

Finding a friend in *currere*

Tamara Wiehe ¹

¹ McGill University, Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Montreal, Canada

Abstract

In this article, I recount finding a friend in *currere*—a method that reconceptualizes curriculum as lived (Pinar, 1994)—during my master’s degree in education, and how, like any meaningful friendship, we expanded each other’s horizons. Enthralled by its goal to humanize curriculum, I began by exploring the relevance of *currere* in relation to my lived experiences of self-estrangement. Similarities emerged as I learned about *currere*’s origins: we are both outliers in our contexts, and we are both rooted in clinical psychology. Finding common ground enabled our friendship to grow; I synthesized a novel association between *currere* and the psychological framework, Internal Family Systems (IFS; Schwartz, 1995), due to their shared desire to bring the many parts of our identities together. However, a key difference was revealed: where IFS struggled to ground the fragmented parts of me due to the impact of self-estrangement, *currere* remedied this by contextualizing my experiences within education to form an attachment. *Currere* challenged my perceptions of attachment theory—the inevitability of poor life outcomes due to failures in early bonding (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979)—through its potential for self-renewal in adulthood. In response, I proposed *currere* as a method of self-synthesis—an empowering approach in which the self-estranged can piece the parts of themselves together for the first time. Insights from this paper informed my master’s thesis and may prove useful for those seeking a framework for self-synthesis within their educational landscape.

Article History

Received 05.11.2025



Accepted 06.03.2026

Keywords

Currere; internal family systems; attachment theory; self-synthesis; self-estrangement

Introduction

I have a friend whose name is *currere*. We first met a few months ago in a graduate course as part of my master’s degree in education, introduced through a mutual colleague. If first impressions are anything to go by, we should have parted ways after that first interaction. Coming from a certain sociocultural economic background, fancy Latin names are not commonplace in my friendship circle. But in the good spirit in which I have approached my new life in Canada over the past two years, I decided to give *currere* the benefit of the doubt. Thank goodness I did. Over only a matter of months, *currere* has gone from being a feigned stranger to a companion, confidant, friend. This did not happen overnight, though. It relied on my commitment to learning and trusting, to remembering and feeling, to sharing stories and finding common ground.

Corresponding Author Tamara Wiehe  tamara.wiehe@mail.mcgill.ca  McGill University, Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, 3700 McTavish Street, Suite 244 Montreal, Quebec H3A 1Y2, Canada

It was in learning about *currere*'s origin story that I discovered some of our similarities. *Currere* – a child of the 70s – is a rebel, the black sheep of the family, the one who goes against the grain. While most educational researchers and practitioners, like Tyler (1949/2013) and McTighe and Wiggins (2006), focus on a curriculum of content, instruction, and objectives, *currere* has a rather different conceptualization of curriculum: one that lives in and through our inner experiences (Pinar, 2015a). The definition summarizes this well: '*currere* is not the course to be run, or the artifacts employed in the running of the course, it is the running of the course' (Pinar, 2015a, p. 24).

Born two decades later than *currere*'s inception in 1975 (Pinar, 1994), I grew up sensing that I too did not belong and that (higher) education—study—would be my way out. By conforming, remembering facts, and performing well in examinations, I excelled and became the first in generations to complete further education, then higher education, attending a Russell Group university². Achieving all of this while concealing my past was draining. But back then, I did not have the time or notion to stop and think about what I was sacrificing, or the suffering I was forcing myself to endure, or the fact that no one stepped in to help. I vowed to keep running as fast as I could, without looking back, until I became unrecognizable—disconnected from family and my past selves: estranged from myself.

Currere and the Self

A detachment from oneself is encouraged by traditional methods of education. By not considering or caring about each student's experience of the curriculum, traditional methods teach students not to care about who they are and where they belong in the world. But *currere* cares. *Currere* wants us to 'tell stories about our experiences, to make sense of our past, present, and future' (Pinar, 2015b, p. 81). Storytelling occurs sometime after the event, though, such that we engage with the 'virtual experience' (Langer, 1957, p. 155 as cited in Grumet, 2015a, p. 97) beyond the physical reality of the moment, opening the door to ask ourselves, 'what does this mean to me?'. To even begin to answer a question like that, one must first begin the process of getting to know oneself. Simon (1992) suggests we do this by centering oneself 'as subject(s) of their own experience' (in Pinar, 2015a, p. 17). I felt compelled to respond to Simon's call to action through my master's research. However, the impact of self-estrangement complicated this endeavor because the parts of myself were disconnected from one another.

One of *currere*'s most attractive characteristics is its potential to increase self-awareness (Pinar, 2015c). Grumet (2015a) conceptualizes the self-system as 'present[ing] the physical, emotional and intellectual being whom we educate' (p. 87). I think I have climbed a few rungs on the intellectual ladder, if I am to compare my academic and career achievements to my humble beginnings. But other aspects of myself have remained in the past, hidden beneath these achievements, unable to come up for air. For an increase in self-awareness, all parts of oneself must surface. Otherwise, energies are left on the burner until they reach maximum temperature and break through the barriers, causing chaos. *Currere* offers a way to develop all aspects of our identity by exploring the interaction between the self-system and the curriculum (Grumet, 2015a). Safer, perhaps, but not easier.

As I continued reading *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), I realized that we—*currere* and me—share roots in clinical psychology. *Currere* turns to psychological frameworks,

² The Russell Group consists of 24 research-intensive universities across the United Kingdom. For more information, see <https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/who-we-are>

namely Freud's psychoanalysis, to interpret meanings from our experiences, externalizing them to make better sense of them, and then encourages practicing speaking in one's own voice to arrive at a fuller understanding (Pinar, 2015b). I too have an affinity with clinical psychology, studying it as part of my A-Levels and as my Bachelors, then becoming a therapist and trainer in Higher Education. *Currere* is even likened to psychological therapy; however, more aptly, *currere* offers a method in which one can 'translate, interpret, and articulate what they find there [within the self] through dialogue with oneself' (Grumet, 2015b, p. 149). As a therapist and trainer, I had helped others locate themselves in amongst their suffering, and yet, my authentic sel[ves] were nowhere to be found.

Currere, Parts Work, and Attachment

That all changed when I met *currere*. In practicing autobiographical writing during a graduate course in the first term of my master's degree, I began to brush against some of the silenced parts of myself. Then, in meeting *currere*, I was offered a method by which to unveil and (re) connect with them. Coincidentally, while engaging in psychological therapy—this time as a patient—I was introduced to a technique which was also new to me: Internal Family Systems (IFS; Schwartz, 1995). Through study and practice, I started drawing parallels between IFS and *currere* in that both are concerned with bringing together the many parts of our identities. *Parts work*, as IFS is commonly known, does this by engaging two (or more) parts of the self in conversation to resolve conflict. Imagine a dinner party with versions of yourself from various times in your life gathered around a table; some are arguing and fighting, others are silent and withdrawn, some try to hide under the table or leave early without anyone noticing, and others want everyone to just get along. It is a difficult process to engage in, but one that has offered me and many others much needed healing and reconciliation.

Like parts work, *currere* engages the parts of ourselves in a complicated conversation (Pinar, 1995), but the aims are not the same. Instead of conflict resolution, Grumet (2015a) theorizes that *currere* 'is designed to create dissonance, to dislodge the comfortable fit of self-as-object, self-as-place, self-as-agent, for where there is a neat complicity between these three, there is no movement, personal or professional' (p. 101). Gusdorf (1980) adds that it is in the tensions between the self where the process of individuation can occur as the autobiographer 'reassembles the scattered elements of his individual life and regroups them in a comprehensive sketch' (p. 35). *Currere* does this by drawing on the tensions found within and between the four stages of the method – Regressive, Progressive, Analytical, and Synthetic – to reconceptualize the self (Grumet, 2015a).

Oftentimes, when I have engaged in IFS as part of psychological treatment for complex PTSD, I have felt like I was floating. Even the table, with all the parts of myself, floats in the sky on a cloud. On reflection, this is likely due to my lack of grounding as a result of self-estrangement; in not knowing my past selves, I feel untethered from myself in time, place, and body. *Currere* instead uses our experiences with education to provide context, by forming a two-way relationship: an attachment. We can all recount good and bad experiences of education, but these may be more significant to those of us who relied on that relationship to define who we are and locate our place in the world. This attachment, this need for validation perhaps, is enduring, having spent most of my adulthood in higher education.

Here, I was reminded of attachment theory, a staple in the undergraduate psychology curriculum, popularized by Bowlby in the 60s and later developed by Ainsworth into four attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Still used today to categorize attachment between a child and their primary caregiver, the four styles – secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-resistant, and disorganized – were arrived at through a study known as *The Strange Situation* (Ainsworth, 1978), which tested an infant's 'secure base' to their primary caregiver. While attachment can change slightly over time through therapy and positive relationships, it remains largely determined by the initial infant-caregiver bond; this is established during the first five years of life, known as the *critical period* (Bowlby, 1979).

Can it really be that black and white, I wonder, questioning the deterministic approach outlined by Bowlby and Ainsworth. If so, people like me never stood a chance. And yet, here we are, not only surviving, but thriving. Therapy and other positive relationships may provide some explanation for this, but could my lifelong attachment to education be another? And, could *currere* offer a far more empowering approach through which to care for and heal oneself? Baszile (2017) suggests so in saying '*currere*—as a kind of self-praxis—is my opportunity to engage in a personal way with the curriculum in a co-productive process; it shapes me, and I shape it' (p. 7).

Currere and self-synthesis

Emboldened and slightly apprehensive, I designed and studied *Currere for Educational Researchers*: an independent reading course that consisted of weekly readings and writings, including autobiographical journals, a theoretical synthesis (the basis of this paper), and a methodological plan for my master's thesis. As the course progressed, and the parallels I had drawn between *currere* and *parts work* strengthened in theory, journaling presented the first opportunity for application. Four journals emerged over a period of two months, each using one of the four stages of *currere* (Pinar, 2015b)—Regressive, Progressive, Analytical, and Synthetic—to interact with the parts of myself in the context of education. Rather than focusing solely on the intellectual self, I attended to my emotional experiences, as required by parts work, to connect with the parts of myself I had neglected.

The Regressive stage was the most painful. *Currere* asked me 'to observe oneself functioning in the past' (Pinar, 2015b, p. 73) and record the experiences found there, be it with teachers, peers, or a particular classroom subject. Then, through the psychoanalytic technique of free association, one writes freely about one's memories to create a photograph that will be used as a new vantage point in the second stage. Pinar (2015b) explains that the key to a successful Regressive stage is to remain in the past; to avoid interpreting it, as this interferes with the quality of recollection. Rarely do I (re)visit the past for fear of becoming stuck there; however, with *currere*, I felt safe to do so. And the little girl that had been left in that primary school classroom felt seen, heard, and validated for the first time.

Next, I time-travelled to the future via the Progressive stage of *currere* to observe and record my dreams and aspirations for my intellectual self, again using free association (Pinar, 2015b). Pinar explains that success relies on repeating the process several times over a period of weeks or months to reduce distractions and ensure the 'photographs taken are more reflective of more lasting anticipations' (2015b, p. 76). I found the Progressive stage to be the most liberating. Fear of the past often blinds my view ahead, but through *currere*, I went there—toward an imagined future—and in doing so, I encountered a new part of myself.

The Analytical stage followed, whereby one describes—not interprets—the present in terms of one’s emotional wellbeing and career or academic pursuits and interests. This stage requires you to ‘photograph the present as if one were a camera, including oneself in the present taking the photograph, and your response to this act’ (Pinar, 2015b, p. 77). Even in the present, *currere* requires an element of distance for dialectical reflection, that is, to see oneself seeing (Grumet, 2015a). Merleau-Ponty explains how this is made possible by ‘slackening the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice’ (1962, p. 118). I found the Analytical stage to be the most empowering. Due to trauma, the parts of me are often blended (Schwartz, 1995), and with IFS alone, I often struggle to separate them for fear of who I might uncover. *Currere* had shown me how to curate a sense of safety from distance and contextualization in education.

In the final stage—the Synthetical—*currere* (re)integrated the past, future, and present parts of me from the previous three journals so that ‘I am placed together.’ (p. 79). From this new vantage point, we can see more of ourselves and of others, and begin to explore what we see by asking ‘who is that?’ and ‘what concept is finally visible? Can one bracket and thus escape from the conceptual, take it into one’s hands as it were, examine it, and then see its relation to one’s psychological, physical, ontological condition?’ (Pinar, 2015b, p. 78). The Synthetical stage felt the most humanizing because it instilled hope: if I could synthesize the parts of myself from the journals for this course, then I could keep doing so, through my master’s thesis and beyond. In that moment, I realized that *currere* is not only a ‘dynamic method of self-renewal’ (Grumet, 2015b, p. 143)—*renewal* suggesting a sound sense of self already exists—rather, an empowering approach, alongside IFS, in which the self-estranged can piece the parts of themselves together for the first time.

Conclusion

Currere arrived, for me, at a *critical period* in my life where I have the capacity to care for myself, and where using oneself as the subject of research suggests I now see myself as worthwhile (Graham, 1989). And, unlike my early attachments, this newfound friendship with *currere* is reciprocal: ‘it shapes me, and I shape it’ (Baszile, 2017, p. 7). *Currere* offers a ‘secure base’ through the grounding and attachment of myself to education, and in return, I extend *its* ‘horizons’ by theorizing and applying it as a method of self-synthesis for the self-estranged. Selfishly, I am curious about where this friendship may take me. Less selfishly, I know that there are many others out there who are navigating this relentless and unforgiving quest of piecing oneself together and creating lasting ties. If I succeed, I may have a story or two to tell, which others might use to find their own voice: to make connections with who they are and where they belong. Pinar (2015c) says it best when he writes: ‘heal yourself, and with all the potency of one’s being, make selective, careful, useful insertions into the social world’ (p. 122).

Declarations

Acknowledgments: Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Strong-Wilson, for introducing me to the method of *currere* and for your words of encouragement as I conceptualized this paper.

Authors’ contributions: The first author is the only contributor to this article.

Competing interests: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: This paper, as part of the author's master's thesis, received ethical approval and adheres to the institution's ethical principles for autobiographical study.

Note: This paper is derived from the author's master's thesis.

Publisher's note: Currere and Praxis remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Orcid ID

Tamara Wiehe  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5614-3446>

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1978). The Bowlby–Ainsworth attachment theory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1(3), 436–438.
- Baszile, D. T. (2017). On the virtues of currere. *Currere Exchange Journal*, 1(1), vi–ix.
- Bowlby, J. (1979). The Bowlby–Ainsworth attachment theory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2(4), 637–638.
- Graham, R. J. (1989). Autobiography and education. *Journal of Educational Thought / Revue de la Pensée Éducative*, 23(2), 92–105.
- Grumet, M. (2015a). Toward a poor curriculum. In W. F. Pinar & M. Grumet (Eds.), *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed., pp. 84–112). Educators' International Press.
- Grumet, M. (2015b). Psychoanalytic foundations. In W. F. Pinar & M. Grumet (Eds.), *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed., pp. 142–190). Educators' International Press.
- Gusdorf, G. (1980). Conditions and limits of autobiography. In J. Olney (Ed.), *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical* (pp. 28–48). Princeton University Press.
- McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2006). *Understanding by design*. Pearson.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 67(4), 401–409.
- Pinar, W. F. (1994). The method of “currere” (1975). *Counterpoints*, 2, 19–27.
- Pinar, W. F. (1995). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses* (Vol. 17). Peter Lang.
- Pinar, W. F. (2015a). Self and others. In W. F. Pinar & M. Grumet (Eds.), *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed., pp. 8–39). Educators' International Press.
- Pinar, W. F. (2015b). The method. In W. F. Pinar & M. Grumet (Eds.), *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed., pp. 65–83). Educators' International Press.
- Pinar, W. F. (2015c). Political-spiritual dimensions. In W. F. Pinar & M. Grumet (Eds.), *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed., pp. 113–141). Educators' International Press.
- Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. (2015). *Toward a poor curriculum* (3rd ed.). Educators' International Press.

Schwartz, R. C. (1995). *Internal family systems therapy*. Guilford Press.

Simon, R. I. (1992). *Teaching against the grain: Texts for a pedagogy of possibility*. Bergin & Garvey.

Tyler, R. W. (2013). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. University of Chicago Press.
(Original work published 1949)