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The Thicket

By Thomas S. Poetter
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Caveat: Emptor?

I gained a reputation in my household as the strange bird guy this year because during the ongoing pandemic and while the social diseases of racism and inequity rampaged in our justice system and politics and schools, to ease the pain of isolation and the stifling fear of the known and unknown, I ramped up my bird watching habits on our property just north of Cincinnati, Ohio. We have a beautiful tree-line in our backyard, and the region attracts and serves as the habitat for many indigenous and migrating birds. Especially in the springtime, the trees on our property, including pines, oaks, and maples, pop with the colors and the songs of their inhabitants such as the northern cardinal, wren, blue jay, mockingbird, indigo bunting, goldfinch, red bellied woodpecker, rose breasted grosbeak, house sparrow, rock pigeon, and the dreaded equalizer, the Cooper's Hawk, among others. There I go, listing my friends' names again. You see?

To ease the pain and fear and to earn my reputation in the household, I started taking pictures of them all. I needed beauty. I found it in the trees, and I started to deeply appreciate the birds, their beauty in flight, their beauty in song, their beauty in just being there despite what was happening with the rest of the world. It was the Shutterfly book I wrote and bought three copies of that truly did me in at home. I still think the pictures and their captions constitute some of my best work. And now it's fair to say that I love birds. But my family still constantly wonders if I am well.

As I watched the birds live from day-to-day and fed them and put out fresh water for them, I began to appreciate the most amazing aspect of their movement around our home to be their darting, purposeful, fearless flights in and around and THROUGH the thicket that borders the north edge of the property. During the spring as the leaves and branches of the thicket take shape and fill in, you can barely see through the bramble from 10 feet away. It's thick, really thick. And routinely birds just flew through it and out the other side unscathed. How did they do that and why? I imagined that they did it for protection, avoiding the flight of bigger birds who could poach them at any moment, and since we had seen the work of the Cooper's Hawk up close, we knew that the smaller birds had plenty to fear. I also imagined that they did it for expediency and perhaps just because they could as they went from point A to point B like any being on the mission that drives their existence. And, I thought, maybe they just liked flying fast and being carefree and feeling effective, because flying is what they do.

But as you know, no system for action or way of being is perfect, of course. Every so often we hear the plunk of a beautiful bird into one of our windows. Dead on the spot. A mistake, sometimes caused by the chase of the hawk (we have seen it happen!), and ultimately, I'm afraid, the demise of the "beautiful thing that was just flying, merely doing its thing" in an instant. The end comes so fast.

So I began to wonder: How can we soar again as human beings and be full of freedom and possibility and love, when we feel as though we are, and may actually be, grounded by hate? That is, how can we fly freely given the fact that our fates are so fragile and, perhaps, determined by others? What is the way forward through the thicket?

The Task at Hand: The Flight I'm On

I have been writing a series of *currere*-oriented articles for the *Currere Exchange Journal* since Issue 1.2 in 2017, focusing on curriculum fragments—small bits of

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memories that continue to stick to me (Poetter & Googins, 2015)—that persistently influence my thinking and actions in my personal and professional lives (Poetter, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b). The idea from the beginning has been to work my way through a series of aspects of life experience that have informed my educational journey and to theorize and speculate about their meaning and worth through the lens of seven life processes, borrowing from Louise Berman's (1968) heuristic device in her curriculum text, *New Priorities in the Curriculum*.

My seven processes are:

Loving (Loved)
Knowing (Known)
Bullying (Bullied)
Losing (Lost)
Ignoring (Ignorant/Ignored)
Removing (Removed)
Hoping (Hopeful)

My goal is to build some momentum with the manuscripts toward a deeper understanding of myself by providing insights into life and educational experience that could guide my own and perhaps others' curriculum and pedagogy. I am not putting forward the verbal forms that name certain processes in life and education as means for organizing curriculum for schools, as Berman did with hers in the late 1960s (though two of them overlap, "loving" and "knowing"). Instead, I posit that processes are excellent ways not only of planning for life and educational experiences, but also for understanding them, especially since life and educational experiences continue to teach us after the fact, perhaps *ad infinitum*.

So, I began in 2017 with a piece on "losing" and have puzzled my way through two pieces on "bullying" as well as one on "ignoring" in the years since with all of them appearing in different issues of this journal. This manuscript is on "loving." In it, I explore the possibilities that have accrued in my own thinking and being from growing toward love, as I perceive love through the inescapable lenses of white supremacy and the times we live in now, and have been living in for many centuries, tortured to the last breath (literally) by the dominant structures of power embedded in the whiteness, the racism, of it all.

I position love here, in the midst of injustice and violence and structural racism, because for me the issue of our time, and certainly a long time in coming to the fore, finally after so many efforts to bring it, is how we as a people will work together toward the eradication of racism, and if that isn't impossible, which I actually don't think it is, then at least toward the erosion of it. As with other human-made evils that hound us non-stop, like bullying (bullying and racism sometimes go hand in hand), racism can only be countered by a powerful force that is stronger—love. This kind of powerful force is embodied in the lives and commitments of service and care as those depicted in Bettina Love's (2019) third grade teacher, Mrs. Johnson, who according to Dr. Love cultivated a "collective spirit of accountability, love, and purpose" (p. 48) in her classroom for all children. How can we imagine a now and a future that is governed, directed, and inspired by love and not hate, in life, and in education, even schooling? And how do we grow to love each other across the boundaries that society has created and reified for us through our socialization into the norms of organizations, institutions, religions, political parties, etc., that stultify, teach us to hate, create distance, limit equity and opportunity, and, ultimately, foment alienation and misunderstanding?

Liam Neeson Said What?

In February 2019, while engaged in a press interview for an upcoming movie release and in response to a question about a key aspect of the movie, revenge, actor Liam Neeson admitted that many years earlier, after learning about the rape of a friend, supposedly by a Black man, he spent a week roaming the streets hoping to engage with and exact revenge on any random Black person he encountered. Neeson's language describing the episode was much more graphic in the interview. He was insensitive, and his admission felt gratuitous at best. I was appalled at what he said and at the language he used as well and felt at the time that a person couldn't choose to say anything worse and that he certainly lacked remorse in the moment.

The fallout was swift. Some said Neeson should be castigated and he and his movies boycotted for his racism. Some said he should be applauded for admitting that we all have racist thoughts, for seeking help for his issues, and for feeling ashamed for what had happened (or not) during that time in his life so many years ago (Michallon, 2019).

When this episode with Neeson popped in the media, of course, so much was happening in the world related to the never-ending trauma for Black people in the U.S.—daily acts of racism, microaggression, and violence (and of course you know that it hasn't stopped and has gotten even worse, if that is possible!). And I was just beginning to consider writing this very piece on loving through the lens of racism when the Neeson news hit the TV and press writ large. My wife saw one of the news reports on a morning show and said point blank to me, "No one like Neeson or anyone else should ever say anything like that or write anything like that. There are certain things you just can't say. Nothing can justify thinking that or doing that or saying that. It's just wrong."

Her position, of course, challenged the very basis of the type of work that I want to do and have been doing and was just getting ready to have published in my first article about bullying, in which I was the bully. So I kept struggling with two positions. On the one hand, how can we depict hatred, prejudice, discrimination, racism in any form, and put it forward in any form, even if the ends are meant to reverse the passions and justifications behind the act or to seek forgiveness for the act itself (for either thinking about doing something or actually doing something), especially if we are the authors of the hate? On the other hand, how can we *not* depict it, surface it, admit it, and recognize the truth of the matter—that all white people in the United States (and perhaps throughout the entire world) have been socialized in a racist society and, therefore, whether we consciously recognize it or not, act in racist ways throughout our lives (Diangelo, 2018)?

White people, especially, need to keep saying it out loud until they themselves finish breathing, as long as the inequities caused by racist practices that white people and white institutions control and implement exist. If we keep it all inside, how do we help others see the parallel errors in their own lives, adjust and improve our own lives, and help create a new community, a society and world that is at least aware of racism even if it can't be completely eradicated? After all, love can only conquer all, in my opinion from an educational perspective, if the hidden is exposed, and if we take the step of expressing instead of repressing memory.

I made my peace with Liam Neeson, even if my wife didn't. And I have decided to continue working no matter and to approach this topic in my own way with the best of intentions no matter how many pitfalls I fall into or create. Neeson's mistakes in his life are his, and we can probably learn something from all that has happened in the past two years and more, including his saga. And it's about time, if even in the most awkward of ways, to surface what has been and what could be. That's at least part of the work the *currere* approach fosters.

And I want to be as clear as I can about my own positionality on this journey. I have every advantage, at least in terms of how the white superstructure views me and has treated me, in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, as a white, upper middle class, male, heterosexual. I have literally nothing to lose even if I make mistakes, which will bear out and will no doubt come to bear in this writing, whether I see them or not, which I probably won't. My intention isn't to create answers but to surface stories that lead to further questions. Maybe they will lead to possibilities. Maybe they will lead to love. Ultimately, I am convinced that we are taught the things that distance us and connect us, subtly and not so subtly by the world, by our families, by our communities, by our experiences and non-experiences. We all have our own stories to tell and to interrogate. I would like to hear more of them, not fewer of them, even the ugly ones. When we begin to tell more, with hearts and minds open to learning and reconciliation, my belief is that we can be better and heal. Maybe I'm wrong. Let's see.

In the following pages, I surface memories about race from my life, especially as they have to do with my encounters with Black lives, and attempt at the end of this work to interrogate them. You be the judge, and see if, in the end of it, even after reading this truncated, blathering mess of things, love is possible.

Curriculum Fragment 1: Black Is Beautiful

The following memory is absolutely etched into my mind's eye. It's one that remains with me—that is inescapable. I don't quite know why, but I do suspect an answer. This is the first time I've ever told anyone about it. I can sometimes pinpoint my own approximate chronological age tied to longtime memories because of the location where the event took place. In this case, the church my father pastored remodeled the parsonage I lived in as a young boy in 1970, which displaced the family room to the other side of the house. The event below took place in the family room before the remodel, so I know I was no more than 7 years old.

My dad was a protestant pastor in a large mainline church in my hometown in Ohio, where I was born and raised until I went away to college at 18. My town was mostly white in a region that was mostly white and considered mostly rural. It still is. A few Black families lived in our small city and had for many generations. It was thought widely that our town, while not racially diverse, was at least welcoming to persons of color. I knew the Black families and their children, went to public school with them, played with them in the neighborhood, and played sports with them through high school. But I have no doubt that they experienced racism there in ways that were and are unimaginable and horrible and, sadly, typical.

In addition to preaching, seeing parishioners in their homes, teaching confirmation classes, and visiting the sick in area hospitals, Dad served on pastoral committees and traveled widely in the region, and sometimes pastors would come from out of town to our church and home for meetings. They might even come to the parsonage where we lived for 16 years and pass through for coffee and a smoke (most pastors smoked in that era) before meeting formally in the church or at a community site. This was one of those occasions.

One Saturday morning, I was watching cartoons by myself (rare, with three siblings usually fighting constantly for TV rights) in the family room, and a group of about five pastors, white men with one Black woman, came through the front door of the house just off the family room, laughing and talking loudly. The men followed Dad into the kitchen for coffee, but the woman peeled off after seeing me sitting on the floor.

She came into the room and said, "Hello, young man, what's your name?"
"I'm Tom. Who are you?"
She said, "I'm Barbara. I'm here for a meeting with your Dad. What are you watching?"
"Bugs Bunny."
"Oh, I love Bugs. Do you mind if I join you?"
"No," and I scrambled off the floor and onto the couch next to her where she sat down.

We watched a few minutes of the show together, but I also looked up at her, and we talked about the show. And she laughed. I recall how beautiful she was. I knew Black women from town and had seen several on TV, like Denise Nicholas on *Room 222* and Diahann Carroll in *Julia*, but my new friend was even more beautiful, I thought. And she was kind and funny and, I remember, so at ease.

At ease. Kind. Friendly. Beautiful. Funny.
At ease, there in that place.
She had put her arm around me as we watched the show and laughed.
Then all of the men emerged from the kitchen, including my Dad, and called Barbara to come along for the meeting.
The episode was over in a flash.

She said, "Good-bye, Tom, thanks for letting me watch Bugs with you," as she patted me on the knee and smiled.

I said, "Good-bye, Barbara."
And I watched her go.
I never saw her again, except for every day for the rest of my life.

Curriculum Fragment 2: Racial Conflagration (Or Racist Fire Raging Everywhere without Any "Visible" Flames)

Fiery.

Most people would describe us both that way: Dan, Black, 5'7", point guard, a freshman, and Tom, white, 5'7", point guard, a sophomore.

We both were trying out for the college basketball team for the first time. I had focused on academics and baseball as a freshman at our small college and did well, making the dean's list and the starting nine games that first year at second base and as leadoff hitter. I didn't play basketball my first year because I had been so disappointed during my senior year in high school by the lack of interest in me by colleges and coaches. I decided at that time that I would focus in college on my best sport, baseball, and that would be enough. But the head basketball coach at the college, who expected me to play my first year after showing real interest in me as a player and student, stayed after a varsity practice to see me play in an intramural game one night; I made at least 10 shots in a row from way outside right in front of him. We both knew I should be playing basketball, especially after that flurry even against weak competition, and he continually invited me to come out for the team as a sophomore. I realized that I couldn't get basketball out of my system without trying.

Dan came to college highly touted, having played on a team that made the state high school tournament's final four. He was very good—fast, strong, skilled, but not as good a shooter or passer as me. That's a fact that would bear out in time. In addition, Dan was funny and well-liked. He had a great high school basketball career, like all the rest of us, and he never stopped thinking or believing for one minute, just like I did, that he was better than all the rest of the guards in the pre-season camp.

But the overall outlook and situation was grim for both Dan and me, realistically. Four guards had made the team by default because they already owned letter jackets. All four of them were future all-league selections, highly recruited themselves, with game experience, strength, great endurance, size, speed, skill, and athleticism, and they were only getting better at every practice. They clearly occupied the top of the team's depth chart at guard. All of us, including Dan and I, and at least six other grown men, new recruits with dreams, would be in pre-season workouts and practices together under the head coach's microscope nearly every second, competing just to make the team, let alone to have a shot at any varsity playing time that season.

And Dan and I found ourselves pitted against each other in nearly every scrimmage, in nearly every drill in pre-season workouts. After a few weeks, we really started to get on each other's nerves. After one hard foul after another, the blows mutually exchanged in one long, tight game in a five-on-five scrimmage to 11 baskets, I finally snapped, "You know, Dan, you're nothing but an asshole." I know I shouldn't have said it, then and now, no matter, especially loud enough for everyone to hear. He immediately came at me, of course, and our teammates broke up the scuffle very quickly. Cooler heads prevailed, and things settled down between us over the next weeks and months after we realized that we were trying to make the same team. But as we made our way through the final cuts, both of us surviving and making the 18-person roster, we grew even more distant, competitive, eager to subdue the other.

At the same time, I went to classes and worked in my residence hall as an RA in the same building where Dan lived in on a different floor. Dan's RAs wrote him up constantly, and he abused them verbally and threatened them. He said they were racists and didn't enforce the rules fairly on the floor. They complained in meetings about Dan and said none of what he said about them was true. I believed the RAs, my friends, both of them white. Dan piled up the infractions until one night when I was on all-floor support duty (all of the RAs took one night every couple of weeks to be actively available to lend support for any situation in the hall), Dan's RAs called me up to their floor to help out with a situation with him. They were having trouble getting him to close his door with his music on, one of the hall's rules, and I showed up to help. When I entered Dan's hallway, someone shut his door from the inside, and the music went off. I went to the door and knocked. Dan opened the door.

"What's up?" he asked.
"Your RAs called me, I'm on duty tonight, and they said you had the music on loud with your door open."
"You just knocked on it."
"Yeah, but I saw you shut it when I opened the hall door."
"That's total bullshit."
"Maybe, but the RAs on your floor are fed up, and they are going to write it up."
"So?"
"I'm just sayin'."
"Okay, whatever." And Dan shut the door in my face, hard.

The RAs filled out the loud music/open door violation form, which proved to be the final straw that broke the camel's back. The office of residence life held a hearing with all of the piled up infractions, some not so serious like the music one, some more so. I was called as the last witness to the hearing, since I had signed the report as the RA on duty that night. I entered the room. Dan was not subdued, but more agitated than ever, mad.

"What happened the night of this last write up, Tom?" the assistant dean asked.
"Well, I went into the hallway after the RAs called me while I was on all-floor duty, and when I entered the hall the door was open, and the music was playing loud. I went in and told Dan at the door that I would support the write up confirming the noise violation."
"That's a lie," Dan said, "Tom knocked on my door, and the music was off."

I just sat there after rolling my eyes, looking at neither one of them. I didn't care. I just wanted the charges and whatever punishment would follow to stick. After an awkward silence, the dean dismissed me.

"Thanks, Tom, that's all."

As I walked out the office door, I realized that I had lied and that I had to make it right, no matter the consequences. I didn't think I could live with myself if I didn't say something.

I turned around, sat back down, and said, "Dan's right, I saw the door close and heard the music go off when I entered the hallway. The door was shut, not open when I knocked on it. So, I did lie just now about the door being open when I knocked on it."
"Liar!" Dan pointed at me and screamed at the dean, "I told you, I can't even get a fair hearing over all of these minor infractions without people lying!"
"Dan's right," I said, and walked out.

I didn't feel any better. I felt worse. I realized that every single thing was wrong with me and the world.

Nothing ever happened to me after that in terms of consequences. The dean never called me in, never questioned me, nothing. The school finally kicked Dan out of the hall the next semester and provided off-campus housing to finish up the year. A year later, the deans made a liar the head resident of an entire hall.

Dan and I played together the entire rest of that season and fought hard the next season against each other for many months to "earn" the small nuggets of playing time on the college's best team in history. I won out in the end. But we never, ever spoke one word to each other after I lied. Not one word.

Curriculum Fragment 3: But I Didn't Know…Does That Make Any Difference?

We moved to the location of our current family home two years ago to make my wife's work commute more manageable, 20 minutes instead of an hour in the car each way. During the pandemic, one saving grace has been the presence of good takeout food options in our area. But my wife and family would also be quick to add that our pickup

orders are literally never correct. The order is wrong every single time, and we are just amazed at the odds of that—even given the paucity of workers, the stress of the volume of the work, the absolute difficulty of the work, and how low paid it is, etc. Of course, some orders are going to be wrong. But every one? The whole thing is a mess, and we are right in the middle of it. But how can that be? Are we the only ones? Are we doing something wrong when we order?

To combat our negative batting average on incorrect orders at pick up, we began in stops and starts to check the orders before leaving, every item, and there can sometimes be up to 10 items in sealed containers, not always easy to manipulate in the car, and the food gets colder when we check everything, and we just hate that part of it. There's also almost a reverse mental angle happening now where we are like, "We are not checking it. It can't possibly be wrong again after we have come all this way!" Of course, if anything does go wrong with the order, it's my fault, and I am the one who has to drive all the way back to make it right.

We know that we are complaining from a position of privilege. We have the money for food, the means to order and pick it up, and to have leftovers the next day. But who we are doesn't change the fact that we worked all day and are hungry and will pay for it, even at a premium price. Or does it?

Recently we placed an order from one of the newer places that we like; they made a mistake on the order by leaving out an entire entrée. When we unpacked the food, it was my dish that was missing, and the others grabbed their food and just sat down and started eating. I didn't expect them to wait, though I was still a little peeved that my own people didn't seem to care about the inconvenience. It would be another half hour if I left at that moment before I got back with the right items. I had already spent a half hour in the car to get the botched order!

I called the store on my way out just to make sure they got it right this time...

"Hi, this is Tom, I just picked up an order, and an entire entrée was missing. We only had three items. It's hard to imagine getting the order wrong. I don't suppose you can deliver it to the house to make this right?" I had already started the car and was pulling out of the garage because I knew the answer.

"No, sir, we can't do that without charging you a fee, and it will take at least an hour."

"Right, okay, well then, I'm on my way, I'm about 15 minutes out, and I've already spent a half hour in the car. Please put the manager on the line so we can get this right."

Wait… Wait… Wait…

"Hello, this is Pat, the manager, just come in the store, and we'll make the order right for you. And be sure to bring in the receipt."

"No. I'm not coming in the store," I said brusquely. "I know that you bring orders out to cars all the time, and we come in to pick up as a convenience to you. I'd like for you to get the missing order right and complete and bring it out to the car. And I don't have the receipt. It's with the other bags, and I'm already on my way. I can't go back home again without the order."

"But sir, we need the receipt to make the order."

"I know that's not true," now more slightly miffed. "I was just there to pick up the incomplete order. My name is Tom. The order is in your system. I saw it on the computer screen. I'll be there in 15 minutes. Please have it ready."

I hung up.

When I got to the store, I called, said I was there, and identified my car.
The manager walked out to the car, masked, as was I, and when she got to the door, I reached out my hand and said to the young Black woman, smiling (unseen), "Thanks so much for getting the order right for us."
She held the food back. "Sir, I'll need the other food back that we made for you."
"What do you mean, the other food? It's being eaten at home by my family while I waste another half hour in the car making up for your staff's mistake."
"But I made the entire order over again like you said to do while you were yelling at me on the phone."
"I certainly never yelled," but I think I'm yelling now. But that really stung. I never yelled. Did I yell?
"I merely said to make the missing order, the missing dishes that were left out the first time."
"Well, I made the entire order over again, not just those items, but all of them," she said, and then she started crying.
I said, moved, very sad myself, so many casualties, a completely lost cause in every way, "I literally said from the beginning that I was only coming back for what was missing. I would never expect you to make the whole order again, just what we paid for that wasn't provided. I can't drive away without the food. I still don't have all the food that I paid for. And by the way, I wasn't yelling. And your staff made the food wrong, and I drove all the way back for it. I will have spent an hour in the car now for this order."
She said, crying, "You're yelling again."
"I am not yelling. Please hand me the food."

She handed me the bag. I drove off. Sickened. It all went down the drain.

Curriculum Fragment 4: Move!

I like to go to Walmart. When I'm confined to home so much, getting out for even a short trip makes me happy. I like seeing other people, watching them make their way in the world. And the staff is generally good natured and kind. There are so many different types of people in our local store, of all races and nationalities, speaking different languages, trying to make their way in this upside-down world. It's good to see them out and about.

I had just a couple of grocery items to get, picked them up, looked to see if there were any baseball cards for sale in the checkout aisle, and picked up a sandwich in the Subway store just inside the front door.

As I exited, I felt really happy. I was just carrying a small bag and a sandwich. I had looked at the greeter on my right to show my receipt, and she waved me through. I nodded and smiled behind my mask. I had no expectations that anyone would be coming in the exit when I turned back to look at my next steps out of the store.

Just two steps away from me, surprisingly, straight ahead and entering quickly and with purpose, with a really good head of steam, was a tall Black woman wearing big blue plastic eyeglasses, like really big, fashionable ones, though with a borderline Elton John style. She was wearing a one-piece blue pant suit that matched the glasses and blue high heeled shoes. Amazing how much you can remember about an instant.

It happened so fast.

She said, "Move!" and brushed me out of the way to the wall with her arm, not touching me. I basically fell into the wall, without losing my footing, to avoid her; I just

could not risk running into her. I would have been in the wrong, no matter the directional exit/entrance issue, and she was at least 6' tall to my 5'7". I was no match.

I looked back at her and at the greeter, herself a Black woman, who, amazed, watched the woman walk into the produce area. The greeter looked back at me, I gathered myself, and I turned and walked out.

When I think of it, I think of the suddenness and the wonder of it all, of how so many disparate things can come together at once and nearly collide but also not meet, at least literally.

I will never forget the disdain for me that she communicated in the way she said "Move!" with such authority, and clarity, and with a dismissive quality that reduced me to a mere obstacle. What an effect she had. She flew right by me and into the store and on with her life, confidently navigating the world, flying fast and free and unfettered, no matter the boundaries or barriers. Freedom.

I am no victim. I smile. I realize—I am the thicket.

Curriculum Analysis

I have been sitting on the first two curriculum fragments for decades, and the last two fragments occurred the past few months amid rising racial tension and strife along with the persistent and very dangerous 2020 pandemic, which as we know has been most cruel to people of color. The strain all around has been palpable. If you don't feel it now or haven't felt it at all, somehow you aren't in it or aren't aware of it or your own complicity in constituting the thicket. It's time to awaken. I had known for a while that I had to write these stories down, to more clearly see myself and others; it is time.

After the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Chad Sanders wrote a definitive opinion piece for the *New York Times* on June 5, 2020, entitled, "I Don't Need 'Love' Texts from my White Friends: I Need Them to Fight Anti-Blackness." So I stopped doing to my own friends what Mr. Sanders' friends were doing to him. I took his advice of trying to find in my life and work ways to fight anti-Blackness and not wallow in my own guilt and need for forgiveness from people who were battling deep injustices and despair every day on a level way beyond anything I ever could or would experience. I'm not sure that the fragments from my life about participating in and watching racism as it played out in experience do the work of ameliorating anti-Blackness, but as my colleague and friend Denise Baszile taught me, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Perhaps no matter the consequences, I wrote them down and associate them with loving. To be even clearer, I don't expect anything but criticism for writing them. I especially anticipate your skepticism that they have anything to do with the life process, the curriculum, of loving. I am not looking for nor do I deserve anyone's forgiveness for the past rights or wrongs I depicted here or for what I'm about to say. However, I do want the curriculum fragments and my analysis of them to be thought about from perspectives oriented toward the process of loving. To make any more headway than the stories themselves may make for me/us, it's important to frame them continually, at least from my point of view, with educative intentions connected to love.

I realize now that my image of beautiful Black women was shaped by images of them that the white mass communication structure felt as though it could forward on primetime broadcast network TV in late 1960s America. But no matter my prejudices, or how the world was reading Blackness to me at that time—and I realize that the structures in place were teaching me to be anti-Black in subtle and not so subtle ways—I would contend that Barbara was a beautiful person and still is in my mind's eye, mainly for the

kindness she showed to me—how genuine and warm and caring, and, in a word, loving she was in that moment. I like to imagine that she served her entire career as a pastor in this way, nurturing and caring for others no matter what they looked like, what they did, where they came from, unconditionally.

I can say for sure that I had no tangible sense of anti-Blackness in me at seven years old and that my encounter with her certainly put me more at ease around people of color for the rest of my life and confirmed the self-love and worth she captured in me by sharing her love and care in that agapic moment on a granular level. Maybe that is thin, not substantive. But it's true from my perspective. Just maybe she thought in the moment that she could connect with a little white boy who might grow up without being filled with hate and maybe turn out to be at least as good as his father was in that regard. Maybe in a moment the world can shift, move, love, no matter how shaky that vision of possibility turns out to be in real life, in practice.

And that perspective, of how life events, even the seemingly tiniest of them, while not the same or maybe even not parallel, collides with Baszile's (2016) stunning, poignant depiction of "spirit murder" in her mostly fictive *currere* work "Gettin' on with the Business of the Rest of Her Life: On the Curriculum of Her Blackness." Baszile's work is a progressive *currere* project in which she imagines a "fictive" character who has been damaged by a teacher's past demeaning acts, whose very spirit, soul, has been murdered by the discipline of schooling, and I believe we are to infer that the discipline, perhaps the entire enterprise of the white educational superstructure, is bound up in racism. There are two aspects of Baszile's story that are germane to my stories and the topic of a curriculum of loving—the need for love in education and in every aspect of human life and the position that love can be spurred, expressed, and even lasting in significant ways as encapsulated in a mere, yet powerful, moment of action.

The first aspect is that Baszile's (2016) character in the story wonders about the total impact of spirit murder, the kind experienced in her memory of being disciplined by her second-grade teacher, as she listened or not to the voice constantly ringing in the back of her head. It happened when the teacher

> made her stand in the garbage can in the corner for talking too loud in class, and she definitely didn't listen to the voice that told her, "You ain't nobody's trash!" And though she would have never admitted it, probably be ashamed to, that hurt grew up like a poisonous vine all around her soul until it killed her dead over and over again. (p. 12)

While the spirit murder is critical, important, and central, as it has to be, the deeper issue here has to do with our response. Baszile's character, the one scarred, continues:

> But I just keep wondering even if we made a law that says you can't make kids stand in a garbage can for talking too loud in class, it might not do any good. What if it's not the law in the government but the hurt in the teacher who would just find some other way to take it out on us. Maybe she would just hit us, or hang us over the window ledge, or worst of all just slice us up with her words, the ones spewing out of her mouth like vomit or the ones hiding behind her squinting eyes. And besides if it did any good, it would be for all those kids coming after us, but it would do nothing for her whose hurt grew up like a poisonous vine. And if we still have a lot of her running around all broken up how does that impact the rest of us? I'm just saying. (p. 13)

What I hear Baszile saying is that one person can make a difference, perhaps turn things. The tumbling disaster of our lives together is that we don't take any care or responsibility for how we are hurting each other, maybe even when it's pointed out to us. In our denial, we rebuff the love that is possible, that could come about by not repeating bad acts, in building ways forward that value others instead of demean them, that focus on growth and not the socialization toward traditional discipline that marshals only punishment—and usually only in racist ways for racist reasons—and ultimately in ways that foreground forgiveness and love of self as well as love of others.

The second aspect, the notion of self-love, serves as the catalyst that drives our love of others. We can't have one without the other. To develop a sense of well-being for self that doesn't highly depend upon loving and valuing others leads to insulation, maybe even hate, the worst form of action that comes from isolation and alienation, which can result without the necessary connection between self and others socially and culturally in ways that build connections and possibility. Instead, Baszile (2016) says,

> It is love of self that extends to love of others, that provides a foundation for the kind of the agency that will change systems, institutions, policies and *people*. We have failed to consider love as central rather than tangential or simply as the domain of mothers, fathers, and lovers. (p. 14, emphasis in the original)

The allegory of the thicket, then, is representative of the tangles that we negotiate and navigate and sometimes get caught in and suggests that to fly free, full of love and the act of sharing it, we have to be able to move, carefully, purposefully, and recklessly—all at the same time—toward a more radical sense of ourselves as creatures of agency, action, and meaning. Everything we do matters, committing to sharing ourselves matters, and the world matters when we take stock of and nurture the tiniest moments during the encounters amid the greatest set of obstacles, the thickets that we encounter, that could bring us down, and, perhaps in a lifetime, free us on the other side to soar.

Now back to the ground. Dan and I haven't spoken in 35 years. I don't know if he is still alive. I do care if he is, I hope he is, and I wish him well, and I regret everything that happened and didn't happen between us. In fact, at the time, what didn't happen between us on any sustained level brings me the most sadness—the fact of our mutual lost potential and friendship and understanding that could have happened if we ever really permitted ourselves to be on the same side, to share common ground. At the same time that I am filled with regret over the entire incident from start to finish, I remember very fondly the rare moments when we were playing *together* and not *against* each other, times when I was able to imagine and actually see in practice that we would have made a great combination in the game we both loved, basketball.

The fact of the matter is typically only one player of our small size could be covered for by the others on defense in a college game. But occasionally during that first season in JV games ahead of the varsity contests and in our few precious moments of varsity playing time, we wound up on the court together, even after the closed-door incident in the residence hall and the fallout during the hearing. We played so well together during one stretch of one game after the incident that our work resulted in a winning comeback for our side that was sparked by a flurry of steals and passes to each other for baskets that turned the game. We ran off the court when the distressed opponent called timeout, and we high fived each other and sat in the huddle side-by-side getting ready to put the touches on a great win. I remember Dan smiling at me in the huddle,

which I'll never forget and always cherish and appreciate, and I smiled back. I never saw that coming. We never spoke, but I think we figured out one place in the world where we could be together, fulfilled, at peace, almost flying, if not fully embracing any long-term resolution. We had that moment, but it didn't really reframe the equation. Our lives required more long term, continuous examination of all that stood between us and the rigorous trial of working through our differences. We never did that. But in that moment…

What Dan and I may have had together is something Wang (2020) surfaces in her work in melding Chinese philosophical thought with *currere*: that is the experience of "pure knowing" or the experience of "innate knowledge" or "intuitive moral knowledge" (p. 82). And that came in those few moments on the court when we could do no wrong, communicated on a different level, and won together. Those moments still constitute some of the most fulfilling of my college sports career and my curriculum journey of becoming a more complete human being. Wang (2020) suggests that experiences of this sort might constitute a case of "pure knowing," signifying a return to the "pre-conceptual" (p. 83), which according to Pinar et al. (1995) constitutes an aspect of *currere* and its phenomenological roots:

> Unlike mainstream educational research which focuses upon the end products of the processes of consciousness as described by Husserl, those end products we call concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations we, in accumulative fashion, call knowledge, *currere* seeks to slide underneath these end products and structures to the preconceptual experience that is their foundation. (p. 415)

I love the brilliant imagery of "slide underneath" and think of Dan and me flying through a thicket of opponents, in one moment in time, in one game, side-by-side, where we could be as complete as we could be. Perhaps Dan and I for a moment slid under the alienation, mistrust, and anger we felt toward one another and reached some other destination. Wang (2020) goes on to describe this further, saying:

> Pure knowing is, then, not scientific knowledge or comprehension and application of external ethical rules, but rather every person's clear awareness of morals, especially through the emotion of approval and disapproval (Lu, 2014). It is moral awareness, and it arises naturally. … The emotion of love is the manifestation of pure knowing as the highest good. (p. 83)

The fact that we had these moments may constitute a form of love, but none of it excuses every ill and hurt and violence that Dan experienced and that I helped inflict. However, it perhaps constitutes a hopeful opening, maybe a place to look for room to maneuver, to make something out of seemingly nothing. I suppose that's what love does in the first place, pre-conceptually, at root. If that's who we are as human beings, then we have to build from these moments so everything we interact with, on all levels, has the emotional wherewithal to value and pursue love and not hate.

And finally, both of the young Black women I interacted with recently, so briefly, but in some ways deeply, especially when our experiences together caused tears to flow that were not my own (until later), feel the most distant to me from love. Certainly, the restaurant manager doesn't love me now, and the woman in blue who nearly knocked me over wouldn't and couldn't remember me in a million years. I am

just some little, old white guy in the way. But in many ways, though almost literally a disposable obstacle, like a pylon, I'm just as big and as scary and as ominous as ever, with power.

It is true that I create a substantial set of obstacles because of my existence, not just in terms of entering the thicket of a Walmart through the exit and somehow getting through the store having found what was needed, or in terms of completing a day where customer after customer yells and complains while you simply try to keep a business afloat with too few customers, unreliable employees, and uncertain health and welfare concerns at work, home, and school. Every moment itself, as we have learned this year in our strained lives, is potentially filled with peril, especially in terms of a higher sense of and actual influence of racist actions and policies and institutions. I think this is turning out to be more so and more evident than it ever has been, though colleagues and students have pointed out that ever it was and ever it shall be for those living outside the white power bubble. But I think we are at a crucial point, where the world is turning as it must, though these moments of flight have also always been particularly frightening for people of color in ways that exponentially surpass anything I will ever experience. And people of color have to navigate, move, risk, and tangle themselves in the world in ways that I don't have to.

Grumet (1988) attacks the notion of the *concept* itself—the ideal, an end in sight that we can set and clarify—as freeing, because the ideal, like the American dream, or safety, or clarity of objectives in the curriculum *abandons intimacy for anonymity*. It *privileges notions of public ends over family concerns and a common culture over the particular cultural lives we live locally*. If we are constantly moving toward the common and think that a common culture will yield a more perfect democratic nation or any notion idealized and worth pursuing, we are mistaken. Grumet (1988) writes, "What is common is never how we live or what we share. What is common is the ideal, the dream that manages to elude us all" (p. 171).

Instead, while I can't go back in time, I can live differently now. I can create fewer barriers, even in places where the interactions are mostly transactional (Buber, 1996) and live purposefully through communication and action toward more a substantive relationality with others. I can be less hungry, upset, and harried. I can be kinder, more helpful, more loving. I can see other people, where they are coming from, what they are experiencing, and value them. And I can make way for them when they are traveling at high speed and get out of the way without resignation. I can be a better human being, granularly.

In the end, though, the key is translating the world beyond my/our thicket, to become more than an obstacle, but a clearer of obstacles or at least a bridge to the other side when power closes down the openings ahead. How can I help create a thicket (it can't be cleared, I'm afraid, what would we do about the ozone layer then after razing the thicket? See how metaphors break down in time?) with enough room in it for all of us to pass through in ways that help us soar? I must dismantle, with awareness, all of the rules and norms and traditions that bond me with others but separate me, too, and figure out some way to connect, attach, facilitate, value, understand all those I see and teach. And love.

Perhaps Berman (1968) said it best in her book and her section on the process of loving:

> *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*. (p. 68, emphasis in the original)

Perhaps the barriers we create to loving, embodied in our thicket, truly manifest, ultimately, in how we strategize, incentivize, and implement power through our separation from, our distance from, and our fear of each other. Can we do something different from all of this?

Can we love?

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Using *Currere* to Process the Curriculum of Elementary Science Methods: A Quest for Pedagogical Restructure

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I found myself asking, why isn't the science methods course I teach what I want it to be? And how could I make it better and more in line with what my teacher education students need? I operate under two core beliefs. One is that I build my courses with my students in mind; it is my job to help equip them through the courses I offer. Two, I believe teaching is dynamic, and therefore, curriculum and instruction should also be dynamic. The following is my use of the *currere* method to organically examine my teaching past (the regressive), my teaching present (the analytical), and search to improve my science methods course to more appropriately impact my future elementary teachers (the progressive and synthetical) (Pinar, 1978, 2004).

Looking Back: My Teaching Past

My classroom experiences as an elementary school teacher taught me that show and tell science did not work. Student-led experiments were more engaging but more difficult to manage. Science materials cost money, and because I taught in a school with 95% free and reduced lunch, money for such things was scarce. My passion to offer my students opportunity led me to discover that free materials could be scrounged up from all sorts of places—small donations from businesses, old and unwanted science totes and texts in school basements, parent donations of used items and/or time. Beyond the lack of resources provided by the school and district, I lacked scientific knowledge. My deficit led me to invite content experts into my classroom. I found multiple resources beyond my classroom—locals who came in with expertise, who offered a depth of knowledge that I would never have, and who afforded my students an opportunity to engage with material in new ways.

Much of my outlook regarding teaching science to elementary students formed while on the job. My first year of teaching was an exciting blur that exposed many of my teaching weaknesses. My second year of teaching brought about a boldness, particularly in teaching science. Because I taught in a Spanish bilingual classroom, I took on the attitude of "simplemente hazlo" or "Just do it" as Nike coined. The summer in between years one and year two of teaching, I met the newly hired instructional coach for elementary teachers—she was a kindergarten teacher, we taught in the same school and had become friends before her role changed, and she visited my classroom often. I lamented to her the fact that I never taught science once my first year, and that made me sad. She sat down with me and devised a plan to teach animal habitats, the rainforest, and an astronomy exploration in my mixed level bilingual classroom. She and I developed units that asked big picture questions and more importantly took my students on journeys in which we transformed our classroom. These projects took weeks, connected reading and writing, and led us on explorations and field trips. We wrote, we experienced, we researched, we transformed, we learned—all in the name of science. But it was not until I had her nudge, along with my principal's blessing, that I felt empowered to teach science. I think about what was lost in the first year that I did not teach science.

Moore, T. (2020). Using *currere* to process the curriculum of elemetary science methods: A quest for pedagogical restructure. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 16–22.

Fast-forward 20 years later, where, in my current role as teacher educator, I take seriously my commitment to best equip the teachers I send out to teach. Reflection on my own teacher preparation often shapes my approach. How many teachers don't have an individual to shake up their world? How many teachers lack the support of an administrator to tap into what could potentially be one of the most engaging areas? How many teachers do not hold the same perspective of "simplemente hazlo"?

These reflections have led me to realize how ill-prepared I was to teach science within in my own classroom. Thinking even further back to my own teacher education, my preparation afforded me a one credit science methods course. The text offered multiple methods for teaching science, but I never experienced planning or teaching a science lesson until I did so within my own classroom, well into my second year of teaching. As young and inexperienced as I was, I had no idea how to use the one credit of science methods training I had. I recall a conversation with one of my peer mentors during my teacher education program. He was clear in his task that a methods class was never meant to be a "how to course" but a level of certainty accompanied this clarity. This is my same struggle.

My current role has established an empathy for education preparations programs and the rigidity in which they operate. Programs are bound by institutional credit limits for graduation, and they are beholden to accrediting bodies. A natural outcome is that course titles and credit hours often dictate program scope and sequence. This is not something I appreciated until I taught in higher education and gained insight on how courses could be minimized to load, credit hours, and seat time—all of which impact course quality and student perspective of the value of the course.

At this point in my teaching career, I realize the importance of failure leading to success, something that didn't exist in my earlier years. In part, that is one of my conclusions, foreshadowed. I began teaching in higher education over decade ago. It was not until I began interviewing to be an education professor that I had to share my teaching identity applied to my teaching philosophy and the institution's mission. What a powerful practice, when taken seriously. My time in higher education has afforded me the space to own these very personal concepts. Having confidence that I indeed *teach who I am*, as Parker Palmer says, and the clarity in such a concept is paramount when teaching others. Further, I believe it is my work to teach, to shape, and to send teachers who teach. And because we are human, I believe that we learn more when we are able to experience. However, to help construct meaning, we must embody success and failure and follow both by thoughtful reflection. The meeting point of all of these things allows for an articulation of conclusions about what worked and what could be changed. It is an artful intersection of many components.

Parker Palmer (2016), in "The Heart of a Teacher," wrote "we teach who we are" (p. 15). Careful examination of where I had been, articulation of my teaching identity, and intentionality about where my teachers needed to be have spoken into my writing. Palmer's text also famously challenges teachers to reflect by holding a "mirror to the soul" (Palmer, 2016, p. 15), a method that fits nicely with the *currere* method of "self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal…viewing of what is conceptualized through time" to make meaning (Pinar, 1978, p. 1). As Palmer (2016) pointedly put it,

> When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my own unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. (p. 15)

Palmer's (2016) encouragement and Pinar's (1978, 2004) *currere* method merge together with the current body of literature regarding elementary science education and the voices of my teacher candidates to produce a framework to establish change in my teaching practice.

Recognition and Articulation of an Issue

I have just recently been able to articulate the issue I am facing—how do I equip my elementary teachers to "really" teach science? What constitutes preparation? What or who determines the definition of "really teaching," and how do you know when you've reached that goal? I am not alone in this quandary. Recent evidence collected from multiple studies specify that elementary science is too often defined by incoherent and conceptually disconnected sets of hands-on science activities (Abell & Smith, 2007; Eshach, 2006; Lee & Houseal, 2003). Just teaching the basics as a how-to guide is not enough. Research has identified a deficit in current practice—that teacher education offers talk of progressive and project-based work, asking students to engage in activities that promote such work, but often values theory over practice and fails to walk beside students in authentic ways (Glazier, Bolick, & Stuts, 2017; Shulman, 1998). The struggle I have faced over the years in determining the right mixture of what to teach while falling within given parameters of credit and accreditation parameters is very real.

So here I am at a crossroads—I teach a two-credit science methods course. When thinking about restructuring the course, I noted ways I replicate the same system I experienced in my own educational experience, a perpetuation of a system that clearly doesn't work. For six years, I have sought to slowly introduce changes in my teaching that would permit me to involve deeper pedagogical elements, to help teacher candidates experience science, and also to sustainably translate theory, experience, and hands-on learning into the actual classroom. But at the heart of this slow change, I desire so much more.

I am validated and not alone in this endeavor, as research supports the conclusion that elementary teachers are not adequately prepared to utilize, incorporate, and teach science in a way that leverages learning to its potential (Abell & Smith, 2007; Eshach, 2006; Newman, Abell, & Martini, 2004). Because of this inadequacy, I seek to make a difference for those within my sphere of influence by improving my own science methods to include just the right mixture of the needed elements to achieve this. Existing literature, student voices, expert insight, personal experience, and classroom teaching experience weave this dynamic tapestry; my journey and discovery of *currere*—self-reflection and self-discovery (Pinar, 2004).

The Teaching Present

Course improvements over the previous six years had been minimal, yet the fact remained, course improvement was needed. Verbal comments, evaluation feedback, and course reflections repeatedly brought up issues surrounding an ongoing conundrum of striking a balance that would help elementary teachers see value, feel prepared, and find purpose and place for teaching science in their classrooms.

The submission of my sabbatical proposal began the official journey of a pedagogical overhaul for my science methods course. This point marked the moment at which I began to process and name issues with course structure that had been circling for years. It also marked a turning point at which I intentionally began to seek change to improve upon a single course and more appropriately meet teachers' needs. An approved sabbatical

application, coupled with approval from the College's Institutional Review Board to collect the qualitative data I sought, offered the space to digest anecdotal information from the previous six years and more formalized data collection. Additionally, my state's timely adoption of new science standards and an accreditation program review seemed the perfect mix to move forward and to construct meaning. While I incorporated action research methods to collect and generate data for my own improvement, this document contains my autobiographical internalization of the data collected and the story of my understanding.

A more formalized collection of data began when I issued a pre-course survey to my then group of teacher candidates. The intention of the surveys was to identify needs, pre-course, and use that information to tailor-fit the offerings. Responses were underwhelming and did not drive any change in curricular structure. I was disappointed in the lack of participation, but the void of information was as powerful in my own journey, as it spoke volumes of candidates' needs at this point in the program. When asked about the underwhelming response, the consensus was that they were too busy. One teacher candidate indicated that, because a response was not required for a grade, the task did not take precedence over other tasks. This led me to ask—if teacher candidates are unable to find time to answer three questions, is this a scheduling issue, or is it something different? If they do not see value in completing a task unless a grade is attached to it, is it a value issue? And if it were it a value issue, why didn't teacher candidates offer a response?

An implicit assumption is that, for the methods course to fully meet its potential and my goals, teacher candidates need space to practice purposeful reflection. To date, this course has not met its potential in its current placement in the program, as teacher candidates struggle to digest material beyond a survival level. This continues to be a very real struggle, one that grounds me in the reality that my teachers face. My own struggle here connects me to their daily endeavors and strikes a chord of empathy. During the course, this same group engaged in participant-led focus groups that discussed the following prompts:

- Identify explicit conclusions; implicit conclusions; null conclusions that you have about teaching elementary science, unique to the topic/unit.
- Discuss how teaching science in this way could work in your student teaching placement.
- How might teaching this topic/unit be different in your own classroom?
- What factors must be in place for you to utilize concepts taught in this topic/unit?

The more formalized focus groups yielded trends pertinent to my course restructure. ***TREND:*** the course needs an explicit component to help teacher candidates clearly navigate and recognize the following practical differences in position: not teaching science at all, teaching science as a standalone subject, and teaching science as an integrated subject. I need to further explore what elements perpetuate the limited thinking about teaching science and better understand where teacher candidates generate ideas about teaching science. ***TREND****:* teacher observation supports the notion that immediate reflection following the experience does not offer teacher candidates opportunity to digest the experience appropriately. Formal data collected did not directly support this, yet it was apparent that teacher candidates struggled to name those strategies that were shared or modeled. This merits further exploration. ***TREND:*** teacher candidates need

to begin the methods course with a basic list of possible strategies in order to recognize those that are implicitly modeled prior to any experience or hands-on learning.

Noting these trends, I immediately sought ways to incorporate them into my next course offering. I believed, and still do, that the adjustment of these areas will bring me closer to meeting the full potential of this course.

An extension to my understanding was thoughtful consideration of words from those who had completed the course and were teaching. I invited former students to offer hindsight about teacher preparation, particularly in science methods. Conversations with former students were based on the following:

- What course material (if any) stuck with you?
- Was there something that helped prepare you most for teaching science in the classroom?
- Was there anything from the course that offered you a framework for thinking about teaching science?
- What would have been most helpful to promote long-term and sustainable science teaching in your classroom?

Because the success of my teachers is my target, understanding their perspectives and incorporating them into my work is paramount. Perhaps the loudest voice in this process, my journey to construct conclusions, was directing me to look at what was missing, what I have come to respect as the "yets."

Former teacher candidates, now teachers in the field offered parallel insight: teachers identified the need for direct interaction with *the state science standards,* yet the course could not be minimized to a "teaching to the standards" course. They expressed a desire for help with *knowing how to find resources and ask for help,* yet the course needed to offer gentle guidance not a heavy-handed how-to guide. A handful suggested *adding an element of connecting science and ELA as a means to justify class time to teach science,* yet the course needed to teach flexibility to be able to digest constructing rationale and arguments to validate a deeply personal teaching practice. Some lamented their feeling of inadequacy in science content and indicated *that their lack of science content knowledge held them back from teaching science,* yet the course could not be replacement or a Band-Aid for years and credits of science content otherwise gained in a science major.

None of this came as a surprise. In part, grappling with this, I realize how important naming what it is and what is not—the "yets"—strikes me as uniquely informative when determining my next steps. Further, I appreciated that trends were consistent among former program participants and current program participants, an indication I was on the right track in my discovery. I believe the key to striking balance begins here with these identified trends. Seeking this balance has opened intentional conversations. One such conversation occurred with an individual pivotal to the state's adoption of the new science standards. The greatest takeaway from that conversation further shaped clarity in my own teaching philosophy. "Teach teachers to fail forward. Help them establish confidence in the complexity of their role—help them know that it is OK that they are not experts in every field. Teach them to be discoverers with their students." This guidance was paramount in further understanding my role as a science educator. Further, it deeply informs a pedagogical restructuring—beginning with my own re-visitation and re-clarification of my role and responsibility and what we must accomplish within the course.

Now and Beyond

The conversations nicked the tip of the iceberg. My conclusions from this endeavor are not really conclusions, rather they are jumping off points that must be visited again and again. I gained insight about the importance of focusing on nuts and bolts and tools to help teacher candidates better digest concepts while in program. I even added this explicit instruction to my course structure, but the balance eludes me. I seek to capture, in words, what this balance is—the go between of structure and "yets." Certain course elements must be very clearly addressed and presented while others are unearthed and discovered. Further realizations are less likely to be made by my teacher candidates if not clearly stated upfront, because they do not have appropriate capacity to reflect on and digest the material, making it difficult to process, name, and apply abstract concepts that are organically and authentically occurring. Therefore, I must do my best to narrow and clarify what is happening and create intentional space for reflection to occur that promotes a purposeful processing designed to help teacher candidates meet course goals. A John Dewey quote (as presented in Eisner, 2002) resonates from my undergraduate studies and seems appropriate here, "Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time" (p. 87).

Back to the Practical Present and a Momentary Synthesis

For now, the culmination of this *currere* reflection is that my two-credit science methods course offered every spring will purposefully attempt to merge Elliot Eisner's three curricula, the explicit, the hidden, and the null (Eisner, 2002). These will be reflected in course structure and course goals and will be kept at the forefront as I work to improve this course to meet its full potential. The explicit curriculum will appear in the offering of nuts and bolts on building science lesson plans and units and how to read and use science standards; the hidden or implicit curriculum will focus on working to establish confidence in teaching science, practicing to fail forward, naming fears when teaching science, and by articulating clarity in the teacher self—who are you as a science teacher and how will you move forward; and the null curriculum will appear in the way students may unlearn certain science teaching aspects traditionally associated methods courses and by gaining practical experience of teaching elementary science without being a content expert.

Ultimately, as a teacher educator, my role is to offer the framework necessary to help my teachers think and to succeed. The aforementioned points are a clear "restarting" point. My struggle is ongoing—what is that mixture that strikes balance where my teachers can achieve that level of critical thinking to be able to use what we generated in their own teaching. While I am unsure of the exact measurement of the three components—my focus remains on "trying" out what will work within the context of the three identified curricular elements.

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Bilingual Education Ascertains Global Citizenship

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Writers in social work have highlighted the role of language in a range of social activities, such as identity formation, meaning making, representation, and knowledge construction (Gai, 2009, p. 1082). Dr. Sabine Ulibarri (1964, as cited in Smith & Rodriguez, 2011) stated the following:

> In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh. It was so in the beginning and it is so today. The language, the Word, carries within it the history, culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other. To love one is to love the other. (p. 186)

Language is an identity that indicates our citizenship and a bridge that connects people together through communication. It carries love, and we can love each other because we love each other's language. For example, when I talk with my parents, we always speak in our hometown dialect, even though we all know how to speak the standard language, Mandarin. The dialect we speak is not only a language, but also a bond that shows the love we have for each other in our community.

This kind of love and bond is disappearing in our current school system. From a global and stereotypical perspective, English, as a symbol of power, brings people privileged opportunities. When you speak English with the perfect American or British accent in non-English speaking countries, people tend to be more friendly to you. Non-English speakers often want their children to grow up speaking English so that the next generation won't be discriminated against because of the language they speak. Some parents also believe speaking "real" English with an American accent or British accent can bring more opportunity for their children when they face interviews. That's why "VIPKid" is so popular in China. Chinese parents pay hundreds of RMB (*renminbi*, the official currency of China) per hour to have their children practice their oral English with a native speaker through VIPKid. All these stereotypes indicate that English is truly the most important language in the world if you want to be among the privileged.

In this article, I want to challenge "English as the dominant language" in school curricula by applying the method of *currere* to share my educational experience and reflect on how bilingual education can prepare students to become global citizens through a more inclusive curriculum. This paper is organized into four parts following the four parts in the method of *currere*: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, 1994, p. 19). These parts provide a clear framework to conceptualize my past educational experience and envision my future research and teaching.

Regressive

The first step of the method of *currere* is regressive, which means "return to the past" to "capture it as it was" (Pinar, 1994, p. 21). To prepare you to read my past educational experience, I want to share "complexity" in my conversations (Pinar, 1994, p. 21). Everyone's life is complicated, and the stories can be long. All the choices and

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experiences are complex because there are so many factors from different perspectives that impact every move we make in life, including family members, teachers, friends, and even strangers. There are many related questions, but the predominant one is: "What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?" (Pinar, 1994, p. 20).

Here is the beginning of my story: when English became a mandatory subject for me in China, I was in the 7th grade. The intention was to prepare us as global citizens for the future. I still remember the moment that a female English teacher walked into our classroom and started our class with interesting sounds. I had no idea what she was saying. All the letters "a, b, c, d…" that I had known as a part of the Chinese language since I was little were pronounced differently in English. It was interesting to get to know another language that is completely different from Chinese. A typical English class during my childhood consisted of reading the vocabulary list, learning the grammar rules, and readings the texts. It was the teacher's job to teach and the students' job to listen and follow. We had quizzes on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, which included writing short essays. My English grades were not that great. The truth is that it took me almost a whole week to learn how to spell "basketball." The spelling, the grammar, and the sentence structure did not make sense to me. The Chinese language system is pictographic; each word is a character or group of characters that represent meaning, while English words are a combination of letters. My English teacher told us that there are two kinds of people when it comes to learning English: one who is good at English because of their talent and another one who is bad at it because English is not their thing. She put me into the group of "bad at English" students after the first test because the teacher only cared about scores. It was not her fault because that was how the whole Chinese educational system worked: only test scores mattered. I hated English from that time because I labeled myself just the way my first English teacher labeled me. I always failed my English tests in middle school and high school.

My mother learned a lesson from my schooling experience and started my sister in English classes when she was in early elementary school. My sister, unlike me, loves English and has been good at it because it was so easy for her to learn the language. I wish I had learned English earlier than the 7th grade like her. Maybe I would have been a member of the group that is good at English if I started early. One thing I am sure about now is that I have strong feelings about language education because my middle school and high school language education failed me. I did not escape from the failures of my early English language education. Rather, I "totalized my situation" (Pinar, 1994, p. 21) and conceptualized a different view on language education. I started to think that bilingual education could make the process of learning another language easier and better prepare students to be global citizens.

I studied hard enough to get accepted to an excellent teacher college in China. I have wanted to become a teacher since I was a little. However, I had to major in English if I wanted to attend the university. Making the decision to major in English education was difficult. The first two years of college were even harder because I was so far behind everyone in my classes in terms of the English language, no matter how hard I tried. Then I realized that the traditional way of learning English did not work for me. My English did not improve through memorizing spellings and practicing grammar rules. In fact, I suffered from the traditional way of learning a foreign language. I suffered from practicing listening, reading, writing, and speaking by myself at 5am every morning. I suffered from all the English-related course work, and I hated my major. There had to be a better way to learn a foreign language.

In the summer of 2014, I met John, an American professor from a U.S. university. He encouraged me to talk with him and write my ideas down on my paper instead of worrying about word choices, sentence structure, and grammar. He was the first person who said my English was great. I was so happy and decided to continue being happy in college by enjoying the language instead of only paying attention to the English tests and exams. John taught me that learning a language is a way to express yourself and communicate with others, not to get a higher score on final exams. I made friends with American Fulbright students at our university. We explored delicious food and historical sites in the city together. It was a wonderful time, and I fell in love with the English language and the culture. Language became a bond to connect our love and friendship.

Sam, one of my friends from the Fulbright program, recommended that I visit the United States before I began to teach English. He always questioned our curriculum because he didn't think we could teach English without seeing and knowing how it is used in authentic contexts. Language, as a part of culture and a way of living, is more than a communication tool in social life. Therefore, I decided to apply to an exchange program to visit a U.S. university for my senior year.

I was an exchange student at Wright State University in Ohio in the TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) department. It was an amazing learning experience. I had a lot of opportunities to practice my English and learn more about western culture. I also built friendships with U.S. students who were learning Chinese at Wright State. In our conversations, we talked about how learning a language can be life-changing and hard at the same time. We mentioned how wonderful it would be if we had been raised with bilingual education. We could have communicated with each other in both languages and known more about each other's cultural background. Growing up using both languages, English and Chinese, could have helped us become more open-minded with the possibilities and opportunities in life.

By the end of the program, one of my favorite professors at Wright State suggested the graduate program in TESOL to me. I did not think I was ready to teach English because I had not learned enough about the language. With the support of my family, I continued my education at Wright State University and graduated with a TESOL M.A. degree and a SAHE (Student Affairs in Higher Education) M.Ed. degree.

During my first year of graduate study, my research interest was about improving English speaking skills. I learned so much about student services in college and gradually formed a more holistic view of education. I realized that if I wanted to make learning a language easier for students, I needed to think bigger and share my failures to possibly find a better form of language education. Instead of thinking about how to teach English effectively, I started to reflect on the educational system, the teaching pedagogy, and the assessment design. I started to question what has been missing from the current curriculum. I then joined the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Miami. I started to research bilingual education as a possible reform for the language curriculum.

Progressive

The second step is progressive, which suggests "we look the other way…at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (Pinar, 1994, p. 24). We relax, then we think about the future in a reasonable way because "it is important in the progressive as well as the regressive moment to free associate" (Pinar, 1994, p. 25). Therefore, I pictured the education I want for my future children.

I want my children to be happy and enjoy their educational experience. I want them to enjoy the learning process with their friends collaboratively. I want them to have kind and beautiful hearts that welcome all the others no matter their economic status or color of skin. I want them to be critical global citizens who ask questions and pursue their own unique way of living. I want them to love and bond with each other because that connection will provide the support and courage they need when they face challenges.

I don't want my children to discriminate or be discriminated against. I don't want test scores to limit their abilities. I don't want judgments and stereotypes to narrow their possibilities. I don't want them to follow the mainstream and have no thoughts of their own. I don't want them to speak only one language and make friends with only others like them. I don't want them to resist changes and differences. I don't want them to think only from their own perspectives and not analyze things holistically.

I hope my children will have the kind of education that embraces diversity and prepares them to be global citizens. I hope they can grow up speaking different languages and understanding that all languages are equally important. I hope educators will be ready for bilingual education and more diverse students' needs.

Analytical

The third step is analytical, which "describe[s] the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them" (Pinar, 1994, p. 25). Possibilities and opportunities in life bring changes and aspirations to people. I understand education as the process and product of learning through social interactions, books, observations, and many other ways. *Currere* can critically reflect the flaws we have in the current curriculum by encountering the failures and re-imagining a better way forward.

When I look back at every step of my journey, I realize how important language education can be because my life has been truly changed through learning a different language, even though the beginning of the learning was not pleasant. Language education not only brought me more opportunities and perspectives in life, but has also taught me to look at education in a holistic and critical view. I never even imagined going to another part of the world until I fell in love with English. I never even thought about getting into graduate school until I had the study abroad opportunity. I never even connected education with politics and economy until I taught language classes in a local high school. English serves as a symbol of dominant power, and marginalized groups need bilingual education to disrupt the mainstream.

All these lived experiences taught me how important language education is and how challenging it could be to design a better language curriculum that would prepare students to be global citizens. San Miguel (2004) stated, "Scholars found that bilingualism was an asset to learning in the schools and that it played a positive role in intelligence" (p. 6). When students know two or more languages, their cognitive skills, academic skills, and social skills will be improved (Haft, 1983, p. 253). Schools can also transform systemic oppressions by acknowledging and supporting the cultural assets and wealth of other minority groups in the United States (Yosso, 2005, p. 81). "As with other social positions, such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender in explicating the unjust and stratified reproduction of knowledge, language is a key component in the production of inequality" (Kubota & Lin, 2009; Luke, 2009; Ruecker, 2011, as cited in Cho, 2017, p. 667).

However, it is not easy to reform school curricula. It is challenging to design a curriculum that uses two languages in teaching school subjects, such as math and social

science. Moreover, San Miguel (2004) stated, "Bilingual education is one of the most contentious and misunderstood educational programs in the United States because it raises significant questions about national identity, federalism, power, ethnicity, and pedagogy" (p. 1). Bilingual curricula could encounter a lot of obstacles without support of the dominant power. Delgado Bernal (1998, 2002, as cited in Yosso, 2005) asked: "whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted?" (p. 69). Bilingual education could be difficult to achieve, but it is going to be a revolutionary change in education that could disrupt the mainstream. English is a language, but not the language for education.

Synthetical

The last step is synthetical, which is to "look at oneself concretely, as if in a mirror …Who is that? In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present" (Pinar, 1994, p. 26). My lived experience formed my research interest on bilingual education as a doctoral student. My past guides me on my present and enlightens me on my future. Klapwijk and Van der Walt (2016) stated, "The scenario is a familiar one for a multilingual (usually postcolonial) country: a society in which multiple languages enjoy equal status by law, and where the national curriculum acknowledges and supports multilingualism" (p. 67). Language is an asset for education, and educators need to face the challenges in the bilingual curriculum design. San Miguel (2004) stated, "The changes in bilingual education, in general, were the result of several forces, including litigation, legislation, a changing political context, and activism on the part of contending groups with competing notions of ethnicity, assimilation, empowerment, and pedagogy" (p. 1). My present and my scholarly work about bilingual education will disrupt "English as the dominant language" in the school curriculum and contribute to future students' global citizen identities.

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Lived Curriculum: The Teacher at the Heart of the Protest

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When curriculum is understood as being constructed narratively through the construction and reconstruction of experience, what is valued are the stories lived and told by teachers and students of what is important, meaningful, relevant, and problematic for them. Curriculum then becomes what students and teachers experience relationally and situationally through undertaking a narrative construction and reconstruction of experience as they interact with each other. Individuals uniquely author these stories according to their own personal and situational particulars. Pinar (1975) describes this as a living biographical experience dealing with past, present, and future involving decisions made or not made. This biographic experience focuses on the living of the life, the running of the race, the individual in a particular space at a particular time, with life as the data source—*currere* (Grumet,1975; Pinar,1975). This is the lived curriculum; it is the lived experience of students and teachers in the classroom as they live out their lives individually and in relationship to one another. It is what Aoki (1993) refers to as the other curriculum. Aoki (1993) points out that this lived curriculum is not the curriculum as it is set out as a plan, but rather, it is a plan lived out. However, in spaces that were once colonized, such as Jamaica, actualizing the lived curriculum is a complex undertaking that requires pushing against prescriptions and systems that are hierarchical and deeply entrenched in the minds of students and teachers. In such spaces, *currere* becomes a prescribed race, in a particular space, at a particular time (Grumet, 1975) and a stifling of the lived experience in the present in order to adhere to traditions and maintain the status quo. The view of the curriculum as lived, therefore, is a rejection, a protest if you will against the traditional conception of curriculum.

Using an autobiographical lens, this paper seeks to explore how the lived curriculum is actualized in a Jamaican classroom through the role of the teacher (Mr. M). The intention is that this paper will serve as an inspiration to other Jamaican teachers to disrupt the traditional view of curriculum, which is often touted by policymakers.

Curriculum Organization and the Teacher's Role

At the secondary level, there are two types of public schools in Jamaica: government owned and run high schools (once called secondary schools but now known as upgraded high schools) and high schools owned by churches or trusts but funded by the government inclusive of paying the teachers in these schools. Schools of this second type are referred to as grant-aided high schools. Within these two types of schooling are remnants of the colonial legacy that give rise to tensions in how curriculum is thought about and actualized—tensions such as who attends which type of school, what subjects are offered, and what resources are available. Additionally, such tensions are linked to the examination-oriented nature of curriculum organization in these schools. Once students are placed in these schools, most of these tensions are borne out at the upper secondary school level. The upper secondary (Grades 10-11) curriculum is decided upon and driven by the syllabi of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

Grades 10-11 of secondary schooling are highly structured, examination oriented, and competitive, as students' success at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC) examinations determine how students articulate to the next phase of their lives.

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At the end of Grade 9, students choose a number of subjects to pursue that align with their desired career paths or are given subjects to pursue based on the school's view of their attainment levels. Students then pursue these subjects for two years in Grades 10 and 11 and at the end of Grade 11 take the CSEC examination.

After CSEC, students may go on to community colleges, vocational colleges or certain universities, or move on to Sixth Form: Grades 12 and 13. CSEC is a prerequisite for these colleges and also for sixth form, which is an extension of the high school that serves as preparation for entrance into university, especially the University of the West Indies. Over the two years of Sixth Form, students choose a smaller number of subjects from those in which they had success at the CSEC level to continue. Students in Grades 12 and 13 take the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) also administered by CXC. CAPE is the prerequisite for the University of the West Indies and increasingly for the University of Technology: the two main traditional universities on the island.

Students' scores on the CSEC and CAPE examinations are used to determine teachers', students', and schools' success. As a result, emphasis at this level is placed on the coverage of content/syllabi, completion of past papers, and the passing of examinations. Curriculum takes on the traditional prescriptive approach and reflects a narrow view of curriculum, which limits possibilities for students in making sense of their world. In such a system, the teacher's role in helping students to make meaning and expand their world view from the content is critical. But often in these systems, the teacher's role is limited to that of a technician—implementer of someone else's vision of curriculum without much autonomy if any (Sachs, 2001; Winter 2017). However, given the importance of the lived curricula to students' understanding, interpretations, and construction of knowledge, teachers are called upon in such contexts to help students broaden their experiences and make connections between what they are learning and the world around them in meaningful ways. The teacher is called upon to become a curriculum maker with curriculum as symphony arising through learning and in interaction with students (Craig, 2006). The teacher then is at the heart of the curriculum in such systems. But in systems where teachers are used to being told what to do, it becomes a difficult undertaking to break out of this mould and to exercise autonomy in making decisions. This may create tension between one's own philosophical traditions and the pressures toward control and standardized examinations.

For the remainder of the paper, we share the journey of Mr. M, a classroom teacher who sought to break out of the mould and to help his students make meaning as they engaged with learning during an examination phase of their schooling. Through Mr. M's journey, we sought to answer the question, how can the lived curriculum be actualized in a Jamaican classroom? The question is answered through the analysis of interactions between Mr. M and his students, decisions made by leaders at Mr. M's school, and Mr. M's interpretation and action following those decisions. Pinar (1975) pointed out that educational experience could be examined biographically by accepting that one's biography contributed to one's formal studies. In this sense, the personal self and existential experience become the source of data (Pinar, 1975). Autobiography then can be considered as one's story of experience consisting of regression - looking back, progression - looking forward, analysis - stepping to see where one is, and synthesis - seeing how the past, present, and future are all integrated to allow for an understanding of the lived present (Pinar,1975). In this story of educational experience (*currere*) one also reflects to see how one is complicit in existing power structures (Pinar, 1977) and, hence, able to make necessary change.

Autobiography of Mr. M

Who am I? I am a Spanish teacher, French teacher, graduate student, and graduate researcher. I have been at the heart of the curriculum since 2001 in Jamaica. I have taught students at all levels including students at the CSEC and CAPE levels. Much of my concern revolves around the construct of curriculum as content, as product. I had always tried to maintain a constructivist classroom, as I learned from my Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Training; however, it was during my studies toward a Masters of Education in Curriculum Development that I first became introduced to the Reconceptualist view of curriculum. I confess that I did not really comprehend what that meant. It was not until I was conducting my study for that degree focusing on the perceptions and feelings of Jamaican high school students that it began making sense. Seeing their apathy, somewhat negative feelings, and reading and listening to their frustrations, uncertainty, and contradictory emotions from their reflective pieces and interviews was enlightening. I then understood curriculum as biography, *currere*, and the meaninglessness of school experience (Greene, 1971; Pinar, 1977). These CAPE students did not see their experiences toward these exams as positive. It was then that my protest truly began. I decided that, when I returned to my own classroom, I would not have my students endure this traditional concept of curriculum in which I had been complicit. It was time to change.

With my graduate experience, my protest began, and I looked to radicalize my teaching and actualize the lived curriculum. I no longer thought of curriculum in terms of the prescribed curriculum, the curriculum as plan (Aoki, 1993). I decided that I would no longer follow the status quo at my school in terms of in-class standardized testing and in terms of the role of the teacher as provider of knowledge and responses to prescribed questions from past examination papers and the reliance on the method of drill and practice for students' success. Instead I gave the students voice in the classroom as they learned and prepared for their examinations. This meant that when students had concerns on their minds not directly related to the subjects I taught, I would allow them the opportunity to discuss those concerns. I wanted to have the lived curriculum become fully actualized in my classroom. Instead of the monthly in-class standardized tests, I focused on classwork and homework assignments because I was concerned about the quality of the student experience. In lieu of these standardized tests, I gave students videos, portfolios, dialogues, and group assignments. I also gave students choice in their assignments and at times the opportunity to determine the ways in which they would show me what they had learned.

Students were provided with opportunities to vote on choice of assignments, were able to vote on the due dates of assignments, and even to suggest assignments to be done, which in several cases were accepted. During the first semester of the 2016/2017 academic year, with my then fourth form (Grade 10) French students, I was teaching a particular topic (the Passé Composé: a past tense), but as we went through the class activity, Laura volunteered to come to the board to share her response to a question. She then went on to start explaining some vocabulary and grammar to her classmates. I recognized a "teachable" moment, and I stepped back to allow Laura to take charge of the class and to teach her classmates. My only intervention was to make clarification. Previously, I would not have done that, as I thought time was limited and I needed to cover the syllabus for the examination. However, with this method, as time progressed, this group of French students became more and more active in class. This was the curriculum coming alive in my classroom as, instead of choosing to assert my authority, I was recognizing Laura's personhood. It was not about me but about Laura

and her becoming. I had to step back, recognize that becoming, and indeed to allow her to become. Laura would once again take charge of the classroom at another time when I was running late for class and internal oral examinations were upon us. When I reached the classroom, Laura was already running the class, leading practice for the oral examinations. I sat and watched for a while before intervening to make some clarifications. Laura gave me a look indicating that I had taken over her class. I realized that I had talked too much, and I returned the class to Laura. I had to recognize Laura's uniqueness and her willingness to teach.

Other students besides Laura also sought and received opportunities to take control of the classroom and teach their peers. There were individual students who sought very hard to remain in the shadows, but even for those students, there was greater involvement in that, while not extroverted enough to take control, they were much more willing to share their work and even to volunteer responses in class. As a group, they were becoming. They became more connected to each other and to me as their teacher, and I became more connected to them. It was not simply a class, but rather a family. There was also a Spanish group of fourth formers (Grade 10) in 2015. I decided to give students individually or in pairs the responsibility of teaching specific topics—Por and Para, the Present Perfect and Pluperfect tenses—to their classmates. Ana, Marta, and Arissa had these responsibilities, and I only intervened for clarification. Ana and Marta prepared their lesson and requested that I ask for a projector, which I did. Not only did they teach the topic to their classmates, but they sought to ask their fellow classmates questions and went so far as to prepare a practice activity. Arissa taught her classmates while I was absent, and her classmates were able to tell me what they had learned while I was away, and they were able to show me the notes they had taken. I was following in the footsteps of Miss O who speaks of Heidegger's role of the teacher to let students learn and allow students to become (Aoki, 1993). This is the essence of the lived curriculum. I had to allow Laura, Ana, Arissa, and Marta to become.

Additionally, I found myself concerned that my students were learning languages of whiteness in a pre-dominantly Black country, seeing Spanish and French as languages of the original European countries. This meant that these languages were outside of these students' lived experiences. I decided then that I had to ensure that my students were introduced to the fact that these languages were not simply languages of white people, but also of people who looked just like them. In 2016, with Laura and her classmates, I introduced them to the French Muslim rapper's song "Il nous connaissent pas"(Translation: They do not know us) speaking to the alienation of young people. I used the song, to introduce the prescribed topic of Direct Object Pronouns, but this was not my only focus. We spoke about how they as adolescents felt and to what extent they could relate to the stories in the song from their own personal experience or knowing of others in situations similar to those depicted in the song. I then moved on to showing them the words of the song in French and asked them to provide a sight translation of their own. I asked them to identify the Object Pronouns and then moved on to showing them how the pronouns were used in the context of the French language and then examined the differences between the positioning of the pronouns between both languages. I was looking to reorient their thinking to see new perspectives, as Greene (1971) described the teacher's role, and to hopefully have them "lend the curriculum their life" (Greene, 1971, p. 262), for the curriculum is not simply to be experienced but to be lived. The curriculum for my students was then a symphony from cacophony. Each of their own experiences infused with this new experience becoming a part of each of them emerging with a curriculum of life and lives.

Aoki (1993) and Olson (2000) remind us that the lived curriculum is a curriculum of multiplicity, a story of lives as they intersect. It is an important consideration because as Greene (1971) reminds us:

> Curriculum, from the learner's standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp. Rarely does it signify possibility for him as an existing person, mainly concerned with making sense of his own lifeworld. (Greene, 1971, p. 255)

Having decided to protest, I deliberately ignored school requirements and the Head of Department's requirements for testing. I changed my focus from trying to teach them a curriculum read as official documents and focused instead on their experience in the classroom and the process of learning rather than on the outcomes of learning as measured by standardized tests.

This process was far more successful with the French group as a whole than the fourth form Spanish group, despite my best attempts, so one could not truthfully state that this group of Spanish students were transformed. Shifting students' thinking requires patience, as they are used to the traditional way of preparing for examination through drill and practice. I was calling students to shift from the known to the unknown, and this can be uncomfortable leading to resistance. The French third form group had a mixed outcome as some students continued to resist any attempt at becoming, concerned only about grades and the teacher as everything and all things. Yet I had reason to be happy with several students who became fully engaged with French and would seek to be fully and completely involved with classes—volunteering to take control of classroom activities under the guidance of the teacher. Indeed, while one can set forth one revolutionary action, its success is also dependent on the willingness of the students to participate in that revolution. One of the third form French students resisted me and my actions for nearly a year. It was not until near the end of the school year that she relented, and her performance improved dramatically. As Greene (1971) pointed out, when students find that their own conceptions of the world and its meaning no longer fit comfortably with the reality of their existence, they are then forced to confront the need for change.

Seeing the experiences of my students, I shared with the Head of Department (HoD) what I was doing. She indicated she already heard through the students but could not support my actions because this was not the route the school was taking. I also became concerned about students' career choices at the fourth form level being limiting. I sat and wrote a paper to my then principal to get the school to recognize the curriculum conceptualized as lived. I recommended that testing be de-emphasized and that subjects be pooled. Sadly, these were not acted upon then. No actions were taken on his part, not even bringing up the matters for a broader discussion with the staff. Disappointed as I was though not surprised, I did not broach the subject with other teachers in a specific sense. I did, however, discuss teaching in general with close colleagues and with members of my department. At least one colleague who was head of another department broached her teaching in a way that was not built on testing. While there was some broad agreement from other colleagues on a relational approach, the march and the drive toward testing as curriculum continued.

Not being able to control the actions of others, I could control my own, and so my protest continued on its long lonely road of subversion in action without

necessarily stating out loud what I was doing. My students were still performing well on examinations, and so there was no expressed concern about my methods. In many ways, it is most likely that teachers will have to be prepared to conduct some parts of their revolution quietly subverting the system from the inside. Though my protest continued it was largely unrecognized at the broader school level.

Implications of Actualizing the Lived Curriculum

For teachers, actualizing the lived curriculum is not a series of actions but a way of being. It means an adjustment to the way teachers think and teach as they seek to achieve curriculum ideals. It means that power is shared and that teachers are not always "the authority." The curriculum as plan is pervasive in Jamaica because many teachers, especially young teachers, are afraid to take bold action, as they fear being victimized. However, teachers and administrators are called upon to take gradual steps until the message permeates the schools and spaces in which they work.

For Teachers

If the lived curriculum is to be moved from the realm of the theoretical to the realm of the everyday, teachers must be introduced to *currere*. Pinar (1977) tells us that, through the method of *currere*, we are able to reflect on how we contribute to the maintenance of existing power structures. In Jamaica teachers themselves are products of colonial structures that sometimes give rise to unconscious biases and systems that oppress students in the classroom. Through reflection we can acquire the ability and power to make the necessary changes. Making such changes requires committing and re-committing to the protest against the alienating prescribed curriculum in Jamaica (Greene, 1971). *Currere* is one way of aiding teachers to re-attune, as it opens one up to reflection and self-critique and, hence, to making change. Through *currere* teachers can better see and understand who it is that they are. In this understanding, they may live a curriculum story that will allow them to understand that their students have their own stories. Every institution preparing teachers should introduce them to *currere* so that the lived curriculum can become fully actualized. The prescribed curriculum is nothing but a framework; true curriculum is lived out by students with their teachers and teachers with their students. Teachers must wage a battle against focusing on the curriculum as laid out in a plan or syllabus. Teachers must reorient themselves to the lived experience of the students in their care. This may mean choosing not to simply follow directions of others—possibly their own administrators—but rather being aware and alive to their respective pedagogic situations and act accordingly.

Each teacher needs to become aware of his or her students as individuals, recognising and acknowledging their individuality and building relationships that focus on the individual human being and not on the specific subject matter being taught. Greene (1971) suggested that the role of the teacher is to help students to combat meaninglessness, to open their eyes to seeing the world in new ways, and in so doing to make sense of the world in which they exist. However, before teachers can do this for their students, they must be able to do it for themselves. The teacher has to embody new assumptions reflective of her students and context while achieving the intended outcomes of the planned curriculum. In order to do this, the teacher must know each student. Moreover, the teacher needs at times to also step back from being *the* authoritative figure, allowing students to lead and discover and, hence, to become.

Teachers may need to protest the prescribed curriculum by directly engaging with their administrators in seeking to make change. They may need to engage in mass action

to ensure the quality of the student experience as the teachers of Oklahoma did during April 2 to April 11 of 2018. Those teachers may or may not know anything about the lived curriculum, but in that protest action, they were showing concern for the lived curriculum. It is up to each teacher in every classroom on the planet to fight to make the lived curriculum real. That fight may be in the individual classroom, adjusting one's ways of thinking and one's attitude to what curriculum is by being attuned to students and how the cultural environment of the classroom is designed.

For Administrators

Administrators need to recognize that the curriculum in school is not restricted to the subjects offered by the school and the respective syllabi. Administrators need to recognize that the students and teachers in the institutions they lead are living human beings with their own stories, and the school experience is only one part of those stories. Administrators need as well to listen to the voices of their teachers and students when they speak about the nature of experience within the school and to engage broader stakeholders to see how the lived experience of school may be improved. This should include school-based, co-operative, and collaborative curriculum planning. By working in this cooperative manner, giving voice to students and teachers and considering the totality of their experiences, we are as Aoki (1993) described it, legitimizing the lived curriculum.

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Spatializing my Researcher Identity in Higher Education

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As an Indonesian lecturer and now an international graduate student who is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the United States, I found that research is an integral part of defining who I am as an academic and who I want to be within my academic community. Henkel (2005) argued that research is the ultimate currency in higher education, since it legitimizes one to be a member of his or her academic community. In other words, without research, society cannot fully identify me as either a lecturer or a graduate student. As I live for and thrive through academic success in the complexities of academic communities and its cultures, my researcher identity has turned out not to be a single static unity nor to stand in a vacuum. Instead, my identity is discursively and progressively enacted in my on-going teaching and research work, which interacts with academic discourse over time and space. In this article, I focus on the spatial orientation—focusing on my shuttling to different contexts of higher education—to frame my research identity construction. My research identity then becomes an on-going process that is situated and evolves within space, and as a result, it becomes versatile (Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). This article is my metaphorical space to reflect on and articulate my researcher identity construction as I shuttle from one space to the other.

Before narrating my research journey between and among different places, I define the terms of researcher identity, research, and space that are employed in this article. To define research identity, I follow Clarke's (2009) notion, denoting that identity is mutually intertwined with certain discourse and communities. In higher education, teaching and research are entwined as the unified professional work of lecturers; thus, the lecturer's identity can be marked as a teacher-researcher identity (Taylor, 2017). Borg (2013) refered to the term *research* in teaching work as *teacher research*, representing any research done in school or higher education to enhance the understanding of teachers' work. In this article, my research work relates to my learning to conduct research and write academic publications in higher education. A professional space plays a critical construct for my researcher identity formation. The notion of space here is against a long-standing traditional view: space as pre-given physical structures (Madikizela-Madiya, 2014; McGregor, 2004). Space as a fixed context is disruptive because it excludes people's interactions and only values material structures. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space links with the integrated semiotic entities that accommodate symbolic relations and interactions between human and materials. The idea of space here is broadening from the physical sphere to virtual, metaphorical, social, and even personal space as long as it gives meaning to individuals, or rather, space provides opportunities and resources to influence and be influenced by humans and material interactions. Treating space in higher education as significant in the process of lecturer identity construction means acknowledging the contributions of any integrated physical and social resources and interactions that impact a lecturer's work.

Identity takes on continual identification and negotiation within the process of living and shuttling between spaces. Hanauer (2010) noted that a temporal physical site produces identity, and when individuals change place, they reconstruct and renegotiate their identity. Similarly, Khademi-Vidra (2014) defined space as the site for identity performance. As such, when individuals move from one place to the other, they will

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situate, construct, and re-construct a sense of identity through their perceptions and act in relation to physical, socio-cultural environments embodied in space. Lefebvre (1991) employed the term representational space, where space becomes dynamic and individuals can adjust the existing space and define that space with a new meaning to suit their needs. This representational space echoes the notion of spatializing. Low (1996) defined spatializing as the way individuals "locate, both physically and conceptually, social relations, and social practice in social [representational] space" (p. 861). In other words, lecturers can spatialize their work by viewing space as the representational space where they locate their work and actively re-define the meaning of space for their work and, accordingly, their identities.

In the context of Indonesian higher education, lecturers are required to do three related tasks to maintain their professional standing: teaching, research, and service. In doing so, lecturers travel to different spaces and spatialize their work. The ways in which they utilize their space to accommodate their work contribute to the way they see themselves as professionals in higher education. In this article, I narrate my own spatializing research journey. I realize the three lecturer tasks are treated as equally important in my institution. However, I give particular attention to my research development and identity, since research is highly regarded as the professional currency in the wider academic community. In this article, I articulate my vulnerability and development through different spaces in the context of higher education.

Spatializing my Researcher Identity Through the Lens of the *Currere* Method

I use the *currere* method in spatializing my researcher identity to make sense of how my it is entangled with and evolving within spaces. According to Pinar (1975), the *currere* method is "the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal," "the viewing of what is conceptualized through time," and "the complex relation between the temporal and the conceptual" (p. 1). This method can help me to frame the construction of researcher identity through complex research learning processes as I travel between different spaces. As I identify the spaces where I move and reside temporarily, I aim to explore the spatial impacts on my research scholarship development vis-à-vis researcher identity. Each space represents the amalgamation of physical and social integrations that support and constrain the process of transition and transformation from a novice to a professional researcher. To contextualize the spatializing process of my research identity, I introduce the place where I resided and its popular tagline. Each space corresponds to a particular period: past, present, or future. In each space, I reflect on my strengths and weaknesses as a researcher, recognize constraints and affordances provided by semiotic resources within spaces, and develop a strategy for doing future research in higher education. In my narratives below, I begin my spatial journey with a poem, reflecting on myself as a novice lecturer and researcher. I then turn to my first trip to Australia. My journey continues as I pursue my doctoral degree in the United States, and this journey will continue as I return to my hometown, Ambon, Indonesia.

I came to this ivory tower
A place I called my professional home
carrying small baggage embellished with a bachelor's degree in education
I had no clue that my teaching practice toolbox
Was incommensurate with demands of research labor
the academic currency that determined my value as a professional
I felt unsuited to and hopeless in my profession

Coz of my lack of research competence
I then chose to drag my small baggage again
now embroidered with four years of teaching experience
To travel to different spaces
I carried hope to gain more than just a research tool kit
I expected more than just an article with my name on it
I wanted to understand who I am within research
Who is not objectified by research
But the one who owns research as part of her being (IOT).

Australia: The Land of [Cultivating my Researcher Identity] Down Under

Australia is construed as the country in the Southern Hemisphere, below other countries around the globe.

I embarked on my first actual research journey when I pursued my master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at one of the universities in Melbourne, Australia. Coming from a space with limited access and support systems to develop my research skills, I was mesmerized when I observed the physical environment of my new campus. At first, I thought that spacious and high-tech classrooms, study places, and a library would speed up my learning process. In reality, these facilities did not provide an instant change in my perspective. Instead, I had to interact and make good use of them, which took me some time as I learned to leverage all these semiotic resources. Due to my unfamiliarity, I sometimes felt overwhelmed and alienated when I tried to use the facilities despite any support and training provided. But then I kept telling myself that, if I wanted to instigate change, then I had cultivate versatility and be ready for change within myself. I gained basic research skills, such as searching for textbooks and references in the library system and engaging more with classroom discussion and study groups. This whole process supported my writing for coursework assignments and prepared me for larger research projects.

Fieldwork was introduced as soon as I started doing my thesis research. The research was rather short but complex because it took only four months for me to conduct research in my hometown and to write a thesis. I followed my advisor's advice to select my home university and colleagues as my research site and participants. This decision was based on the research problems found in my program and the practicality of accessing the research participants. By doing so, I could address the prevailing issues, initiate the solutions, and advocate for my colleagues and my program. I acknowledged that I faced many uncommon challenges in the research site, like time constraints in data collection or subjectivity as an insider in my research site. Thus, I decided to be more vulnerable and open to continuous learning and adjustment during data collection and analysis so I could build my research credibility. Finally, I wrote up my complete thesis without any significant trouble and successfully defeated my fear of research. This hands-on experience in thesis research increased my confidence and cultivated my research skills as a novice researcher.

Ambon: Sojourn in my Far-Flung Island

People sometimes cannot locate Ambon on a map, since it is either a tiny dot or missing altogether.

After finishing my master's program, I went back to my home university in Ambon, carrying my research tool kit and a promise to myself to be more active and productive in research in my professional space. Madikizela-Madiya (2014) argued that space, like higher education, can have a lack of neutrality. This means that my aspiration might not

always match the contextual condition influenced by the sociopolitical tensions in my home university. The physical situation, with no good internet access and facilities for research, made engaging in research impractical. I encountered additional issues as soon as I was assigned to teaching tasks. As a junior lecturer with a newly minted master's degree, I had to accept an overloaded teaching assignment that required more than 50 hours of teaching per week. I was overwhelmed with preparation, teaching, and assessment. I felt drained and found it difficult to focus on research work. I had intended for my classroom to be an experimental space of teacher research, as I could bring improvement to my own teaching from research findings. Nevertheless, the excessive teaching hours limited my creativity, my research with curriculum, in team teaching, and with students. As a result, my passion to do research turned out to be a missing piece of my whole being as a lecturer.

Regardless of the challenges in my work site, I attempted to turn my thesis into a journal article to be published in one of the international journals in the English Education field. I was very shocked after learning that my article was rejected. The experience was even worse when I received harsh comments by the reviewers expecting me to seek help from "a native speaker" to edit my language. I felt downhearted at the time, because this incident unveiled the cruelty of the academic community. I was surprised how this community still upheld the mythical discourse of perfect English by "native speakers" who were considered as saviors for redeeming the language of international writers. I told myself that this experience would not derail my goal of becoming a good researcher and decided to focus on writing for conferences and seminars.

I then ventured to look for and create my own research space beyond the classroom with a group of students. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) interpreted space as temporal based on the action taken within the time boundaries. Instead of using a classroom as my research space, I developed my metaphorical space by engaging students who were eager to do research outside of the classroom. My office functioned as a research space where I was able to share my research knowledge and tool kits and conduct research collaboratively with my students. In this route, I chose to publish a short article for a research conference to redeem my academic work. I was not fully satisfied since I did not accomplish what I dreamed of after gaining my master's degree—the ambition to write and publish articles in an academic journal. Although I let nature take its course and continued working endless teaching hours, I knew had taken a small step toward doing research. I realized that this process was not enough for my research development. I had to find a way to develop my researcher identity such that it would support my teaching labor.

The United States: The Land of the Free [Research Space]

The United States is claimed as the land of the free, where people can gain opportunity and fortune.

After more than three years working in my home university, I realized it was time for me to free myself and looked for a space to grow my research passion and capacity. Thus, I decided to pursue my Ph.D. degree, and I am currently studying in the Composition and Applied Linguistics program in one of the public universities in western Pennsylvania. By shuttling beyond my working place, especially into a new higher education environment as a graduate student, I believed that I could have full access to more research prospects that would aid in my discovery of my whole being as a researcher. Madikizela-Madiya (2014) argued that individuals can develop their potential within a supportive physical environment. So, I traveled to a new sphere to

look for the land of the free with available research space to leverage my research skills and potential with opportunities, access, or materials.

At first, when I entered my new program, I found that the conducive physical environments were similar to my previous master's program. The physical facilities such as libraries, study rooms, classrooms, and buildings created a supportive and convenient learning atmosphere. However, I realized that the expectations of students in my doctoral program were higher compared to my previous master's program. Ph.D. students are expected to be intellectually independent in our learning, development, and research. Most courses in my current doctoral program have introduced me to the path of the research-based project by incorporating theories, practical experiences, and research interests. This space was ideal for my academic growth, yet it became a site of struggle. My academic skills were not capable of what my academic context expected. In the past, I wrote academic articles addressing effective teaching methods or strategies to satisfy my academic audience back in my home country. In contrast, during my doctoral program, I was expected to critically interrogate and challenge my own beliefs and praxis, something I had never been asked to do. I was perplexed and chose to be silent while deep down inside I battled with myself whether or not to unravel and voice my vulnerability.

I was fortunate to have a great academic support system of professors who guided me in growing academic maturity, as I slowly opened up to exploring who I was as a writer and researcher. My professors encouraged us, the international graduate students, to make good use of our writing center as a safe space to support our academic writing. I have learned that different spaces enact different writing discourses; thus, I had to negotiate my own voice within a different space of writing. In my learning journey, my professors also fostered critical ideas to spark a discussion and collaborative works for research. They gave constructive feedback for our coursework papers and suggested revising them and turning them into publishable articles for journals or conferences. I was excited to know that I could learn how to write for publication. My classmates became my research partners as we shared our research interests in the physical classroom, our zoom meetings, or the coffee shop. This journey taught me that learning can occur anywhere, from the classroom to the coffee shop. This practice has affirmed what McGregor (2004) stated regarding how space is "made" and "re-made" by combining materials and social practices (p. 354). A coffee shop becomes a work site for an individual like me who personalizes this place as a working site for writing my dissertation.

During this new chapter of expanding my research space, I learned to courageously send my papers to academic conventions, such as the TESOL Convention and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4Cs). The first time when I presented my research in these prestigious forums, I was very nervous, because I met so many big names in my field. Those scholars taught me about humility as I met them in person and shared my research interests with them. I felt validated and became more positive and confident about what I am doing, which led to me sending my manuscripts to several top-tier journals. Although I still experienced some rejection, I was beyond happy to accept it. My happiness came from reviewers' constructive feedback on the content of my articles. I came to believe that the academic publication process has some sense of fairness. I then rerouted my navigation. I took ownership of publication by choosing a good journal that can give me the freedom to express my voice, rather than just journals that are most popular. I value not just the product of my publication work, but also my endeavors to publish them. This stage of my early publications was very crucial, because it helped me to shape my identity as a progressive researcher.

Ambon: A [Research] Light From the East

Ambon has been labeled as "A light from the East" like the sun rises in the East, showing the optimism of life.

As I am going to finish my Ph.D. study in the near future, I plan to return to my hometown, Ambon, to continue working in my university as an educator and a researcher. I envision my future path of being and becoming a researcher who actively negotiates the demands and needs of my academic community as my ecological space (Billot, 2010). This aspiration keeps me motivated to focus on what I have learned and done with my research and how I can integrate it with my teaching praxis in my context. Therefore, I will raise my awareness of any existing affordances in my work site and capitalize on them to accommodate my research. For instance, I will begin by introducing an autoethnography as one of the forms of qualitative research to my students. I can ask the students to interrogate their own literacy trajectory and write an autoethnography as a way to understand their own learning and identity as a language learner. This essay can be an example of how they may explore and narrate their journey in a particular topic. Another instance is building a research partnership in my program. I will invite my academic communities, including my colleagues and students, to initiate the research group to foster the habits of writing academically in collaborative ways. With the heavy teaching workload, the research group allows a safe atmosphere and a support system for lecturers and students to share knowledge as they work collaboratively in conducting research.

Another aspiration that I aim to achieve is to benefit from a network with my professors and university in the United States by creating a partnership with my home university. One way is by providing support in the establishment of a writing center at my home university. With the era of the digital age, a geographical territory does not limit any collaboration from different parties in different countries. During this time of the Covid-19 Pandemic, people in my hometown rely more on digital platforms, like Zoom or Google Classroom, as learning spaces. Thus, I will make use of this digital platform for conducting webinars from the United States or other places to my small island, Ambon. The physical space has evolved into a digital space that shows the incorporation of technology and people for the sake of communication. This digital platform also reflects a representational space, suggesting that a learning space is no longer a brick and mortar institution. The virtual space has now been utilized for people to study together without any physical presence in one space. These examples of my aspiration are the forms of my plans that I aim to apply upon my arrival at my home university. I believe that I will continue adjusting and negotiating my path to build my representational space with the support of my environment regardless of the possible roadblocks that may cause a detour in that journey.

My journey in constructing and re-constructing my researcher identity has not finished yet. It will continuously advance and transform through my travel in different spaces. Space has become a significant construct in my researcher identity formation. Hence, I will keep seeking opportunity and access to travel from one space to another, physical to metaphorical ones. From those spaces, I can experience more inquiries, bring the research learning back to my classrooms, and inspire more teacher-researchers to be confident in doing research to improve their teaching.

One day,
I will return to my own ivory tower
Carrying my suitcase with an emblem

of the humble heart of a learner
And of the sharp-witted mind of an inquirer
In my suitcase, I packed my research tool kits
Wrapped with my struggles and achievements
As I bring to the classroom
I ain't talking just about my work
But sharing my spatial journey
To inspire the young to go on their path
And create their own story of being a researcher.

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Learning Empathy: A *Currere* Reflection on Parenting, Medicine, and Education

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Currere as Methodology

Currere, a Latin verb translated as "to run," reconceptualizes curriculum in its literal meaning as the "running of a course" (Maxwell, 2002, p. 13). *Currere*, in this light, may be conceptualized as curriculum realized through lived experience. Gibbs (2013) described *currere* as professional knowledge "enacted in practice rather than enshrined in propositional knowledge" (p. 148). Pinar (1975) described *currere* as "the complex relation between the temporal and the conceptual" and the "self in its evolution and education" (p. 1). Grumet (1975) also highlighted the lived, temporal aspect of *currere* in her view of *reconceptualization* as central to the educative experience and as a dialogue between the professional and the environment. To reconceptualize is "to update our abstractions" and "reform" the world (Grumet, 1975, p. 2). The work of *currere* emerges where philosophy, politics, and our lived experiences intersect and are engaged for growth.

This autobiographical narration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991; Grumet, 1990) bridges right-left brain creativity and logic (Goleman, 2006; Siegel & Hartzell, 2014) to connect past and present meaning from personal and professional lived experiences (Zhang, 2013). Practicing the work of *currere,* this reflection engages the four stages of Pinar's (1975) methodology—the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical. This *currere* reflection practices past-present-future analysis across personal and professional contexts in a horizontal (Pinar, 1975), rhizome-like storytelling format (Stewart, 2015) to synthesize experiences confirming and maintaining an inner character quality first learned from a parent no longer physically present, a quality valuable to the researcher's present and future personal and professional contexts: empathy.

Parenting

In this essay, I reflect on my mother as both person and professional to realize empathy as a strength transferable and valuable across contexts. In many ways, empathy toward others begins with a felt empathy toward ourselves and the challenges faced. In this space, we can set and work toward dreams that initially may seem hard to reach. My mother's empathy toward others perhaps began with a learned empathy toward herself, leading to a quiet confident work ethic in working toward her early dream of becoming a doctor.

My mom worked her way through college and medical school to become a professor of medicine and to help establish an adolescent medicine program that became regarded as one of the top programs of its kind in the nation. For this, she received an annual award given to a few women across the state for their professional leadership. This was no small feat for someone who had walked to and from elementary school each day as there was no other form of transportation in the small southern Indiana town, and her family did not own a car. As the oldest of seven children, my mom took to heart her self-selected role to pave a path for others. Yet, her capacity to exercise empathy remains the brightest of her achievements—a practice engaged as a mom, a physician, and eventually as a patient. Parenting is a wonderful arena to learn the practice of empathy. As I grew up, in seasons of struggle to discover my own abilities, interests, and identity, adolescent

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criticism at times became a defense against my own fears faced in that journey. I now peer over the horizon of raising two pre-teen daughters and can only hope I picked up some of mom's parental resiliency. In an afternoon of gardening with my then 10-year old, I was feeling pretty good about our shared quality time. Heeding advice from our neighbor, I reached to clip some over-flowering grass and jolted upon hearing, "That is *so* barbaric!" While pleased to witness my daughter's growing sense of eco-justice, I was challenged to receive this descriptor in gracious stride, mumbling something about being kind with our words as our mommy-daughter gardening moment came to a close. I realized in that moment that the *tween* years had begun. I worked to exercise a skill my own mom modeled so effortlessly—empathy. In many cases, a critical word comes from a place of inner criticism. I took a deep breath, let go of the criticism without and within, and tried to return to a non-barbaric self-image.

I was in awe one month later when we returned to our front yard with Grandpa, who explained the importance of pruning to support new plant growth in a way that our justice-oriented pre-teen accepted. This memory serves as a reminder that some relational moments benefit from a third party, whose neutrality holds both actors in place long enough to realize their complementarity and connectedness, to serve as empathy's activating agent. The original grass-clipping moment became a source of humor with empathy's restorative property.

In some contexts, the professional may be called upon to serve as such an agent to restore the relationship of a patient to one's environment or a student to the classroom setting. Across contexts, empathy may restore connection and transform loss into soil for new growth. Adolescence is an insecure stage, floating between childhood and adulthood and with fleeting footing. This life stage also provides opportunity for parents, physicians, and teachers to develop and demonstrate empathy and understanding toward the individuals navigating the awkward space of moving from agency-less to agency-full living. This development of agency does not just happen between ages 10–24, but repeats itself across seasons of the lifespan. Learning to cultivate empathy for adolescents also provides opportunity to learn and re-learn empathy in our own lives, as a vital lifelong capacity. As a person extends empathy to children, patients, or students, empathy is also extended to oneself.

Empathy lets go of the need to judge and embraces the opportunity to understand. As a professional skill, empathy is less interested in measurement and more interested in restoration. Empathy does not find its fullest expression in comparison, but in relationship. It is a skill vital not only in parenting, but also in professional contexts.

Medicine

Engaging *currere* as autobiographical inquiry, this reflection explores empathy as a quality needed as much in professional contexts as personal contexts. Merging Pinar's *currere* with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic mode of thinking "displaces binary logic for open pluralistic thinking" to engage autobiography as rhizomatic curriculum inquiry (Stewart, 2015, p. 1169). This autobiographical reflection also builds branch-like connections across time and across contexts, rather than following linear modes of life progression or thought. This reflection explores the practice of empathy in medicine to understand better its role in the professional work of a parent and how she was able to transfer this skill to her role as a patient.

The physician's committed spirit of empathy is articulated well by David Kessler (as quoted in National Geographic Society, 2015), pediatrician, lawyer, author, administrator, and Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (1990-1997): "There is within each one of us a *potential for goodness* beyond our imagining; for *giving*

which seeks no reward; for listening *without judgment*; for loving *unconditionally*" (p. 91, emphasis added). My mom sent me this quote, from a book of inspirational quotes that I had given to her as a holiday gift. Only two months later, this book became a source of encouragement during a tough season in her life, when my mom suddenly found herself battling uterine cancer with surgery, chemotherapy, nutrition, and exercise. She became cancer free in less than five months. This medical miracle was the product of hard work combined with medical knowledge and experience, along with an intuitive wisdom regarding the layered complexities involved in the healing process. My mom texted me our daily inspirational quotes, remaining the steadfast supportive spirit that she has always been in my life. It was as if she were showing me empathy in this shared struggle, first finding it herself. This generosity of spirit persistently looks for, sees, and draws out the best in others. In a season of suffering, her strengths shone brighter than ever. It was awe-inspiring to observe my mom navigate this new time-space of becoming a patient with grace and develop an even deeper agency than what grew within her as a practicing physician. It was a blossoming that I will always draw upon, in seeing the most capable of professionals endure a humbling life trial and come out on the other side stronger, wiser, and with a far greater regard for the beauty and complexity of healing. To reach this place, I believe my mom had to learn to practice the same empathy toward herself that she so naturally offered to others. She practiced acknowledging her genuine needs, listening to her own experience, and recognizing new insights.

A remarkable shift observed in my mom's perspective and practice in this journey was movement toward a more integrated, system-based approach toward health than even that embraced as a physician of an inter-disciplinary adolescent medicine program. While Western medicine has offered great capacity to identify and eliminate "problems" in health, these measures applied alone can add to health problems. Offering balance, for example, a system-based approach might emphasize community education for preventive strategies to support holistic health. My mom's response was to apply her nearly 50 years of experience in American medicine with an integrated approach she was just learning to value. She combined these two approaches by first benefiting from surgery and chemotherapy, followed by intentional and rigorous application of nutrition, exercise, and acupuncture. Each of the latter holistic approaches recognized and strengthened the body's natural health-enhancing capacities. Acupuncture enhances neurotrophil repair work (Manni, Albanesi, Guaragna, Paparo, & Aloe, 2010). Curcumin, the natural chemical and supplement found in turmeric, sends excess carcinogenic white cells into natural apoptosis or cell death (Bengmark, 2006; Zheng, Ekmekcioglu, Walch, Tang, & Grimm, 2004). Distance running results in the production of nitric oxide, causing the body to treat chronic inflammation naturally (Lorne, 2008). My mom had to exercise empathy for her own struggle and unique journey to tune into these emerging insights and be able to apply what she was learning.

Exercising *currere* by actively listening to and learning from one's unique lived experiences takes more work than following pre-determined standardized practices. Empathy is a powerful tool that shifts focus away from simply identifying the targeted problem and enables *understanding and identifying with the person*—the child, patient, student, or other—who is experiencing challenge in some aspect of development, health, or learning. A targeted approach aims to remove what is "bad" but in the process may damage or eliminate other surrounding context important to the system. Empathy comes along side of the child, patient, or student to inspire and strengthen an innate capacity to address challenges met in one's development, health, or education.

Education

This reflection considers life experiences that have contributed to my development as a professional and charts the connected rhizomatic (Stewart, 2015) lessons in empathy gleaned in my personal and professional worlds—and recognizes the cross-field importance of this quality. As an educator-researcher, I began my career as a high school English teacher and English as a New Language program coordinator. It became clear in supporting teens, particularly those on the margins of society, how powerful *regard* can be, how encouraging when regard is wielded well, and yet how destructive when handled carelessly. Cobo (2013) wrote that learning in the 21st century is primarily about soft skill development, particularly the skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. As adolescents face more "soft power" relational challenges, in-person and online, in classrooms and in their social worlds, it is important to help teens cultivate the ability to extend empathy to themselves when a peer, teacher, parent, or other community member may cut them down.

Goleman's (2006) social intelligence theory suggests that empathy is integral to our human evolutionary composition and concludes that empathy involves *social awareness* and *facility*. *Social awareness* includes being receptive to and feeling other's feelings with an understanding that connects one to the broader world, while *social facility* is the ability to shape social outcomes, particularly by caring for and meeting others' needs. Goleman's research demonstrated, neurologically, that we depend on one another, relationally. Likewise, Brown's (2007, 2012) sociological research showed empathy's power to connect and counter isolation that may result from internalized criticism or judgment. Brown (2007) described resiliency as the ability to receive and extend empathy, with less concern for "right-wrong" narratives and a recognition for the potential value of mistakes.

Education research in language learning (Gottlieb, 2016) also emphasizes the importance of allowing children the freedom to make and learn from their mistakes as a vital component in the learning process. In a global era of standardization (Spring, 2008), empathy is a virtue needed more than ever within and across classrooms to cultivate the ability to connect with one another in meaningful collaborations, rather than comparative competition (Liu, 2015; Renshaw, 2013). It is helpful to recognize ways in which cultures conceptualize and apply empathy similarly and uniquely (Pang, 2005) and to appreciate these diverse approaches as part of our cultural tapestry (Gay, 2010). It is helpful to *receive* empathy in order to extend empathy thoughtfully to others and authentically guide adolescents in this. Giving and receiving empathy is a culturally embedded practice. In some cultural lenses, to receive empathy from another *is* a generous act, validating the relationship and the person. To give and receive empathy from another involves seeing and welcoming that person into our lives. As educators engage the quality of empathy, it is vital to consider the cultural lens through which one's students might experience this practice and the extent to which it is or is not part of their family's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Currere as Continual Renewal

Empathy is a valuable developmental skill and pedagogical tool that involves generous regard toward fellow humans viewed with appreciation for their strengths and consideration for their challenges to build our relational support networks (Brown, 2006). This was my mom's daily *currere* as a person and as a professional, as a mom and a physician: using her past experiences to muster the empathy needed to see and

appreciate the strengths in others. This was not a choice she made once and programmed herself to repeat, but a daily lived experience that continued to shape who she became and, as a result, who others in her orbit might become. In her own personal-professional journey, Adams (2014) described *currere* as retrospective examination of "my experiences and my actions in light of my new learning, thereby changing my sense of self in the present" and resetting the "boundaries of my imagination for my future (p. 8). Mezirow (1991) advised that new knowledge cannot be consumed by the intellect alone, but must become a part of "our hearts, souls, and bodies" and "interactions with others in the world" (p. 93). In this light, perhaps the only professional knowledge that is fully internalized is that which extends across personal and professional realms. This suggests that professional schools across fields may benefit from greater curricular connection across the personal and professional. In applying this insight, I am grateful for my mom's lessons in empathy and hope to practice routinely their applications as a person and a professional, as a mom and an educator-researcher.

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Dear Math Letter to Self: Student *Currere*

By Mary Anne Webb
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The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.
—Mark Van Doren

The story you are about to read is true. The names have not been changed because those names give voice to the voiceless and empowerment to those once thought of as powerless. Those names have become allies to the work of changing the structure of school as it has been and is currently for many students. Their words have not been changed or edited for grammar to reflect their voices and personal experiences.

It was the summer of 2009 when I was introduced to *currere* by Dr. Sheri Leafgren while taking EDL 780, Curriculum Planning at Miami University while pursuing a PhD. Little did I know at the time that this introduction to *currere* would be what I needed to finally come to terms with my negative perception of being a high school drop-out. In fact, as I reflect on this transformative experience, I think of it as taking a bandage off a wound that had finally healed. The scar and the memory of the injury are still there, but it is healed and serves as a reminder of what makes me unique in my thinking about life and the journey of education having endless possibilities.

Curriculum theory's Reconceptualist Movement, exemplified by William Pinar's (1975) notion of *currere*, shifted the field's emphasis from making curriculum to understanding it. *Currere* as a process is a reflective opportunity to go back to the beginning and project into the future, while intentionally examining the in-between spaces of our educational experiences with the ultimate goal of synthesizing the parts to understand the overall meaning.

Currere allows teachers to develop self-portraits, which include educational experiences, dreams, and the imagination of teaching. Through telling of our experiences, we can understand and shape our practices. Understanding curriculum as a strategy that transforms experiences into useable knowledge helps us to develop our practices so that they are responsive to the needs of students and to ourselves as educators. Deconstructing personal histories and stories may allow teachers to gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege. By examining our practices, we might also develop strategies and practices for dismantling oppressive systems and structures so that our students may be empowered to find their voices and become active agents of learning and allies in demanding that the structure of school be changed to meet their individual and cultural needs.

The Practitioner

As a classroom practitioner and researcher, my goal is to go above and beyond the standardized curriculum to engage, encourage, and inspire my students while introducing them to the world at large and sharing the endless possibilities for their future. This creates a dichotomy between my requirements to teach the standardized curriculum in the traditional manner and my desire as a professional to decide what knowledge is of most worth and how that knowledge should be delivered. Projects and things that are of interest to students take time, and administrators generally want to see worksheets, textbooks, and, now, students spending hours online interacting with the mandated curriculum in preparation for state mandated testing.

Webb, M. A. (2020). Dear math letter to self: Student *currere. Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 48–55.

Through critical reflection and identity construction, teachers can improve instruction and, thereby, improve student learning and achievement in any discipline. This kind of reflection gives us the opportunity to share our truth and to expose the intricacies of what it is really like to be in the classroom with 30 budding personalities, the care we give, and the joy we share when they discover the true meaning of learning.

School has become a place where many students (especially students of color and those identified as economically disadvantaged) do not want to be. Rather than changing the schools, we demand that students change to fit the capitalistic structure of school that would rather force them out by removing their cultures and cultural practices (languages, values, customs, preferences for reading and music) and ignoring their interests than meet them where they are, encouraging, inspiring, and coaching them to be their best selves.

Each summer, I purposefully reflect upon how to enhance the mandatory curriculum I deliver. How can I create an experience for my students that is indelible while promoting authentic learning that not only supports their academic growth, but their social and emotional growth? How do I get students to think differently not only about the math they are learning, but to reflect on that learning and make meaning of it that is transformational? How do I get them excited about the possibilities for the future? I must be honest; my goal is always to provide my students with an experience that was better than the math experience they had the previous year and probably the best they will have for the rest of their school careers. Unfortunately, this is an easy task. I know that I am the only teacher in my school who plans a field trip, and sometimes two, every month. I am the only teacher who teaches math but has more resources for projects from every branch of science and engineering than all of our science and math teachers in the district. Students will often forget a great lecture, but they will almost always remember a great experience. Critical to this notion is that experience can lead to learning and, therefore, transformation.

"There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education" (Dewey, 1938, p. 20). Throughout the 20th century, John Dewey's concept of learning through experience has been valued as an important foundation in education. He called for education to be grounded in real experiences and rejected the notion that schools should focus on repetitive, rote memorization. Dewey's philosophy of experience is the basis of a curriculum that leads to growth and values. New experiences are usually acquired when past experiences interact with the present and are filled with educational meanings and educational materials. Dewey (1938) said that experience "includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played" and is the "total social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged" (p. 44). Teachers must be familiar with and understand students' background knowledge in order to design and facilitate a lesson interlinking past experiences and new knowledge. While Dewey (1938) theorized that the basic tenet required for learning was experience, he also believed that reflection was a key component in making an experience worthwhile. Thus, Dewey believed that experience and reflection were both required for an experience to lead to true learning for future application. This instructional model teaches students how to apply information to real-world situations and facilitates greater retention of what is learned. Students remember what they learned because they see meaning in what they do, and it provides them with an opportunity to acknowledge and demonstrate that they are good at something. This is juxtaposed to what Friere (2005) called "banking education," which our current education system subscribes to, in which our students learn by rote memorization and are treated as empty vessels into which the teacher deposits knowledge (like money in a bank).

Dear Math Letter – The Assignment

This project used Pinar's process of *currere* to provide a lens for my students to reflect on their educational experiences with math (regressive), imagine future possibilities (progressive), examine the relationship between the past, present, and future (analytic), and create new ways of thinking about their educational experiences (synthesis). The *currere* method was used to deconstruct past and present experiences with mathematics by 7th grade students as defined by Pinar and Grumet's (1976) work. These experiences became what Pinar described as their "data source" and served as the foundation for their writing.

Historically, many students, especially those classified as economically and educationally disadvantaged, fear mathematics. In fact, some just hate mathematics. They feel that they aren't good at mathematics, they don't believe they can do it, they don't see the value of it, and they often fail to put forth much effort. As early as 3rd grade, these students have been labeled by teachers as incompetent, unmotivated, cognitively deficient, mathematically illiterate, and as less than ideal learners relative to other student groups. These students come to my classroom with fragile mathematical identities. Math holds an elitist role in most schools in the United States, which holds that only those who are gifted can "do" math. According to Boaler and Dweck (2016),

> When mathematics is taught with an attitude of elitism, and it is held up as being harder than other subjects and suitable only for the gifted few, a tiny subset of those who could achieve in mathematics—and the scientific subjects which require mathematics—do so. When this elitist idea is combined with stereotypical ideas of who has the gift, harsh inequities are produced. (p. 95)

Many teachers, perhaps unknowingly, practice and perpetuate math elitism. They may give greater attention and encouragement to those who are more gifted, leaving everyone else with negative assumptions about themselves. Therefore, many students are excluded from the opportunity to learn and develop an affinity for math or given the encouragement to pursue their academic passions. This math elitism results in students experiencing anxiety, avoidance, exclusion, and helplessness. My job as an educator is to build and repair this broken relationship and to work to eliminate elitism in mathematics. This project was an attempt to encourage students to uncover, discover, explore, and reclaim their relationship with their mathematics experience.

Students in my 7th grade math class were asked to revisit their math past and reflect on and write about their present experience/relationship with math as they wrote a letter to themselves. Students were asked to think about their experience in math class the previous year. I explained that we generally don't experience things in isolation and that our experiences often include other people, happen in a location, and can be physical or emotional, making us feel come kind of way. Because they were middle school students, I didn't want them to get stuck on writing about their teachers, who they may have liked or not, and miss the opportunity to reflect on their learning and making meaning of it, so they were encouraged not to think about the teacher, just the kinds of things (projects/activities and field trips) they experienced and then compare them to the current school year. They were asked to describe how their experiences shaped their thoughts and actions and how those experiences affected who they could be in the future. I asked them if they had changed the way they think and feel about math as a result of their experiences. The students were given this assignment in the fall when school began. I felt it was important to capture their thoughts about their 6th grade math experiences early in the school year before they forgot the most significant details. In the spring

after testing, I asked them to go back and edit their writing from the fall so that they could write about their experiences from their 7th grade year. This self-reflective process allowed students to find their voices while enabling them to link meaning to experience. It aimed to help students become more confident in their skills, abilities, and self-esteem related to mathematics achievement, as well as their social and emotional growth.

While this work was primarily focused on how it befitted students, it also was beneficial to me as their teacher as I was able to use their reflections to examine my own practices. In *Teacher Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Poetter (2014) cited Dewey as "calling for teachers to study their own work and to report their findings to colleagues as a means for understanding and improving education" (p. 95). He went on to make a profound statement, "those who know the most about teaching and learning (teachers!) should produce knowledge about it" (p. 95). The ultimate goal of teacher leadership is to improve the quality of education to which all children have access, to shape curriculum and practices that directly meet the needs of each student.

The Letters

(Letters were not edited in order to preserve the students' voices)

Dear Kaniyah,

Last year I didn't learn very much because we had so much distractions and the teacher would go too fast when doing a lesson. So therefore, I had a rough time concentrating and understanding all the concepts that were being taught to me. My experience with math was bad last year so, it caused me to give up on math and not like it. So, coming into 7th grade I didn't even want to attempt math because last year I barely learned anything that encouraged me to like math.

The thing that was great about this year was that I focused a lot this year. We did amazing projects that helped us with math. My teacher taught us slow and made sure I knew what to do. I learned integers, circumference, and how to do word problems. Word problems were the hardest thing for me to do, but we got through it and now I get it, and I would rather do a word problem then a regular problem. We also went on great field trips such as: Morehead State University, Golden Corral, we went to the Aronoff Center to see a one man play called ¨Adam Clayton Powell ¨and more. I had the best experience in those field trips. We also met wonderful people along the way, and I really loved that in particular because now I know when I get older if I need help with something or a second opinion I can ask them and I know I will get the best advice. Last year was not like this at all. We didn't do any projects; we didn't go on any field trips, and my math skills were horrible. I didn't get the learning experience that I needed, and I didn't push myself to my full potential. Field trips are important to my math experience because we learn more than just math it mixed math with history with fun etc.

My advice to myself is to work hard, keep a good attitude, stay smart and don't get distracted and to STAY FOCUSED. It is important for me to follow this advice when I get older because I'm already smart but when I really focus and push myself, I will be great and wealthy in life. In the future I hope to be wealthy having a good car. I want to be able to buy what I want and supply stuff for my family also. I don't want to have to struggle or ask people for anything or have to borrow money from my family members. I want to be able to take care of my siblings and get them anything they ask for. The past has really prepared me, and my parents did also by disciplining me and setting good examples for me to follow. I did stuff that got me in trouble but I learned from it so I won't do it again and I'm happy that I learned.

Future Me,

Kanyiah

Dear Michael,

My favorite things in my 2017–2018, 6th grade math education that help me develop into the person I am today is division and multiplication. Because division is it is hard but, I got better at it. Multiplication was my favorite thing in math, and I am good at it.

My favorite game we played was Equate.

This school year 2018–2019, 7th grade, I learned how to use hot glue and how to sew. I learned how to do fractions better. This year was better than last year. We did way more this year. We went on more field trips then any year ever. My favorite field trip was the Air Force museum. I learned about different types of planes and helicopters. I think I got better at math because I was not good at it last year.

Some advice for me in the future is. Do not hang out with the wrong people. Do all your work so you can get good grades. That is it and be treated how you what to be treated. My favorite was the field trips.

Thanks, Michael

Dear Steven,

What was great about my 2017–2018 math education was it help work out hard problems I would get stuck on most of the time and I had fun doing 12 by 12 and Equate. My education changed me over the year by helping me understand how to explain how I got my answer. I learned how to work out harder problems out and showing how I got the answer. My favorite thing about my education that help me was stay after school and getting help on the stuff I had trouble with. I learned in math class was Equate. My grades were good, I had A's and B's. Also, I wish we play Kahoot and put nicknames for Kahoot. If I could give my future self one piece of advice, it would be go in with a strong attitude and a good school year, be ready to work.

Now that I am in 2018–2019 school year, my goal for this year was to pass the 7th grade and achieve an A in math class. My hope for the future is to become a Major League Baseball player and my second hope is to become car engineer if I don't become a Major League Baseball player. My dream is to become an Athlete or an Engineer. I learned about data plots, ratios and proportions, angles and circumference. The correct and returns, taking notes, asking questions and staying after school, all these things helped me become smarter. Things that I did this year that I didn't do last year was ask more questions to help me understand and staying after school more. The correct and returns help me understand the mistakes that I made and figure out different ways to solve problems.

Your Friend, Steven

5/10/19

Dear Future me,

I have had a great past year and great experiences. My favorite experience was the Morehead State University tour. I really liked the college because they had a whole area on the college campus where you could study to become a veterinarian. The campus had lots of areas where you could study, relax or hang out.

My favorite memory was the first day of school. I say this because in this past school year I have made new friends and had new and old teachers and lots of more new educating experiences. I have learned so much over the school year and feel positive about my state testing.

I have grown in so many ways over the 2018–19 school year. I have grown more mature, got more education and gained more self-respect for me and others. I have also had a bumpy journey this school year, but it has all worked out in the end. Overall math

has to be my favorite subject. Not only because I had/have the best math teacher (Ms. Webb) but because I and Dr. Webb pushed me so I could do my best.

Math is everywhere in life and is going to be a big part of whatever you do and wherever you go. That's why math is so important. My math experience has changed drastically over this school year from last year. When I was homeschooled last year, I was bored and lonely, so I didn't do my schoolwork and play games. I wasn't interested in learning so when I came back to NCH, the beginning of the school year was tough. I didn't know much of anything, but everything turned out well in the end. I learned about ratios, multiplying and dividing fractions, circumference of a circle, perimeter and area and finding the value of X.

I have done lots of fundamental projects this school year. I have done Bowties, Graham Cracker houses, cooling pillows, Bloxels and Y-Par. The Bowties were going to be sold for 2 dollars and all the money we earned was going to St. Jude's for cancer research. I was doing Graham cracker houses to learn how to calculate the scale factor of a house. I did cooling pillows for Market Madness (which we won ☺). I did the Bloxels project at the beginning of the school year as an activity. It's a very cool program that you could build and code your own game with. The Y-Par program was all about social justice. This is very important to us, especially now with this generation. Social justice is all about helping those who need it and giving a voice to those who doesn't have that. Social justice is fighting for what's right.

Some further future advice I would give myself is do your best and try as hard as you can. And if you could push yourself to the limits and you could succeed. This is something that is important to remember throughout your life because it can help you succeed.

From, You (Diamond J)

Dear Future Me,

The great things about the 7th grade compared to 6th grade is that I know how to control my anger better than last year. Even though I am still working on it I improved a lot since last year. My experience in math got a lot better over time, like I used to always fail or do bad on math test now I am getting the highest score in the class in the A+ and B+ group, I know I still got to improve on doing math homework that's mainly why my grade is down but I am working on it. In 6th grade, I didn't learn anything I didn't already know but this year I learned a lot more like some geometry. We did a few projects, but this year is different because the projects were fun even when it was just a project on paper.

I feel like I've changed a lot over time like I have better attitudes in class I ain't always mad. I learned how to control my anger and not say something back if a teacher says something to me. I also do my work in class in 6th I would never do my work in class. My advice to my future self would be to never give up don't let anyone stay in your way of doing what you want to do.

Kyra

Dear Future Me,

My experiences from math class is that I learned from my mistakes and now I know I can do better than I did last year. The things I did last year are doing equations, fractions, ratios, etc. Those are the three things we really did last year. One of the things I enjoyed last year, is doing Equate (a fun math game). It was the best thing I did last year. Things I didn't like last year, was not going on field trips.

What shaped me for who I am today are my mistake I had because I learned from having bad grades and not getting my work done like I should've. What affected me for in the future is doing things I know I should do. Yes, because I shouldn't have hung out with the wrong group.

Something I improved on this year was not getting suspended all year. I got suspended a lot last year. What I learned this year in math was geometry, that's one thing I didn't learn last year. I didn't go on any field trips last year and this year I went on plenty of field trips. That's really something I didn't get to do at all last year. This year the best field trip that impacted me is the police academy because it let me know what police officers do when someone has done a crime.

This year, I improved my attitude and my grades. I was a lot of trouble last year but, I changed my ways and this year my grades were good. I had A and B honor 2x in a row.

A motivational speech to the future me: never give up; get good grades and follow your dreams no matter what anybody says just be yourself.

Sincerely,
Isaiah

Analytical

The analytical stage of *currere* is a "critical self-examination" of the past and present that seeks understanding of the multiple facets of an educational experience (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). *Currere* provided a focus for writing the letters. Pinar (2012) intended that *currere* be used as a "method of self-understanding through academic study" (p. 6). As a self-study, *currere* involves thinking about one's personal story. The epistemological value of *currere* allows students to develop their voices and narratives as they reflect on and understand their relationship with math and their experiences in a math classroom. These letters reveal the layers of meaning and history that surround the students' perceptions of themselves in the context of being math students in the past and present. *Currere* allowed them to explore their experiences with math in relation to the larger educational environment, in an attempt to help them claim their stories, reclaim the idea that they are good at math, and reclaim the idea that math has value while engaging them in interesting and more meaningful classroom experiences.

Synthesis

Although the teaching environment in the current testing culture zaps the creativity and motivation of students and teachers, I have made a concerted effort to move in a different direction, one that is not only beneficial to the students, but one that is also beneficial to me as the teacher. I have decided to create an environment that makes "optimal experiences" the norm by creating absorbing and challenging tasks for myself and my students. These worthwhile learning experiences, I hope, will inspire students and help them develop an intrinsic desire to continue the journey of becoming lifelong learners while simultaneously becoming their best selves. Ultimately, I really want my students to love learning, and I am always committed to thinking of ways to keep them engaged in our work. It has only recently occurred to me, however, that their learning is also greatly impacted by how I feel about teaching. What do I love about teaching? When and how am I doing my best teaching? How can I reflect and increase my optimal experiences of teaching? In an effort to answer these questions, I tried to make sense of them by engaging in the reflective method Pinar (1975) calls "*currere*." I describe it as an intentional autobiographic reflective process for uncovering and understanding the crafting of my professional identity and practices as an educator.

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Shaping Healthy Minds: How My Mental Health Journey Has Impacted My Teaching

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"What is meant by the term mental health in schools? Ask five people and you'll probably get five different answers" (Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, 2001, p. 3). Despite the lack of a consistent definition, the Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools (2001) pointed out a need to focus on the *health* part of the definition. Mental health does not just consist of mental illness (Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, 2001). It also includes mental wellbeing and how students can handle different life occurrences with flexibility (Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools, 2001). With this definition in mind, mental health applies to every human being, not just those who may be struggling with it or suffering from mental illness.

There is a level of stigma that currently exists around mental health, and it strongly impacts whether people who are struggling seek out the resources they need. Hampson, Watt, Hicks, Bode, and Hampson (2018) defined stigma as negative associations applied to a certain group of society. This can result in stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Hampson et al., 2018). Past studies such as theirs have pointed out the possibility of providing education on the topic from a young age, such as with elementary students (Hampson et al., 2018). Hampson et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study in Australia to collect perceptions regarding employment barriers for those living with psychosis. The most frequently referenced barrier to employment mentioned was the stigma surrounding mental illness (Hampson et al., 2018). Participants pointed out that it isn't talked about in schools, and most people's knowledge mainly comes from what they see on television (Hampson et al., 2018). The need for more education on mental health to reduce fear was brought up by 13 out of 14 focus groups, and 7 of the 14 specifically mentioned this education taking place in schools (Hampson et al., 2018). They felt that it needs to be normalized from a young age (Hampson et al., 2018).

Salerno (2016) reviewed the literature on 15 empirical studies of the implementation of universal health programs, or health programs provided to all students. He found that all 15 studies indicated some level of improvement (Salerno, 2016). Salerno (2016) noted that mental health stigma and a lack of mental health literacy are barriers to adults getting the help they need, but he feels that this can be prevented with universal interventions. He concluded that mental health awareness programs can have a positive impact (Salerno, 2016).

Climie and Altomare (2013) noted that teachers should educate all students on the realities of mental health. Mental illness becomes more severe and difficult to treat over time, so they feel schools must intervene at a young age in order to combat the stigma around receiving treatment. Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, and Goel (2011) also recommended that educators teach social-emotional lessons to all students in their classrooms in order to help break the stigma surrounding mental health treatment. Kamphaus and DiStefano (2013) view this stigma around mental health as the underlying problem surrounding receiving treatment and feel that prevention and early intervention can eliminate or reduce the severity of emotional and behavioral disorders. There is a clear connection between this stigma and difficulties in adulthood, and it is our duty as educators to prepare students for a successful future.

Gullion, H. (2020). Shaping healthy minds: How my mental health journey has impacted my teaching. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 56–62.

In this self-study, I set out to use the *currere* method to determine how mental health awareness education could be implemented and integrated with standards in an elementary classroom. In the regressive step, I explored my personal experience with mental health throughout my childhood. In the progressive step, I imagined my goals for mental health education in the future. In the analytical step, I navigated how the regressive and progressive shape the implementation of my study in the present. Lastly, in the synthetical step, I determined what these experiences, including the implementation of curriculum in my classroom, mean for the future of mental health education.

As a teacher who lives with mental illness and grew up in the public education system, I am able to see the issue from both perspectives, educator and student, to work towards a solution. Though mental illness can look vastly different from what is depicted here, I have the ability to draw from my own experience and combine it with the current research. This is something I am passionate about, as it is imperative that we determine a way to combat the stigma that exists so that people of all ages seek the help that they need. In order to move towards what we must do in the future, I began by reflecting on my past.

Childhood Experiences

There have always been signs that my brain worked differently than the average person. When I was a child, I colored pages in with whatever order I found the crayons in the box. There was no creativity involved in this process for me. It was simply a routine. If a family member wanted to color with me, they had to be sure to put the crayons back exactly where they were, which caused frustration among the adults. When I read picture books, I lined up several books across the room and worked my way down the line, reading one page at a time during each rotation. I didn't play with Barbies in life situations like other little girls. No matter how many times my mom tried to set up house or shopping scenarios to play Barbies with me, I couldn't engage in the lack of structure. My Barbies also lived their lives in a line, though I don't recall the details of what they did. Any imaginary game I invented began with so much rule-creating that I often didn't have the energy left to actually play the game once I'd finally sorted through all of my thoughts. There was no spontaneity involved in anything I did.

At school, I was a star student. I was gifted, and I was an extreme rule-follower (sometimes too much so). I couldn't understand those who didn't follow the rules, as structure was what I lived for, and I would often come home complaining to my mom about peers who broke rules that day. I struggled with perfectionism, but I was certainly not considered to be a behavior problem by my teachers. At home, I was difficult. I was stubborn and argumentative. No one knew why, nor what to do about it. My parents tried strategy after strategy to address my "behavior," but nothing worked. Looking back, this defiance was yet another red flag.

As I got older, things became more stressful. I did well in school, and I was a high achiever, but my brain constantly felt jumbled, and it's still hard to sort through the feelings and thoughts I experience. I couldn't understand or handle how everyone else seemed to manage so much better than me, especially considering how high my expectations were for myself. I didn't have any way of expressing this to anyone, nor did I know there was even anything to talk to someone about.

I had a friend in high school who had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, "a biological brain disorder that causes severe and unusual fluctuations in an individual's mood, energy, and ability to function" (Killu & Crundwell, 2008, p. 245), and an anxiety disorder, which is characterized by a disproportionate amount of negative or distracting thoughts that lead to increased physiological symptoms (Minahan, 2019). She saw a

counselor, but I never even considered what these diagnoses looked like or entailed. I distinctly remember the day that we were in P.E. class together, discussing something that had me stressed out. She suggested a way of thinking, a coping mechanism, that her counselor had taught her. Upon further questioning, I came to the realization that the level of "stress" (amongst other symptoms) I was experiencing was not healthy.

This was a hard pill for me to swallow. As someone who held myself to the expectation of being perfect, despite the fact that this isn't possible, I couldn't handle thinking that something might be wrong with me. I felt very self-conscious about it, so I didn't tell anyone for a long time. Months later, during a meltdown with my mom, I finally shared the research I had done. When I told my mom that I thought I might have a mental illness, she took me to a counselor. I have since met many people who tried to report signs of mental illnesses, and people (parents, teachers, etc.) assured them that they were fine and over-exaggerating the problem. I don't feel that these adults are intentionally shutting these reports down, but rather that they aren't educated enough on the topic to understand the significance of this kind of cry for help. I am thankful that my mom was supportive throughout the process. To this day, I am often more resistant to seeking help than my parents ever were.

When I met with the counselor, she confirmed diagnoses of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). The defining characteristics of OCD include "involuntary, recurring, and unwanted obsessions and/or compulsions" (American Psychological Association, 2013, as cited in Chaturvedi, Murdick, & Gartin, 2014, p. 72). These obsessions are thoughts that cause fear or anxiety, and the compulsions are repetitive behaviors that are used to help calm this fear or anxiety (American Psychological Association, 2013). GAD is characterized by chronic, consistent, excessive anxiety that is not triggered by a current stressful event (American Psychological Association, 1994). I did not share these diagnoses with people or continue to seek help for quite a while. However, it was the start of my own education about mental illness. Though I still struggled to cope, I started to become much more aware of my patterns, ways of thinking, routines, etc. This journey of self-discovery was important to getting to where I am now.

The summer before I left for college, a celebrity I admired publicly opened up about their own struggles with mental illness. This level of vulnerability in such a spotlight during a time when mental health was not often talked about still inspires me. It was a turning point in accepting my own diagnoses. It also led me to begin opening up about my journey in hopes that I could provide this feeling of comfort for others. Until that summer, I wasn't aware of the stigma that I had internally held against myself or how freeing it was to feel okay about myself.

I have since made it a point to be open about my mental health status, even to people I don't know. I have done presentations for college classes, shared on social media, and spoken up in personal or group conversations with others. I have had several people tell me that through these conversations they either came to realizations about their own mental health or that I opened them up to a whole new view of mental illness, as most people tell me they would never have expected me to be someone who struggles with it.

I have developed coping mechanisms, and I can function at a successful level, but my daily life and the thoughts I fight are still a constant struggle. Unfortunately, by the time I sought help, my ways of thinking and routines were very ingrained in my brain. I, a mental health advocate, still have difficulty in counseling, because I don't want to make the changes they recommend. I often wonder how my life would be different had I been identified at a younger age. Had my parents and teachers been more educated on mental illness red flags, my path may have been very different. Had I not been so judgmental of

myself, because of society's stigmas, I may have started counseling earlier. There are a lot of what-ifs that I'll never be able to answer, but as a teacher now, I can work to build awareness and reduce the stigma with my students so that others might receive the help they need sooner.

Looking Forward

As someone who still struggles with mental illness, I work to be open and push back against the stigma. While I am passionate about this and I don't mind doing it, I do hope that there comes a day when I can speak about my mental illness without needing to explain and defend my struggles first. In today's world of social media, much is blamed on mental illness, such as gun violence and suicide rates. While mental illness plays a large role in many societal issues, I fear that some of these conversations are adding to the stigma. My hope for society is that we can come to a place where people are accepting and supporting of those with mental illness, where insurance provides the same coverage for mental health as it does for physical health, and where no one feels ashamed to seek treatment or learn to cope. These are not overnight changes, and the way that we address mental health with the current generation will impact the future.

While there are ways that we, as educators, can better serve students with mental illness, this is a moot point if we don't know who these students are. Identification, such as through the administration of a universal screener administered to all students (Climie & Altomare, 2013; Kamphaus & DiStefano, 2013; Splett et al., 2018) can help educators know who would benefit from interventions or accommodations. Matching them with resources and providing education can help these students learn to help themselves as they learn more about the way their brains work. As an educator, it is always my ultimate goal to set students up for a successful future as well-rounded citizens, so helping them find long-term solutions to any struggles they face works toward this purpose.

While I would, of course, like to see these changes in my own building and district, my hopes are to see policy changes at the state and national level. The district in which I teach requires all school staff to attend a one-hour mental health training that is given by the school counselor. While this is certainly a good first step on the path to quality teacher training on mental health, more is needed. This training is sped through, often ending early, which does not send the message that we prioritize mental illness as a crucial issue. This required training focuses on signs that a student may be suicidal and the steps staff must take to help. This is so important, as we must work to prevent student suicides. However, there is little training or information on other mental illnesses and how teachers can work to accommodate students when an illness is not a life-threatening issue. I would like to see this training be expanded to address various mental illnesses, what they may look like in students, and how teachers can help students with these signs. Even without an official diagnosis, a student can benefit from receiving services or accommodations from teachers. I would like all schools to be mandated to provide training to teachers on these topics.

There are many students, like I was, who don't show external signs of mental illness (Splett et al., 2018). Splett et al. (2018) found that there was an 180.1% increase in identified students after the implementation of a screener, which demonstrates the ineffectiveness of current school identification. I struggled constantly, but I didn't know how to verbalize what I was going through. I didn't even know there was anything abnormal or unhealthy about the self-degrading thoughts I was having. At a recent meeting I attended about referring students to a counselor, teachers were eager to speak up about the students they would be referring with behavior problems. Comments were made that implied that all students who would miss class to attend counseling are

students who are causing problems in class anyway. I am a personal testament that this is not true and that those assumptions are dangerous for others like me. I constantly struggle with intrusive thoughts, otherwise known as obsessions, that cause me distress until I can't think straight, and if I spoke aloud the comments I make to myself in my head, they would be considered abusive, but I would never have been considered a behavior issue at school. I never received a detention in my entire school career. There are so many students like me who do not even know that they are struggling who need support just as much as the students who externalize, especially in a time when suicide is so prevalent. These students need support, but they may not know how to ask for it, and it isn't always easy to determine who these students are. Therefore, just as we screen students for other health issues, such as hearing and vision, all students should be screened for mental illness red flags (Climie & Altomare, 2013; Kamphaus & DiStefano, 2013; Splett et al., 2018). I think it is important that this take place before high school so that students and their families have plenty of time to find the best course of action.

Even without the assistance of teachers and parents, some of my problems could have been identified and reduced if I had simply been educated on various mental illnesses and what they look like. Mental health awareness should be a required standard in all states. More than just stress and how to cope with it, I want students to learn about specific mental illnesses, how they work, and what some warning signs are. I want students to be taught how and where to seek help if they feel that they need it.

In addition to this mental health awareness education being of benefit to students who may be struggling and unaware, all other students would benefit from a greater understanding of what mental illness looks like. In order to break the stigma around mental illness, people need to understand what it is and what life is like for those who do struggle with it. If students were exposed to it as a normal part of their education, it would normalize mental illness. Reducing the stigma may encourage people to seek the help that can so drastically impact their quality of life.

Taking Action

I don't know and will never know how my life may have been different had I been diagnosed or helped at a younger age. I am passionate about preventing this from happening to others. Because of this, I sought to create a series of mental health lessons that could be implemented within a 4th grade curriculum to determine the impact doing so had within my class. My goal was to teach mental health awareness lessons in the regular classroom to work towards reducing the stigma. This unit consisted of four 15-minute lessons that were aligned with existing health standards in my home state of Missouri.

The first lesson focused on what mental health looks like. Part of understanding mental illness is understanding what is healthy and what is not. All people deal with stress, but there are unhealthy levels and amounts of stress. As a class, we sorted through examples of healthy stress, such as being worried about a math test the next day, and unhealthy stress, such as being consistently worried about a healthy family member dying. This lesson's objective was for students to recognize the difference between these two types of stress, as well as some healthy coping mechanisms for stress. Some student-generated ideas included playing outside, reading, and spending time with family. Students were validated in feeling stress, and they were provided with tools to help.

The second lesson addressed what mental illness is and what it can look like. The focus was to humanize mental illness. I spent the majority of this lesson sharing my personal experience with struggling with an unhealthy amount of worry and stress. I

shared different coping strategies I have used, such as seeking help from a counselor, and this prompted several other students to share about times that they have spoken with a counselor (for any reason, not just mental illness) and how it helped them. Students were excited to share about these experiences with counselors, which seemed to empower them. Several students requested to see the counselor that week, so I do feel that students had a positive takeaway on seeking help for any problems they may have.

The third lesson dealt specifically with anxiety or worry. Many young students, even ones who are mentally healthy, struggle with worry. Worrying about grades, things going on at home, or anything else can impact their academics throughout the day. Once students were able to define anxiety as excessive worry, we once again discussed healthy versus unhealthy worry. We also looked at how it is connected to stress, as well as how it can be different. Students then worked to identify strategies to handle worry, such as relaxation methods or thinking about the problem realistically.

The last lesson homed in on more specific ways to seek help. Different resources were discussed, such as teachers, counselors, parents, or other adults. We also reviewed processes specific to our school, such as the steps to request a meeting with the counselor. This lesson emphasized that not only people struggling with mental illness should reach out, but any student who feels like they need help with an emotion that is hard to handle on their own. Students were very engaged in conversation.

At the conclusion of the unit, there was a positive feeling surrounding emotions, learning to handle them, and seeking help. If standards change, I would love to go into even more specifics regarding other mental illnesses and what they can look like, but I felt that this was a great start. At the very least, students in my class finished the unit with gratefulness that they have access to a counselor at school who can help them, and they felt encouraged to ask for that help. Students in my class now know someone who struggles with mental illness, so they will not feel as alone if they are struggling with any emotional issues.

As someone who didn't even know what mental health or stress was as a student, it was empowering to watch these young students have educated conversations about this topic. My students already know more about mental health than I did as a high school student. I hope this, in turn, empowers them to seek help whenever they may need it. I also hope this emboldens them to step in and educate others when stereotypes and incorrect information are passed around in conversation. This step is crucial to reducing stigma in society, much of which stems from ignorance on the topic. Just as I was inspired to be transparent about my journey from a celebrity I admired, I hope that if a student of mine ever feels self-conscious about a diagnosis they have been given, they can feel confident about themselves and know that they are certainly not alone.

Future Implications

I would like to continue to implement this series of lessons in my classroom in future years. I would also love to share my curriculum with other teachers in my building along with the research I did beforehand and my own personal experience so that they can see and understand why it is so important. I know I am simply one story among many of those who have experienced mental illness, but I also believe that stories of successful people with mental illness are undertold. There are likely many adults who assume they are not struggling with it, because they are able to keep a job and function. My days are still a struggle, but freedom has come from learning to cope and process in a healthier way. Once I learned what to ask of those around me, the support was incredible. As I mentioned earlier, when I tell my story, I am often met with responses

that indicate people have a clear picture in their head of what they think mental illness looks like, and I am not it. This gives me the power to advocate for others who may not "look like" they have mental illness, which is something I take seriously.

I hope my story will inspire other teachers to implement awareness lessons and hold these necessary conversations in their own classrooms. If students are exposed to these topics each year and from different teachers, it will help instill in them the subject's importance. If students can head to middle school with an understanding of healthy and unhealthy emotions, feeling confident about seeking help when necessary, they will already be in a better place than I was.

Mental health and mental illness are certainly more present in conversations in society than they were when I was in school. I look forward to the day when mental illnesses are regarded as important as other diseases discussed in health standards and curriculum. I look forward to continuing to share my story with new audiences, as well as watching others feel confident to share their own. And I look forward to the tremendous impact that this will have in our society as students become healthy adults who know how to handle their emotions, stress, and worry and take care of themselves.

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On/Beyond *Currere*

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Critical feminist scholars have contributed much theory that enriches our understandings of curriculum. They have pointed out the perniciously patriarchal nature of schools and schooling while posing alternative ways of understanding the work of teaching and learning as embodied, deeply emotional, relational, and autobiographical (Grumet, 1988; Lather, 1991; Miller, 2005). The understanding of curriculum as autobiographical generated and has fed the Reconceptualist notion of *currere* first introduced to the field over four decades ago (Pinar, 1975). And it is clear that the field collectively and individually continues to value and work from this deeply impactful framework. No question—we are indeed indebted to Pinar's profound contribution to the field, and we remain grateful. But if a post-*currerian* moment is indeed emerging, as we, the authors, believe is the case, it is necessary to indicate what we mean here by "post."

Curriculum scholars certainly continue to return to c*urrere* as a framework for curriculum theorizing; its seminal status and continuing influence within the field of curriculum studies is not in question, but that same prolific influence can be put to work effectively in order to move beyond *currere* and to generate post-*currerian* conceptualizations of curriculum. While, the concept of *currere* continues to resonate deeply with us as women and scholars committed to a vision of teaching and learning that honors the complexity and richness of the human experience, it was in illuminating such complexity and richness through a series of paradoxes within our work with a cross-racial affinity group of teachers that we began to tentatively and then with growing confidence ask: what lies beyond *currere*?

The Affinity Group

In July 2010, a group of 10 educators from across the country met at a small midwestern college to participate in a Teaching for Educational Equity (TFEE) seminar. The participants represented a wide array of racial identities and experiences from an African American male working as a program administrator to a Latino immigrant who had just earned his degree in education to a white middle-aged, self-employed female working in professional development and personal coaching and a little of everything in between. The TFEE seminar was designed to immerse participants in experiences and discussions that surfaced the disparities that exist in our society along racial lines. As we have described elsewhere (Adams, 2013; Adams & Buffington-Adams, 2016, 2020; Adams & Peterson-Veatch, 2012) across the course of five days in an immersive, residential setting, TFEE seminar participants utilized structured protocols to explore how race shaped not only our current contexts and the myriad historical moments that led to these contexts, but also how we might begin to identify, interrogate, and ultimately disrupt pernicious traditions, practices, and narratives of U.S. schooling that perpetuate systems of racism and oppression.

From that seminar, a smaller group of teachers, the affinity group, formed following its conclusion. While the members of this affinity group were from the same urban center, they had little else in common outside of the shared experience of the TFEE seminar. However, as a result of the seminar, the group members came together around a deep commitment to abiding with and posing uncomfortable questions and to accepting

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

non-closure. Like the members of the larger TFEE seminar, the members of this smaller affinity group represented a variety of racial and other identities. Of the six members, five were women. One woman identifies as African American. Another identifies as Jamaican American. The last three women are white. The sole male is African American and the only member of the group who did not attend the TFEE seminar but who was known to several group members through school networks and consequently invited into the work at his request. Two members taught in the same K-12 school district, and the others taught in neighboring educational institutions. The group was composed of an elementary classroom teacher, a middle school science teacher, a high school English teacher, a high school art teacher, a special education teacher, and a university instructor. We ranged in age from early thirties to early fifties. The authors of this article, Susan and Jamie, were two of the white, female members of the affinity group.

For nearly two years, the affinity group met on a monthly basis to explore questions of race as they impacted our professional contexts and personal lives. Like the TFEE seminar, the affinity group relied on structured protocols to guide our explorations and hold us accountable to engaging in the work in ways that saved space for each member to construct their own understandings. The goal was not to advise or solve a problem for a fellow member, but to offer questions to prompt deeper reflection on the challenges in hopes of illuminating new understandings for that individual and for the group as well.

In the affinity group's analysis of their work (Adams, 2013), the members articulated how membership in the group could be characterized as, and consisted of, holding up the mirror *for* as well as *to* one another. Holding up the mirror *for* one another speaks to the ability to engage in critiques of ourselves and our practices in a community of trust and support. However, holding up the mirror *to* one another highlights the critical power of engaging others' perspectives in our attempts to surface our own presumptions and moments of complicity so that we might each not only journey towards greater awareness, but take action in our individual contexts. It is the delicate balance of offering (and receiving) both support and challenge to take on new, more complex perspectives.

This shared commitment to holding a mirror *for* and *to* one another resulted in moments of reflexivity in which members created the conditions and space to evolve individually and collectively. In these moments of collaborative reflexivity, we witnessed and experienced realizations that were synergistic, that surpassed the sum of their parts, and to which participants said they could not have come on their own. We also witnessed and experienced personal and professional transformations that we, Susan and Jamie, have since struggled to find theory to explain.

Analysis and Comparisons of Adult Learning Theories with Currere

Transformational Adult Learning

The initial study that included the affinity group utilized adult learning theory as a frame for understanding and analyzing the experiences of both the original TFEE participants and the affinity group members. Adult learning theorists explain how reflexive practice results in personal growth and how engaging in reflexive cycles across a lifespan brings the learner ever closer to self-actualization. Kegan (1994, 2000) referred to this level of adult development as self-authorship and claimed it is characterized by the ability to examine one's positionality and relationships and to act, not upon commitments that originate in the discourse communities to which you belong, but from your own analysis of the world and your role in it. Likewise, Mezirow's (1991, 2000) transformative learning phases describe how adults, through reflection and in reaction to crises, have the potential to travel through a series of orientations that potentially result in a more complex world view.

While Kegan's (1994, 2000) use of the term *self-authorship* in describing the ultimate destination of adult development is largely self-explanatory, his use of *worldcentric* to describe stage four development invites a bit more explanation. Adults who exhibit worldcentric characteristics are open to new epistemes and, thus, are able to understand and accept that people in other times, circumstances, and geographies make ethical decisions that are different from our decisions and positions, yet are "right" for them. For example, members of a number of contemporary societies might contend that polygamy is an abhorrent practice. In Kegan's stage three development, the subject, in identifying and offering allegiance to her/his culture community's stated values, extends those same anti-polygamy values to all people everywhere, regardless of the origins of the practice. To put it simply, in this example, polygamy for any reason anywhere is deemed wrong, and a person in stage three forms these judgments in light of her/his membership rooted within identity community values. In stage four, however, the worldcentric subject comprehends that the limited economic options of unmarried females in a community in which the male population has been decimated by war make polygamy a far more humane and sensible system than one that callously relegates unmarried women to remain homeless and hungry on the margins of society. In short, the worldcentric subject demonstrates an ability to see situations and practices from a variety of nuanced and more complex perspectives and in doing so understands the ways in which other choices, traditions, and practices are valid given the unique contexts from which they spring.

It is also possible, however, that the subject will choose to maintain and reinscribe previously held beliefs, perspectives, and practices even after encountering new knowledge and experiences. Thus, self-authorship or worldcentric orientations are possible but are not necessarily achieved by all adults. And this development is neither fixed nor neatly linear across all aspects of one's identities or allegiances; regression and inconsistencies are always possible. In both Kegan's (1994, 2000) and Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theories, transformation is a choice after all; across the long arc of adult lifespan, one often faces changing conditions (war, global pandemic, societal upheaval, economic or environmental events), life crises (divorce, illness, loss of relationship, unemployment, death), or grapples with unsettling new knowledge that calls into question what the adult has previously held to be reliably "true."

In the face of such challenges and upheaval, adults can choose to embark on doing the deep work that potentially results in an expansion or change of perspective, likely resulting in new identities and allegiances, and the possible rejection of previously held values and beliefs as the subject now sees the limitations and consequences of the previously held perspective. Mezirow (1991, 2000) noted that this transformational process produces both exhilaration and grief for the learner who can experience transformational learning as both personal growth and the metaphorical or literal death of relationships, epistemes, and ways of being and doing. Drago-Severson (2009) added that, "All developmental movements involve some form of philosophical crisis, pain, emergence, and rethinking of what was taken previously to be of ultimate importance" (p. 49).

An important question of the original study (Adams, 2013) was how the affinity group functioned to support each member's ability to make and sustain these life-altering shifts of perspective and practice, particularly as they related to questions of race. The collaborative analysis (Adams, 2013; Adams & Buffington-Adams, 2016) of the affinity group's learning supplied some early understandings of the extent to which disruptive experiences transformed members' belief systems and assisted them in moving towards self-authorship and worldcentric views. However, we now question

whether adult learning theory as articulated by Kegan (1994, 2000) and Mezirow (1991, 2000) fully articulates the richness and complexity that characterized the collaborative reflexivity of the affinity group.

The descriptions of transformative adult learning from Mezirow (1991, 2000) and Kegan (1994, 2000) outline adult stages and possible outcomes as if this transformation can be represented neatly, as in Piagetian decision trees, while the affinity group's experiences were rarely tidy and characterized by members more as oscillations between past commitments and new perspectives rather than a linear progress through well-defined stages. While the TFEE seminar was explicitly founded on Mezirow and Kegan's foundations and these concepts were incredibly helpful to our analysis in the early years, now we sense that these theories feel a bit too clinical.

Kegan's (1994, 2000) and Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theories both pit the lone subject against an occurrence or upheaval that has caused such dissonance that the individual must engage with it to reinstate equilibrium, whether through stagnation or transformation. While some of Kegan's later work with Lahey (2001) explored how an outsider might intentionally create these moments of dissonance as a means of prompting transformative thinking, the subject continues to grapple with and make sense of them on their own. Additionally, in both theorists' work, the moments of dissonance or upheaval that prompt the subject to pause and reflect are largely uninvited and invasive, rather than pursued. Conversely, the affinity group invited dissonance and complexity into their midst in the belief that doing so created a fruitful space for personal and collective growth.

A Post-Currerian Adult Learning Perspective

In an era in which understandings of curriculum had come to be dominated by mechanistic and technocratic definitions, *currere*, Pinar's (1994) declaration that "the curriculum is not comprised of subjects, but of Subjects, of subjectivity. The running of the course is the building of the self, the lived experience of subjectivity" (p. 220) was indeed radical. This reconceptualization of curriculum shifted the focus from the static content too often compartmentalized into specific content areas to the dynamism of the knowledge building process experienced by the individual and laid out in the method of *currere* (Pinar, 1975).

The method of *currere* challenges us to reflect on our pasts, to project forward into our future aspirations, to take stock of our present commitments, and, in doing so, to identify their relationships to one another. "Juxtapose the three photographs: past, present, future. What are their complex, multi-dimensional interrelations? How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?" (Pinar, 1994, p. 26). The goal of examining the connections between one's past, present, and future is to weave the common strands into the shape and direction of one's life not only conceptually but concretely through action. Like the upper echelons of adult learning theory, the point of *currere* is to foster the kind of self-knowledge that leads to changes in the way people go about living their daily lives, to foster the ability to take action in your personal context, to encourage praxis. Unlike adult learning theory, *currere* encourages the transcending or transgressing of artificial boundaries in developmental stages. That is to say, it invites complexity.

To the extent that affinity group members engaged in individual cycles of reflexivity that resulted in changed ways of being, *currere* rings true. In addition, parallels to *currere* can easily be identified in many of the group's processes where emphasis was placed on connecting past experiences and future aspirations to understand what actions or decisions were needed in the present moment. Likewise, the group members' understandings of

themselves and their positionalities in most cases approached if not exemplified Kegan's (1994, 2000) or Mezirow's (1991, 2000) self-authorship or worldcentric orientations. However, in our estimation, both the seminal and contemporary texts addressing or employing *currere* as a framework or process fail to account for the rich complexity that collaboration brought to moments of reflexivity in which members not only created the conditions and space to evolve individually, but perhaps more importantly, to evolve collectively.

For Pinar (2004), the synthetical moment results in change for both the individual and the collective as through the steps or stages of *currere* the individual "undertake[s] [the] project of social and subjective reconstruction" (p. 4). As Pinar (2004) stated clearly, "I outline the autobiographical method of *currere*, a method focused on self-understanding. Such understanding, I believe, can help us to understand our situation as a group" (p. 5). That *currere* holds both the progression of the individual and the collective as its aims is clear. Additionally, Pinar (2004) emphasized that the method of *currere* requires an understanding of the Subject as contextualized within specific historical and political contexts. Thus, the method of *currere* engages the contextualized Subject in what Pinar (2004) termed "autobiographical confession" (p. 39) in the hopes that a growing body of individuals will shift the trajectory of the whole or the collective. Yet, ironically, despite feminist curriculum theorists' conceptions of teaching and learning as relational acts and their significant contributions to the concept of *currere* and the undertones of interdependence in Pinar's writing (1975, 2004), the method of *currere* still seems to be a journey upon which one is apparently supposed to embark alone. While the collective is certainly a focus of *currere* outcomes, if you will, collaboration or the collective are absent from the process. There appears to be no process, or perhaps, no need, for the holding of mirrors up to and for one another.

Boler's (1999) Collective Witnessing

Tucked neatly into Pinar's (2004) discussion of autobiography as a revolutionary act is the explicit inclusion of Megan Boler's (1999) assertion that self-knowledge may not lead to self-transformation as well as Pinar's (2004) observation that "self-knowledge and collective witnessing are complementary projects of self-mobilization for social reconstruction" (p. 37). Boler (1999) situated collective witnessing as an integral component of what she terms a "pedagogy of discomfort," the goal of which is to "see things differently" (p. 176). Like *currere*, a pedagogy of discomfort involves both inquiry and action, introspection and reconstruction, or as the affinity group called it *inside and outside work*.

As the name would suggest, a pedagogy of discomfort also calls upon its participants to commit to engaging with what is not easy, to learn to live with/as what Boler (1999) called an "ambiguous self" (p. 176). The use of a collective is particularly crucial in supporting these aims as "collective witnessing is always understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories and material conditions. To honor these complexities requires learning to develop genealogies of one's positionalities and emotional resistances" (p. 178). The descriptions here are familiar to the affinity group experience: striving together to "see things differently," agreeing to live in discomfort, working to trace the genealogies of one's beliefs and perceptions.

Yet, as Boler (1999) provided examples of collective witnessing from her own pedagogical experiences, a pattern emerged which strays from the affinity group experience in an important way. Boler consistently provided examples in which she and her students were working to see an event or text outside of themselves differently as a means of identifying and evaluating the beliefs each individual brings to their perception

of the object. Conversely, the affinity group made its own experiences, texts, and questions the objects of focus. Or, one might say, the affinity group chose to collectively witness subjects from within its own ranks.

While Boler (like Pinar, Mezirow, and Kegan) admitted that "the Socratic admonition to 'know thyself' may not lead to self-transformation" and "may result in no measurable change or good to others or oneself" (p. 178), a group of people simultaneously working to unpack their reactions to an external object as she described certainly stand to benefit from sharing their individual journeys, to learn through observation or proximity as the collective engages in what almost reads like tandem or parallel experiences of *currere*. The affinity group, however, repeatedly, intentionally, and willingly chose their own moments of reflexivity, or their own genealogies if you will, as the object of witnessing, shifting focus from one group member to another as need and time dictated. In doing so, they created an environment in which the work of reflection was never undertaken alone, but instead was supported by members who committed to probing, questioning, and checking each other's thinking.

On/Beyond Currere

While the thought of moving on/beyond *currere* from the autobiographical into collaborative transformational learning is not terribly radical at first glance, the act itself of learning under these conditions certainly is. It means making yourself vulnerable and immersing yourself willingly in moments of dual consciousness, not in order to discover the ways in which others' perceptions might oppress or impose upon you, but because through others' perspectives we might discover truths that otherwise we would likely hide from ourselves, truths that are difficult knowledge, that are instructive, or that might trigger moments of crisis. Sometimes, to put it bluntly, when we work alone and in private, we are far too likely to let ourselves off the hook. Herein lies our search for a post-*currerian* conceptualization of curriculum as we continue to hearken to the voices of a group that insisted on holding up the mirror for and to one another no matter how painful the experience or how bitter the knowledge (Britzman, 1998) revealed by the mirror. The group exemplified the trust and faith that makes vulnerability and transformative learning possible.

Additionally, members of the affinity group identified ways in which participating in collaborative reflexive practice not only spurred their personal and professional growth, but provided them with a source of positive accountability. In short, when you know that your allies will ask you difficult questions but will do so with utter faith in your capacity to change yourself and your context for the better, you hold yourself doubly accountable—accountable to creating a more equitable world within your own sphere of influence and to upholding the integrity of the group's collective work. If we return to Pinar's (1975) claim that curriculum is the building of the self via the running of the course, we believe that it is best to join a running group in which the members provide fresh eyes to critique your form, with running partners who expect you to show up to train, who offer encouragement when your strength is waning, and who spur friendly competition to push your pace. The affinity group believes that we are better off personally and collectively when we do this inside and outside work together rather than in isolation and self-protection.

Conclusion

While the frenetic connectivity and conflict of a globalized society makes moments of quiet introspection or a return to *currere* both increasingly rare and perhaps sometimes even personally necessary, the complexity of this moment also poses a challenge and an

opportunity to engage one another critically and compassionately in the service of both individual and collective transformations that result in social action. Examples abound of the need to create spaces in which members feel both safe *and* challenged and in which the work is both personal and collective, both within U.S. K-12 schools and in the larger community beyond.

The spring and summer of 2020 have witnessed an upwelling of racial conflict, ongoing protests and clashes, and the surfacing of the ongoing implications and consequences of inequitable systems of policing, schooling, housing, and economics so powerful and persistent that they have even trumped and transcended a global pandemic. Voices too long silenced are at last finding audiences. Perspectives previously considered invalid or irrelevant are coming to the fore of American consciousness. Perhaps now more than ever before, a collective will to reckon with America's long, destructive history of racial oppression is emerging with potential to result in schools and communities that are truly equitable for all community members, but especially for members of any identities historically oppressed and silenced.

But the question of how this bitter knowledge (Britzman, 1998) is taken up and grappled with in order to create meaningful, necessary social change remains an open question. *Currere*, while much appreciated for its long and meaningful impact on curriculum studies scholarship, will not be sufficient for this moment. We are convinced this moment can only result in meaningful outcomes when the deeply personal work we each must do is collegially and collaboratively rooted within and accountable to a collective that spans a rich variety of identities and experiences, including racial identities. The affinity group's practice of, and insistence on, holding up the mirror for and to one another offers some practical, yet theory-shaping guidance for ways other educators could create similar spaces in which to do this long, patient, and urgent work. It is in theorizing the transformative power of the synergistic collective that we hope to approach a post-*currerian* conceptualization.

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Shame on Course Evaluations: *Currere* and Duoethnography

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Reading Course Evaluations

I am thinking about Dewey's (1938) continuity where "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Ontologically knowing this to be so, I wonder, is one ever done with an experience? How much self-reflection is sufficient? How many nights will I go to bed knowing "the most powerful shaming experiences are often self-inflicted" (Brown, 2007, p. xvi)? Will I ever be able to "know what…[I] know and to feel what...[I] feel without becoming overwhelmed, enraged, [and] ashamed" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205)? Finally, is it possible to interrupt and/or stop Dewey's (1938) "taking up" of early familial curriculum making, that curriculum I experienced that was "situated and composed…outside of school, within family and community" (Lessard et al., 2015, p. 198) on my tenure track, specifically course evaluations?

Figure 1: The beach

These wonders swirl as I contemplate opening an email that includes a link to course evaluations. I tell myself, rather sternly, that who I am and the value of the work I am endeavouring to do cannot be judged solely by student evaluations. "I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away" (Thoreau, 1995, p. 6), and I leave the link untouched. I head outside to the beach and hope for what Slattery (2017) described as a proleptic moment where I "transcend linear segmentation of time and [create] a holistic understanding of the past, present, and future simultaneously" (Slattery, 2017, p. 185).

Jack-Malik, S., & Kuhnke, J. L. (2020). Shame on course evaluations: *Currere* and duoethnography. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 71–82.

The following day, I read the course evaluations. I highlight all of the negative comments in bright orange. Looking at the glowing sentences, I slip into a "cycle of self-loathing and shame" (Brown, 2006, p. 23). I am certain I will be fired or denied tenure.[1] I feel myself shrinking, which activates my self-criticizing hamster wheel. I shove the evaluations into an envelope and attempt to halt the emotional imploding that results from a shame cycle. I struggle to redirect my thinking. I reread an online, *University Affairs* article (Farr, 2018), where the author describes how an Ontario (Canada) arbitrator, William Kaplan, informed Ryerson University that student evaluations of teaching "are not to be used to measure teaching effectiveness for promotion or tenure" (para. 14). I also flip through Gilligan's (2011) book where I read the following, "the initiation into patriarchy is driven by gender and enforced shaming and exclusion. Its telltale signs are a loss of voice and memory, an inability to tell one's story accurately" (p. 26). I will myself to remember previous jobs where I was mostly competent.

In September of 2021, I am due to apply for tenure; I must speak to the big three: research, service, and teaching—including course evaluations. I cannot, however, bring myself to revisit the course evaluations nor put a plan in place that demonstrates I heard the feedback and am working to improve. I return to the online article:

> Student…[course evaluations] are merely opinions that are not reliable, particularly when two students can sit in the same class for a full semester and have totally different experiences. How is it that one student experienced a 5 and the other student experienced a 1?? In sum, course evaluations are simply surveys of opinions and student opinions should be heard but not fixed as the determinant of faculty employment. (Grey, 2018, para. 1)

This resonated with me as my student evaluations included the following comment:

> Not a good instructor at all. Made everyone afraid to speak and talk. Put us out in the hall because we did not do a reading, and, not an approachable professor.

In contrast a second student wrote:

> I loved this course. The class always seems to fly by. I loved the activities we did in class. Sandra was the only prof who genuinely asked how we were doing, so I know she cares a lot. She gave us opportunities to be creative. She is kind and thoughtful, and I now have a great understanding of the course materials.

Struggling to unravel and understand the divergent comments and my reactions to them, I desperately need a trusted friend and colleague and Janet agrees. She suggests I read Brookfield's (2015), *The Skillful Teacher*, and particularly to consider the following:

> when students greet our efforts with anger, resentment, or indifference—we immediately conclude that we have failed. We need to remember...that when we are doing our job properly some hostile student evaluations of our teaching are inevitable. (p. 273)

I go online and order the book. When it arrives, I attack the reading with my orange highlighter. I experience relief as I see myself and my reactions reflected on the page. Moreover, I read concrete suggestions for how to improve and experience profound relief.

Methodological Decision Making: Laying Duoethnography Alongside the *Currere* Process

With Brookfield's (2015) book in hand, Janet and I continued our discussions, thinking narratively with stories (Clandinin, 2013). We wondered why my reactions to the course evaluations were immediate, severe, and shame filled. Moreover, we wondered how my reactions were influencing my forward-looking tenure track stories. Because we were interested in a deeper understanding of these stories and how they continue to shape my lived experiences and because I was struggling to move beyond reacting to the negative comments, we wanted a methodology that made room for the other. We wanted this because it had been our experience that, within the trust of our relationship, each of us was able to hear and consider the thinking of the other. Hence, we laid *currere* (Pinar, 1975) beside duoethnography as it allows "for emergent meanings and meaning making to become dialogic within the text and between the text and the reader, problematizing reader (and inquirer) alignment with implicit metanarratives" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 10). Moreover, we integrated the tenants of duoethnography methodology in efforts to create "texts that promote the exposure and reconceptualization of perceptions of experience" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 89) through dialogue. This resulted in dangerous conversations[2] including tension filled[3] moments (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010).

Moreover, because we are courageous women we know "one remedy, and that is to undertake something difficult, something new, to reroot [ourselves]...in…[our] own faculties. … For in such moments, life is not just a thing one wears, it is a thing one does and is" (Heilbrun, 1997, p. 44). *Currere* and duoethnography are methodological tools that provide a structure where our experiences (past, present, and future) are the site of inquiry. They afford us opportunities to retell, "to interpret lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities," and to relive stories "to live out the new person" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 478).[4]

Initially Janet was not interested in duoethnography; she was focussed on the *currere* process. I, however, was gently and then increasingly insistent we consider duoethnography, because I felt the stories I was sharing and the stories I observed and heard Janet share were based on and later nurtured in shame. I imagined we were both going to have to take risks if we were to deepen our understanding. Reading Norris et al. (2012) reminded us that duoethnography

> involves taking a risk through the sharing of one's intimate experiences on a mutual topic in relation to the Other who has differing and at times opposing points of view. Duoethnography is about trusting the Other to be open to new and challenging points of view. It is also about trusting one's self to be open to new and challenging points of view. It is about seeking and finding, not holding on to; about letting go and ultimately moving and transforming. (p. 526)

As we tentatively continued with writing and discussions, Janet asked if I had reflected on early familial curriculum making experiences and how they might be influencing my reactions to the course evaluations. I said nothing came to mind; however, I would continue to think about it. We concluded by agreeing how difficult our conversations were becoming. Le Fevre and Sawyer, (2012) helped us frame the difficulty by describing dangerous conversations:

> Duoethnograpghy is a conversation, and whenever we reveal ourselves, we become vulnerable. Such conversations can be both difficult to disclose and challenging to

> articulate. They are potentially dangerous, and if the danger is considered too great, they may be silenced out of fear. (p. 263)

We would return to this idea as we wrote, rewrote, thought about, discussed, and lived with these works.

The Writing and the Discussions Begin

With methodologies in place, we began. We previously decided we would individually write a *currere* and then share it with the other as we engaged the duoethnography. The *currere* shared here deals only with Sandra's experiences. Our intention was to create an additional, thick layer of description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while utilizing the structure of the duoethnography for our conversations. I gave Janet a copy of my course evaluations. Handing them off was both comforting and shame inducing. I felt confident that, together, we could analyze them in ways I was incapable of doing on my own; however, I knew Janet would read all the negative comments students had written about me. This did not thrill me.

Once we had individually written pages, Janet, having written a *currere* not related to my course evaluations, posted her work on Google docs, and we read and discussed it over the phone. We immediately felt we were treading deep within temporal stories, including complex, mis-educative early familial curriculum making (Lessard, 2015). We sensed the enormity of the task. Having previously created *curreres* (Jack-Malik, 2018; Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019), I knew it was important to listen and respond in ways that created spaces where the other could imagine educative forward-looking stories, while dealing with "the imprints of the trauma on the body, mind, and soul" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205) and while reconceptualizing what I thought through time.

A few days later, in the midst of a Google doc writing session, including a phone conversation,

> **Janet (commented):** "Sandra, your evaluations had plenty of positive comments. I enjoyed reading them. I marked them in blue—like the brilliant sky."

> **Sandra (*thinking*):** hearing this, triggered me. I quickly directed our conversation back to the shared writing task. Later, I felt Janet's comment left no room for my initial reaction to the course evaluations. I wondered if she understood my perspective and my feelings. I felt in judging my course evaluations she had also judged me and my reaction. I sent Janet an email including Wiseman's (1996) operationalization of empathy. Wiseman (1996) argued that empathy involves the following: "to be able to see the world as others see it; to be non judgemental; to understand another person's feelings; and to communicate your understanding of that person's feelings" (p. 1165). The next day when we met face to face in my office, I referred to the course evaluations and to the email, including Wiseman's ideas.

> **Janet responded as follows**: I took your course evaluations and put them into a new manila folder; they needed to be wrapped in the safety of a comforting scarf. I knew they hurt you, and therefore, I wanted them safe from all other eyes; I felt it imperative to keep the contents confidential. I wanted to sit by the woodstove to read them and think deeply about the comments. Our dean directed me to frame student

> evaluations in Brookfield's (2015) maxims of skillful teaching: "if you don't take care of yourself emotionally, then you'll be in no fit shape to help students learn" (p. 265). Thinking with Brookfield's (2015) ideas, I learned to recognize my emotions associated with receiving student feedback and to utilize them in productive ways. I wanted to talk with you about your evaluations. I wanted you to move quickly towards that same knowing. However, overnight, and in reflection of Wiseman's (1996) ideas, I appreciated that while I had understood the shame you shared with respect to the course evaluations, I had not communicated this understanding to you. Furthermore, and again thinking with Brookfield (2015), I appreciate it takes time to step back from the emotional reaction to negative course evaluations. I know you need time.

Listening to Janet and understanding why she did what she did, and why she said what she said, created a space where I felt heard and understood. In this space, I began the process of considering tweaks to my teaching practice that will hopefully result in a more inclusive classroom environment. I also continued to reflect on early familial curriculum making and wondered "how these lived experiences have affected my teaching and learning practice" (Brown, 2014, p. 527).

Regressive Story One

A few days later we discussed the 11 years I was in private practice as a tutor for students living with dyslexia. During this time, my efforts focussed in two areas. First, we worked to improve reading fluency and comprehension. Next, to remove barriers. Over time, I purposefully became increasingly aggressive towards teachers who were not, in my estimation, teaching and or behaving in ways that supported the students I tutored. Reading the comments on the course evaluations got me wondering how 11 years of tutoring was shaping my current teaching. Charged with the responsibility of training up future generations of teachers, perhaps it was time to reconceptualize myself as an educator of pre-service teachers. I appreciate this is an important work to do; it does little, however, to help me understand my reactions to the course evaluations.

Regressive Story Two

At age 18, I left home to participate in a national youth exchange program. For nine months, participants aged 17 to 21 from across Canada lived in three different communities. My first community was in Ontario. We were young, able-bodied, clueless, and desperate to be well-liked. Each day a trip was made into town, including a stop at the post office. When dinner was completed, mail was distributed in what quickly became a ceremony. One of the participants, who was funny and articulate, became mailman. He would stand next to a cart and read out the names on the letters and packages while providing commentary. He would comment on:

1. frequency of letters received from a certain someone,
2. additional work that had gone into making the envelope or package unique, and
3. as letter writers and package senders became aware of the antics of mailman, they increasingly included comments, colours, pictures, and drawings that served to ramp up the response of mailman. Some invited the mailman to open packages and share the contents (cookies, balloons, pencils etc.).

It quickly became clear which participants had families and friends willing to write and include treats. I received enough mail to keep me from being known as one who had no support. I understood that, to receive mail, one had to write. I, therefore, wrote to my parents, siblings, and friends.

One evening, mailman, got up to do his thing. He had almost reached the end when I felt him looking at me. He had a couple of envelopes left in his hands. He called out two additional names; I watched as friends received their mail. Mailman remained with a single envelope, and his eyes locked on me. I felt I should snatch the letter; I did not move. The group was expectant. "Who's the last one for?" and "Read the name!"

Figure 2: Looking at this jar of peanut butter resulted in a computer search where I read the following: "fatso: disparaging and offensive" (Dictionary.com, 2020).

Barely audible, mailman read, "Fatso Jack, this one is for Fatso Jack." I got up, grabbed the letter, and headed outside. Later that night, alone with my thoughts, I understood I belonged to a family and had a brother who would purposefully hurt me in the most public of formats. In a previous letter, I shared with him the antics of mailman, and he used this. My brother underlined the word Fatso in orange crayon. In the days that followed, I was repeatedly reminded of the letter and the salutation (see Figure 2). My shame was complete; I was unable to take an active role in pushing back. Lyons-Ruth (2003) wrote "if you cannot tolerate what you know or feel, the only option is denial and dissociation" (p. 123). I was unable to "make sense of what had happened and…to imagine a creative alternative" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 53). My best friend stayed close; she repeatedly ran interference. I now understand Janet is attempting to do likewise with the course evaluations.

Analytical: Thinking About This Today

I am sitting quietly and letting my thoughts return to early familial landscapes in efforts to deepen my understanding of my reactions to course evaluations. There is much to consider. I grew up in a home where alcohol was abused. Woititz (1987) describing adult children of alcoholics said, "we judge ourselves without mercy. Since there is no way for us to meet the unattainable standards of perfection...we are always falling short of the mark we have set for ourselves" (para 4).

I am also thinking about Bruner (2004) who wrote:

> stories happen to people who know how to tell them. Does that mean that our autobiographies are constructed, that they had better be viewed not as a record of what happened (which is in any case a nonexistent record) but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience. (p. 691–692)

This idea of continual interpretation and reinterpretation keeps me hopeful and willing to continue on this journey. Committing this memory story to the page, sharing it, and listening as Janet's sister[5] Laura read it aloud over the phone represented a significant risk for me. The perception of risk was made significantly easier because we were in different geographical locations. My willingness to participate in what I imagined would be a dangerous conversation was heightened by the distance (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). My willingness to sit quietly as Laura read my memory story aloud over the phone was possible because they could not see me, and so I felt safe. I imagined I would cry; however, the fact they would not see me or be able to physically comfort me was a relief. I could hear their suggestions and respond to their musings while not feeling overcome with emotion.

Reading course evaluations transports me to complex, dysfunctional, early mis-educative familial curriculum making (Lessard, 2015). Highlighting the negative comments in fluorescent orange was a temporal trigger. Through this process, I am coming to understand how I "continue to organize…[my] life as if the trauma were still going on—unchanged and immutable—as…[if my reaction to the course evaluations is] contaminated from the past" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 53). Will I ever be able to "terminate this continued stress mobilization and restore the entire organism to safety" (p. 53)? This frustratingly circles back to the idea that "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). There are times when I wish this was **NOT** the case! Other times I wish I could "take up" something more helpful in the moment.

> **Sandra (online writing conversation):** It is so hard to think about this memory because I know one of my parents knew about the letter. My brother would not have spent his own money on a stamp. Last night, I was flipping through albums containing pictures taken when I was a teenager; in every photograph, I see a slim kid. I think about my brother, and I cannot imagine being so intent on hurting another. I know, however, each of us regularly endured multifaceted, familial dysfunction associated with alcohol abuse.
>
> **Janet:** Was your brother living at home then?
>
> **Sandra:** Yep.
>
> **Janet:** He was old to be at home (*questioningly as captured in voice inflection*)?

Sandra: (*a long pause*) Maybe no. That's a very good point Janet. Maybe he was already gone. We all fled very early, and I am the youngest. (*a pause and Sandra in a tiny, broken voice*). It is not possible that he was living at home (*another long pause*).

Synthetical: A New Interpretation

Sandra: I feel a fissure forming in my memory, like a fault line. I always believed my mother was implicated having paid for the stamp and mailed the letter. This knowing, this reconceptualization of the memory provides an alibi for my mother, and this comforts me. When I think about the reconceptualization in terms of student evaluations, I wonder in what other ways I might read and interpret them. Is it possible they don't have to trigger me? How do I release "outdated assumptions and beliefs from childhood" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 285) while respecting the function they served and at the same time rallying my strengths before clicking on the link? Thank you, Janet.

Janet: My sister says memories get unwrapped and re-wrapped and, therefore, new understandings are possible. Course evaluations are like mail, like the link in your email, like the mail your brother sent. When you click on the link, you are never sure what you will find in terms of content.

Sandra: That is a good analogy Janet. It creates another space to step back and consider anew. The emotional wrenching and shame I experience, reading this aloud reminds me, my body remembers (van der Kolk, 2014); however, in sharing, I am afforded an opportunity to re-story, "to interpret [my life]...in different ways, to imagine different possibilities" (Connelly, 2006, p. 478). For over 40 years, I regularly "put all my energy into protecting...[myself], developing whatever survival strategies…[I could]...I repressed…[my] feelings; [I] got furious and plotted revenge. [I]...decided to become so powerful and successful that nobody can ever hurt…[me] again" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 280). This is precisely what I have done and to what avail? How does one release a memory that no longer serves? In the moments when shame comes calling can I "find a way to become calm and focused" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 280). I am spent Janet; this process is exhausting.

Janet (listening and then speaking on the phone): Shame, re-shame, and re-shaming occurs regardless of self-talk. This is how I hear and see you. You are a capable, kind, and funny writer. In your office, there are shelves full of tutoring books, fiction for kids, colourful games, and stuffed toys. The shame, in my perception, has become so dominant it is overshadowing the books and literature—Wilbur and Charlotte, your kind and trusted friends (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019). This angers me. So I am thinking, if I call shame out and name it, we could talk about it and maybe release it from its hiding place (Brown, 2007). I realize now calling shame out is your job, not mine. Therefore, I sketched this image as words often fail me (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Your courage is evident to me in this image.

Sandra (experiencing tension and irritation whilst writing over Google docs and talking on the phone): I do not appreciate this illustration because the shame appears outside the body. Through this *currere*, I have struggled to own the idea that shame lives within. It must be this way if I am to mobilize shame resilience (Brown, 2007).

Moving Forward and Making Room for Other Possibilities

Through the process of *currere* and the ongoing duoethnography conversations with Janet, I was able to identify and then step back from the binary of right or wrong, good or bad, and create a space where other interpretations were possible. Prior to this work, I would not have had Janet review my course evaluations, nor would I have spoken about my shame. Doing so has allowed me to begin to see the image Janet drew as having merit, because it challenges me to think of other explanations and other ways forward. In addition, this work has shortened time required to resuscitate myself from course evaluations. And, it has demonstrated ways to mobilize a shame resilient response before clicking on a link to course evaluations. Nothing about this is easy; however, it is possible. Furthermore, by reflecting on Brookfield's (2015) insights, I was able to talk about setting one or two achievable goals in response to the student evaluations. I have rewritten the course syllabi to reflect the goals.

When I focus specifically on my shame reaction that was first triggered by reading the evaluations, I defer to Brown (2007) who argues that shame resilience is important. She defines it as:

> the ability to recognize shame when we experience it and move through it in a constructive way that allows us to maintain our authenticity and grow from our experiences. And in this process of consciously moving through our shame, we can build stronger and more meaningful connections with people in our lives. (p. 31)

This is precisely what Janet and I have done; I am profoundly grateful.

Brown (2007) suggests that possessing high levels of shame resilience makes us capable of giving and receiving empathy. This highlights the importance of imagining and living out Wiseman's (1996) notions of empathy. Throughout this process, Janet and I have endeavoured to listen empathetically and to receive empathy. Because of this we were able to engage in dangerous conversations (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012) that allowed us to deepen our understanding of how early familial curriculum making was shaping my reaction to course evaluations and, therefore, my tenure track journey. In the safe, trust-filled spaces where the giving and receiving of empathy flourished, we were able to begin the process of imagining other possibilities, and on occasion, we lived out new stories. We did this while reminding ourselves of Dewey's continuity (1938) and the words of Heilbrun (1989):

> there always seems to loom the possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clear the way for contentment. This is the delusion of a passive life. When the hope for closure is abandoned, when there is an end to fantasy, adventure for women will begin. (p. 130)

These hard stories are part of who we are; however, the new stories we imagine are bold examples of what is possible. They are in stark contrast to what can happen when one "chooses to stay right where…[one] is, to undertake each day's routine, and to listen to…arteries hardening" (Heilbrun, 1989, p. 131).

Final Thoughts and Why It Worked for Us

We experienced the writing of the individual *curreres* and the subsequent dangerous conversations as challenging and emotionally draining. There were many moments when we needed the comfort and safety of a warm, wrapped scarf to shield ourselves from the onslaught of complex emotions and to take a break from our commitment to engage in the related dangerous conversations. We needed to pause. We needed quiet to read and reflect. We needed moments for ourselves, to hold steady in a torrent of dangerous conversations (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). There were days when we wanted to give it up. There were other days when one of us was unsure if we had the individual strength to be empathetic within a dangerous conversation—regularly unsure of what could or should be asked and how best to respond and how to proceed. Sandra began using the phrase, "my guts are on the table." There were many times when it felt precisely like that. For both of us, these dangerous conversations, including "guts on the table," were only possible because of the pre-existing bedrock of relational, personal, and professional trust.

As we quickly approach the date when we will submit documents to be evaluated for tenure, Heilbrun's words ring out strong and clear. She wrote,

> I do not believe that death should be allowed to find us seated comfortably in our tenured positions. … Instead, we should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular. (p. 131)

We are endeavoring to be tenured professors who do precisely that. Writing these *curreres*, engaging in dangerous conversations, struggling to tell, retell, and live out the women we are in the midst of becoming is all part of our efforts to take risks and be courageous tenure track hires.

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Endnotes

[1] Student evaluations were intended to help instructors improve their teaching. However, they were quickly adopted by chairs and deans and tenure committees to help make personnel decisions, such as hiring, salary increases, and promotions. Today these ratings are used ubiquitously and are considered the single most important indicator of teacher effectiveness (Stroebe, 2016).

[2] Le Fevre and Sawyer (2012) described "difficult professional conversations to include dangerous conversations, silenced ones, problematic self-disclosures, daring publications, and unfettered electronic communications" (p. 263).

[3] Tensions that "live between people…are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways" (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 82).

[4] Connelly and Clandinin (2006) used four terms to "structure the process of self-narration." Lived stories are those we live. Told stories are those we tell. Retold stories are those used "to interpret lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities" (p. 478). To relive stories is "to live out the new person" (p. 478).

[5] The authors thank Laura Dann for her contributions to the process and the creation of this article.

A Call for Queering Adult Classrooms

By Chrystal Coble
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Every time I stand in front of a classroom as an adult educator or sit in a classroom as a learner, I ask myself, "Is today one of those days?" Is today a day where I go along with the oppressive weight of heterosexist assumptions, or is it a day where I have the energy to remove some of that weight and bare parts of my soul by disclosing part of my identity? As a lesbian growing up and attending college in the South, many of my interactions were filled with decision points on how to best navigate heteronormative spaces. This reflection serves as a way to examine my journey, explore my memories, and further understand my own educational experiences. This article emphasizes moments from my past that have left an indelible imprint on my mind, but it also aims to share a vision for how we can create more inclusive campuses and classrooms.

Navigating Heteronormative Spaces

My younger sister and I would ride the 45 minutes with my mother after school to sit in the back of the classroom while she attended night classes. We usually behaved and kept quiet while doing homework, but during the times I should've been memorizing my multiplication tables, I found myself fascinated by the classroom conversations. I remember rushing to complete my homework so that I could listen intently to the college lecture and pretend to take notes by scribbling on the back of my worksheets. I had an eagerness to learn and couldn't wait for the day I was old enough to attend college. When asked what I wanted to be when I grew up I would proudly declare, "I am going to be a college student." I didn't understand much about the college experience at the time or that the goal was to get a job after college, but I knew I wanted to sit in a college classroom for real one day.

Ten years later, I was ready to take that step and decided on a college about two hours away from home. My motivations for attending college had changed by that time, and I was mostly looking forward to moving away to a bigger city and the freedom that came along with it. As I had started to explore my sexual identity a few years earlier, I began feeling less connected to the classrooms that once fueled my thirst for learning. My relationships with friends and family had been strained for quite some time after I came out as gay, so I was eager to start a new chapter.

After moving away from home and living off-campus, I was yearning for a connection to my classmates. Despite my efforts to fill the growing internal void and feelings of isolation, I quickly realized that my college campus might not provide that outlet. After having received my first group project, the group decided to meet at a local fast food restaurant, probably because it was one of the few places we could afford to eat. At the time, laptops and wireless internet connections were not yet commonplace, so we were armed with spiral notebooks and mechanical pencils. Eventually, the discussion drifted away from school to our social lives and dating. One student had recently been married, and her husband was stationed at the military base nearby. Another student was single and hoping to meet someone at the fraternity party she was invited to over the weekend. The third girl couldn't stop talking about her boyfriend and when he might propose. When I was asked if I had a boyfriend, I said nothing. My heart beat so hard at that moment I could feel it in my throat. I fidgeted under the table and hoped no one would pick up on my avoidance while I tried to change the topic to something more

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comfortable. What I didn't tell the other students was that I lived with my girlfriend. I had no plans to get married because marriage was a privilege reserved for only heterosexual couples at the time. I also began to think about how I was going to continue the façade that I had portrayed by intentionally omitting details of my sexuality. I would not be able to use the pronoun "we" when asked what I did over the weekend. I would not be able to have this new group of friends over to my house without hiding the pictures in my living room. I would not be able to get too close to anyone in the group because of the exhausting effort it takes to avoid conversations that may disclose details of my personal life. Being from a small town in rural North Carolina, I learned to let people assume I was straight. My hopes of moving away to college and being able to remove the weight of those assumptions had been shattered. The realization I made that day was that my identity as a lesbian would continue to be separate from my life as a student. I spent the remainder of the semester thinking of creative ways to avoid conversations that could turn to my personal life so that I could protect details that might hint at my sexuality. This continued to leave me with feelings of isolation and disconnection from peers in classroom settings.

A few semesters later, I enrolled in a sociology course that covered human development and stages across the lifespan. On the first day of class, I sat in the front row eager to learn. I was hoping in the back of my mind that this class would be different than previous experiences. My thoughts wandered to the idea that I would finally feel validated and not invisible in a room full of my peers. Naturally, we started with discussing early life stages, but I craved the day we would get to topics that might help me feel normal and maybe even re-connected to the classroom. I sat through weeks of lectures and slowly started to lose hope. After we covered adolescence and early adulthood, I started to select seats closer to the back of the classroom so that it was easier to retreat into internal isolation. I felt like a stranger to the idea of typical human development because I didn't see my identity reflected in the lecture anywhere. Heterosexuality was the assumption in every lesson, in every assignment, and every image presented in the PowerPoint slide deck. Midway through the semester, after returning from fall break, I once again had a glimmer of hope when we began talking about relationships. My roller coaster of emotions quickly plummeted during the one class session that mentioned same-sex relationships. The lecture started by covering terms and definitions related to sexuality and quickly turned to how homosexuality had been classified as abnormal, pathological, deviant, or as a mental disorder throughout history. The instructor wrapped up the lesson by sharing that in 1973 the American Psychological Association had issued a resolution that homosexuality was no longer considered a mental illness or sickness. He made it sound like being stamped as mentally fit was a final triumphant moment, and it minimized the experiences of an entire population of people. The emphasis on the history of intolerance in class coupled with the homophobic comments and snickers echoing in surround-sound from neighboring desks left me on the verge of tears and my hopes of having a different classroom experience shattered. As I continued my journey as a gay undergraduate student in the South, I battled the constant internal dialogue and the fatigue caused by navigating spaces where the assumption is heterosexuality. Many of the moments that stand out for me are associated with feelings of invisibility and isolation from my peers, teachers, and even family and friends. Educational materials were sometimes hard to connect with because I was unable to see myself represented in the heteronormative conversations, relationships, authors, language, assumptions, images, and curriculum throughout my years as a student.

A Vision from My Current Self

My experiences as an undergraduate student more than 20 years ago would be different if I were sitting in those same classrooms today. There has been progress made in understanding the experiences of marginalized populations including, but not limited to, the LGBTQ+ community. That said, my biographic present can't be discussed without reference to some of the historical events that are embodied in the past of the queer community and that impact my current experiences and are a part of my understanding of the world around me. I was not alive during the Stonewall riots or the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, but I stand on the shoulders of those who fought during those times. I remember distinctly the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in 2016 that resulted in the death of 49 people, injuring dozens of others, and traumatizing a community for decades to come. I remember the controversial law passed in my home state of North Carolina that prevented transgender individuals from using the bathroom that matches the gender with which they identify. My current experiences and responses to the world around me are related to the messages these events send to people who do not fit into majority categories related to sexual orientation or gender identity.

In addition to heterosexist messages, LGBTQ+ students also face victimization and bullying on campuses ranging from microaggressions to harassment and violence. There is evidence of higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ college students when compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Woodford et al., 2018). My experiences of constant heteronormative messages throughout my post-secondary educational journey, as well as current research on the needs of LGBTQ+ students, support the need for different approaches in the classroom. The core of college students' experience is the curriculum, so we must bring LGBTQ-sensitive pedagogy into the classroom (Renn, 2017). By making these issues visible, students have the opportunity to explore topics related to identity, which can expand thinking around the experiences of other marginalized populations. Paiz and Zhu (2018) add that queering teaching involves designing a course "so that students engage with and interrogate identities, not just sexual ones, in a critical manner and come to understand how social discourses structure and police those identity options" (p. 566). This vision for inclusive classrooms will require additional support for faculty development focused on facilitating difficult or uncomfortable conversations and improving classroom climate for LGBTQ+ and other minority students (Renn, 2017). Some of these conversations have been included in the social sciences, but faculty and higher education leaders in all areas should strive for emphasizing diverse topics in the curriculum.

In addition to exploring topics related to identities, educators must work to break down binary views of gender in learning spaces. Gender nonconforming students are limited in how they can connect to classrooms when educators refer to students as "ladies" and "gentleman" or other gendered terms. Imagine sitting in a classroom as a female and the instructor consistently referring to you as "sir." Not only would it be inappropriate, but rather distracting from learning. Students should be provided the opportunity to share their names and the pronouns they would like others in the class to use. One way of doing this is to begin the first few class sessions with name tents that include names and pronouns. This would allow students to write their pronouns without being put on the spot to announce them to the entire class if they are not prepared to do so. In online courses, students should be encouraged to include pronouns in their student profiles on the learning platform. There are many ways to approach breaking down binary references to gender in classrooms, but each of them requires intention by the teachers setting the tone for acceptable classroom interactions.

Educators should also be mindful of the messages embedded in selected texts, images, and materials such as problem sets or case scenarios. Not only is it important to include course materials that reference queer perspectives, but an emphasis should be placed on interrogating the lens through which students are reading texts. For texts not written from a queer perspective, students should be encouraged and supported to examine texts from stances of otherness and difference (Shlasko, 2006). Some of the most profound conversations I have experienced in classrooms have been sparked by questions that encourage students to step away from dominant perspectives. A professor asking, "What does this look like from a same-sex family's perspective?" in an education class could be what allows a student feeling connected to the content. These concepts should also be considered when writing problem sets for a math class or adding images to slide decks. The assumptions in our classroom should not always be the dominant perspective if we are to provide a space for inclusiveness.

My Present Becomes My Past

My vision for the future will continue to grow and change as my present eventually becomes part of my past. As an adult learner working a full-time job and raising a family with my partner while attending graduate school, I bring into the classroom an accumulation of my experiences. According to William Pinar (2010), "when we listen to the past we become attuned to the future" (p. 178). My reflections as a student struggling to find a voice in the classroom or amongst school peers were just a few examples that helped me become attuned to the need for a different approach towards inclusiveness in the classroom. We each may have parts of our identity that have been in some way excluded, so my vision for inclusion emphasizes the need for breaking down binary ways of thinking that continue to marginalize groups. Oppressive hierarchies are carried over into classrooms, and my hope is that as educators we can continue to support alternative ways of thinking that question these norms.

I am in no way claiming that my experiences are representative of everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. What these experiences are representative of is my way of knowing and how I have arrived at my understanding of my current self. Baszile (2015) described this through her explanation of critical race/feminist *currere* as "a desire to both understand and free oneself from the confines of oppressive ways of knowing and being" (p. 120). What this means for me and my current work in LGBTQ+ issues in adult education is to continue my research focused on understanding the classroom experiences of other LGBTQ+ learners. I was not able to find a place for my voice in the classroom for many years, but through this journey, I've committed myself to sharing my voice and serving as shoulders upon which others may stand. And so, I revisit my opening question, "Is today one of those days?" Yes, today is absolutely one of those days where I remove the weight of heterosexist assumptions, and I call out to fellow educators to revisit our classrooms with intention and attention.

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The Logic of Heart: Remembering Hurricane Katrina

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Synchonicity, when multiple events converge to create meaning, is amazing when it happens. As dean of the College of Education at LSU during the events that occurred leading up to and following Hurricane Katrina, I was wrapped in the maelstrom of the aftermath of Katrina in ways that would impact my life and leadership for the rest of my career.

But the synchronicity of events had nothing to do with Katrina, at least not directly. Almost 15 years after Katrina reshaped the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast, I received a request for two of the articles I had written (Fleener, Jewett, Smolen, & Carson, 2011; Fleener, Willis, Brun, Hebert, & 2007) about our efforts to support afterschool activities for children and families living in a FEMA trailer park after Katrina through a three-year-long service-learning project. As I looked through my files and had our graduate assistants try to find copies of the articles to send to the person requesting them, I found a powerpoint presentation I did in January of 2007. The powerful images and presentation of activities we were involved in brought back a flood of memories and feelings that put in context the 10 years that followed in which I served as a dean at LSU and another southern university.

To add to this synchonicity, I was teaching a "reflective practice" class for doctoral students in an adult learning Ph.D. program and a class in organizational theory in an the EdD program that focused on preparing community college leaders. The Ph.D. class had as an assignment a *currere* project; the EdD class had an institutional logics assignment to evaluate complex organizational dynamics. I decided my video of the events and activities post-Katrina would make the perfect case study model for both classes.

I was amazed as I presented the cases in the classes, each with its specific twist, that the emotions I was feeling were still so strong and vivid. The emotions were not about the events of the aftermath of the hurricane, but my intense desire to help my current students understand the impact those events had on entire communities and the lessons that could be learned from them. The lessons learned were too important to be forgotten and pointed to a way of thinking that is important for creating more caring futures. This was my motivation for writing this *currere* exploration.

Remembrance

We lost electricity around 5:30 a.m. on August 29, 2005. It was a Monday morning. The wind was whipping the trees, making them dance, as we quietly read and waited. I had my Blackberry cell phone, the most advanced cell phone at the time, and called or texted a few of our new faculty to make sure they were okay. Without electricity, the landlines were useless and, at the time, not everyone had cell phones. I remember feeling very isolated and glad for the online company as we addressed our life challenges of extreme heat, melting ice reserves in our ice chests, lack of generator power, and the need to cook whatever might spoil in the refrigerator on the gas grill out back. While we were well provisioned, I was thankful that the neighbors had some ice blocks in their freezer that they shared with us after a few days.

I don't recall how I heard, but upper-level administrators were told to try to get to campus by Wednesday. By then, the roads were cleared enough to make it to

Fleener, J. M. (2020). The logic of the heart: Remembering Hurricane Katrina. *Currere Exchange Journal*, *4*(2), 88–96.

campus in Baton Rouge even though there was still no electricity for the stop lights. After two days in the heat with no electricity, I was looking forward to getting into the air conditioning. LSU had its own power plant, so I was anticipating a few hours of relief from the heat and some cool water. And I had that darn NCATE report to work on. It took a long time to get to campus on Wednesday—the usual 15-minute drive took over an hour that day and for many months to come. Baton Rouge had doubled in size over night.

As I got to campus, I began to understand the extent of damage to New Orleans. There had been no news out of New Orleans, so we did not know that the levees had failed nor about the human tragedy we were about to become a part of. Even though the university was officially closed, we were told to send students to the Pete Maravich (PMAC) basketball arena to volunteer and to enroll any students from the New Orleans universities who walked through our doors without worrying about traditional protocols and transcripts. Campus was closed for the next two weeks, but it became a hub of activity and center for communications for South Louisiana.

My Associate Dean, Patty, and I half-heartedly worked on our NCATE report, listening for students to come through the front door to the back-drop of helicopters landing down the hill at the track and ambulances taking off from the PMAC to downtown. We were told, "serve human needs first," the chancellor, Sean O'Keefe, making it clear that we were to eliminate all red tape, break the rules if necessary, and think creatively to solve problems as they occurred. It was hard to concentrate on anything as the continuous sounds of helicopters overhead and ambulances taking off from the track were constant reminders of the activity and response occurring down the hill from us. The sirens heightened and foreshadowed all of our fears, uncertainties, and the unknown of what was yet to come.

Over the following 10 days, LSU operated an 800-bed field hospital for those who were most critical and triaged over 15,000 evacuees. We converted several facilities across campus to support the largest acute-care field hospital ever in U.S. history. LSU became the site of the largest deployment of public health officials while coordinating with and supporting DHH, FEMA, U.S. Public Health Service, CDC, LSU Health Sciences, State emergency response teams, the U.S. Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, National Guard, Navy, Marines, and volunteers (LSU, 2006). Over 3,000 faculty, students, and staff volunteered, requiring another level of response. In addition to our dorms housing students and their families and friends, over 800 mattresses and 100 computers were donated to convert office buildings and any spaces that had shower facilities into temporary housing for the many emergency response personnel requiring food and shelter. The LSU Vet school housed and eventually found homes for 1,300 pets (LSU, 2006).

Everyone in Baton Rouge also took in volunteers and displaced families. Over the next two months, my house became a second home to my friends from New Orleans, my housekeeper and her family, who were without electricity for over a month, and six International Rescue Committee volunteers arriving from Pakistan to support recovery efforts.

What I remember most was the heat. It was so hot and humid in the days and weeks after the hurricane. I was glad I had done laundry before the hurricane because it was hard to stay in clean and dry clothing. Body odor became a new social norm.

Power was out in most places, and there was very little reliable information about what was going on both in New Orleans and in our own downtown River Center where many of the evacuees and their families were being taken. We kept hearing rumors of violence and desperation, especially at the Superdome in New Orleans and the River Center in Baton Rouge. What we didn't hear was that 80% of New Orleans had flooded or that all but one building in Chalmette had taken on water while the St. Bernard Parish school superintendent ran her own command post from the second floor of the flooded high school. I don't remember getting any information from TV or the radio. That seems so strange now, with cell phones and social media, where even when the electricity is out you can share on social media real-time experiences. It seems so long ago that, without electricity, there really were no communications with the outside world.

In the immediacy of response, the foundations were laid that would define our efforts for the next three years. I received a call requesting that we send some of our kinesiology students and faculty to the River Center to work with the kids who had been traumatized by their experiences of death, flooding, and evacuation. Could we send our students to get the kids up and moving, involved in physical and mental activities? My faculty stepped up.

The next request was to help with setting up a school and using donated computers on the cruise ships in New Orleans that were housing the families of the first responders. Partners from UC Berkley were working to set up internet access so their students in California could tutor and counsel students who might spend the next year without a school to go to. Apparently New Orleans did not get the same memo we did about cutting red tape as efforts to set up the internet met obstacles at every turn. This would not be the last time we had challenges with red tape.

As waters receded, we were asked to go to schools in Lakeview and New Orleans East to see if we could help reopen them for students who might be returning to the area. The New Orleans schools had been taken over by the state before Katrina, so what had been public school systems were now independent agents, and administrators were very interested in having our College of Education take them over as charters.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) left one natural disaster in Pakistan to work with recovery efforts in Louisiana later in October. IRC members commented how this first experience in the U.S., as opposed to responding to natural disasters overseas, was their most difficult with obstacles and resistance to their help from bureaucratic red tape. For example, working with our students and community leaders to survey the needs of churches and other pop-up shelters for evacuees, they were met with resistance from the Red Cross and governmental agencies who wanted to close down these smaller places of refuge to consolidate evacuees into larger FEMA run and Red Cross supported shelters.

As smaller shelters were denied resources and support, the Renaissance Village (RV) opened (see picture below). With close to 600 trailers at its peak (Seabrook, 2008), the RV was the largest evacuation trailer park created by FEMA to shelter victims of Hurricane Katrina. By the end of October 2005, there were approximately 2,500 individuals living in small FEMA trailers in the middle of a field in Baker, LA, approximately 10 miles north of Baton Rouge. The trailer park became a central part of my activities from October 2005 through June 2008 when it closed.

Figure 1: Picture of Renaissance FEMA Trailer Park, Baker, LA
Photo by: Patrick Salisbury (2008)

We began coordinating and training student volunteers through a service-learning class designed to prepare our students to work with "children in crisis." Run as a funded program through a variety of sources including private donations and small grants, Delta Express, as we became known, worked with numerous partners to provide after-school services for students and families. Initially, we had planned to open a school at the RV, but there was a law that said there could be no schools in Louisiana that had a disproportionate number of homeless children, and all of our children were considered homeless. Then there was the challenge of having facilities donated and paid for by the Rosie O'Donnell foundation that FEMA would not let us use for almost six months until legal liabilities could be figured out. As described by NBC reporters Cynthia McFadden and Sarah Rosenberg, "The 'Rosie' trailers came to be seen as a perfect little picture of the big FEMA problem: an overwhelmed bureaucracy unable to untangle itself enough to make even simple things work" (McFadden & Rosenberg, 2006). Using tents and trailers, we collaborated with other RV partners to provide social, psychological, and educational services such as art-therapy, kids-with-cameras, mentoring, eco-art, oral history projects, journaling, after school tutoring, educational games, computer tutoring, and physical activity. Until the family services area sponsored by the O'Donnell foundation was opened, all of our activities took place in the tents and on concrete streets. The only thing that even began to approach an exercise facility was a single basketball hoop put up next to the activities tent.

The Progressive

As I reflect, I can't help but think about how my experiences and understandings as a dean were shaped by who I became in August 2005. As Chancellor O'Keefe emphasized, people first. As I have transitioned after 17 years as a dean to being a faculty member, and as I look to the last years of my professional academic life, I continue to believe this mantra and am driven by it.

Putting people first is not the best way to operate as a dean, however. I remember the times when HR (Human Resources) or our legal team advised me to work against this instinct in support of the institution. It is very hard to be so legalistic that you can't

tell someone you're sorry or that you don't have their best interests at heart because you must put the institution over the person.

Now, as a faculty member, I have regained my humanity and work toward the fulfillment of this important lesson-learned—that you have to sometimes break rules and overlook difference to meet people where they are in order to help them. That working for the concomitant good releases positive energy that creates better futures for everyone. And that you can't treat people's brains without feeding their bodies and souls.

So I now get to work with students and faculty colleagues again. But even more importantly, I get to work toward creating communities of the future (Smyre & Richardson, 2016) with a heart. I have to wonder what has happened to higher education that, in order to work for the system, you become so trapped by the needs to maintain it that you must lose your own humanity. This question will continue to frame this inquiry into the case of LSU in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The lessons learned with Katrina have import beyond crisis management or long-term crisis support but speak to the very purpose and soul of higher education. The hope for the future is that higher education, especially public universities and colleges, can reconnect with our mission of serving our publics with honor, integrity, hope, and care for the concomitant good.

The Analytical

In analyzing the LSU response to Hurricane Katrina, both in the immediate aftermath and over the longer-term commitment to the Renaissance Village partnerships, institutional logics (Thornton Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) and neo-institutional theory (Friedland & Alford, 1991) provide a framework for understanding the complexity of responses and needs from mind, heart, and gut perspectives (Fleener, 2002; Fleener & Irvine, 2019). Using institutional logics framing, the case of LSU and how we responded to the aftermath of social, emotional, and physical devastation also provides insights for higher education futures.

> *I remember the first day the school buses came to the RV trailer park. We weren't even sure how many students there were in the village. With 600 trailers at capacity, we anticipated several hundred students were now residing in this encampment surrounded by wire fences, so when the buses first pulled up, we expected at least 100 students would be boarding to go to their new schools in Baton Rouge. We were surprised when only 35 students showed up. Working with our partners, we tried to find out why students were not going to school and found out the parents had been told they could not get on the buses with their children to go to the schools to help enroll them. Since for many of them their last ride on a bus was to be plucked off of levees or from the Superdome in New Orleans without knowing where they were being taken and because many of the children were still experiencing separation anxiety and trauma from the events of Katrina, we could understand why parents didn't want their children getting on a bus and being taken to places unknown. Why, we asked, couldn't the schools suspend their "no parents on buses" policy in this case?*

Analyzing this and the many other situations we faced from an institutional logics perspective shows the multiple levels and dimensions of the complex challenges faced in the aftermath. The institutional logics framework delineates many of the contextual, social, cultural, organizational and ethical challenges we faced at the Macro, Meso and Micro levels.

At the Macro level, there were policies, politics, legalities, and bureaucracies with their red tape that created challenges and worked against putting people first. There were expectations about what universities were supposed to be and do that were disrupted as we became a communications hub and critical care emergency hospital. The no-parents-on-buses policy was one example, but there were so many. As another example, FEMA policies on proof of property ownership were problematic not only because much of the proof was swept away by the floods, but also because chain of ownership in neighborhoods like the 9th Ward was not clear. Families often lived in grandmother's house or an aunt or uncle's house, so it was not easy to prove family ownership. This is one reason that, even now, much of the 9th Ward has not been rebuilt.

Another example of Macro level politics occurred with setting up the RV education and family services center, as described earlier. Rosie O'Donnell donated double-wide trailers and built a state-of-the-art playground to create a place where children and their parents could go for tutoring, counseling, educational services, and support navigating the bureaucracies of applying for social services, permanent housing, and schooling. Although the facilities were built and ready for use by December 2005, we could only look through the wire fence at them as it would be almost another six months before they could be used. FEMA had leased the land for the RV park and didn't feel the family services facilities was appropriate under their mission to provide temporary housing for displaced families. It took months to untangle the legal challenges of unleasing a portion of the land from FEMA and leasing it to the family services facilities. These were similar challenges that we faced in New Orleans as our partners at UC Berkeley attempted to create internet access for the children of first responders living on the cruise ships in New Orleans.

What is noteworthy about the analytical framing of institutional logics is the impact of the heart and gut responses to the crises. While most of the "mind-centered" approaches were obstacles driven by policies and bureaucracies that prevented thinking outside of the box, it was in the heart and gut responses where innovation and care emerged. The heart and gut responses maintained and supported the human and ethical responses important to an ethic of care that puts people first.

Neuroscience supports the idea that beyond our traditional ways of thinking about learning and knowing, complex, functional neural networks (brains) exist in our heart and our gut as well as the organ we call the mind (Cooper, 2001; Soosalu, Henwood, & Deo, 2019). Analyzing across the Macro, Meso and Micro levels of organizational complexity using the three-brains perspective of learning provides a useful dimension for understanding the context of the LSU response during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Research studies have used three-brain ideas to explore leadership (Dotlich, Cairo, & Rhinesmith, 2010), individual growth (Cooper, 2001), and leadership development (Soosalu & Oka, 2012).

While mind-structures are rules, policies, hierarchies, legislative mandates, and legal constraints, heart responses are driven by individual needs and collective care. When one responds through the heart, the response is driven by a desire to "do the right thing" or to demonstrate care and concern for people. Heart-knowing is emotive and connected and driven by values and ethics. Even at the macro levels, a heart response meets the needs of the individual or institution that are unique and often unexpected. Heart responses are more contextually driven and support decision making in unique situations.

The gut responses, like the neurophysiology of our own guts, is associated with movement, action, and a different kind of structure than the mind structure. While the

gut has a clear structural relationship with keeping the body healthy through digestive and elimination processes, the action of digestion and elimination for the health of the system are the foci. From an organizational perspective, the gut dimension includes the structures that make things happen, that keep things moving, and that respond to consumption by extracting nutrients and eliminating waste. The gut response, like the heart response, is situational and contextual, and while structures support the response, they do not dictate the response. As described by Heifetz and Linsky (2004),

> solutions to technical problems lie in the head and solving them requires intellect and logic. *Solutions to adaptive problems lie in the stomach and the heart and rely on changing peoples' beliefs, habits, ways of working or ways of life.* (p. 35, emphasis added)

Addressing the challenges of setting up the Family Education and Services Center required legal and political action. Suspending the no-parents-on-buses policy would be a heart practice, driven by meeting the needs of individuals and doing the "right thing" rather than following the rules. Registering displaced students without the need for transcripts or developing partnerships with UC Berkeley, Big Brother, The Community Initiative Foundation of Baton Rouge, Americorps, among others, was a gut response, providing for adaptive response and creation of structures to meet the needs of the families and children in the RV village.

Thinking about organizational complexity from an institutional logics perspective that captures the levels of organizational existence and the dimensions of three-brains knowing helps untangle the challenges of higher education and support the heart and gut responses that think of people first and break the rules to meet their needs.

Level	Org. Features	Mind/Structure	Heart/Practices	Gut/Acion
L6 Macro	Societal/ Community Level – Education as a Social Structure	Legal and social expectations and support for higher education	Desire to help educate kids and support families	Resources for response to needs such as the Rose Education Center; External partnerships such as Big Brothers, IRC, Americorps
L5	Institutional Level – Higher Education Sector	Existing HE facilities and capacities (e.g., technology, communications, human resources)	Fund raising across institutions (e.g., Virginia Tech. raising and presenting a check for $20K at first LSU football game post-Katrina) to support LSU students displaced by hurricanes	Work across institutions, e.g., accommodating students by registering them without need for transcripts
L4 Meso	Organizational Level – Public Research Carnegie I Institution Context	LSU-specific infrastructure e.g. communications, technology, buildings	Focus on "People first"	Culture of "all-hands-on-deck"

L3	Institutional Level – LSU Baton Rouge Campus	Existing policies, rules, hierarchies, and bureaucracies; Service-learning classes developed	LSU student studies of children in crisis; students and faculty volunteering time to work with families and kids at the RV	Funding for RV activities; development of service learning classes and providing money to hire staff for coordinating RV efforts
L2 Micro	Individual Level – capabilities & motivations	Tutoring, Case Management	Students and faculty stepping up to work with RV after-school and programming; creative approaches to helping kids	Consistent and long-term presence ("Are you going to be here next week?")
L1	Individual Level – cognitions, mental models, constructs & values	Educational Games, Activities in Playground	Art Therapy; Kids with Cameras	Service Learning Student-to-Student

Figure 2: Institutional Logics Analysis of Katrina Response & Three-Brains Approach

The Synthesis

As I enter the final years as an academic, I have the luxury of being able to think about what's next. I also have the perspective to think about what has been and how we got to where we are. Where we are, in higher education, is a reflection of our society with its backlash of neoliberal emphasis on instrumentality, pragmatics, legal conservativism, and production. At many institutions, tenured faculty are becoming an endangered species, and administration celebrates the demise of the tenured-faculty-member-dinosaur. And maybe that is deserved as we have shifted away from our commitments to meeting the needs of our students and our communities. But at the same time, those of us who endeavor to work across institutional boundaries to support communities and work for the concomitant good are discouraged from this work unless it can produce external funding. We, as faculty, seem to exist to feed the institution rather than vice versa.

Why did it take a disaster like Hurricane Katrina for us to realize our true purpose? How do we hold on to the ideas that we should eliminate red tape, break the rules if necessary, and think creatively to solve problems as they occur?

As I consider institutional futures, the strict hierarchies that dominate higher education will eventually collapse under their own weight of sterility and uncaring objectivity in how we treat each other and how we interact in the world. Faculty incivility and discontent has reached extreme levels, making a career as an academic more and more unfavorable. Many of the most creative scholars no longer choose careers in higher education.

My *currere* experience of our institutional and collective responses to Hurricane Katrina can help us understand the importance of taking care of people first and bending the rules when necessary. This means reconsidering the rules and bureaucracies to embrace the heart and gut of ethical, caring, and coordinated action. I hope my students remember from my lessons on Katrina the importance of heart and gut knowings as drivers for doing the right thing to support each other in caring and loving ways.

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