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Article

Exploring miseducation and education: Arriving at a parental engagement tutoring continuum through a *currere*, duoethnography, and arts-based reflexivity inquiry

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Abstract

This article describes an inquiry between a literacy tutor and a nurse-researcher. Using three interwoven research methodologies: *currere*, duoethnography and arts-based reflexivity, the researchers sought to understand complex tensions that resulted when parents' engagement in the tutoring failed to meet the tutor's expectations. The work is grounded in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and a narrative understanding of stories. Working through Pinar's four moments of *currere* while engaging in dialogic and dangerous conversations, the authors came to understand how unexamined assumptions and expectations resulted in minimal progress and the reinforcement of limiting metanarratives. The authors engaged in ongoing arts-based reflexive practices, where they created art and shared it to understand the other's perspective while imagining up more educative and inclusive tutoring. Slowly, through time, working within the three intertwined methodologies and grounded in the trust of their relationship, Janet asked thoughtful and often dangerous questions. She also shared her experience of developing and living out best practices within diabetes-related wound and foot care within communities. This led to the consideration of a parental engagement tutoring continuum. A continuum that allows parents to enter the tutoring and contribute as they choose and as trust develops. By unlearning pedagogical certainties and by challenging assumptions and expectations, tutoring spaces were created where learning is more likely to occur and where parental involvement is routinely welcomed, encouraged, and celebrated.

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Introduction

We were hired as probationary appointments at the assistant professor level at a small, Atlantic Canada university at approximately the same time. We first met at a local research conference. After multiple conversations, we appreciated that honesty and social justice were important to us both. We began to discuss the possibility of cross-disciplinary (nursing and education) research. Over time, we collaborated on multiple research studies, building a strong foundation of trust. These studies included dialogic conversations where we explored ideas, constructed shared meaning, and learned together (Norris & Greenlaw, 2012). Our

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developing trust provided a secure foundation from which we thought deeply about, proposed, and then lived out and reported on qualitative, autobiographical, and arts-based research studies. With our first collaborative study, we sought to deepen our understanding of how our identities as academics were being influenced and shaped by multiple and complex factors (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019). Methodologies gave us a research language focused on the dialogic, while providing structure as we inquired into and reconceptualized our understanding of the academics we wanted to become (Sawyer & Norris, 2012). One of these was *currere* (Pinar, 2012). The other was duoethnography (Norris et al., 2012). Over time, our appreciation of what these methodologies afforded deepened. As we moved forward as researchers, we continued to lean into and utilize these methodologies, which included spaces to understand how our lived experiences were shaping the research (Johnson & Hineman, 2019). The present research—the subject of this article—was no exception. Questions related to the possibility of future educative stories (Dewey, 1938) within a tutoring space brought us back to these methodologies; we are invoking Dewey in using the word "educative", which we later explain in relation to "miseducative." Our study was full of both such moments and stories.

Janet is a community-based nurse-researcher within the School of Nursing. Her research focuses on access to equitable, rural, foot health services, especially for individuals living with diabetes mellitus. Moreover, her research includes sepsis prevention, wound and foot care for those using intravenous drugs. Sandra was a teacher-educator within the Department of Education and retired in 2023. Her research focused on understanding dyslexia as a shaping influence on identity and how a structured approach to literacy instruction can positively impact students. Upon retiring, she moved to her home province and renewed her tutoring services. Shortly thereafter, she was contacted by parents asking her to tutor their children. She quickly found herself amid multiple, complex, tension-filled stories[1] (Clandinin, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Wanting to learn from the tensions, Sandra reached out to Janet in search of a trusted ear, another perspective, and insights to deepen understandings of what was occurring. Therefore, this article is framed as a dialogic conversation between Sandra and Janet (duoethnography), structured through the four phases of *currere* as we moved through different understandings of the tensions. As well, we engaged in ongoing arts-based reflexivity. We did so because we wanted to access and understand Sandra's positioning and how it was being shaped by previous lived experiences, while also imagining future, educative tutoring spaces.

Why This Work is Important

This work is important because it can provide opportunities to see and live out tutoring experiences in new, educative ways, including practices that are more inclusive and welcoming for families.[2] As well, the work can shed light on the experiences of a tutor, specifically how her early lived narratives shaped the present tutoring. Furthermore, it illustrates how early educational experiences can limit one's willingness to inquire into and subsequently imagine a range of possibilities for change. In addition, the work provides suggestions for other tutors and literacy researchers to work collaboratively when encountering and researching tension-filled moments. Finally, it contributes to a growing body of studies on literacy tutoring.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks are the lenses we looked through as we sought to understand and explain how we were constructing meaning and wonder how we might learn from and then shift our understandings. The theoretical frameworks guided the analysis and justified the choices made in terms of the methodologies. They provide a link between this work and existing literature in the field of literacy tutoring.

John Dewey's Theory of Experience: Educative Versus Miseducative Experiences

From an ontological standpoint, this research draws on Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education, where reality is understood through the nature of experience. Inherent to Dewey's framework is the distinction between experiences that are educative and those that are miseducative. To understand if an experience is educative or miseducative, Dewey described two criteria: interaction and continuity. Interaction, he argued, is always occurring between an individual, objects, and other people. An experience is what it is because of the transactions between an individual and her environment. Continuity draws attention to how each experience influences later ones, such that what one learns in one situation becomes a lens through which to experience and understand later ones. Dewey wrote: "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). A consideration of the intersection of interaction and continuity is important because it affords "narrative ways of thinking about phenomena" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 36). Dewey (1981) wrote, "in an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously lived" (p. 251). This theory of education is the overarching lens through which we thought about, analyzed, and described Sandra's experiences.

Dewey (1938) argued that experiences are educative if they "live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p. 28). When describing miseducative experiences, he wrote:

> any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. (p. 25)

We returned to these ideas as we worked to renegotiate relational aspects of the tutoring, moving away from the pedagogical certainties of the Orton-Gillingham approach[3] and moving towards a focus on an active, social, and reflective partnership between the tutor, the tutee and the parents.

Metanarratives, Values and Assumptions

Lyotard (1979/1984) used the word metanarratives to capture the idea that prescriptive ways of knowing, those that are aimed at ordering society, silence and quietening those that think otherwise. In turn, metanarratives are stories infused with beliefs, values and assumptions that, if left unexamined, can negatively influence experience (Reiss, 2012). We wanted to understand how the tutor as expert became a metanarrative that made it difficult to hear, understand, and assign value to parental narratives that did not fit within the assumptions and expectations of the tutor. Our ongoing collaborative dialogic conversations helped us examine and disrupt these metanarratives.

Reflexivity and Relational Ontology

This study is also grounded in a theoretical understanding that knowledge is co-constructed (Vygotsky, 1978). Truth is not something a researcher objectively finds; rather, it is co-created between people (tutor, parents, students, and society) and co-created between the authors. The authors' ongoing reflexivity practices (Finlay, 2012, 2017) intertwined with their related conversations, were used to deepen understanding and imagine future possibilities. Embodied responses and relational empathy allowed us to attend to our bodily sensations, resonances to previous experiences, and relational trust (Finlay, 2005) as we struggled to hear, fully attend to, and ultimately understand the other's experiences and perspectives. Moreover, this stance allowed us to lean into our trusted relationship while remembering understanding is not limited to one's intellect; it requires an emotional, physical, and relational connection to another person's perspective. This was particularly important when the nurse researcher first introduced the notion of a parental tutoring continuum where parents are active, contributing participants. The tutor struggled mightily to hear and value this suggestion; however, through time, she came to appreciate the value of the continuum.

Methodological Frameworks

Grounded in the above theories, we structured our inquiry around three qualitative research methodologies that we intentionally interconnected. We used them as tools to collect, think deeply about, and analyze data and then synthesize what we learned. We began with Pinar's (2012) four moments of *currere*, the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical, and his assertion that curriculum is the lived experiences of students, teachers, and parents. Furthermore, Pinar and Grumet's (2014) *Toward a Poor Curriculum* helped us understand the importance of reducing[4] a curriculum until what remains is the subjective, lived experiences of the student and teacher interacting with each other and with knowledge. Pinar and Grumet encourage teachers to engage in a poor curriculum[5] so that students remain the primary focus, experiences reflect their lives, and relationships are central to meet the goal of reconstructing identities. Grumet (2015) proposes a poor curriculum allows for the active autobiographical examination of one's educational life. She described this process as:

> a procedure of autobiographical writing and reflection upon those writings. Autobiographical entries reveal the genesis of the assumptions and commonsense attitudes of the individual. When in reflection, the student brackets those assumptions and identification from the everyday, it is not to remove himself from that world, but to move closer to it by seeing through the structures of objectivity to the pre-objective, pre-reflective contact with the world upon which they rest. (p. 89)

Simultaneously throughout a *currere* process, we engaged in duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Duoethnography includes polyvocal, dialogic,[6] and sometimes dangerous conversations[7] occurring within trust-filled spaces. Differences are shared with the purpose of disrupting metanarratives and shifting researchers' awareness to the specific and localized. Differences are respected and treated as analytical strengths. Specifically, we analyzed our dialogue in efforts to unearth, understand, and then reconceptualize meanings we assigned to lived experiences. Thus, we were able to disrupt the metanarratives that were shaping our experiences and expectations (Norris & Greenlaw, 2012). Sawyer and Norris (2012) argue that when working together on a duoethnography, "we seek to untangle our perceptions of our narratives and reform their proportional impact on our lives" (p. 296).

Finally, this work included arts-based reflexivity as methodology. As researchers, we aim to include art in the analysis, discussion, and presentation of the data, which is a tenet of arts-based reflexivity (Etherington, 2004; Finlay, 2012, 2017; Leavy, 2018). We do this because art created can be used to heighten awareness and help expose learners to new, creative ideas and ways of knowing (Leavy, 2018). As well, art may be transformational in capturing and sharing deeply embedded, emotional layers of lived experience, which in turn can broaden the self-reflective process. Creating art helped the authors remember specific lived experiences. Viewing art created during the research allowed us to call up stories, including emotions, visuals, and relationships with individuals. Art creation as a source of data was a medium to capture embodied responses (Finlay, 2005). In turn, we worked to use words to describe the stories we accessed and learned from. Reflexive collage and the reworking of an antique shoe last[8] afforded new perceptions and understandings. The physical objects were a lens through which we could step back, in a less emotionally charged manner, to engage in a process of co-reflection (Given, 2012). Greene (1995) summarizes some of the benefits of arts-based research:

> At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to *see* more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed. (p. 123)

It is our hope that the inclusion of artwork makes this research more accessible to readers.

The Four Moments of Currere, Our Narratives and the Analysis

Sandra Starts with a Story – Regressive

I am the youngest of four children. My parents were readers, and they provided daily support to their children as we learned to read. I was particularly eager to read because my siblings enjoyed reading independently and I was desperate to do similarly. At school, I did not struggle to read and write. As an adult, reading is one of the cornerstones of my daily life. I read for pleasure, I read to learn, and I read to stay abreast of and understand research. I cannot imagine a life without reading or writing.

Two years into my retirement, I received phone calls from family members and friends who knew I had previously worked as a full-time tutor with children and families living with dyslexia. I was keen to help. Each caller wanted to know if I would tutor their child. I remembered how much joy I experienced when tutoring children (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2025) and how grateful I had often been when I allowed the children to teach me. I responded to the parents by asking questions to understand what they were hoping for, and requesting recent report cards, copies of psychoeducational evaluation reports that included cognitive abilities, academic achievement, and social/emotional assessments. I also asked to see samples of schoolwork. I listened as parents shared their stories, including frustrations with school and their hopes for their child. Over the course of two or three calls and multiple emails, we agreed I would begin tutoring. I prefer to work face to face; however, because some of the children live a significant distance from me, some tutoring occurs online. Dates and times were agreed upon, and a schedule was established. Within two months, I was tutoring a range of students across the grades (high school, kindergarten, and the early years).

I began tutoring students with the intent of creating relational trust between myself, the children, and their families. It did not, however, take long before I experienced what Clandinin

(2013) has described as tension-filled moments: moments where my stories of how best to proceed came into friction with parents knowing, making visible the complexity of our individual efforts to support a student struggling to read. For example, I wondered why some of the students experienced difficulties logging in on time or logging in at all. And there were others who were never prepared in terms of having the requested items (paper, pencil, headphones, reading materials, and water). Moreover, I experienced surprise when some families believed a weekly, 30-minute tutoring session would result in closing significant literacy gaps in a couple of months. I patiently explained best practices (Moats, 2020). Moats argued that a structured approach, including explicit, systematic, and diagnostic instruction, is how to proceed. Such an approach targets word-level recognition and language comprehension while mapping phonemes to graphemes and teaching morphology. Through daily intervention and practice, the student achieves mastery. I acknowledged the importance of tutoring intervention; however, I was quick to state that tutoring was one step in the remediation plan. Parents would need to participate between tutoring sessions, attending daily as their child read or wrote while reinforcing the strategies introduced and worked on during tutoring. Amid the tensions, I thought about those children who had daily literacy parental support and how much more quickly they were progressing.

Despite my efforts and follow-up reminders of best practices (Moats, 2020), children routinely arrived at tutoring unprepared and not having practiced throughout the previous week. I was growing increasingly frustrated with parents who were obviously not taking what we discussed seriously, nor were they engaging in daily practice with their child. I never directly stated this frustration to the noncompliant parents; however, I knew my expectations for their child's literacy progress were diminishing.

Analysis of the Regressive Moment

Collaborative discussion of, and self-reflection on, Sandra's learn-to-read experiences opened the door to identifying how her childhood memories were potentially influencing the tutoring space in "miseducative" ways (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). Because her parents had supported her, her expectations and assumptions (Reiss, 2012) were that all parents would readily support their children as they learned to read. The regressive moment also allowed us to wonder how the past might shape the future more educatively, as per Dewey's (1938) theory. We were hopeful that in looking back we would uncover opportunities for future, more educative literacy remediation tutoring stories. Furthermore, part of our regressive moment included reviewing our published *currere* studies (Jack-Malik, 2018; Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019; Kuhnke, 2020; Kuhnke, 2021; Kuhnke & Jack-Malik, 2019; Kuhnke et al., 2021), which reminded us of the importance of completing the individual *currere* moments and then stepping back to synthesize the whole, which resulted in deeper understandings and foundations for future changes.

Progressive: Imagining What Tutoring Could Look Like

Janet: I hear you describe best practices related to literacy remediation intervention, including daily parental support for the process. I also hear you describe an urgency related to your understanding of how quickly a child can fall behind, not meeting literacy outcomes, and the subsequent labeling that can occur. Moreover, I hear concerns for students moving from

primary grades where they are expected to learn to read, to the junior grades where they are expected to read independently (Armbruster et al., 2006; Hernandez, 2011; Stanovich, 1986). I am wondering if families are not yet ready to fully trust you, nor do they understand how they might contribute to tutoring. I am also wondering if you are open to a range of parental contributions, some of which you might be unfamiliar with. Can you imagine a *continuum* of parental engagement? And can you envision families moving along the continuum, slowly making progress towards full support of the tutoring process? What would parental support of the tutoring look like if you framed it as movement along a continuum, and do you have patience for this process?

With rising frustration, Sandra replied: **No!** I can't imagine a continuum. It is not helpful! Parent(s) must understand their child is significantly behind in terms of mastering literacy outcomes, and the longer this continues, the harder it is to remediate, and the further behind their child falls. I share the following quote with parents: "pre K–12 tutoring interventions rank among the most widespread, versatile, and potentially transformative instruments in today's educational toolkit" (Nickow et al., 2024, p. 74). As well, from my experience and the documentation parents provided, I am confident improvement is possible. I discuss parents' role and expect them to work diligently with their child between the tutoring sessions (Khumairoh, 2023). When we first meet, I listen patiently as they describe how the school/teachers have failed their child. At the same time, I am confident I can help, and I know the tutoring and therefore the remediation proceeds more effectively when parent(s) work daily with their child between sessions (Çalışkan & Ulas, 2022; Tinpay et al., 2021). Parents must be able to imagine their child shifting away from the experiences of a struggling reader and moving towards the identity of a fluent reader (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2025). Moreover, they must come to understand the critical importance of their daily contributions to their child's shifts in reader identity.

I know tutoring needs to be a safe space where the child can begin to imagine themselves as a competent reader and writer. For some children, this is a sizeable identity shift because when they begin tutoring, they regularly name themselves as "dumb" (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2025, p. 232). I get frustrated when parents do not support tutoring as I assume and expect they will do. Listening to your questions, I am wondering how my positioning negatively shapes tutoring and, more specifically, the child and their parents. Furthermore, I am reluctantly trying to imagine what I might do differently. I feel confident having repeatedly lived out what I know to be reading remediation best practices. I know, and the research demonstrates that children can improve; however, they need daily parental reading and writing time. When you ask me to imagine otherwise, I experience it as demanding. I know who I am as a tutor, and your questions result in uncertainty and additional frustrations (Clandinin et al., 2018). As we have returned to this point through several conversations and emails, I am reluctantly hearing my expert arrogance (Frye, 1983). I am also thinking about a child who is being tutored. I ask myself why I get frustrated when the child is late, materials are not ready, and no practice has occurred. I know the child is not responsible and therefore my frustrations are aimed not at them but at parents.

Janet: I wonder if some parents need time to imagine, understand and value the contributions they can make to their child's remediation (Nickow et al., 2024). Based on your experience and the literature, we know students learn quicker when parents provide daily support. I am also thinking about the frustrations you described. Specifically, are your frustrations grounded in assumptions (Reiss, 2012)? Reiss described assumptions as "... thoughts that cause us to

predict an outcome. They are usually based on past experiences or old stale thoughts. We think we already know what will happen, based on the assumption we've made" (p. 11). What assumptions are you making, and are they in the child's best interest? I am also thinking about encounters parents may have had with school/teachers from their own history when they were learning to read, coupled with present-day encounters. Are schools and teachers welcoming parents and listening to their concerns? How are past experiences a shaping influence on what parents can contribute? Moreover, are you assuming that parents know how to contribute to the remediation process or that they *can* do so? We know there is a genetic predisposition to language-based learning disabilities (Shaywitz, 1998). How does a parent living with a learning disability contribute, if they themselves struggle?

Analysis of the Progressive Moment

Sandra: I don't want to think about the questions you are asking me. I just want parents to do what I say to help their child. I want them to respect that in this situation; I know what is best and they should do what I recommend. And yes, I hear my "arrogant perceiver's expectation" spilling out, and I know there is a lot of ground to cover before I can embrace Frye's loving perception (Frye, 1983, p. 69). I know this inquiry is helping me to examine and understand my assumptions, expectations, biases, and fears. I also know parents, and I want the same thing: for the child to meet all grade level literacy outcomes. Still, I am frustrated because I imagine a future that includes the worst-case scenario for children I am getting to know and care about. These concerns/burdens shape how I live in the moment with students and parents. I wonder how my beliefs are negatively interfering with my development as a tutor and with the children's progress.

I created this three-dimensional, multimedia, cut paper collage (paper, fibers, puzzle pieces, water-based paint, foam board, and a protective clear coat) as part of my efforts to understand the tensions and to think deeply about Janet's questions (See Figure 1). Moreover, I wanted to understand who I was being as a tutor (miseducative; Dewey, 1938) and who I might become (Greene, 1995) if I was tutoring educatively (Dewey, 1938). As well, I wanted to employ Clandinin's (2013) process of "coming alongside"[9] parents and within tutoring spaces (p. 34).

In this reflexive artwork, I looked to the future and imagined a child leaning forward, head down, surrounded by puzzle pieces that did not fit together and books he could not read; he would have missed so many opportunities. I constructed the buildings, floating to illustrate things that are out of his reach. And I clad him in blue clothes to illustrate my hope that he knows that, regardless of the chaos surrounding his struggles to learn to read, he knows he is clever. I also called him "Blue." I carefully selected blue because Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) argued that the colour blue evokes calm, trust and quiet thoughtfulness; all things I want for the student. Janet's suggestion that my childhood learn-to-read experiences only allowed for a single form of parental participation in the tutoring defined by me was initially startling and then became a tool to interrogate my positioning. My self-positioning as expert prevented parents from contributing in ways that did not fit within my assumptions and expectations; this resulted in complex tensions. Janet asked if my goal is to provide tutoring that supports the child's mastery of literacy outcomes. If so, then I ought to consider reframing my expectations for parental support such that they could experience movement along an educative parental engagement continuum. This was a powerful idea, one that pointed towards greater possibilities.

Through time, I slowly began to imagine a future that included a parental engagement continuum. I attempted to capture this notion through Blue's forward motion. While initially I experienced Janet's questions as prodding and annoying, our carefully selected and intertwined research methodologies allowed me to understand that the greater the annoyance, the greater the likelihood that the questions were valuable opportunities to deepen understanding, particularly so as to interrogate my arrogance related to an identity thread of self as expert. I reflected on the notion of dangerous conversations. Le Fevre and Sawyer (2012) argue that dangerous conversations are those that "are often silenced ones, problematic self disclosures, daring publications, and unfettered electronic communications" (p. 263). I appreciated that we were amid one such conversation. For the first time in my adult life, I wondered, can a life be full of options when one is not fully literate? Perhaps the answer is yes. Honestly, I don't know. Coming to this understanding, I appreciated the methodologies that could simultaneously support miseducative imaginings for the students' futures if I was willing to stay the course of the *currere* and the duoethnography, they might afford hints at futures that included reconstructing and living out new, more educative tutoring stories.

Figure 1. Blue and his complex reading journey

Analysis of the Analytical Moment

The analytical moment provides an opportunity to understand present lives and how lived experiences intersect with social, cultural, and political contexts (Pinar, 2012). During the analytical moment, one examines the relationship between data previously collected.

Sandra: Our ongoing dialogic conversations allowed us to appreciate how past experiences continue to shape current beliefs, expectations, and assumptions (Reiss, 2012). Furthermore, Janet's questioning slowly began to shape how I imagined inviting and encouraging parental

tutoring support that was outside of my previously held, narrow expectations and assumptions (Reiss). I had understood reading remediation best practices as behaviours or attitudes that were either a best practice or not. This either-or thinking allowed me to label parents as supporting or negatively interfering with the tutoring. Implementing Janet's suggestion of exploring a parental tutoring continuum opened spaces for parents to engage in tutoring in a variety of different ways. It also allowed me, the tutor, to shift my thinking, decreasing my proclivity to label parents' actions as right or wrong. Furthermore, the continuum shifts the responsibility for change from the parents to me, the tutor. I began to wonder if I changed my thinking, would it open spaces for parents to consider asking questions, making suggestions, and contributing to the remediation process. With Janet's support, I began to construct different future stories that included parental tutoring engagement along a continuum.

Part of this reconsideration included reflection on how I utilized a resource entitled *Tips for Parents Navigating Online Learning* as provided by the Orton-Gillingham Academy (2020). During a complicated conversation[10], Janet suggested I could be more deliberate with this resource. I refer to it when meeting with parents; however, I assume they have read and utilize the suggestions. I assume they are excited and willing to practice what it describes. These assumptions have proven to be arrogant, naïve, and erroneous. Upon analysis, I am slowly beginning to appreciate recurring themes, such as my proclivity for either/or thinking. I often label things as right or wrong and then react. Our commitment to complicated conversations inherent in the methodologies allowed for a deepening and widening of my approach to support parents and value the contributions they make to their child's remediation process, while moving along the continuum. Moreover, the progressive moment allowed me to hold multiple understandings at one time, such that some parents can contribute to tutoring, some will need more time and support, and others may never step on the continuum, or their contributions are invisible, or I don't yet recognize them.

My goal ultimately is to support children as they learn to read. My future stories include the following. When a child appears for tutoring, I teach to the best of my ability, foregrounding the relational. Moreover, I understand it is my responsibility to continually work to set aside the expert label and be open to all forms of parental participation. I am endeavouring to enter each tutoring space with an expectation to listen to learn, to understand students and parents. I encourage, praise, and cheer for the child. I am reminded of a conversation with a former superintendent. I was complaining about poor attendance and a lack of parental support. He looked at me and said directly, "Sandra, you might never fix the issues of attendance or parental involvement, but *you* can teach every child who shows up as best as you can" (*Private communication*, fall 2013).

The Synthetical Moment and Analysis

Janet Describes Her Present Reality: This is important work, Sandra. It is hard to unpack assumptions and to shift in ways that result in more welcoming and inclusive tutoring spaces where parents feel valued for their contributions.

As I listen, I am reflecting on my community practice. I research and write on best practices (Kuhnke et al., 2025), research diabetes-related foot health and people living with wounds. Also, I work at a primary care clinic focused on harm reduction where the interprofessional

team utilizes the mental health and addictions community wellness framework when providing best practices (Government of Nova Scotia, 2024). So, the notion of best practice is interwoven within my work. As part of the team, I regularly assess skin health and wounds, wash skin, trim and file nails, and provide dry socks, shoes, and foot health education to folks in the community. Attending to their feet provides pockets of time for me to listen and learn. Clients share stories of their complex lives, including experiences with homelessness, mental wellness, drug addiction, efforts to access health care, and their feelings when the only providers are local, underfunded services.

As we tentatively, through time, experience the humanness of each other, I am sometimes afforded opportunities to ask questions and to listen. In this space, I reflect on my perceptions and assumptions of people living complex lives, where determinants of health[11] often negatively shape their lives. I hope these conversations result in more stable and routine care built on our developing trust (Frankl, 1963). Clients routinely comment they appreciate being listened to; they enjoy discussing personal and family events and issues related to their health (Kuhnke and Jack-Malik, 2019; Kuhnke et al., 2023; Walsh & Kuhnke, 2023). These relations develop slowly through time with many stops and starts. I frequently experience the holistic nature of caring for feet and caring for a developing relation with a complex human. I have come to know that the focus is always shifting, feet first or relation first. When I am guided by the client, things often develop that support the wellbeing of the client.

Similarly, I wonder if the notion of a parental engagement tutoring continuum provides a framework that reduces frustrations and is more invitational and supportive of parental contributions. A continuum is consistent with what we learned in the regressive and progressive moments because it acknowledges the shaping influence of past experiences while supporting shifts in your identity from expert to collaborating with parents.

Thinking about a parental engagement continuum reminds me of Riddell (2018) and her transformative notions related to the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration. Specifically, I am thinking about the steps we have taken as part of this research, including your steps towards making changes. Because of my practice, I am thinking about human steps, feet, and the movement of relationally coming alongside (Estefan et al., 2016). As part of my reflexive practice, I was wondering how to explore and express change through art. My neighbour gave me an antique, oak shoe last: a wooden form shaped like a human foot used in the manufacture and repair of shoes (See Figure 2). I wondered about the steps a shoemaker takes to repair a shoe or boot. Similarly, I reflected on the three previous moments in efforts to allow new understandings to emerge while appreciating how identities and experiences were being influenced. This wooden last was worn, tired, and in need of revitalization (remediation). I cleaned and sanded the wood with increasingly fine sandpaper to prepare the last for painting. The repetitive sanding motion allowed me to experience (feel and see) change through my hands and eyes as the old, stained wood transformed into a smooth surface, revealing a stunning oak grain. I also cleaned and oiled the leather band and then massaged in a conditioner. Using acrylics, I painted red and yellow flowers, emerging upward from under a blue sea. When I shared this work with Sandra, we discussed our understandings of the colour blue, given that we both used it in our creations. We also discussed changes, small and large, and how they impact an experience. In particular, we thought about the tutoring and like the shoe last, how small changes might result in significant improvements. Finally, we discussed our art and how it is a medium to illustrate our reflexivity practices (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019; Kuhnke et al., 2021), including through ongoing dialogic conversations.

Figure 2. Revitalized wooden shoe last

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) stated that it is blue that draws the human gaze to another space, allowing for other possibilities. He further discussed the embodiment of change, the felt experience of colour perception, motion, and bodily movement while creating. In reflection on Merleau-Ponty's work, Svarnyk (2014) wrote:

> blue is that which prompts me to look in a certain way, that which allows my gaze to run over in a specific manner. It is a certain field or atmosphere presented to the power of my eyes and of my whole body (para. 2).

When I look at the revitalized last and the collage you created, I feel possibilities for creativity, inclusion, loss, and potential (Greene, 2001). Moreover, my appreciation for the notion of a parental engagement tutoring continuum deepens because I see a range of educative options for the tutor, the tutee, and for the parents (Dewey, 1938).

In the final moment (synthetical), both of us integrated what we learned from the previous moments (Pinar, 2012). We imagined a deeper understanding of Sandra's frustrations, parental involvement, and recommendations for future tutoring and tutors.

This is not our first experience with *currere*. We engage in this type of intertwined research methodologies because we know we will re-enter a space where we are safe to say anything, to question, and to share our wonders. We are confident the other will listen, prompt us towards literature, encourage us to create art as part of our reflexive practice, and offer suggestions that in the moment we could not conjure on our own. In this *currere*, Janet suggested a parental engagement tutoring continuum (Dewey, 1938) that Sandra initially rejected because it meant she would have to examine assumptions, expectations, and pedagogical certainties.

Working within the methodologies, the authors came to not only consider assumptions but were also able to think deeply about how they were constructing meaning, including by interrogating the shaping influences of previous experiences. It was this back and forth, within a safe space, all the while knowing there are dates in our calendar when we jump online and continue the conversation, that makes the process engaging and informative while offering possibilities for reconceptualization (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012).

Before beginning this study, Sandra knew parents mattered because they support their children's learning. She also knew there can be gaps between what she knows and what parents understand about their contributions to tutoring. By placing parental engagement along a continuum, it makes space for parents, the child, and the tutor to live out a range of experiences while learning from one another. A continuum opens the door to possible parental engagement that previously had not been considered. Moreover, the continuum helps to level the playing field, including by acknowledging a power differential that parents may have experienced, particularly those who struggled with school and learning to read, write and comprehend. It nudges tutors to continually reevaluate the limiting assumptions they may be prone to make about parents and their contributions. Greene (2001) reinforced the notion of possibilities when she wrote:

> I hope you think about the wonder of multiple perspectives in your own experience. I hope you think about what happens to you—and, we would all hope, to our students—when it becomes possible to abandon one-dimensional viewing, to look from many vantage points and, in doing so, construct meaning scarcely suspected before (p. 187).

Discussion: Thinking Beyond an Individual Tutoring Practice

The need for literacy intervention results in tutors and parents being thrown together over a shared desire to support a child's literacy remediation. Each tutoring experience is unique; however, as we worked through the *currere* moments, themes emerged.

From this *currere* process, we understood narratives held by the tutor can collide with parental narratives. Each brings their own storied experiences which influence the tutoring and can result in tension-filled moments. Within the tension and because of the tutor's expertise, it is possible she may be reluctant and/or resistant to the possibility that parents engage and support in a variety of ways, some that are unfamiliar to the tutor. Viewing parental engagement along a continuum allows parents multiple points of entry based on their knowledge of their role and possible contributions while honouring their lived experiences. Furthermore, by analyzing early learn-to-read experiences, expectations for parental involvement alongside deep concerns for children who struggle to master literacy outcomes, Sandra was able to broaden her understanding of tutoring as a place for emotional safety and relational trust for children and their parents (see Figure 3).

As well, the intertwined, dialogic and creative methodologies of this study helped to disrupt and interrogate preconceived notions of best practice and the shaping influences of adherence to an expert label (Frye, 1983). Furthermore, the use of the methodologies allows tutors to wonder who they might become within the tutoring space when parents enter the continuum and contribute in new, unfamiliar ways (Docherty-Skippen & Beattie, 2018). When tutors acknowledge the possibility of a continuum and the presence of shaping influences: students, parents, and their own, they are afforded opportunities to make changes that support the

development of a literate child. We therefore call on tutors, when faced with tension-filled moments related to a perceived lack of parental support, to reach past their individual tutoring practices towards other tutors, literacy researchers, and colleagues who might engage in similar inquiry.

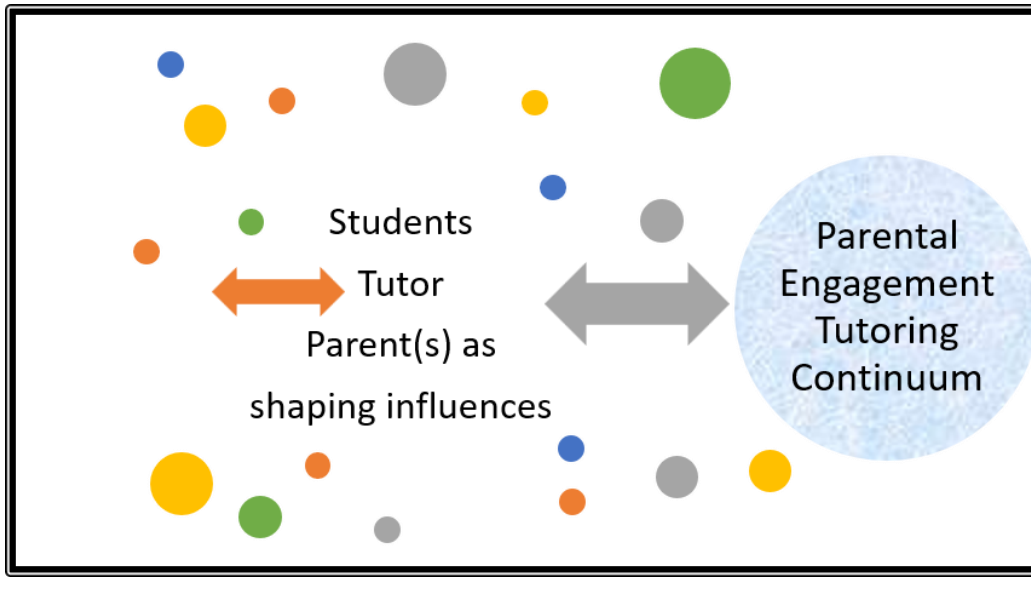

Figure 3. Shaping influences on tutoring

By combining the three methodologies, Sandra was able to broaden her understanding of best practices, including perceiving parents in new ways. Sandra no longer understands that she is solely helping a child to remediate. Rather, she is also participating in creating shared stories in the moment and in the future. In future stories, she can imagine more doors will be open for the student because the child is a better reader and writer than before beginning the tutoring. This allows her to see literacy remediation as a relational act and therefore an opportunity to consider the merits of stepping away from self as expert. It also allows her to appreciate how literacy remediation can result in deep, emotional relationships with students. Furthermore, listening to Janet describe her best practice work with those living with wounds, diabetes, and requiring foot care reminds her that tutoring students and parents arrive with a wealth of experiences and stories that can support and inform the tutoring.

Finally, we would suggest tutors engage in research, including utilizing dialogic methodologies to deepen understanding of their own literacy stories as shaping influences on tutoring. The more one understands how stories can be shaping influences, educative or miseducative (Dewey, 1938) when teaching children to read, the more likely one is to successfully support children as they learn to read, while also supporting parents.

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Notes

[1] Tension-filled moments are "bumping places as individuals' lived and told stories bumped against the lived and told stories of others who had been shaped by different social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional narratives and who were positioned in different ways within the professional knowledge landscape" (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 83).

[2] In this chapter we appreciate that not all children live with their parents. We use the term parents inclusive of parents, guardian and or caregivers.

[3] The Orton-Gillingham Approach is a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive way to teach literacy to individuals for whom reading, writing, and spelling do not come easily, such as those with dyslexia. It is most properly understood and practiced as an approach, not a method, program, or sysem. In the hands of a well-trained and experienced instructor, it is a powerful tool of exceptional breadth, depth, and flexibility. (Orton Gillingham, n.d., para. 1). https://www.ortonacademy.org/resources/what-is-the-orton-gillingham-approach/

[4] Reducing a curriculum includes focusing on reducing distractions, technology, and focusing on relational learning.

[5] Poor curriculum is "one stripped of technology, structured instead by dialogical encounter, solitude and sustained study" (Pinar & Gumet, 2014, p. viii).

[6] Dialogical conversations" model a state of perpetual inquiry"(Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 17) alongside a trusted peer with the goal of shifting positioning and deepening understandings.

[7] "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" (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012, p. 263).

[8] Lasts are wooden or iron forms and used by shoe/boot makers, to create or repair footwear. The form helps to hold and shape the footwear in place while being repaired or created (Sieburth, 1936).

[9] The objective of coming alongside is for the researcher to appreciate the inquiry is continuous, collaborative and co-composed (Estevan et al., 2016).

[10] In Pinar's (2012) conceptualization of *currere*, complicated conversations occur between text,

students, teachers and the broader world. These conversations aim to create deeper self-understanding, broader awareness and ultimately academic freedom.

[11] Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the "nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, worship, and age. These conditions include a wide set of forces and systems that shape daily life such as economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, and political systems" (U.S. Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2025, p. 1).