "crisis" of people from the City moving into the suburbs should have been viewed as a blessing bestowed upon the isolated White people in Central Crossing. Research demonstrates the value of racial diversity upon businesses, communities, peoples, and improved problem-solving (Ayscue, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2017). Whites living in geographic isolation, in respect to African-Americans, mixed with a faulty, collective, "colorblind" frame of reference, end up producing a completely contradictory, paradoxical view of reality for Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). "Colorblind liberalism," which is the ideological frame used by Whites to explain most aspects of race in America, does not logically hold up when it is dissected and interrogated for its logical rigidity (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). "Colorblind liberalism" is not the only ideological or theoretical paradigm inhibiting the advancement of African-Americans today; so-called value-free implementation science and system theories that guide school reform efforts, which will be discussed in the next section, cause educators across the country to treat the symptoms of racism via educational interventions, to change the so-called "racial achievement gaps," while ignoring the "root cause" of educational inequality in America.

Closing the "Gap"

Standardized tests are laden with racial biases and prejudices, so they can't truly determine what all students have learned inside of public schools. Many well-intentioned White educators believe that standardized tests, in conjunction with formative assessments, when properly coupled with high-leverage instruction and differentiation, can help to improve the academic achievement of African-American students. However, standardized testing, school report cards, as well as other accountability measures, have levied great harm upon African-American students by setting undifferentiated goals (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Accountability measures, I believe, set up certain performance criteria that result in many African-American students being labeled as "underperformers" compared to Whites (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This testing causes

great harm to African-American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). My treatment of discussing assessments, which are aimed to alter instruction to close the so-called "achievement gaps," is meant to review the status of educational "reform" in America. In the next several paragraphs, I will attempt to briefly summarize the status of nationwide school improvement/reform efforts before covertly peeking at the "root cause" of so-called African-American "underachievement" in the next section.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), between 1990 and 2007 only four states narrowed then so-called "racial achievement gap" between Black and White students in 8th grade mathematics (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). Decades of federal school reform initiatives have mostly failed to narrow the persistent, so-called "racial achievement gaps." The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 mandated states and school districts report subgroup, performance data for African-Americans, English Language Learners (ELLs), Hispanics, students with disabilities (SWDs), as well as other groups (Ravitch, 2016). NCLB also banned the reporting of average performance scores of all students to avoid masking the underperformance of subgroups (Ravitch, 2016). The DOE has also noted that the NCLB benchmarks mandated the implementation of "one-size-fits-all" interventions in low-performing schools, which resulted in its failure to recognize the local needs of the schools as well as students (Vanneman et al., 2009). Educators across the country complained about, even resisted, the NCLB Act of 2001 and its negative impact upon student learning (Poetter, 2013), so our elected officials have now supposedly "fixed" the problems through another legislative effort, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

ESSA of 2015 has more recently provided states with greater flexibility to waive certain elements of NCLB in exchange for the adoption of "evidence-based," rigorous, comprehensive, state-developed improvement plans, interventions, and processes to close the so-called "racial achievement gaps." Many states have adopted or will be adopting, systems-based school improvement processes grounded in systems theory, as well as implementation science research (Fixsen, Blase, Duda, Naoom, & Van Dyke, 2010). These so-called value-free, scientific, school improvement, processes and implementation science frameworks do not adequately address the current or historical root causes of inequalities in public education/society. They still fail to recognize the power of cultural/geographic differences in schools as well as the role of implicit bias/unconscious racism in reproducing social inequalities within the public education system as well as broader society (Klaf & Kwan, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Without addressing the "root causes" of social inequalities, systems theories and implementation science will at best make superficial, temporary changes in the so-called "racial achievement gaps," thus, continuing the status quo in education, allowing persistent inequalities to continue unabated. Improvement plans and systems that ignore the "root causes" of inequality build a false faith that, with enough time, training, and the right, "evidence based" strategies, educators will permanently close the so-called "racial achievement gaps."

Taking a Peek

Central Crossing is not the only suburb of Principal City that has experienced a significant demographic shift in the past 20 years as the result of widespread suburbanization. Another suburb directly adjacent to Central Crossing is Western Station, which has a slightly lower population than Central Crossing. A second suburb, although not directly adjacent to Central Crossing, is called Thriftville, which will be briefly mentioned in this section. The major theme of all three suburbs (Central Crossing, Western Station, and Thriftville) is that Principal City has significantly grown in the past

several decades, so new residents have flowed from the City into areas adjacent to the City. Due to the outflow of people, all three suburbs have quickly grown and experienced an increase in African-Americans. Due to new state and federal accountability measures discussed in the previous section, school district administrators are aware now, more than ever, that they must improve the academic "achievement" of African-American students without an understanding of what the real problems are.

Western Station is another interesting place to inspect because the city school district has a much higher level of diversity than Central Station, because it is closer to Principal City and contains different types of housing. An area just outside of the Western Station School District contains a large mall, which was a busy place to shop back in the 1970s and 1980s. People from across Principal City would drive to the Western Mall to shop up until the 1990s and 2000s, when the demographic shift started to take place. When this happened, people began to become cautious of going to the Western Mall to shop, because they thought they would get mugged or robbed. Now, the Mall is in slight disrepair and some of the stores are empty. Sears, JC Penny, and other major retails stores have left. There are newer, trendy malls in Greater Principal City where people now go to shop. Many of the storefronts adjacent to the Western Mall in both directions are now empty. This same "boom and bust" cycle of commercialization and de-commercialization, which is often connected to racial integration in the suburbs, appears in large cities across the Midwest.

According to the state's Department of Education, the Western Station School District is "underperforming," with an overall letter grade of "D." The number of African-American students has significantly increased in the past couple of decades, thereby, also increasing the number of students enrolled in the school district. A major, Midwest-based foundation has taken an interest in both the Western Station School District and the Thriftville City School District due to the large amount of diversity in these traditionally White suburbs. The foundation has sponsored consulting work at Western Station High School and Thriftville High School to help the administration better serve the African-American student populations. One of my friends, who must remain anonymous to protect his work interests, has conferred with me about the situation in both high schools, because he is not familiar with the history of the communities. He asked me, "Why do the White teachers [at Western Station High School] refuse to look at the African-American students when they are talking with them?" My response was, "I suspect that these White teachers have worked at the high school for many years, and they have witnessed the demographic shift as well as the expansion of Principal City. The teachers do not like what is happening." Another comment I received, "The administration at Thriftville High School are all Whites. I certainly don't expect the school district to just [blindly] hire an African-American, but I wonder how there couldn't be an African-American in administration with such a high level of diversity there?" Unfortunately, I am convinced, through my personal experiences, that my friend's observations may be common occurrences in White suburban school districts.

My Present Situation

Currently, I live in the Northfield City School District, which is a sizeable suburban district next to a "hypersegregated" city in the Midwest (Golden City). Golden City was once a much larger city, but deindustrialization as well as "white flight" left the urban core depopulated with a large concentration of African-Americans. The suburbs are notably either White or African-American with a relatively low amount of interspersion of people groups, except for Northfield, due to its relative concentration of African-Americans. Much like the previously discussed suburbs of Central Crossing, Western

Station, and Thriftville, Northfield has experienced a demographic shift due to African-Americans and Hispanics moving from Golden City. There are additional population groups, mainly as the result of recent immigration, residing in Northfield, including but not limited to Africans, Asians, Eastern Europeans, South Americans, Arabs, and Central Americans. My street in Northfield is diverse; my neighbors are Caribbean-Americans, Hispanics, African-Americans, a Filipina, Mexican-Americans, Russians, Whites, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese people. Although there is White resistance and even some resentment over diverse peoples moving to Northfield, the school district administration understands the importance of diversity. For example, the Northfield City School District Superintendent openly highlights, even brags, about the diversity of the school district. Diverse speakers have given professional development at Northfield School District about diversity and "implicit bias," including an Associate Professor of Curriculum/Culture at a local university and a nationally-known African-American school principal who is also a noted author.

There is "implicit bias" (mostly unconscious) in Northfield City School District, like most suburbs across America, but the district administration is working hard to address these issues. There are at least three African-American district-level administrators at Northfield City Schools. Professional development in the district has focused upon the issues of race, racism, and power in schools. Northfield, despite its shortcomings, is a place, unlike other suburban areas, where racial integration is slowly moving forward, not backward. In a political climate like we are experiencing now in America, we need more suburbs and suburban school districts, like Northfield, to demonstrate that our great country embraces diversity, immigrants, and new ideas.

An Imagined Future

A future for public education without implicit bias would benefit every stakeholder, including but not limited to students, parents, teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, the community, school-business partners, and others. If implicit bias were eliminated, teachers would have accepting and positive views of all students. Students' attitudes, performance, and views of learning would be improved across the board. There would be fewer discipline referrals in every subgroup category. Administrators would have an easier job running the school; administrators would suddenly have more time to conduct instructional coaching instead of calling parents all day long. Teachers would have better interactions with students. Students would be more respectful of teachers, administrators, and school property. Perhaps the custodians would be cleaning up less graffiti, particularly the type where teachers' names are attached to four-letter cuss words. The so-called "racial achievement gaps" would narrow to the point that conversations about students' performance during teacher-based teams (TBTs) may begin to change to discussions of how much they enjoyed teaching a particular lesson plan. An "imagined future" for public schools where implicit bias is eliminated is something that is worth discussing and pursuing, because it would be in all stakeholders' best interests for this to happen.

References

Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017). The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools. *National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief*, *10,* 1-8.

Bogue, D. J., & Seim, E. (1956). Component of population-change in suburban and central city populations of standard metropolitan areas 1940-1950. *Rural Sociology*, *21*(3-4), 267-275.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Boustan, L. P. (2010). Was postwar suburbanization "White flight"? Evidence from the Black migration. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *125*(1), 417-443.

Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., Duda, M., Naoom, S. F., & Van Dyke, M. (2010). Sustainability of evidence-based programs in education. *Journal of Evidence-Based Practices for Schools*, *11*(1), 30-46.

Klaf, S., & Kwan, M. P. (2010). The neoliberal straitjacket and public education in the United States: Understanding contemporary education reform and its urban implications. *Urban Geography*, *31*(2), 194-210.

Lee, B. A., Iceland, J., & Farrell, C. R. (2014). Is ethnoracial residential integration on the rise? Evidence from metropolitan and micropolitan America since 1980. In J. Logan (Ed.), *Diversity and disparities: America enters a new century* (pp. 415-56), New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lichter, D. T., Parisi, D., & Taquino, M. C. (2017). Together but apart: Do US Whites live in racially diverse cities and neighborhoods? *Population and Development Review*, *43*(2), 229-255.

Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1989). Hypersegregation in US metropolitan areas: Black and Hispanic segregation along five dimensions. *Demography*, *26*(3), 373-391.

Pinar, W. F. (1975). The method of *currere*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Washington, DC.

Poetter, T. S. (2013). Stemming the tide: Calvin's high-water mark and teacher resistance. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *49*(3), 100-104.

Poetter, T. S. (2017). Curriculum fragments: Theorizing while practicing an educational life and building a *currere* oriented representation of an educational "I." *Currere Exchange Journal*, *1*(2), 1-11.

Ravitch, D. (2016). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Steele, C., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(5), 797-811.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, *62*(4), 271-286.

Tolnay, S. E. (2003). The African American "great migration" and beyond. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *29*(1), 209-232.

Vanneman, A., Hamilton, L., Anderson, J. B., & Rahman, T. (2009). *Achievement gaps: How Black and White students in public schools perform in mathematics and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.* Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Woodson, C. G. (2010). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Endnotes

[1]All names used are pseudonyms.

[2]All population data was retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau. Further citation is not provided to protect the identity of study participants.

Dazed and Confused: Bullied

By Thomas S. Poetter
Miami University

Over the years, I have thought deeply and almost continuously about bullying and being bullied. You may have read about my bullying of classmate Stacy (Poetter, 2018a) in 6th grade, when I conspired along with my friend Jerry Wilson, on the fly, to pelt her with wet nerf balls on the playground while she played on the school's swing set and begged us stop. That event had consequences in real time, and it has also stayed with me ever since, challenging my sense of any good in me and, as a result, my overall sense of self-worth at every turn. And you have perhaps read my musing in that curriculum fragment about the confluence of the personal, social, and natural worlds, and the explosions that can happen in the blink of an eye through my use of the heuristic "supernova." Perhaps we are all, in microcosm, mini-supernovas of a sort, living and burning and moving but ultimately on course to explode and perish. And we all carry, no doubt, at least a tiny bit of Mars dust inside of us (Poetter, 2018b). By the way, I know Mars is not a supernova, at least not literally.

There is also no doubt that all of us have played the bully. And there is no doubt that we have all been bullied. After all, we're all enmeshed constantly—in schools and jobs and communities and families—in unequal relations of power. Harmony in our lives—no matter our genders, sexual preferences, classes, races, and/or religious affiliations—is hard to come by. Most of us find happiness, harmony, and well-being, maybe, in small doses, in nooks and crannies of lives in search of any sense of joy that is so often crowded out by a legion of afflictions such as conflict, mental anguish, physical violence, and, ultimately in the end perhaps and all along the way, alienation, distance, despair, and even hatred.

And it is so with me and my life. I am working up my courage with words toward telling you with words about something that has been devastating to me—at least as bad as the cycle of despair brought on by my bullying of Stacy and, in retrospect, many others along life's way no doubt. But it's hard to tell it, any of it. Telling about Stacy caused me to spiral with self-doubt and despair for a long period before, during, and now after the writing. But I have put this next telling off for too long, scared of the consequences, but knowing how essential it is to take it on, at least from my perspective. So here goes: I was bullied.

Frank Bowser: Bully

I found myself grazing through our cable TV channels recently and landed on the iconic movie *Dazed and Confused* (1993). I couldn't stop watching it. I tried, but couldn't, kind of like when people my age land on a TV channel replaying *Caddyshack* (1980) or *The Notebook* (2004). In almost every case, we can't stop watching. Seemingly, to varying degrees depending on the day, time, conditions at hand, I can't pry my eyes away, and so I settle in with movies like these that are constantly appearing and rotating through channels, sometimes watching something familiar that I've seen many, many times before, thinking I'm relaxing but most likely avoiding other responsibilities and tasks. I hadn't ever seen *Dazed and Confused* before. I had heard about it, but it came out in the early 1990s, right during the end of my doctoral program and dissertation writing regimen, when time was scarce for me.

Poetter, T. S. (2020). Dazed and confused: Bullied. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 39-46.

If you haven't seen it—"alright, alright, alright" then (Matthew McConaughey's lingering line from the movie that continues in the public ecosphere of language)—the movie was set in 1976. I started high school myself in 1977, so I could definitely identify with the writer's depiction of the key action in the story. The plot swirls around freshmen at an Austin, Texas, high school who are depicted as spending a great deal of their time in and out of school trying to avoid the hazing rituals perpetrated by senior high school boys, mainly, against freshman. The high school senior bullies and the freshmen chase each other throughout the script. It's a romp, and awful, and funny (sometimes, but also not so much), and almost all true to form. Many of us closing in on 60 lived lives incredibly close to the ones depicted in *Dazed and Confused.*

When I started high school in the fall of 1977, I had just lost Dad after his second heart attack in November 1976 (Poetter, 2014). His death made me wobbly, both personally and in school, but I was in the know enough to be aware of what was going on around me. I had been in the junior high for two years in the building adjacent to the high school and knew a lot of my older peers from school and sports and community life, like church. And I had heard about "Freshmen initiations." It was relatively well known in stories circulated through our small city that seniors on sports teams hazed freshmen, performing initiation rites like kidnapping, blindfolding, and driving kids out of town after practice and dropping them off to walk home. Other stories told of older students scooping any kid off the street after school and pummeling him with punches just for "kicks." We never heard about any permanent damage being done to anyone, just that all of it was bound to happen at any time to all of us, and it was very unlikely that anyone would escape the situation unscathed. Even if we didn't get pummeled, we walked around for months in anticipation and fear of it. So, great harm was done no matter, just in terms of the threat itself, as abstract as it was and seemed. Most freshmen in high school in my day would be lying if said they didn't worry about and fear hazing, bullying, and initiation rituals during at least their first semester of high school.

But I have to admit that I thought I would be immune to high school bullying back then when the story I'm going to tell you all went down. I worried about it but didn't truly fear it, especially since I had been building a strong relationship with a high school senior in my neighborhood who was popular in school and a very good basketball player. He drove me from home to school every day. We played ball after school in fall workouts in preparation for the basketball season, too, so I was interacting with and meeting and playing with a lot of upperclassmen in the school. Things were going well…

Then one day things turned for me as I walked through the main gymnasium to the to the locker room for workouts. I never saw it coming.

Almost every day after school, I made my way to the auxiliary locker room to dress for workouts and never had any issue as I walked by the upperclassmen on the football team while they messed around and dressed informally for practice at the same time. I knew almost all of the boys, some of them well, and despite the age difference, some of them were friends. And nearly everyone in the school knew about my situation, who my dad was, that he had perished suddenly, and that I now lived in a single parent household, with uncertain prospects in our lives. My family, having lived in the same town for all of my lifetime, decided not to move away. We were staying put, despite the limited prospects for employment for my mom. The schools were good, and we had friends, and my sister Anne, born with Down's Syndrome and thriving in the county school, had a base of support from which to build her life. We weren't going anywhere

and felt loved in our own home and in the wider home of our community, schools, and church.

And I want to be honest about what I'm going to tell you that happened. I pretty much have never backed down from anything. Most people who have known me forever would at least call me "spirited," "competitive," even "physical." Especially in athletics, I never shied away from contact or conflict. Even though my sports were basketball and baseball, and not football, I didn't mind a rough contest. And I had my share of dustups on the playground throughout my school years with other boys. I know I'm considered diminutive in terms of physical stature, especially now in my late 50s, but I was nearly full grown at 12 years old, so I wasn't small for my age. I grew up in an era when bullies knew that the people they picked on, all of them, had permission from their own families to take care of business with any means necessary. If that meant a fistfight to even the playing field, so be it. And friends almost routinely stepped in to set things straight if there was a mismatch. We all knew that there could be consequences at home or in school from engaging in retribution, but we all knew how to settle a score and what the rules were. And I grew up in the household of a prominent protestant pastor; he taught me to stand up for myself and not to bring my problems home. That's just the way things were.

And in that moment—as I think about that dark set of hours that happened so long ago—I admit I was vulnerable to fits of rage while grieving the loss of my father. I was angry, hurt, lost, alone, and could be mean. I didn't want to snap, but I had no mechanism for defeating my anger except through physical activity. Church helped, and I remained faithful. I did the best I could. I had a deep sense in me that peace and justice were far more important in life than power and strength. My parents taught me all of it, to love others, as well as to defend myself if need be. I have mentioned in other places (Poetter, 2014) that playing basketball saved my life, and perhaps it's literally true. Working out, running, playing, even fighting on the court, helped me work things out, make new friends (and a few enemies), and solidify my identity. It gave me space and room to maneuver—to figure it out, to work through (Pinar, 2012). We didn't have mental health options back then, no therapy, no counseling, only friends and family and church and basketball.

That's all there was. There was life, and there was death; my entire culture challenged me with the bottom line: deal with it. Comforts popped up here and there, through friendships, good teachers, and family. But the stark truths about life and love and fairness and pain entered me at an early age. And they no doubt consumed me, and broke me, and made me who I am all at the same time.

So, as I walked casually and alone in front of the football team that Tuesday afternoon after school on the way to basketball workouts in September of 1977—with my gym bag in one hand, my books in the other—I never saw Frank Bowser coming. Before I even knew he was there, Frank got in my face while poking me hard in the sternum with his index finger, literally stopping me in my tracks and knocking me on my heels. I had great muscle control and balance back then and tremendous reflexes, and I can remember not dropping anything to the ground though I had been sucker-punched. He hit me really hard, and I will never, ever forget the sharp, physical agony caused by that one move.

I looked up very quickly in wake of that immediate and acutely painful act, and Frank Bowser said to me, "What are you doing walking here, Poetter?"

I said, "I'm on the way to basketball workouts, Frank, just like every other day. What the hell?" I was hurt and angry all at once, just speaking as quickly as my brain would let me while processing it all. And this act was public; everyone there heard every word.

"You don't walk in front of the football team anymore, show some respect. You go around from now on, not in front of us or you'll get the same thing tomorrow. Got it?"

I didn't answer. I just brushed past him and kept walking. I dressed for practice, made my way to the floor, and began thinking about next steps. All of that next 24-hour period is a blur to me now. But I do know that I was steeled against his will and would not back down. I resolved that, no matter what happened, I would not walk around the football team but would take my own path and walk wherever I wanted to. I didn't talk about what happened with anyone at school or at home. I had to handle this on my own.

As is true for most of us our entire lives, the next day came without any drama, and I walked right in front of the team, at the same time, with the same intent, which was to make my way to the locker room for workouts after school. That's it. I kept my eyes open and my head up (I learned that lesson the hard way!). I thought I had made it through the gauntlet unscathed when I felt this extremely forceful push from behind that sent me, and everything I was carrying, flailing to the ground, hard. It happened really fast.

Frank Bowser had tackled me from behind and crushed me to the ground, jumping up and celebrating and running around the gym while I came to my senses on the ground.

I remember very purposefully watching him glory in the moment, for that split second, and then picking up everything that had gone flying, including myself, my glasses, my books, and bag, and making my way to the locker room on my own. I was humiliated but not hurt. Just stunned, and very, very angry.

I also remember that not one person came to my aid while I was on the ground.

Literally, no one checked on me later.

No one said they were sorry and that they would help me out next time.

No one told me Frank was an asshole, a king-sized prick, and that I didn't deserve that kind of treatment, even as a freshman.

No one reported Frank to the principal.

No one called me on the phone later.

And no one in that gym celebrated, except Frank. Even then, as well as now, I think that everyone in that space was just as stunned and upset about what happened, and no one had a clue what to do about it. Mayhem as usual? A drug induced moment of random violence? A cowardly attempt at setting freshmen straight? Whatever. It didn't matter then, just like it doesn't now, except to me.

No one did anything about it that I know of to this day.

But I decided in that moment that an act like that would meet with complete and total retribution. And that the next day, I would walk on exactly the same path, in the same way, but I would be ready to fight Frank Bowser until one of us didn't get up.

And I don't mean that figuratively. That's the truth.

I didn't care about the consequences. I didn't care about hurting him. I would make this right myself. After all, I had just stared my own dead father in the face and buried him in the ground along with everything I thought was stable and good and joyful about life. What else could hurt me now? Frank Bowser? No, effing, way. I felt in the moment like I had nothing to lose. I certainly wasn't scared of Frank Bowser.

After all, he tackled a defenseless person from behind. That's cowardly in every way. And he was exactly my size, not known as athletic or aggressive. He never cracked

the football line-up but participated like so many other boys did in my school just to be on the team and close to the glory and action, which there was plenty of in those days at my school. I learned then, as I learned later after many years, that Frank Bowser was just a jerk. That's all. I also realized that I didn't have a great deal of experience in fights that lasted very long but that I would see this through to the end.

Frank Bowser would literally have to kill me to win that fight.

On the third day, I walked past the team and dressed for practice. No one spoke to me, no one dug their index finger into my chest, and no one hit me from behind.

After Frank Bowser tackled me in the gym, it was as if he disappeared. I never saw him in the hallway at school. I never saw him in the gym. I never saw him out in the town, at a restaurant, at the library, at a ballgame, at a parade. Nowhere. After he graduated, I never saw Frank Bowser again, not even in passing or at a distance, not in a car driving down the road. Never.

I haven't seen Frank Bowser since September 1977, more than 40 years ago now.

It's really impossible for me to explain, though my thinking is that his act either satisfied his hunger for complete domination or that someone who saw what happened or heard about it handled it for me without my knowledge behind the scenes and made him knock it off.

After all these years, I don't know what happened to Frank, though I heard over the years in casual conversation with friends and family that he made it through college, spent some years later in my hometown, didn't become a criminal, and wasn't/isn't dead (I didn't really care either way). But I never saw him again, and believe me, a big part of me was looking for him then and has been ever since.

I'm sure that if I saw him now, after so long, I wouldn't recognize him. I'm sure Frank Bowser wouldn't remember me or recognize me, and I'm positive he wouldn't remember what happened in the gym at our high school in September of 1977.

When conflict like this happens, who gets closure? How does that even happen? What are the consequences of something so egregious just hanging in space, a bad dream gone bad, with no end, no justice (seemingly), nothing? Or is there something else? Anything else? In past attempts at addressing bullying, I described and acknowledged my own bullying behavior. Stacy could tell you first-hand about my bullying side. And I wonder if I've ever been perceived as bully later, in ways that I have even missed, even while being sensitive to it all and knowing what it feels like to get knocked to the ground for no reason and to find no closure or resolution whatsoever to the pain of it all.

Reflective Interlude: Where Is My Thinking Now about Frank Bowser?

Recently NBC aired a story on the *Today Show Third Hour* (Leist & Mazzarelli, 2020) about sisters who suffered at the hands of a bully 60 years ago during their school days in a small town. The person who bullied them, a boy in their class, called them names and got others to ostracize them as young girls in school and then kept it up all the way through high school. His actions hurt the girls, and they described that their experiences in the town and school were tainted by his bullying, their social lives during their youths ruined by the lack of acceptance and care of their classmates and townspeople.

Much later in life, the bully confessed to his wife about his past behavior. His wife located the sisters, and they began discussing together the possibility of his apologizing to them in person. When they made contact with the sisters, the sisters very graciously accepted a meeting. When they met, their nemesis apologized, admitting after all these years that he regretted what he had done and that his treatment of them had haunted him

ever since. The sisters forgave him, and now they have an ongoing, positive relationship, even spending holiday meals together. It's a miracle really, a fitting tribute to the possibilities of humanity. Contrition and forgiveness are possible. They all wished none of it had ever happened, but the end result of reconciliation, the conquering of alienation, is the life giving and soul-flourishing power of forgiveness.

I admit I teared up during the spot, mainly because I desperately want what both parties got: forgiveness, the true kind, filled with grace and understanding and reconciliation and hope for ultimate redemption, as close to "real," and "genuine," and "authentic" as possible, in terms of what those things mean to me, maybe not to you, but possibly. To me, I think that the giving of grace and the receiving of grace, through forgiveness, whenever possible, even up to and beyond the limits of what most in society thinks is "appropriate" or "acceptable," like in the cases of perpetrators of crimes such as rape and murder asking for forgiveness from victims and victims' families and receiving it, constitute one of the great process challenges and possibilities in the human condition, our lived curricula (Berman, 1968) toward fulfillment, redemption, and life.

I know about this because I am in the process cycle of forgiveness, and you know about it because you are in it, too, all of us, like Dorothy caught up in her final cyclone swirl on the way back to Kansas, tumbling inside of memories and feelings about our pasts, with bad acts filled with bullies and bullying dominating the images in our mind. We are all in it when we gaze longingly in the mirror for something else besides those thoughts and feelings, the despair. Truth is that I would like to hear Frank apologize for sticking his index finger in my sternum and blindsiding me in the school gym, and I would like to accept it and also apologize for carrying malice in my heart for him each day of my life since September of 1977. I think that would be a nice moment. I would welcome it, and I long for it.

Curriculum Analysis

I think that most would agree that our life experiences in the cultures we inhabit, in many ways, are dominated by practices and images of interaction that are harsh, punitive. You don't to have to listen too long to TV or radio, and you can land anywhere on the internet machine, to learn about the mayhem that happens all around us. And in our own life experiences, we feel the sting of relationships gone bad, along with the often accompanying physical and mental abuse and/or violence and the bullying, perhaps both as the receivers of bad acts and as the perpetrators. I have occupied both spaces in my life; maybe you have, too.

In many cases we are broken in ways that could result in criminal behavior, but most often we carry the weight of life's infractions committed and done to us that have deeply moral consequences (as opposed to legal ones), infractions that cause alienation, putting us behind bars of a certain type, not the literal kind, but the kind that can constitute devastatingly alienating prisons just as well, like the confinements of self-doubt, fear, self-hatred, loneliness, estrangement, and disaffection. And the world is opening up to the fact that almost all of us carry baggage and that almost all of us need help and support and love to overcome the extreme mental anguish that comes along with living. Joy occupies life, yes. But life includes, by definition, pain as well. How do we find balance in that tension and live lives unhindered by the despair of it all—at least lives lived at their possible best?

In her mostly forgotten but still timely book *New Priorities in the Curriculum*, Berman (1968) writes about a process-oriented curriculum as a set of new priorities

for human beings, focusing on the lived experiences of all students and citizens and the becoming of each person as an in-process work, negotiating in school and community the nature and meaning of space, time, selfhood, and the cohesion of thinking/feeling (pp. 2-13). Essentially, Berman builds a model for thinking about students as curriculum, as malleable, as moral, as moving, as in action. And in the middle of her work on this project is love, naming and describing "loving" as a central process that students learn about and experience in life. Key for her is tying the notion of loving to caring, to more than acceptance, saying that love "helps provide intensity in a mutually rewarding experience" (Berman, 1968, p. 65) where all become better as a result: "True love is a moral process in which all concerned are enhanced. The morality of love is not enforced; rather it is a concomitant of concern for the other" (p. 68).

Further, using Hora, Berman clarifies what love is, and is not:

> Love is essentially a mode of cognition. Love is concerned neither with feeling good nor feeling bad. Love is concerned with understanding. Love listens to hear. Love is a state of complete attention, without intruding thoughts and motivations. Contrary to general belief, love is not just a feeling or emotion. The opposite of love is not hate, as is generally assumed. *The opposite of love is calculative thinking*. (Hora as cited in Berman, 1968, p. 68)

And so I would like to learn and grow through my experiences of bullying and being bullied and not be defined by it all in ways that harm or detract from the life I want to live and the way I live my life in relationship to others and, in particular, how I love others and the world. I would like to become a more complete human, alive and well and getting better, not worse. For me, holding on to all of this guilt and hate for so many years, as a result of these flashpoint experiences with bullying and so many, many more examples that dot my life in the world that time and space don't permit me to explicate here is *calculation*, all the thinking, plotting, mulling, and festering over it all on and on and on. I want to free myself from calculating and move to a new state of being, to somewhere filled instead with love and care.

But where does it stop? How can any of us who have bruised or been bruised respond and work on this without being trite about the pain and without being flippant about the power of forgiveness when serious, even mortal harm has been done? What can I do? What can we do?

For now, I think the answer lies in action, a step I'm willing to take, and the reason for all of it, all at once, from here to eternity: love.

I am so sorry, Stacy. I forgive you, Frank.

References

Berman, L. (1968). *New priorities in the curriculum.* Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Cassavetes, N. (Director), Johnson, M., & Harris, L. (Producers). (2004). *The notebook*. USA: Gran Via.

Leist, L. (Producer), & Mazzarelli, T. (Producer). (2020). Sisters make amends with their bully 60 years later. *The Today Show Third Hour*. New York, NY: NBC Studios.

Linklater, R. (Director/Producer), Daniel, S., & Jacks, J. (Producers). (1993). *Dazed and confused*. USA: Universal Studios.

Pinar, W. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd edition). New York, NY: Routledge.

Poetter, T. S. (2018a). Curriculum fragments: Bullied (bullying). *Currere Exchange Journal*, *2*(2), 2-8.

Poetter, T. S. (2018b). Mars and me. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *2*(2), 1.

Poetter, T. S. (2014). *50 Christmases: Stories of love, hope, and reconciliation in Christmastide (A Memoir)*. San Clemente, CA: Sourced Media Books.

Ramis, H. (Director), & Kenney, D. (Producer). (1980). *Caddyshack*. USA: Warner Brothers.

The Worlding of Teaching: Heideggerian Being, *Currere*, and Ontological Citizenship

By M. Jayne Fleener
North Carolina State University
Ivon Prefontaine
Gonzaga University
Keri L. Rodgers
Ball State University
& Kelly Waldrop
The Publish House

Heidegger and *Currere*: Being-With Being

Issues about what is real, what we know, and what is right provide the basis for our ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics. What postmodernism suggests, and reconceptualist theory offers, is that these are not the right questions. Questions about power, domination, stewardship, sustainable futures, creativity, equity, care, and hope dominate postmodernist philosophic debates, including those about teaching and learning in education.

The reconceptualization of curriculum theory proposes experiential, phenomenological relationships between teacher, student, and curriculum, not a "technical-scientific objectification of [their] subjectivity" (Heidegger,[1] 1993a, p. 172). The latter is an "illusion [that] everything man encounters exists [as] his construct" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 332) and reduces what is taught to scientific treatments with predictable outcomes and what is learned to predetermined quantifiable fragments, not as ongoing, subjective experiences unique to each teacher and learner.

Pinar (1975) brought forth experiential and phenomenological dimensions of curriculum, describing *currere* as autobiographical "investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public" (p. 400). This description does not diminish the essential experience of schooling to subjectivity of the curriculum and suggests a Heideggerian being-in-the-world. Further, Pinar calls for "a self-hermeneutical, phenomenological method [questioning one's lived-experiences] to help an investigator gain access to the *lebenswelt* ('lifeworld'), or that realm of *lebenswelt* associated with *currere*" (p. 403). In this way, curricular inquiry becomes a purposeful "seeking...guided... by what is sought" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 25). Hodge (2015) proposed that "currere is to education what...being-in-the-world is to the understanding of consciousness: a redrawing of the phenomenological scope of the question that shows up the distorting limitations of [modernist's] ways of questioning" (pp. 97-98).

Pinar (2011) offers *currere* as a process outliving classroom experience, a "complicated conversation," enabling each learner, each teacher, and society to engage in ongoing "subjective and social reconstruction" (p. 2). Curriculum, conceived of as *currere*, "privileges the concept of the *individual* in curriculum studies" (p. 2). It relates to (in)forming each individual through classical and practical *Bildung* or self-cultivation, which includes qualities such as tact, "self-determination, freedom, emancipation, autonomy, responsibility, reason, and independence" (p. 66). (In)forming their character,

Fleener, M. J., Prefontaine, I., Rodgers, K. L., Waldrop, K. (2020). The worlding of teaching: Heideggerian being, *currere*, and ontological citizenship. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 47-56.

each teacher and student forms "a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge of general principles does not suffice" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 14).

In this paper, we use Heidegger's Being to extend *currere*, incorporating each teacher's perspective and developing what we understand as ontological citizenship. In this understanding, "everything is an experience" to be interpreted by the person who experiences it (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 204). After his "turn," Heidegger explored Being as a being-in-relation Being, focusing on the "becoming" of Being (Carman, 2008, p. xx). This shift to ontological Being-in-relation orients teachers towards a sustainable, hopeful, creative, and engaged education and citizenry.

Heidegger (1962) introduced *Dasein*, the "there is" of Being, to emphasize ontological existence as experience-with-other and being-in-the-world (p. 26). *Dasein* and Being-in-the-world do not separate "I" from "they." Rather, Heidegger's ontology places Being-in-the-world-with-other in, not above or separate from, the social fabric. Personal and collective meaning-making emerge from cultural and historical embeddedness in past, present, and future (p. 63). Being-with allows *Dasein* to realize the paradox of existence with others while being alone with one's self, emphasizing experiential and phenomenological aspects of *Dasein*.

A focus of being-with-Being entails being open to care for Other. In Heidegger (1962) "Da"[2] of Da-sein is not precisely the "there" of Being, but a presence in "thereness" and "openness" to reflect on the world (p. 344). This ontological treatment suggests that to be human is to experience sense-making within social contexts.

Each human can critically self-reflect on the meaning of their particular existence, which is shared with others. Purposeful self-reflection is grounded in one's experience and phenomena encountered as opposed to being a "vacuous...free-floating thesis," (Heidegger, 1962, p. 61). Rigid dichotomies, such as subject-object, human-non-human, school-society, thinking-feeling, and myth-logic dissolve, as humans interpret, understand, and direct being-with-other experiences, ways of being, and return "to the things [and phenomena] themselves" (p. 72).

Vignette One: Being-as-Teaching Reconceptualized – Keri

Students hurriedly type their answers to questions awaiting them on the board the first day of class. After five minutes, one student asks, "Where is the teacher? Should we just leave?" A few students look up, exchanging uncertain, awkward glances while the rest continue typing their answers. In the back, a person in sandals, shorts, a Dr. Seuss "Teacher of All Things" t-shirt, and a baseball cap removes noise-cancelling headphones and walks forward asking, "Can we move on or do we need more time?"

Surprised, the students look up, some with furrowed brows of confusion. Others stare at the person walking towards the front of the room. They seem to wonder, "Who is this person taking control of the class?"

This person is me—their teacher. In the first five minutes of class, I challenged their preconceived understanding, that had been reinforced over eighteen years of their Being-in-the-world, of the appearance of a typical teacher and who should be a teacher. Teaching is far greater than an action—it is an act of being. We teach who we are (Palmer, 2007, p. 4). As I become more comfortable in my own skin, I realize that my students, especially those with disabilities, often become accepting of their perceived societal shortcomings. Over the semester, they learn socioeconomic

status, gender, religion, ethnicity, and disability do not define a person as less capable of teaching. Some find that traditional markers of marginalization can become assets in the classroom and catalysts for change in their future teaching.

A person is conscious of worlds disclosed to them, existing contingencies that shape the world they are "thrown" into, and "authentically Being-their-Selves [and] authentically [being] with one another" (Heidegger, 1962, pp, 344-345). In this sense, Dasein's Being-in-the-World is a relational ontology of authentic-Dasein as conscious of and open to being in the world in ethical and caring ways—the for-the-sake-of-which ethical Being (Sheehan, 2010).

Vignette Two: An Ontological Ethic of Care – Jayne

I always loved the history and philosophy of mathematics. The foundations of mathematics were being disrupted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in ways that fundamentally changed our expectations about the nature of what we can know in and through mathematics. My high school students always knew they could get me off topic by asking innocent-sounding questions like "What is infinity?," "Why can't we divide by zero?," "What is a fractal?," or "What is a paradox?" I happily conspired with them to tell stories about the history and philosophy of mathematics. But, what they didn't realize was that these were the moments when I felt like I was really teaching. I hoped to instill in them an awe for mathematics, allowing them to live in their worlds in mathematical ways and to question the mathematics handed to them in textbooks. I wanted them to see mathematics not as something static or "pure," but living, breathing, and changing. I wanted them to develop their own relationships with mathematics and experience mathematics as a way we make our world. Plato's ideal forms and abstraction of mathematics give way to human creation and meaning making. I wanted students to understand mathematics as meaning making and connecting with nature, not as answers in a textbook or memorized procedures.

Student relationship-with-content unfolds through relationship-with-others. Heidegger (1993c) explores how humans "dwell" and belong, and Being's situatedness is a "place" of sense-making, culture, and relationship, proposing Being as a relational, "event" ontology to "cherish and protect, preserve and care" for the essence of what is shared with others (pp. 348-350). Being exists in relationship, disclosing political, social, and educational "worlds" through language (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 170). Heidegger's relevance to education combines hermeneutic, phenomenological, and relational aspects, making contextual being essential to furthering what it means to be-in-relationship.

Vignette Three: Being in the Classroom Teaching Long Division – Ivon

After graduating, I taught a Grade 4 class for four months. The principal suggested I not worry about the academic side of learning, but I worried—this was the year they learned long division.

I expressed frustration to my wife, Kathy, about my struggles in teaching long division. I followed colleagues suggestions to use the curriculum, resource guide, and text, but the same students still weren't getting it. When Kathy asked how I learned to divide, as "new math" was gaining ground, I recalled tears during my struggle to learn "new division" and fears my teacher would not accept homework

solved with "old division." My teacher did accept that the method was as important as the mastery.

Kathy suggested I teach students how I understood long division. I announced to the students we would learn more than one way to divide and see which worked best for each of us. Each student learned division by year end. This approach was consistent with what called me to teach: "making a difference for students" without understanding in advance what that meant.

Several months later, four students from that class tracked me down, calling each Prefontaine in the phone book until they found me, wanting to know how I was and if I was coming back. I learned that Being-in-relation with one's students is not exclusive to their learning and my teaching. I experienced them as intertwined and interdependent elements of my teaching.

Heidegger goes beyond earlier understandings of Being-in-time to develop "worlding," transforming Being through relationships with others and "Earth" (Heidegger, 1993a, pp. 170-171). Where things and works go "unrecognized [in] usefulness and serviceability," ever unfolding possibilities are aesthetically "rediscovered by new inquiry" to be "brought forth [and] set forth" through the complexity of autopoiesis and self-creating within natural and cultural contexts (pp. 170-171).

VIGNETTE FOUR: OVERCOMING AMBIGUITY FOR BECOMING SCHOLARS – KELLY

As an academic editor, I often help doctoral students complete dissertations. I find it exciting when scholars transition from being student researchers to "owning" their research. One client was working on a project based in her home school district, where she attended school as a student and later taught and served in administration. Her topic was "home-grown teachers," examining the phenomenon of why teachers often return to their home school districts to teach and whether it is a practice to be encouraged. This client had been in her doctoral program as ABD (All But Dissertation) for years and was in danger of hitting the deadline at which the university would refuse to allow her to graduate. When we began, she had the first two chapters of her dissertation completed and had collected data but had not written the analysis or conclusion. We reviewed the material and discussed the writing left to complete, and she began working on the final sections.

When she sent me a draft of her "analysis" chapter, it was no more than a very narrow paraphrase of the entire data set. I explained that it was her job to interpret the data, to provide the reader with a clear understanding of what the data said, and, as an expert on her topic, to judge what data was most important, what trends were significant, and what the data meant to future research and action. She felt she was not knowledgeable enough to make these calls and feared allowing her feelings and experiences to color her interpretation.

We discussed how she designed the study, how it took place in a familiar setting, and how she chose a phenomenon to examine because it aligned with her personal experience. She lived a similar story to her participants, and the entire dissertation was about wanting to understand why many colleagues followed a similar path. I asked, "Who is better suited than you to share with the world what this data means?" She stared in stunned silence. "Nobody," she responded. A few days later, I received a second draft of the analysis chapter that was analysis, and good analysis at that. She was capable of the work all along. She simply had not

given herself permission to be the person she had become, an expert on her own data. As in my experience is often the case, once she embraced the idea that her dissertation was an exploration of her story and her currere journey, the work flowed, and she completed and successfully defended her dissertation.

Pinar (2012) used allegory to describe curriculum (understood as *currere*), reactivate the past, reconstruct the present, and discover the future as autobiographical and phenomenological reflection (p. xv). In Heidegger (1968), Being-in-the-world creates potential spaces for "thought-provoking" reflection (p. 31). Being-in-relation, dwelling, opens up spaces to reflect on and participate in the "mysterious" realms of Being (p. 31).

Vignette Five: Creating Potential Spaces for Change – Jayne

At the beginning of my graduate Organizational Theory classes, students typically have two areas of resistance, "theory" and organizational perspective. They find discussions about ontology, epistemology, and ethics abstract and confusing. What is the difference between interpretivism and critical theory? Is modernism "bad"? Why do we make things complex and look at organizations from many perspectives? These are some questions students ask at the beginning of a semester.

As we explore their current and former organizations from these various perspectives, new ways of looking at the complexity of social systems and organizations emerge for them. They understand the problem of Larry Nasser at Michigan State or the challenges of a business remaining relevant, multi-layered, interdependent, contextual, isomorphic, with its ethical implications and mandates. What appeared abstract and irrelevant in the study of organization theory suddenly provides multiple lenses through which to look at some difficult problems in social systems. They then can analyze and go one step further in enacting and creating change in their organizational contexts.

How people choose to-be-in-the-world and dwell there and define society has ethical implications, creating openings for new awareness of the world and existence. When "dwelling in tranquilized familiarity," we de-contextualize lived-experience and the life-world, placing calculative thinking and instrumental uses of Being above meditative thinking (Heidegger, 1962, p. 234). We order, count, measure, and compare, obscuring Being's unfolding, and "enframe" people, earth, and things, reducing them and relationships with them to "mere resources" for personal advancement (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 332). We come to understand people and resources as "standing-reserve" only, through technical and instrumental purposes, waiting to be summoned as if a machine and limiting authentic Being and relationships (p. 332). We plug into and unplug from relationships as is convenient.

Heidegger (1962) describes a relational ontology, connecting authentic Being through unconcealment with Being-in-the-World, "observing entities and marveling at them" (p. 216). Through "circumspection [giving] us a route to proceed," rather than saving the world, authentic being honors nature's essence and dignity, its capacity for self-creation, and human capacity to relate to what is possible (p. 216). Authentic Being honors natural rhythms, seasons passing, ebb and flow of time, and human mortality, avoiding instrumentalist attempts to control time and space, earth, and others. In

recognizing one's mortality, authentic and ontological being avoids existential angst and acknowledges divinity of spirit existing and persisting beyond death. An event ontology and understanding of authentic Being as an ethical Being-in-relation has implications for education. *Currere* supports authentic Being and avoids enframing that limits educational outcomes to what can be known, predicted, and controlled in advance, rather than ever unfolding.

Currere and Ontological Education

Vignette Six: Connecting Students to the World – Jayne

> *I envy writing and social studies teachers for assignments that provide students' opportunities to place themselves in world contexts. As a dean, I experienced opportunities to visit schools and witness great teaching, even in an age of accountability. While visiting a school applying for special designation as a global school, I observed fourth-grade students learning about how plastics impact the environment. In the foyer, students displayed posters of various ways plastic refuse affects the environment and societies, with statistics, drawings, photos of animals suffocated by plastic bags, and pictures of children eking out a meagre living for their families by abstracting materials from mountains of plastic trash. What brought this alive was how students approached me to passionately describe the project, the data, unsustainable uses of plastic, how the environment was being poisoned, and their care for others who made a living going through our garbage. For me, this resonated as currere in action.*

An event and relational ontology disrupts dominant discourses that focus on certain, predictable knowledge and a desire for human mastery and negate authentic Being. This ontology provides hope and promise for sustainable ways of being, essential in overcoming political, social, ecological, and economic division without guaranteeing success. For example, Warren (1997) and Griffin (2016) offer cogent, comprehensive critiques of modernism's alienation of women and their bodies in order to parallel raping the environment and to counter continued exploitation of people and the environment.

Vignette Seven: Teaching Human Beings – Keri

> *My students begin their first course in the professional education sequence eager to master teaching skills. On the first day, they share what they hope to learn that semester. Classroom management and lesson planning are at the top of the list.*
>
> *I ask them, "What will you teach?" One after another, they reply, "Art," "History," and "Biology." The list goes on as every content area is represented in my classroom. I answer "No" to each student, and they grow perplexed. Someone tentatively asks, "Students?" I reply that they are getting warmer. Finally, someone gives the answer I seek, "Human beings." I almost see light bulbs appearing above their heads and facial expressions reveal them pondering this new "truth."*
>
> *I acknowledge asking them a trick question I as continue, "We do not teach subjects. We teach human beings." Human beings—with lived experiences, with hopes and fears, each wanting to be valued and appreciated, and hoping to succeed in the real world—inhabit classroom spaces. Our role is not to stand at the front of the class and pontificate about our favorite subjects. Rather, it is to listen with our eyes, with our ears and, most importantly, with our hearts as we model for them authentic ways of Being-with others.*

As an educative event, the Being of being-in-relationships and *currere* engage the past, present, and future in non-linear ways, embracing impermanence, meditative thought, what exists, mystery, and a sense of wonder for what could be. In relational ontology, teaching and learning are understood as authentic, reflective, thoughtful, self-aware, and being-in-relation, seeking and supporting becoming in self, other, and the world.

Vignette Eight: I Am – Ivon

For 10 years, I began each year with an activity called "I Am" to inform my relationships with new and returning students in our multi-grade classroom. I distributed the poem and read it aloud. Student volunteers read it aloud several more times, allowing different voices to be heard.

In small groups, students discussed the poem and its meaning to each of them. Each shared something about themselves, describing what Stony Creek meant to them and what brought them there. I circulated, listening about and learning how returning students changed over the summer and about new students.

For 30 minutes, students engaged with the poem, themselves, and Stony Creek. I then asked each student to write two poems, an acrostic using their names and a free verse about their interests, feelings, dreams, etc. With the poems, they prepared a collage, finding and labelling pictures to reflect who they were (e.g., moto-crosser, dancer, horse person) and their relationships (e.g., son, daughter, student).

They tacked their poems and collages on bulletin boards, helping and learning about each other. They shared what the collages and poems said about them as people. I listened and learned.

Throughout the year, the collages and poems remained on the bulletin boards as touchstones for students, parents, visitors, and me. For me, they demonstrated what students cared about, dreamed about, and were interested in. If they struggled with learning, I referred back to interests they shared in their poems and collages. I feel this activity had an authentic effect on forming relationships between each of us in our classroom.

The authentic Being of education is a Heideggerian unconcealment, a becoming of Being. History connects the authentic Being with natural, social, and cultural pasts, propelling Being to shape the future. Mathematics, experienced in authentic ways, opens up new worlds for Being to interact and engage in the world, not for domination or control, but to understand and appreciate the beauty of patterns and connectedness of relationships. Learning new languages extends opportunities for Being to relate with others from distinct traditions. We derive deeper understandings and appreciations for cultural variance, to shape potential futures through discernment and ethical action, forming openings for Being. While learning can be instrumental, it is not its dominant purpose.

Vignette Nine: Standards Driven Curriculum and the Humanity of Students – Jayne

I was fortunate as a mathematics teacher in the 1980s that I could develop my own curriculum to meet my students' needs with my ultimate goal being to help them each form caring and personal relationships with mathematics. Rather than following a geometry textbook, we spent the first semester exploring various

deductive systems, including creating our own "taxi-cab" geometry with theorems and axioms associated with how a taxi in New York City might navigate Manhattan's avenues and streets.

As a mathematics teacher educator after No Child Left Behind, I sadly realized I had to teach pre-service teachers how to "demonstrate effectiveness" and "teach content" for students to do well on exams. Beginning-teachers were asked to ignore their students' humanity to the point of "giving up" on some students so averages met predetermined outcomes. Policies and my students asked me to "technologize" mathematics in ways that decontextualized them and their future students. In the end, I think this approach to education contributed to anti-education and a pervasive sense of schooling's meaninglessness. I feel we lost our sense of what it means to be educated.

The authentic teacher is a Being who recognizes and supports the Being of others, including students, and their connectedness to their learning through creative openings. Non-authentic teaching enframes and reduces ideas and knowledge to instrumental purposes. It technologizes students, conflates learning with numbers in order to measure learning and time for learning. Authentic teaching supports Being's attempts to uncover and transcend knowledge of a certain time, with openings to reflect and make meaning, and opportunities for connections, insights, and ethics through four moments of what is, what could be, what is impermanent, and what was and persists through time. The fourfold of Being is reflective, self-aware, thoughtful, an authentic being-in-relation, continually seeking and supporting autopoietic becomings of Being in self, other, and the world.

Poiesis (reflective self-creation) of Being undergirds educative experiences to support the knowing-spaces as meaning-making and relational at all levels of being. Education is a coming-to-presence and unconcealment of truth as Being (as a relationship), connecting past, present, future, with impermanence and wonder. It reveals worlds, opening spaces for meaning "over and above the thingly element" (Heidegger, 1993a, p. 145). Being-in-the-world is not about Being in a place but creating potential spaces of being-in-relation.

Transformational learning as a goal for 21st century schooling is driven by an understanding about what it means to know and do. It requires a shift from emphasizing static knowledge to embracing processes and multiple perspectives and from learning as consumption of discrete facts to learning embraced as connected, dynamic, and relational being. As a goal for the realities of 21st century curriculum, it challenges the essentialism of instrumental approaches to curriculum and teaching, providing adaptive opportunities for the 21st century's realities.

Curriculum's reconceptualist movement provides a way to "disentangle" education by challenging the link between education and curriculum as "the [fixed] content of what is taught," the "track of the race course" (Pinar points out, the etymology of "curriculum"), and the "external" of what is taught, the "running of the race," and experiencing curriculum as "*currere*." Reconceptualizing curriculum as *currere* supports an ontological perspective of education to rethink "the key curriculum question—'what knowledge is of most worth?'—... animated by ethics, history, and politics" (Pinar, 2012, p. xv).

Currere as Citizenship

Currere, as method, provokes thinking about how the teacher and curriculum, supporting the learner as connected being, creates these worlds of Being that transform

the learner in the process. Using Heidegger's aesthetic to rethink transformational learning as unconcealment of ontological being evokes insights to develop opportunities for students to engage with learning in ways that support their "being-with" understandings as transformational learning. The setting up and setting forth of curriculum clearings provides spaces for students to create and engage in learning spaces of world-ing. The art-being of transformational learning can be supported by a being-with curriculum. The moments of *currere* (Baszile, 2017) integrate with a Heideggerian sense of ontological being to engage an educative experience for Being-in-relationship that engages the past, present, and future through the four-fold of Being.

Theorizing complex relationships between democratic preparation, freedom, and openings of educational spaces for authentic Being, we move beyond a narrative of citizenship as civic participation and respecting, or tolerating, the rights of others. We begin to appreciate our ontological Being as a complex web of relationships between authenticity, emergence, freedom, and dynamic interplay among individuals and their futures, through the context of their pasts and potentials. We envision an educational lifeworld embracing this ontological turn that supports

> agency, transformation, materiality and relations…[and] the importance of being clear about how educators and educational researchers conceptualize ontology and engage with debates on the ontological turn in related disciplines…[creating] potential spaces for future action in a web of relationship. (Zembylas, 2017, p. 1401)

This is paramount as we seek to prepare our students to meaningfully navigate challenges of civic involvement to support multiple and overlapping perspectives of difference. As such, educating for ontological citizenship is supportive of authentic Being-in-the-world-with-others to celebrate as well as bridge difference across race, class, gender, sexuality, exceptionality, and disability, and overcome tribalism and isolationism as operating principles of the politics of difference.

Vignette Ten: Ontological Citizenship and Currere

> *We began our conversations about being-with curriculum sitting around a table at the 2018 Currere Exchange. Over the past year, we engaged in ongoing and meandering through the moments of currere to arrive at ways of thinking about our roles in nurturing the forming of Bildung—reflective, expansive, lifelong learning as a means for freedom, autonomy, and personal responsibility—as a way-of-Being that supports an "ethic of care" and democratic embrace for authentic freedom, connecting an individual with others and society as a whole (Noddings, 1992). Through these personal and collective reflections, we have revisited our own teaching practices over our collective many years that intuitively supported a Being-centered approach to education. Emerging out of these conversations was a new way of thinking about authentic citizenship that is now especially important as we attempt to over-come and heal our many divisions and tribalisms that threaten to dissolve our democratic way of life.*

Currere supports authentic Being through individual educative engagement. Both exist as ongoing processes, outliving each passing moment as one reflects on the past, imagines future worlds, and lives each present moment.

References

Baszile, D. T. (2017). On the virtues of *currere*. *Currere Exchange Journal, 1*(1), vi-ix.

Carman, T. (2008). Foreword. In M. Heidegger, *Being and time* (pp. xiii-xxi). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Gadamer, H-G. (1989). *Truth and method* (2nd rev. ed., J.Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum.

Griffin, S. (2016). *Woman and nature: The roaring inside her* (3rd ed.) Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Heidegger, M. (1968). *What is called thinking?* (J. G. Gray, Trans.) New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Heidegger, M. (1993a). The origin of the work of art. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Basic writings* (pp. 139-212). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Heidegger, M. (1993b). The question concerning technology. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Basic writings* (pp. 307-341). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Heidegger, M. (1993c). Building dwelling thinking. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Basic writings* (pp. 343-363). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Hodge, S. (2015). *Martin Heidegger: The challenge to education.* New York, NY: Springer.

Krell, D. F. (2008). General introduction. In M. Heidegger, *Basic writings* (pp. 3-35). New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Palmer, P. (2007). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pinar, W. F. (1975). *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists.* Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.

Pinar, W. F. (2011). *The character of curriculum studies: Bildung, currere, and the recurring question of the subject.* New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

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

Sheehan, T. (2010). The turn. In B. W. Davis (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Key concepts* (pp. 82-101). Durham NC: Acumen.

Warren, K. (1997). *Ecofeminism: Women, culture, nature.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Zembylas, M. (2017). The contribution of the ontological turn in education: Some methodological and political implications. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 49,* 1401-1414.

Endnotes

[1]The authors acknowledge that Heidegger is a controversial character. He collaborated with the Nazis and, even after ending his public support, maintained a membership in the National Socialist Party. Equally as damning was his silence and lack of contrition throughout his life. As noted by Krell (2008) in the General Introduction to *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, "Even those…who affirm the greatness of [Heidegger's] thought [acknowledge] his engagement…was a monstrous error [and] his silence disturbing" (p. 30).

[2]Heidegger used a hyphen to emphasize his understanding of Da-sein as there is of Being and the ability to reflect on one's existence in the time and place in which one is situated.

Seeing Through the Sandstorm: Envisioning a Future through Critical Friendship and Alongside the Present

By Stephanie Baer
Miami University
& William D. Cavill, Jr.
University of Nebraska at Kearney

There is a well-known parable:

A professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, he wordlessly picked up a very large and empty jar. He then proceeded to fill the jar with golf balls.

"Is the jar full?" he asked his students.

"Yes," everyone responded.

The professor then picked up a box of marbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly; the marbles rolled into the areas between the golf balls.

"Is the jar full?" he asked again.

The students responded with a unanimous: "Yes."

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up all the space left.

He asked once more: "Is the jar full?"

"Yes, of course," everyone responded.

The professor then pulled out two bottles of beer from under the desk and poured the contents entirely into the jar, filling the empty space between the sand. Everyone laughed.

"Now," the professor said as the laughter subsided. "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things. Your family, your children, health, friends and favorite passions. If everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The marbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, or car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the marbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things critical to your happiness. Spend time with your children. Spend time with your parents. Visit your grandparents. Take your spouse out for dinner. Go out with your friends. There will always be time to clean the house and mow the lawn. Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the beer represented. The professor smiled and said: "I am glad you asked. The beer just shows that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of beers with a friend."

While this seems to be a fitting allegory describing the chaotic lives we all lead, we found it lacking when put to task against our own life situations. We were able to determine what our own golf balls, marbles, sand, and even the beer represented in our

Baer, S., & Cavill, W. D., Jr. (2020). Seeing through the sandstorm: Envisioning a future through critical friendship and alongside the present. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 57-65.

own lives, but neither of us could explain why our jars were continually being filled with sand. We wondered what part of life this parable was missing that related to our own situations, and this *flaw in the parable* became part of the impetus for our exploration through the progressive section of the *currere* process (Pinar, 1994). Having already navigated the churning, though insightful, waters of the regressive step together (Cavill & Baer, 2019), we were prepared for the next leg of our metacognitive journey, determining our answers to Pinar's (1994) call to consider our vision of the future. Having a better understanding of where we had been, we were ready to question what we envisioned for our futures. As teacher educators, we asked ourselves, "where are we going, what is important to us, and how can a continued collaborative conversation help us to elucidate a clearer vision of purpose for ourselves and our work?"

Theoretical Framework: *Currere* Method and Self-Study

> The *currere* process helps us clarify and feel more authentically connected to our choices. I came to the conclusion that the heaviness I was feeling was that, in order to experience anything in depth, we have to make a choice—and that will always mean not choosing something else. This, wrongly, leaves most of us with a sense of guilt—which if you think about it, is just massively egocentric...to think that we have the ability/should even try to multitask a million things at once. Humans have not evolved that far yet. We still need to be singularly connected to make meaning. (Stephanie progressive narrative writing, March 29, 2019)

Currere Method

Pinar (1994) invites us to consider the following as we enter into the progressive mode of thinking,

> if a teacher, focus on your teaching, on your relationship to students and colleagues, especially on the emotional content of these, and on the intellectual content. Discern where these appear to be going. You might imagine a future, perhaps a year hence or perhaps several years hence; describe it. (It is important to free associate, and to avoid use of the rational, critical aspect. Don't for example conclude that an imagined futuristic state is unreasonable. At this state allow usually buried visions of what is not yet present manifest.) (p. 10)

Following Pinar's instructions, we had to reiterate to one another that he asked us to consider relationships *to* people, not *with* people. As teachers, we found it simple and rather automatic to discuss the centrality of our work *with* others, particularly students and colleagues, as well as the intricacies of those relationships. However, what Pinar seems to point toward in his progressive approach is a concern for the self in relation *to* others, rather than putting a primary emphasis on the care of others. As teachers, we are servants to others, and it is easy to lose our own identities in magnanimity.

The collaborative nature of our progressive exploration allowed us to return repeatedly to the notion of an envisioned future for self. We worked to keep one another accountable in staying true to Pinar's (1994) intentions. The collaboration also lent itself to other methodologies, including self-study and critical friendship.

Critical Friendship in Self-Study

Self-study in teacher education is explored intimately in the journal, *Studying Teacher Education*. The journal focuses on the experience of teacher educators working

on enhancing the quality of their work with students in the context in higher education. Much of the work completed for this paper was done under the flag of critical friendship. "A critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience" (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 107).

During the process of working through the progressive component of the *currere* method, we have both taken on rolls that have challenged, complemented, frustrated, and built up the other. The role of critical friend has shed light on the progressive narrative as it was being constructed, which has helped both of us navigate the blustery sandstorm in which we currently find ourselves as we contemplate who we are as educators and particularly as art teacher educators. As faculty who have been charged with the immense task of preparing future art teachers, we have come to realize that the critical friendship we have developed over the years is a weapon with which to combat the frustrating lack of mentorship and direction that exists for people in our positions (Sultana, 2005; Taylor, Klein, & Adams, 2013). By having a critical eye during the progressive stage of the *currere* process, we have pushed one another to see more deeply into the courses we currently teach, to look to the future to imagine what our teaching will look like years from now, and to contemplate the ways in which what we are currently doing will get us to that vision. It has been a journey that would be impossible to embark upon without a critical friend. We have grown to depend on and look forward to the criticism of our counterparts, as we recognize the importance of candid criticism and the nurturing of honest friendship.

The work of this paper, and the larger context of this study, serves as an example for how critical friendship can be embodied in many ways. Intent to engage in the *currere* process as scholars and art teacher educators, we leaned on and continue to lean on the unique benefits of a collaborative search for purpose. Our individual journeys are made more whole and more complex through the checks and balances provided by our partnership. Further, our dependence and focus on a wider vision for ourselves and our field have allowed us to continue to return again and again with open minds and a more flexible palette for considering the future. The *currere* process and critical friendship of self-study have woven new pathways for the work we do as educators and researchers.

Mode of Inquiry

While the regressive step of the *currere* process led us to better understand how and why we are the teacher educators we are, the progressive step necessitated a journey into the unknown. In order to access those deep-seated ideas that we have for the future, Pinar (1994) instructs us to free associate and avoid censoring our imagined futures. Early on, we needed to clarify that these futures were centered around our own identities as teacher educators, scholars, humans, etc.—and not about the futures we imagined for our students. Many of our discussions tended to evolve into considerations for how our journeys will and should affect our pre-service students, but our progressive comments needed to be about us. These progressive moments needed to be spent on turning inward and toward our own futures.

We had every intention of continuing our pattern of individually writing personal narratives, sharing our writings digitally, and then conversing via web conferencing about what we wrote as we did with the regressive step. However, amidst the attempts of writing about our imagined futures, we found ourselves in constant conversation about the difficulty of the task. As Bill wrote early in his progressive narrative,

> this is tough to write about. I don't typically like the interplay of my private and professional lives. Honestly I currently feel like when I focus on one I neglect the other. There is an incessant sense of impending doom for the other when I am focused on one. (Progressive narrative writing, March 22, 2019)

Bill later identified his shifting perspective about the purpose of the progressive step in the *currere* process. He found that "this process is as much about considering how to reach the goals that you have, as it is about actually being cognizant about what you want." Stephanie, like Bill, also focused on the centrality of this emerging need to consider the personal and professional in tandem. She noted in her progressive narrative,

> Envisioning the future seems mostly emotive in nature at this point. It's intended to be dreaming and picturing a whole life—not just a work life.... Considering the future cannot mean ignoring the present or past, as it is those contexts that lead to some kind of future. Perhaps the difficulty resides in the idea that the present contains challenges that we do not want to take with us into the future. Maybe the mediary, then, is a notion of acceptance—coming to terms with the present; accepting the difficulties as steps; understanding the fear and anxiety as part of the path. For it is often those things that motivate us to move forward into an envisioned future. (Progressive narrative writing, February 19, 2019)

In one particular conversation, the metaphor of the rocks, pebbles, and sand came up:

> Bill: Yesterday I cleared out 400 emails. At least 150 were flagged and were telling me, "you need to follow up on this, you need to follow up on this, you need to follow up on this…"
>
> Stephanie: Have you ever heard that metaphor with the jar and the big rocks, the little rocks, the sand, the water…? The first time I saw that, I thought, that's brilliant and beautiful and visual! The more that I see that, I just think it's crap. It's all about having priorities and I KNOW what my priorities are. At least, I think I know.
>
> Bill: I think the part of that illustration that is missing is the fact that you're trying to do all of that while in a sandstorm. Because yes, I should be focusing on these big rocks, but until I can get the sand out of my eyes, I can't do that.
>
> Stephanie: The expectations are everywhere. I feel like you just have to have that gross, disgusting feeling of neglecting things in order to get anything done. Then you apologize and you do the other thing.
>
> Bill: Everything is never done. It just can't be. In my progressive [narrative], I keep coming back to this. Like you said in your narrative, "I look forward to a time when things are just slower." What happened to when things were slow? What happened to the time when it would take forever to get to the weekend? Now it just keeps ticking by—there went another weekend! There went another weekend!
>
> [Chimes go off on Stephanie's computer]

> Bill: And there goes your machine! There's some more sand for ya!
> (Online research meeting, March 25, 2019)

As we continued our conversations amidst the attempts at writing, we came to the realization that our collaborative, progressive step was just as much about the process of being able to consider the future as it was identifying what that future might be. We leaned into the process together to figure out why we were having such difficulty constructing a narrative for where we wanted to be. Honoring the call to avoid censoring ourselves and to continue to free associate, we explored what those roadblocks were and what role they had in our vision for a "slower" future.

Data Sources

Data sources for the progressive step included four written narratives, two of which took on a journal-type format with multiple shorter entries. It also included twelve research meetings completed via web conferencing software, of which seven were audio recorded and saved for review. As we have been engaging in this study for over a year and meeting weekly, we decided to stop video recording and rely on audio recordings due to lack of storage space. Throughout our journey, some meetings ended up being catch-up and support sessions for one another and were, thus, not recorded. As Calderwood and D'Amico (2008) put it, we were often, "leaning on and borrowing from each other's authority and authenticity" (p. 52) in all aspects of our personal and professional lives.

> Stephanie: We need and want others to be as invested in the problems we're dealing with as we are. I don't know how you do that as a human. Your experience is yours, and it's hard enough to translate that to someone else when you haven't figured it out yourself.
>
> Bill: I don't think I'm done with my narrative yet.... It seems that, so far, the times I have written have been frustrating times. I want to write when I don't feel that way. I know there are those times—I had one yesterday, but I was so caught up in it that I didn't think to sit down and write about my future.
>
> Stephanie: It has to come when you're ready to write. There's some element of not forcing this.
>
> [Stephanie mentions her experience with Julia Cameron's (1992) work, *The Artist's Way*, and her "morning pages" and talks about engaging in regular creative practice without censoring yourself.]
>
> The practice we are engaging in is very much like morning pages.... I used to have my [high school] students do this every morning. The idea behind it is that it would open something up in you. It activates your inner thoughts in a way that you can't do just sitting there. I wonder if what we're doing is engaging in this practice with a particular content in mind. We go into it with this beautiful narrative that you started with where when you're sitting out on this porch and you're hearing things and you're seeing things and your thoughts drift towards, "Okay, this is what I want to be thinking about right now," and then it comes out a lot more easily. I wonder if that's the process. The idea isn't necessarily to come to some kind of epiphany

about content, but rather, I think it's an epiphany about the process. Our progressive experience is not writing a narrative and interviewing each other, but it's about figuring out how to think about it and taking time to consider it.

Bill: I think you're absolutely right. That's what I was trying to do this morning. I was trying to recapture that—sitting out on the porch. I was writing longhand, and it worked so much better for me. It's really bizarre to me because I'm such a computer guy. But maybe I'm not. I was trying to recapture that in here [office], and it was impossible. It was just impossible.

Stephanie: Part of what we have to come to, though, is that it's not about finding that one place or that one mindset. It's about learning to center—not like yoga or anything—but finding the center of what you want to say wherever you are. So, if you're sitting in your office, I think you can still notice things. You were writing about that already! Sometimes the writing is just about getting that stuff out.

Bill: Sure, but I think that it is that yoga center. Because in order to find that focus, you have to work through that, what's the word—miasma? You have to work through all the junk that's rattling around up there. Putting it to paper allows you to acknowledge it and move on from it, I think. Only then can you see the trees for the forest or see the forest for the trees—or either way. Then you can see what's actually happening. I think that doing this more frequently would cause a person to be capable of doing it quicker. I can see some serious benefit to being able to focus my thoughts much quicker. I spend a lot of time...I think I have 25 tabs open on my computer. All of which I've gone through a couple of times to see what I can shut down...it's all stuff that I need. I need to—I want to do this more before we stop. (Online research meeting, March 25, 2019)

Our online meetings became centering moments for both of us to acknowledge the sand that was in our eyes and how we might see our way through those storms. The narratives we completed individually provided a grounding for where we were starting and represented a struggle for what we wanted and needed in our futures as art teacher educators. They also provided a platform to express our individual needs, a mirror to discover and confront what was truly on our minds, and fodder for complicated conversations about life.

As with the regressive step we took together, the analysis of our progressive experience was woven throughout our conversations and writings and continued as we wrote this paper. While we were focusing on the progressive step most recently, the regressive work we did together was often connected in conversation and brought up as intimately connected to how we envisioned our futures. Similarly, the analytic step that will follow this progressive exploration remained on our minds as well and played a role in how we made meaning of our work. Pinar's (1994) *currere* method and our critical friendship, exemplified by Curtis, Reid, Kelley, Martindell, and Craig's (2013) concept of braided lives, offered a transformational structure with which we engage in authentic study about both the content and context of our lives as art teacher educators.

Cohesion and Critical Friendship: What We Learned

Macintyre Latta and Olafson (2006) described the centrality of identity in-the-making and self-understanding as the key for authentic and engaged learning. Their focus

on the connectedness between self and other and self and the learning process gives a solid grounding to how our collaborative work in the progressive step of our journey can feed more authentic teaching and learning. Our work as art teacher educators is called into productive inquiry and asks us to consider both what we prioritize for ourselves and our students, as well as how our own perceptions shape the work of future teachers.

> Just as greater self-understanding should be at the core of all learning, and must be known in order to foster such understandings in others, so the tradition of self-study research needs to be at the core of teacher education programs. (Macintyre Latta & Olafson, 2006, p. 77)

We would argue that the *currere* process aligns with this idea as well. We are called as teachers to consider and reconsider a holistic version of ourselves, our students, and the learning journeys we embark on together. We must work to find others who can mirror our frustrations, challenge our assumptions, and empathize with our unique contexts.

> Stephanie: I have not been able to explain it to someone in my life that's part of one of those places.... I think everybody has a feeling like this. For whatever reason, the jobs that we have right now require so much multitasking that I think it creates a tighter pull in all directions.
>
> Bill: That's so true. I will be talking to my wife, and she's like, "What do you do with all of your time? You only teach three classes!" So, I try to explain, and when you explain what you've done with your time, you always do it in terms of what you've accomplished. And I haven't accomplished anything all day after day after day. It's just, aaaggggghhh!
>
> Stephanie: I think part of it is not knowing how to explain to someone, "Well, I sent 500 emails because it moved everything a millimeter forward. But I can't do the next thing if I don't do this in-process thing." How do I explain that sitting at my desk for five hours in a row is exactly what I needed to be doing at that moment. I couldn't have avoided that.
>
> Bill: And this makes it worse [holds up cell phone]. Especially now, with what I'm doing with my online classes. I thought that it was a good idea for me to give them my phone number so that if they had an emergency-type situation that I could respond. That's been one of the big complaints with my students—that I don't respond quick enough.
> (Online research meeting, March 25, 2019)

The collaboration we sought was not automatically available, but rather nurtured in time through multiple encounters, experiences, and conversations. The organic nature of the *currere* process has fed and, thus, informs the self-study within which we continue to work. We have found that the cohesion of ideas and commitment to collaboration is critical in our continued search for identity and purpose. The sandstorm is inevitable, but not without grounds for change. It is in our change in perspective that true learning can occur.

Moving forward, we recognize, as Feldman (2003) did, that "self-study recognizes at least implicitly that to improve our teacher education practices we need to change our ways of being teacher educators" (p. 27). Inspired by the writings of Bahktin (1990), Macintyre Latta and Olafson (2003) recognized that this means encountering, "answerability, outsideness, and unfinalizability" (p. 88) throughout our work. It is through the negotiation of self and other and our place within the world that we begin to confront productive catalysts, urging our ideas and perceptions forward. We must work through the sandstorm both in ways that recognize its place and purpose as well as fight against its potential to swallow us whole. What this requires is not a traditional sense of balance and linear priorities, but rather a renewed devotion to being fully present in each context and situation we are in. The balance comes from making the decision to prioritize each moment in its authentic context—to avoid the urge to multitask—to not live within a constant state of guilt for the choices we make.

Perhaps a more apt colloquialism than the rocks and sand in the jar is that of the eternal questions: What do you want on your gravestone?, or What will be your legacy? Encountering these questions early in our *currere* process, we were able to sift through and beyond the sand.

> Bill: What will be your legacy?
>
> Stephanie: A curriculum; A set of experiences that champion the pre-service, early teacher voice and encourage the early teacher to stand up and trust themselves and say something and be part of the conversation. And to want to get better; to not be ashamed of mistakes. I hope. That's what a legacy is, right? It's hope…. Now I want to ask you that question.
>
> Bill: When I was at the state conference last year, they had a woman stand up, and she came down to the stage. There were two-hundred or so people in the room. The presenter said, "Every one of you in this room who, as an art teacher, was affected positively by this woman, stand up." Everybody stood up. That's what I want. I want to have a big effect. I want to change lives.
>
> Stephanie: Well, you got one. I could stand up.
> (Online research meeting, May 16, 2018)

As our futures continue to approach, a passage from Stephanie's progressive narrative brings a shared sense of productive discomfort, urging us to continue our journey.

> The relational aspects of my future circle around a self I do not know yet. At certain points in my life I feel as though I have come to know and understand who I am and who I want to be—and there is definitely continuity in what I find interesting and passion-worthy. However, we are constantly asked as artists, teachers, researchers, parents, friends, spouses, etc. to re-situate ourselves among others. That inevitably leads to needed alterations in how we self-identify, what we find important, how we prioritize, who we count as allies, and how we go about making decisions—which then lead to a newer self image and concept. I enjoy these changes, overall, and revel in coming to know myself differently and being seen and understood by

> others. The process isn't without complexity, as often we are met up with challenges to who we thought we were, but then if we stick with it—keep searching—remain in ambiguity for a little while longer, we can be met with newness and insight. This process we've been exploring with *currere* has invited this and in a place where I have found myself in regular need of renewal and re-self-identification. (Progressive narrative writing, March 26, 2019)

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). *Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Calderwood, P. E., & D'Amico, K. M. (2008). Balancing acts: Negotiating authenticity and authority in shared reflection. *Studying Teacher Education, 4,* 47-59.

Cameron, J. (1992). *The artist's way.* New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Cavill, W. D., Jr., & Baer, S. (2019). Exploring the process of becoming art teacher educators through collaborative regression. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(1), 95-104.

Curtis, G., Reid, D., Kelley, M., Martindell, P. T., & Craig, C. J. (2013). Braided lives: Multiple ways of knowing, flowing in and out of knowledge communities. *Studying Teacher Education, 9,* 175-186.

Feldman, A. (2003). Validity and quality in self-study. *Educational Researcher, 32*(3), 26-28.

Macintyre Latta, M. & Olafson, L. (2006). Identities in the making: Realized in-between self and other. *Studying Teacher Education, 2,* 77-90.

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

Schuck, S., & Russell, T. (2005). Self-study, critical friendship, and the complexities of teacher education. *Studying Teacher Education 1*(2), 107-121. doi: 10.10801742596050028829l

Sultana, R. (2005). The initial education of high school teachers: A critical review of major issues and trends. *Studying Teacher Education, 1,* 225-243. doi: 10.1080/17425960500288390

Taylor, M., Klein, E., & Abrams, L. (2014). Tensions of reimagining our roles as teacher educators in a third space: Revisiting a co/autoethnography through a faculty lens. *Studying Teacher Education, 10,* 3-19. doi: 10.1080/17425964.2013.866549

The Mope Squad: A *Currere* Exploration of an Unintended Result of a Teen-Suicide Prevention Program

By Kelly Waldrop
The Publish House

This essay details the results of a *currere* exploration (Pinar, 1975) embarked upon by a group of recent high school graduates who called themselves the "Mope Squad." The Mope Squad was an informal, mental-health, peer support group that began organically in response to the students' high school's implementation of an official teen-suicide prevention program called Hope Squad. According to the Hope Squad website, Hope Squad is a "school-based peer support team," whose explicit curricular goals are to work with local health professionals to learn to "watch for at-risk students, provide friendship, identify suicide-warning signs, and seek help from adults" (Hopesquad, 2018, n.p.). The essay provides background into what the Hope Squad is, what its goals are, how it was implemented in this particular school, and how the Mope Squad was formed in response. I then provide results from a group interview with the Mope Squad in which I used the *currere* method as a framework to guide them through the process of developing, together, a clear picture of the circumstances that gave rise to the Mope Squad; an exploration of the future of the Mope Squad, both as an organization and for the individual members; an understanding of the relationship between the Hope Squad curriculum and the formation and function of the Mope Squad; and what actions might be taken by those interested in preventing student suicide and promoting mental health in schools. I close by reflecting in a meta-*currereian* sort of way on the interview process itself and the use of *currere* as a framework for conducting group interviews.

Origins: Hope Squad Curriculum and the Emergence of Mope Squad

Hope Squad is a suicide prevention curriculum that has been enacted in schools across the country. As of 2018, Hope Squads could "be found in over 90 elementary schools, over 200 junior high and high schools in Utah; in 60 schools in states such as Texas, Indiana, North Carolina, Alaska, Wyoming, and Idaho; and in seven schools in Canada" (Wright-Berryman, Hudnall, Hopkins, & Bledsoe, 2018, p. 125). The case discussed in this paper is that of a Hope Squad that was initiated in the spring of 2018 in a large, middle-class, suburban, public high school in South West Ohio. As is explained in the Hope Squad literature, the program is initiated by the school engaging in a selection process, where the students of the school nominate students to whom they feel they could open up if they were having a problem they needed to talk about (Hopesquad, 2018). Those nominations are then reviewed by the group of faculty and staff who will administer the program, and "8-10 students per grade level" are chosen as members of the Hope Squad (Wright-Berryman et al., 2018, p. 125). Under supervision of, "three to five school staff who volunteer to supervise the members, providing support, training, mentoring, and guidance for referral of distressed students" (Wright-Berryman et al., 2018, p. 125), the group of students receives training about "suicide risk, communication with peers, how to help a friend, bullying, grief, and self-care" (Wright-Berryman et al., p. 125). The Hope Squad is introduced to the school and engages in activities that center around positive school experiences throughout the school year. In the case of

Waldrop, K. (2020). The mope squad: A *currere* exploration of an unintended result of a teen-suicide prevention program. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(1), 66-74.

this particular Hope Squad, for example, the group had hot chocolate donated from a local coffee shop to hand out as students came into the school on a particularly cold winter morning. The intention of the program is that the Hope Squad students will become visible, accessible peers to whom students experiencing emotional difficulties may confide, giving the Squad and its advisors the opportunity to intervene and direct "distressed students" to the help that they may need.

The Mope Squad was initially a group of 6 seniors who met daily for lunch in one of the dressing rooms at the back of the theater in the school. Everyone in the group was involved in the school's theater program, taking acting classes and participating in the program's various productions. They all gravitated to their small, quiet meeting space at first in self-defense against the intense, loud, crowded school cafeteria. As they began to spend even more time together, they realized that they all had experienced times of darkness and crises in feelings of self-worth during the course of their high school careers. I asked them when they began to think of themselves as more than a group of students eating lunch together, and they agreed that it was when they adopted the name Mope Squad. On that occasion, one of the Squad members was venting about difficulties in her life and dramatically gestured to the ceiling and shouted, "Hope Squad, where are you? I need you," to which another member replied, "We don't need no Hope Squad. We've got the Mope Squad right here." They all embraced the name, and with its spin on the Hope Squad, they all also began to view their time together as an opportunity to engage in providing each other with a safe space in which to discuss difficulties they were having, to talk about any mental health issues they felt they were dealing with, to provide suggestions to each other for improving their mental health, and, above all else, to serve as an unwavering, judgment-free group of peers who would support each other no matter what.

Use of the *Currere* Method and My Research Process

I went into the process of gathering the data for this paper with the intention of trying to figure out how the official Hope Squad curriculum had resulted in the Mope Squad offshoot. Equally, if not more important, however, was my methodological commitment in conducting this research to, as far as was possible, protect the cohesion and dedication of the Mope Squad to each other and to their continued existence as a support group. As a result of that commitment, I turned to Pinar's (1975) method of *currere* as a framework for gathering the data that would allow me to examine the Hope Squad/Mope Squad phenomenon. While *currere* is generally engaged in by the individual, more and more often it is being used by pairs and groups of scholars to investigate the nature of their curricular experiences (e.g., Brown & Docherty-Skippen, 2018; Hall, Suarez, Lee, & Slattery, 2017; Poetter & Googins, 2015; Porter & Gallagher, 2017; Wallace & Byers, 2018).

Some scholars even go so far as to argue that *currere* is rooted in a pluralistic, communal, relational mindset (McMulty & Osmond, 2019). "Currere," as elucidated by Poetter (2018, as quoted in McNulty & Osmond, 2019), "transforms us from the 'I' to the 'we'" (p. 2). Huddleston (2019), explains further that "*currere* insists that our self-reflection is only worth what it allows us to do in conversation with others to cultivate relationships" (p. 29). He adds that "by being in conversation with other people," as we engage in the *currere* process, "we make sure that our newly crafted understanding of ourselves does not negatively impact other people" (Huddleston, 2019, pp. 29-30). Given that the purpose of the Mope Squad was, indeed, to do just that, to gain a "newly crafted understanding" of self while "not negatively impacting others," and given that

my central methodological commitment was to, likewise, gain a new understanding of the group's experiences while preventing any negative impact, *currere* was an ideal framework to use as the basis of our work together.

To engage in this work, I first devised a list of questions based on the four moments of *currere* (Pinar, 1975) that would guide our discussion time. Those questions, which were shared with the group ahead of our meeting, were as follows:

- What is the Mope Squad? Describe it for me.
- Think back to the time when the Mope Squad was first formed. Tell me about that experience.
- Describe a memory that you have of the Mope Squad, and tell me why it was significant for you.
- Think about your future. How do you think your lives in college and as adults may be impacted by having been a member of the Mope Squad?
- What do you imagine might be the future of the Hope Squad program at your school? What might be the future of the Mope Squad?
- What can schools learn from the Mope Squad?
- Do you think there are lessons from the story of the Mope Squad that could help make the Hope Squad program better?
- What do you think is the relationship between the Hope Squad program and the formation of the Mope Squad?

In addition to sharing these questions with the group, I took the first 15 minutes of our time together to give them a crash course in *currere*, what it is, what purposes it may serve, and why I chose it as the basis for our work. I then encouraged them to engage in a conversation with each other based on the questions that I would ask and that would be audio recorded so that I could analyze it at a later time. As time passed, we fell into a rhythm of me asking one of the above questions, which would be followed by a frenzy of conversation, interrupted by quite a bit of laughter and the general merriment that accompanies a group of friends discussing something about which they are passionate. Over time, the conversation would slow, as if it were the result of some crank having been turned that was gradually winding to a halt. I would ask another question, and the discussion would ratchet right back up again.

When we had made our way through my questions and they had spent almost two hours with me, we adjourned our meeting. I used a free, online transcription service to transcribe the audio recording and went over the transcript while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy. The transcript was then sent to the group for review and approval. As we had agreed at the outset, they were free to alter, amend, or delete any of the content before I would begin to use it for this paper. They all approved the transcript without changes. I then wrote a draft of this paper, which was, again, sent to the group for their approval. All approved the content as an accurate representation of both what was said and what they feel to be their understanding of the Hope Squad/Mope Squad dynamic. I will return at the end of the paper to further consider the degree to which the choice to use *currere* was beneficial to this process. Before doing so, however, I offer the results of my analysis of the data gathered from the Mope Squad's *currere* exploration.

Results of the Group Interview

As is common, yet not required, in the *currere* process, the Mope Squad and I began with regression, as I asked them to tell me about what the Mope Squad is and how

it came to be. In response, they first began to discuss the implementation of the Hope Squad at their school. I asked them to think back to that time and to relate stories to me about it in as much detail as they could. True to the tight-knit nature of the group, they began talking amongst themselves, quickly shifting from addressing me to addressing each other, as they related their memories of the time and began to paint a picture of how the Hope Squad curriculum came to life in their school.

As noted above, the Hope Squad curriculum begins with the nomination of students who members of the student body feel they could approach if they needed to discuss difficult and/or emotional issues they were having. While the process as it played out in their high school resulted in certain members of the Hope Squad who cared for their fellow students and who earnestly hoped to make a difference in the culture of their school, the process was largely perceived by the members of the Mope Squad as a popularity contest, which also resulted in some students becoming members of Hope Squad who admitted to members of the Mope Squad that they had only taken the post because it would look good on a college application. Additionally, in this particular manifestation of the Hope Squad, the results of the nomination process were made public before the final selection process had taken place. Once the nominees were selected, the students and their parents had to attend an information session and then had to agree to take their spot on the Squad. The Mope Squad related stories of students who felt like they couldn't say no to being on the Squad because it would make them seem callous or selfish.

The group of 10 students who ended up on the Hope Squad felt to the members of Mope Squad to be an inauthentic community (Sergiovanni, 1994, which will be discussed further below) that was a mixture of those who really wanted to be there and those who did not. When we would talk later in our session together about what made the Mope Squad work, all of the Mope Squad members noted that they, themselves, were well equipped to help each other because they had experienced struggles with self-esteem and feelings of just not having their lives together. The perception created by the curriculum of the Hope Squad was that its members were selected for the job because they seemed to be sailing through high school without any difficulties, making them, perhaps, not the best sources of advice for their fellow students.

When we moved from talking about the past to talking about the future of the Hope Squad at their alma mater, we quickly and organically shifted through the progression, synthesis, and analysis phases as they discussed the possibilities. First, the Mope Squad was both adamant and clear that the Hope Squad would, given time, become an effective organization. However, they argued that one of their biggest problems with the curriculum was the public nature of the organization. The amount of time and money spent marketing the organization to the student body was perceived by the Mope Squad as all flash and no substance. One of the members of the Mope Squad was also on the Hope Squad, and she acknowledged that the group probably made a mistake in deciding to focus all of their time and efforts on promoting positive school culture. Their attempts at doing so came off to the rest of the group as somewhat shallow and as being more about trying to make the school look good than about providing the students with the support they needed. Additionally, they felt that the publicizing of the group negatively impacted its effectiveness. One of the central components of the Hope Squad curriculum is to make visible and available a group of students to whom those in distress may apply for support. In making these students visible, however, they may also have made them less approachable. Mope Squad members told compelling stories of having heard rumors about a student's mental state starting simply because someone had seen that

student talking quietly with a Hope Squad member, which brings us to the central flaw in the Hope Squad curriculum as identified by the Mope Squad—a lack of trust.

The members of Mope Squad argued that, other than the Hope Squad member who was part of their ranks, they didn't know any of the Hope Squad contingent well enough to confide in them. They said that this was simply a flaw in the original curriculum, which is designed to field a group of 8-10 members for each grade of the Hope Squad. The senior class of which the Mope Squad members had been a part was made up of over 700 students. It didn't take much analysis for the group to conclude there were, certainly, many in their class who did not know any of the Hope Squad members at all. Further, the students said that there was a general fear in the school that every encounter with a Hope Squad member would get kicked up through the ranks of the organization to counselors and administration, perhaps when it wasn't necessary. Shifting again organically back to the regressive mode, one of the Mope Squad members told a story of venting about having a bad day only to receive a text offering official assistance from a member of the Hope Squad. The experience suggested to him both that the Hope Squad member couldn't be trusted as someone to whom he could blow off steam without it becoming an issue and made him question the training that would cause someone to mistake that simple venting as a cry for help.

While it may seem, given what I have related so far, that the majority of our time together was taken up with complaining about Hope Squad, that is far from the truth. However, the flaws in and difficulties with the Hope Squad curriculum that were pointed out by the Mope Squad were central to their understanding of the circumstances that led to the formation of their group. When asked if the Mope Squad would have formed if it had not been for the Hope Squad, the group was unanimous that it certainly would have not. Further, they agreed that, to a great extent, their group formed in response to what they viewed as problems with the Hope Squad, coupled with an appreciation for the intentions of the Hope Squad curriculum and the efforts of the members of Hope Squad who were dedicated to the program.

When relating tales about the origins of their group, they noted that, in contrast to the way in which the Hope Squad group was formed, membership in the Mope Squad was entirely rooted in mutual interests, a love of theater and a need to retreat from the chaos of the school cafeteria. In engaging in my own *currere* analysis and synthesis of the data provided by the Mope Squad, I immediately was reminded of Sergiovanni (1994), who defines authentic communities as "collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together binded to a set of shared ideas and ideals" (p. xvi) and who "share a common place" (p. xvi). He goes on to note that organizations, like Hope Squad, are made up of relationships that are constructed, while communities are made up of relationships that form around mutual ideas, purposes, and values (Sergiovanni, 1994). The Mope Squad formed through their natural affinity for performing arts and because they had the ability to share the backstage space as a place in which they could meet. All of the members agreed that having that space to get together informally during the middle of the school day was key to the formation of their group. Access to that space was made possible by the tacit agreement of the drama teacher who allowed them to gather there during lunch as long as they didn't disturb anyone and didn't leave a mess. The Mope Squad noted that they never would have transitioned from just being a group of friends to being a mental health support group had they been amidst the crowd of the rest of the school in the cafeteria, where those who were less trusted may have overheard their conversations. That said, the group originally began with only 6 members but

then grew when Mope Squad members had conversations with those outside the group about mental health issues and enacted what I have come to think of as the Mope Squad curriculum by providing others the opportunity to discuss their issues in a supportive, judgment-free, safe space. When those outside the group expressed appreciation for the support and said how much they felt it helped them, they were invited to join the lunch group, which by the end of the year had at least doubled in size.

As together the group analyzed the differences between the Hope Squad and Mope Squad curricula, they surfaced a few key distinctions. Where often the actions of the Hope Squad were seen as self-aggrandizing, the efforts of the Mope Squad were clear of any external agenda, since no one knew about their activities other than the drama teacher and a few other theater students who were not a part of the group. The group was clear that the support they were providing was only serving the goal of helping others deal with situations that were similar to those they had been through themselves. Contrary to the interpretation of the Hope Squad members as having it all together, the members of the Mope Squad were very open with each other about their flaws and their struggles, which allowed them to form deep bonds with each other and view each other as fellow travelers on similar journeys. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (2008) define the person who is leading a full life as "one that has…encumbrances, but whose encumbrances make connections to others easier and more natural" (p. 152). The Mope Squad students bonded through the admission of their own brokenness and in healing their wounds together became all the stronger in their sense of authentic community.

Their willingness to be open with each other fostered the trust that they felt was missing from the Hope Squad curriculum. As noted above, the original 6 members of the Mope Squad all already knew each other quite well before they began to enact their mental health support curriculum. The actions of the Hope Squad most often felt to the other students to be rooted in a lack of authentic sentiment, while the Mope Squad, especially as they discussed issues of self-esteem and personal difficulties and as they made a safe-space for each other to admit flaws and ask for help, engaged in what Sergiovanni (1994) calls the hallmarks of authentic community, "authenticity, caring, and unconditional acceptance," as well as a "total commitment to each other" (pp. xvi, xvii). In contrast to the curriculum of the Hope Squad, the Mope Squad curriculum focused on providing a safe space where the members could vent about their problems with no repercussions other than being on the receiving end of unconditional support. Several members repeated during our time together the phrase, "It's okay not to be okay," in talking about what they had learned from their membership in Mope Squad. That said, at least three of their members, with the support and assistance of the Mope Squad, realized that they needed to seek professional, adult assistance with the problems they were facing, without having that assistance thrust upon them. In talking about their activities, the Mope Squad members discussed their support of each other as relentless, as a refusal to allow a hurting friend to isolate themselves, and as a continued, physically demonstrated effort to always be there for each other. Even now, as the Mope Squad has sprawled across several states in their pursuit of college degrees, they maintain a group chat on their phones where they can seek support and assistance from each other at any time of the day or night.

As noted above, the Mope Squad all agreed that the Hope Squad curriculum could be effective given time and given some changes to its procedures. I asked them what they thought the Hope Squad and schools in general could learn from the Mope Squad

curriculum, and I was surprised to hear them reach back to reference what had seemed, during their regressive discussion, to be a small and perhaps insignificant detail. One key priority that the group recommended was that of fostering more authentic relationships between students and teachers. The group agreed that close-knit friend groups and communities of students largely occur naturally in the school setting, but authentic, caring relationships with teachers are rarer and also necessary to fostering the intimacy that the Mope Squad was able to achieve. Had it not been for their close relationship with the drama teacher, they would not have been able to secure a safe space for their daily meetings. The group also mentioned another teacher in their school whose room was known, even to those who never had him as a teacher, as a safe, quiet space to which students could retreat if they were feeling overwhelmed. This teacher was also noted as one who took a clear, pointed interest in the lives and well-being of his students. All of the members of Mope Squad expressed interest in seeing more authentic and more intentionally positive teacher-student relationships. This is, of course, also part of what the Mope Squad saw as a need for a space in which students can meet together informally to discuss issues of interest to them or even spaces where students can take quiet time on their own, away from the hustle and bustle of the school day.

Another suggestion was prioritizing giving time, as well as space, outside of the regular curricular business of the school day to groups of students who already share common goals and values. The Mope Squad originally formed as a group of like-minded students with similar interests who saw each other in classes, at lunch, and after school. Instead of needing to seek out members of the Hope Squad for support, they had support already built into their authentic community. The Mope Squad members suggested that schools making an effort to provide opportunities for students of similar interests, goals, and values to have some downtime during the day with each other would help foster the kind of community that had been such a great help to them.

Finally, the Mope Squad urged the implementation of a mental health and self-care curriculum into the official curriculum of the school. Their member who also served on Hope Squad benefited greatly from the information she received during the Hope Squad retreat on identifying signs of mental distress in students, active listening techniques, and self-care strategies and activities that would help them deal with the stress of their own lives while being a support for others. The Hope Squad member regularly shared things that she had learned with the Mope Squad group, and they all felt that the information was not only useful, but was crucial to their being able to support each other as they did. In fact, one could argue that the ultimate result of the Hope Squad and Mope Squad curricula was a conviction on part of the Mope Squad members that a curriculum focused on fostering positive mental health and self-care is something that should be required content for all high school students. While the Mope Squad believed that providing students with time and space in which to foster authentic relationships with other students is critical, they were equally adamant that providing students with the tools they would need to help each other understand and deal with what was going on in their lives, and also the wisdom that would come from such understanding that would allow them to know when seeking additional help was necessary, would enable authentic communities of students to support each other in a way that could help prevent suicide and promote mental health in their schools.

Meta-Currerian Moment: I Reflect on the Use of Currere

As promised, now that I have completed my analysis of the Mope Squad's joint *currere* exploration of their experiences, I will engage in a brief, meta-*currereian*

process, in which I use *currere* to think about this research project, specifically centering on the choice to use *currere* in this way, which is, as far as I know, unique to the field and perhaps a bit on the *avant garde* side. *Currere* is still, by and large, a solitary process through which individuals come to understand the past and present "nature" of their "educational experience" (Pinar, 1975, p. 2). However, as noted above, there is a growing body of work being done in which two or more scholars engage in the process dialogically. In this case, providing my research participants with a basic understanding of *currere*, especially as it aligned with my desire to gain an understanding of a particular curricular phenomenon to which they had all been witness and my desire to maintain their strong group dynamic, allowed us to benefit from the ways in which *currere* feeds into not just an understanding of self, but an understanding of the self as a relational being and an understanding of self as defined by membership in authentic community.

I noted above in my discussion of the research method used that the group fell into a rhythm of addressing my questions as we explored the Mope Squad phenomenon. A part of that rhythm was that, when I would ask a question, they would spend, as a group, a few minutes talking to each other rather cryptically about what topics, memories, or ideas they would share with me. For example, when I asked them to discuss a significant memory relating to Mope Squad and explain its significance, they began by deciding together how they would respond. "Should we talk about December?" one of them asked. "I'm an open book," another responded. "Well, we don't want to…" another replied, hesitating, clearly uncomfortable. "I was thinking more about before Thanksgiving," the open book replied. "Are you comfortable with that?" the hesitant member asked. "Yeah. Yeah," open book responded. From there, having decided collectively on the memory to be shared, the group engaged in a discussion of who would narrate, which was followed by the story of one of the group needing support, told by one member of the group, with all of the others interjecting and laughing and sharing with me the memory that they were bringing to life together.

In the years in which I have studied and worked with the *currere* method, this was the first time I had engaged in it as more than a solitary pursuit. It worked well as a tool for group engagement in this instance when we were working together to surface the important lessons we could glean from their collective educational experience. I continue, on a regular basis, to be amazed at the quality and depth of curricular exploration that is made possible by engaging in *currere*. Its potential as a framework for eliciting collective experience, especially with groups of four or more participants, has yet to be fully discovered. In this process, I found it to be an extremely generative method for creating an environment in which participants could negotiate a collective understanding of their experiences while supporting and nurturing each other as individuals.

References

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (2008). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Brown, H., & Docherty-Skippen, S. M. (2018). Floating on the surface, delving beneath, and letting go: A poetic currere exchange. *Currere Exchange Journal, 2*(1), 25-31.

Hall, K. K., Suarez, M. I., Lee, S., & Slattery, P. (2017). Currere and prolepsis: A literary analysis. *Currere Exchange Journal, 1*(1), 101-110.

Hopesquad. (2018). *Frequently asked questions: What is Hope Squad?* Retrieved from https://hopesquad.com/suicide-6/

Huddleston, G. (2019). Superheroes as monsters as teachers as monsters as superheroes. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 34*(5), 18-31.

McNulty, M. M., & Osmond, C. (2019). We make our own monsters. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 34*(5), 1-3.

Pinar, W. F. (1975, April). *The method of "currere."* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Research Association, Washington DC.

Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. R. (2014). *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed.). Kingston, NY: Educator's International Press.

Poetter, T. S., & Googins, J. (2015). *Was someone mean to you today? The impact of standardization, corporatization, and high stakes testing on students, teachers, communities, schools, and democracy.* Cincinnati, OH: Van-Griner.

Porter, C., & Gallagher, C. (2017). Exploring professional uncertainty in critical language teacher education. *Currere Exchange Journal, 1*(1), 32-39.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wallace, M. F. G., & Byers, C. C. (2018). Duo-currere: Nomads in dialogue (re)searching for possibilities of permeability in elementary science teacher education. *Currere Exchange Journal, 2*(1), 59-68.

Wright-Berryman, J., Hudnall, G., Hopkins, R., Bledsoe, C. (2018). Hope squads: Peer-to-peer suicide prevention in schools. *Children & Schools, (40)*2, 125-126.

More Action, Please

By Cynthia D. Sanders
Miami University

Prologue

Pinar (1994) assures us that the currere method allows for the "viewing of what is conceptualized through time…so it is that we hope to explore the complex relation between the temporal and conceptual" (p. 19). This story is based on my past experiences as a novice teacher and my current experiences as a teacher educator. I am seeking the links between my younger self, the students I teach now, and our joint futures in the world of education. It is a work of ficto-currere. McDermott McNulty (2018) defines ficto-currere as text that is "fictionalized autobiography—an effort which engages the currere process" and creates a narrative that "blends and blurs the lines between what is true (or real) with that which is imaginatively constructed" (p. 2). Parts of this narrative really happened, parts of this narrative are still happening, and parts of narrative should never happen again.

Elevator Music

She headed to the elevator too tired to worry with the stairs. It had been a long class where she once again felt like she needed better answers to student questions earnestly asked. Pressing the elevator's call and floor buttons was no small feat as bag, papers, and coffee mug all seemed to be conspiring to prevent her progress. Why is everything such a struggle today, she fumed to herself as coffee dripped down her hand. The Muzak was unusually loud she noticed. What is this song? I know this one. Elvis maybe? But she had no time to finish the thought, as the doors finally opened at her floor forcing her to focus on swimming her way out of the elevator against the tide of waiting undergraduates and down the hall to her office.

Settled in with a new coffee, she spread the chart papers out to review the student project ideas again. Teacher Leadership was a required course for sophomore preservice teachers, and she had taught it for several semesters now. It was one of her favorites because the main goal was to provoke students into exploring what Poetter (2019) suggests are the ways teachers can and should be creators not just mere enactors of curriculum. But it was also a challenging course to teach since students, in the field placement days, observed "real" teachers, and what they say during those outings rarely matched up with what she was encouraging them to explore in class. Students routinely expressed their fear and frustration that what they were seeing teachers do was online, textbook, and standards-based instruction. This type of instruction was "required" for the state tests and mandated for teachers to follow since many districts were heavily invested in diagnostic programs to track student progress toward meeting proficiency targets. Students simply did not see where there was room in the school day for the creative, teacher-based curriculum planning she advocated for in class. Their questions were hard to refute: How are we supposed to rock the boat when we will be new teachers with little power? I will need to keep my job you know. If the state testing matters so much to my evaluation, then I'll have to pay a lot of attention to my student's scores.

Even so, it had been an enjoyable semester so far. Along the way, she felt grateful for the thoughtful discussions and the willingness of the students to trouble how teacher leaders can adapt curriculum to address needs within the local community they serve. The discussion on this day, however, had her rattled for reasons she couldn't quite

Sanders, C. D. (2020). More action, please. *Currere Exchange Journal, 3*(2), 75-80.

pin down. All semester, she had pushed the students to truly think of themselves as researchers once they became teachers, encouraging them to study their craft—the art and science of teaching—and take an active role to share these findings with their fellow teachers, other educators, and those outside the field.

As they reviewed the drafts of ideas for the course's final group project, which required them to assume the role of a team of middle school teachers developing an integrated curricular unit addressing a community need or social justice issue, she once again stressed the importance of working collaboratively across content areas and for them to think creatively about how to assess student progress beyond testing for skills mastery. It was that this point that Kaylee, a bright student and frequent critic of thinking outside the box, challenged her.

"Why does this have to be a group project? My mom says the best thing for me to do is 'close my door and teach.' Because teachers don't work together on this stuff because they don't even get time to plan together anyway."

Lots of nods and knowing glances in Kaylee's direction ensued, which encouraged her to continue. Kaylee went on to lament about how professors only seem to talk about things like creating culturally relevant curriculum, running democratic classrooms, and confronting social injustice, but rarely offered students the opportunity to actually practice any of those things in an authentic way. Other students started chiming in to ask why in class there was just talk about how to run a collaborative classroom, integrate curriculum, engage in teacher-based action research, and create professional learning communities, rather than these things being what they did for their course work. Realizing things were getting away from her quickly, she offered a counter.

"Well, I learned how to do all of those things along the way over the arc of a career. Teaching is a profession where you learn on the job, you know. I didn't learn all of that in my classes."

All twenty-two pairs of student eyes locked on her, and she could feel the question behind the stare. Why not?

"Well, if all the doing of teaching is learned after I start the job, what's the point of getting a degree in teaching then?" Kaylee asked, "I could've just majored in math and biology and done the Teach for America thing after graduation."

She didn't have the energy to mount a comeback, and it was time to wrap up anyway. She lamely threw out, "Good discussion today; we'll pick it up Thursday," as a class ender. But Kaylee's point stung and stuck in her brain. Why get a teaching degree indeed? Why not just major in your content area and then complete an alternative licensure option like Teach for America? Defenses of traditional multi-year teaching preparation programs jumped around in her thoughts.

Even so, her mind drifted back to a scene from her first years of teaching, and she felt the familiar sense of regret. She had been teaching for four years and had just moved from the middle school to the high school. She was assigned three bells of American Literature with a total of about 90 students. Being new to the high school, she hadn't been a part of the previous year's meetings where agreements about course content had been made. The other American Lit teacher explained that all the classes read Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because it was a "classic" as well as being "culturally relevant" as it allowed teachers to address issues of racial diversity and social class. This type of planning was pretty typical of the district. While there was a basic course guide for teachers who shared the same class, which laid out a yearly timeline for addressing the state standards, teachers mostly did their own thing.

First quarter had come and gone, so she had already learned that, unlike her middle school colleagues, the high school teachers didn't engage in any formal discussion about the students, what they were doing, or how it was working. Still, she was grateful the other American Lit teacher had at least given her a starting point by sharing unit resources for the novel. She enthusiastically reread *Huck Finn*, got her background readings about Twain, satire, parody, and the time period set, and looked forward to starting the unit. Things seemed to go well. Group discussion showed that students were reading the novel without the usual threats of basic comprehension quizzes. The first set of reflective essays indicated that students were making connections between the themes of the novel and the background material. And, most promising of all, several boys who happened to be on the football team and who she usually had a hard time getting engaged were willingly participating during in-class readings, as well as Socratic seminar time. Life was good.

But, a few weeks later during hallway duty when supervising locker bay transition at dismissal, she found all was not as well as it seemed to be. The student population for the high school was overwhelmingly white. A little less than half the students were on free and reduced lunch, the district proxy for measuring students in poverty. The surrounding area was rural transitioning to suburban. All of which meant, in classroom dynamic terms, that most of the 90 students in her sections were white and fell into the lower socioeconomic class status category. Only a handful were students of color. She had worried about this disparity when she first learned she would be teaching *Huck Finn*, but when she had tried to raise the issues with colleagues, all she got were shoulder shrugs and "we've always taught the book" reassurances.

On that day, standing in the hallway, she heard them before she saw them.

"Hey, Nigger Jim, how about you carry my gym bag to practice?"

Turning the corner, she saw this taunt had been hurled by Steve, a lanky boy who drove a pickup complete with gun rack and Confederate flag sticker in the back window, at Daniel who was the lone African American student in her 3rd bell class.

Straightening up as he slung his backpack over his shoulder, Daniel turned to face Steve and respond, "Sure thing, Huck, right after hell freezes over."

She knew immediately as they walked away without noticing her standing there that this wasn't the first time. She knew that every time they read the N-word aloud in class, every time they talked about the character of Jim, every time questions about racism came up during discussion, Daniel was being mocked in the most racist of ways by this group of boys. That was why they participated in group discussions—why they were reading the novel. They were using the language and storyline to torment Daniel. And, they were doing it with her help because she had failed to pick up on what was going on.

The memory still turned her face red and hot as she finished the coffee that had gone cold. She had been angry, guilt-ridden, ashamed, and frustrated at the time, and she was still disappointed now for not having done better by Daniel and the rest of the students. Her anger with her colleagues also came flooding back—the indifference on Carol's face when she confided in her later the next day.

"Yeah, it happens," Carol had said. "We've all that that kind of stuff come up at one point with some groups of kids."

"Wait, you knew this was a thing? Stuff? It's not just stuff between the kids, Carol. It is straight up racism…it's worse than 'stuff' between 'some groups' of kids." She'd asked, "Why didn't you tell me? I could have been ready or at least been on the lookout?"

"Don't worry about it so much," Carol shrugged. "You live and learn. Now, you'll be ready next time. Trial by fire is the best teacher."

Teachers learning on the job, sure, she thought as she recalled this exchange, but what about the Daniels in their classes?

Her colleagues had given her no professional learning community to turn to for guidance and certainly no sharing out of past learning about how to address the issues in the novel with the students they were teaching. Her teacher preparation program hadn't equipped her to handle tough moments like this one either. And while it was true no education program could address every teaching situation, she couldn't shake the feeling that, if she'd spent more time practicing lesson building and actually teaching kids as an undergrad and then debriefing with professors and in-field teachers, she would have been better prepared for developing the *Huck Finn* unit in ways that were more culturally relevant for the small-town, low-diversity population she was serving.

She had spent four years in a traditional teacher education program at a highly respected and accredited university. The faculty and coursework in her subject area were top notch. Faculty in the department were well known and respected in the field. Learning theory, pedagogy, and content instruction could not have been better. But when it came to the act of teaching, she recalled doing a lot of watching and talking rather practicing teaching herself—well, other than her very short twelve weeks of apprenticeship during student teaching—just like her current students, she realized.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. She laughed at herself. I'm Kaylee questioning the point of the program, its structure, and how it serves me as a practitioner.

The laughter left her as she pondered, What about all the Daniels in classrooms today? What about all the new teachers? What is the consequence of not training teachers any differently?

She respected and was honored to work at her university. It regularly earned awards for undergraduate teaching. The university was also committed to training future teachers to confront social injustice and to empower them to participate in democratic society. And yet, she had to admit, when it came to the actual practice of learning to teach, the program was still steeped in the watching, talking about, and limited apprenticeship model she had experienced decades ago.

There were a few differences she could identify. She and other faculty certainly tried to tie course materials to the students' field placements more. The field block classes required students to do more observations of teaching in the field too. And, most important to her, there was a student led conference each semester requiring students to develop a culturally relevant curriculum unit based on a social justice issue. This was the project her class was working on. They never teach this unit to real students in an actual school setting though, she mused, they just talk about it with their peers and faculty. She was getting tired, and it was getting late. Still, the loop kept repeating in her mind. Her students needed a sustained practice of teaching beyond just the semester of student teaching their last year in the program. It is not enough. She was feeling frustrated again. It wasn't for me, and it's not for them.

What can be different? How can we change this? Mind jumping, she gathered her things and worked her way to the door. She didn't want to think about what her impact on Daniel had been and perhaps even continued to be. She thought about the work of Goodlad (1994) and others who argued for a model of teacher training akin to the training medical doctors received. Although, she thought, doctors and teachers are both

facing a dehumanization of our professions, enduring calls to standardize practice and take the possibility for human error out of the equation. In both professions, we now find ourselves trying not to be human while still cultivating care and compassion and serving our students as well as the larger society. These were human endeavors that were being automated with robot-like precision. The ridiculous irony was giving her a headache.

Halfway to the elevator, she dropped her bag, and her handouts on Dewey skittered down the hallway. As she scooped them up, Ellen Lagemann's (1989) quote on the page caught her eye, "[I] often argued to students, only in part to be perverse, that one cannot understand the history of education in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realized that Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost" (p. 185). What would happen if the ideals of Dewey, Woodson, and other educational progressives were to have their moment to shine in earnest? She had this debate often with students based on the quote. This was the crux of their push back about the gap they saw between teachers in the field preparing students for standardized testing and the type of creative curriculum making she argued for in class. Something lightened in her step as she pondered this more. In terms of teacher education, what kinds of experiences could we offer that would give our preservice teacher students authentic, and sustained opportunities to really practice creative teaching? A way to break the cycle.

Her mind was picking up pace with a new loop. At the very least, we could have students complete a yearlong (or maybe even two?) residency as their student teaching requirement not just 10 or 12 weeks. There could be elementary and secondary schools connected to university teacher preparation programs. She remembered reading about Goodlad's (1994) idea to have "centers of pedagogy" in the vein of Dewey's concept of laboratory schools. Didn't she write a paper about his for her doc program ten years ago? Where was that file? For Goodlad (1994), there could be a reciprocal learning between university faculty, secondary teachers, and preservice teachers who were all participating in research about best instructional practice with students and families involved as well. She also recalled that laboratory schools had been up and running at many universities, including hers, before the standardization movement in American education took hold.

She arrived at the elevator making mental notes to pull her Dewey and Goodlad materials out when she got home. She was feeling a little more hopeful now. Had I been able to practice the art and science of teaching in a collaborative environment such as the laboratory school model perhaps I could have crafted lessons for *Huck Finn* and fostered a classroom learning community to prevent what happened to Daniel in the hallway that day. If not, at the very least, I may have been better prepared to move forward with the class the next day to address the incident after collaborating with my peers and faculty mentors. I could have benefited from the collective experience of my professors and colleagues.

Now in the elevator, she punched the down button, the Muzak caught her attention again. Same song. Suddenly it clicked, Elvis. She sang the song's chorus along with the tune coming from the crackling speakers,

> A little less conversation, a little more action, please
> All this aggravation ain't satisfactioning me
> A little more bite and a little less bark
> A little less fight and a little more spark (Davis & Strange, 1968)

Less talk, more action, indeed.

References

Davis, M., & Strange, B. (1968). Little less conversation [Recorded by Elvis Presley]. On *Live a little, love a little* [Motion Picture Soundtrack]. Hollywood, CA: Gladys Music, Inc.

Goodlad, J. (1994). *Educational renewal: Better teachers, better schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Lagemann, E. C. (1989). The plural worlds of educational research. *History of Education Quarterly, 29*(2), 185-214.

McDermott McNulty, M. (2018). *Blood's will: Speculative fiction, existence, and inquiry of currere*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

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

Poetter, T. (2019). *Teacher leadership for the 21st century* (4th ed). Cincinnati, OH: Van-Griner Publishing.