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Article

A *currere*-flow dialogue: Purpose, belonging, missteps

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Abstract

In this study, we engaged with *currere* as a collaborative demonstration of resistance. Educational settings around the world today are antithetical to what Pinar and Grumet have offered educators theoretically and methodologically. We have asked how our sharing of personal and professional journeys in the face of continuous attacks on public education might reveal or open creative spaces for critical self-reflection and educative actions. Fueled by our curiosities and our individual purposes to challenge the marginalization of multiculturalism inside mainstream curriculum and instruction, and to bring broader and deeper understandings among our students through pedagogical discourses, we translated our experiences in the direction of notions of the good life for all. *Currere* illuminated the paradox of a profession under attack while striving to communicate and educate ourselves and others worldwide. Thus, *currere* offers pathways towards a vision of a better world by keeping the door open to new questions, ideas, and diverse ways of knowing.

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Introduction

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Towards a Poor Curriculum* (2026), we live in a world where the proliferation of educational authoritarianism demands a conceptualization of curriculum that is antithetical to the core ideas of Pinar and Grumet's individual and collective contributions to curriculum theory. The original text stood in opposition to the behaviorist, linear, and technical approaches to curriculum and pedagogy - approaches that critical scholars have noted prime students for hyper-compliance, rendering them vulnerable to future exploitation. What does the work of Pinar and Grumet offer us for this present moment? Are the notions of *currere* and autobiography still relevant, and if so, how might we explore them productively in contemporary contexts?

Before we inquire as to the specific purposes and methods of *currere* as an educational theory, we must first ask ourselves and you, our readers, a larger question regarding the nature and purposes of education in terms of realizing one's full potential. Here, we should consider how self-actualization can be extended beyond individual needs in order to improve or repair the world. Our question becomes how knowing oneself fits into the aims of social reconstruction.

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There is no single answer, as individual responses will likely lead to deep disagreements (Ranalli & Lagewaard, 2022) and debates among educators *cum* educators, and citizens. Around the world, priorities differ, ranging from mastering technological advances and academic content knowledge to cognitive learning processes and workforce development, each with its own champion advocates. The champions or their followers have adopted various labels, including social behaviorists, experientialists, critical constructionists, and others. The underlying philosophical questions hinge on one's view of reality (i.e., ontologies), on the one hand, and the pursuit of what is called objective knowledge. Some of the more rational ideas become mainstream, while others remain on the margins and are identified as critical theories. Conversely, curriculum ideas incorporate one's personal experiences and subjectivities. When one scans this fractious landscape, there may be the temptation to look for commonalities, compromises, or convergences as ways to intellectually manage the complexity/multiplicity of ideas. But we believe that William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet had a different objective in mind, one that was not about reconciling differences, but rather setting out pathways for educators to discover, within themselves, their own unique "appropriate practices," continuously aligning their values with their past, present, and future actions.

Pinar's non-linear phases of self-discovery through life histories reconnect researchers with their educational values, ideas of living well, and the pursuit or pathway towards the good life. The three authors of this scholarly essay engaged in their own rediscovery, hoping that once the process was initiated, they might collectively gain broader insights into how education can change societies (Counts, 1932). In asking this intriguing question, George Counts, a social reconstructionist writing during the Great Depression, held that "Any defensible educational program must be adjusted to a particular time and place, and the degree and nature of the imposition must vary with the social situation" (p. 18). Counts also believed that education had to stand beyond the pursuit of individual advancement; that is, education serves a social purpose. The question, again, is whether *currere* can meet this challenge, theoretically and methodologically. Where educationalists like Counts used argumentation to advance educational ideas, connecting curriculum to social change, Pinar embraced a subjective experiential methodology.

Thus, within the larger question of the purposes of education is also the specific purpose of educational research. The latter turns on the differences between narrowing methods to technology/tools/methodolatry (Janesick, 1994) versus the "doing" and "being" of educational professionals. This task is not about comparing different definitions or how we use the term education, but rather, following Gert Biesta, to inquire into the very purposes of education in the world. In an edited volume by Biesta and Egéa-Kuehne (2001), the philosopher Didier Cahen (2001) asserted that

> Deconstruction moves the whole cluster of questions about education, about teaching, about the teaching of philosophy, and about philosophical teaching, from the plane of techniques and methods to a level which is deeply concerned with the ethical, the political, and, ultimately, with the destination of life, history, and humanity. (Cahen, 2001, p. 5)

As such, education becomes more than measurable with standardized practices and outcomes. Additionally, education goes beyond *a priori* definitions and beyond introspection (i.e., consciousness and identity). The problematic binaries that dominate research methods need to prioritize inquiries into education contingently, for what and for whom (Bogotch et al., 2007). Our educational research methods emerge from our assumptions about what education

should be versus what it is: whether it is education for colonization, indoctrination, stratification, zombification, or marginalization, versus the education that we have struggled towards as inclusive, critical, democratizing, and joyful. Corporatization and neoliberal logics, to which our institutions are enthralled, have perpetuated limiting perspectives of education in general and curriculum and research methods in particular. Our institutions' approach to research methodology (and related assumptions about axiological values) has been antithetical to *currere*, in part because methodological approaches have valued ahistorical decontextualization, no criticality, and marginalized views. That is, education requires interactions with others, as well as with persons, places, and/or things, making education a fundamental human activity, but one that is "inherently unpredictable" (Arendt, 1958) without guarantees. Nonetheless, two conclusions emerge: first, that education occurs within the world of others (i.e., within a world of pluralities and differences), and second, that education is for ourselves as well as for others (which entails its own human ethics and responsibilities). That makes education a project focused on both immediate and future concerns.

Based on these notions, we may begin to see how educational institutions (i.e., schools, universities, etc.) seek to promote education while, at the same time, limiting the possibilities for education worldwide. Biesta (2006) wrote:

> `Common sense' thinking about education generally thinks of education as the insertion of newcomers into a particular order. Education is seen in terms of the creation of particular identities – the lifelong learner, the good citizen, the high-achieving student – and in terms of a competitive, stable, and successful social order. For this to be possible, the educational process itself has to be depicted as a technology. (p. 99)

How, then, should educators seek to go beyond *a priori* definitions, measures, and technologies? Some academics sought answers outside education by borrowing from the humanities and social science disciplines. Looking outside, however, is not the same as looking within. No doubt that inter-trans-cross-disciplinary approaches can offer explanations for specific educational processes looked at from various perspectives, including individual mental processes (psychology), social environments (sociology), cultures (anthropology), critical questions (philosophy), and historical context (history) (see Grumet, 1975). Yet, to Biesta, Pinar, and others, these disciplinary pathways offer only partial truths as they fail to provide education with its own foundation[1]. Biesta (2011) argues that research from other fields should inform, but not define, the unique educational project, which he describes as ethical and political practices fostering both humanity (i.e., value-based "othering") and democracy (open-ended participatory possibilities). The purpose of education is not just to produce effective outcomes but to contribute to the formation of good education as a public good (Labaree, 1997). That means helping individuals develop into independent ethical subjects and, politically, to inform civil discourse and debate (Bogotch & Peart, 2025). No amount of technical expertise can substitute for these civic and civil purposes of education.

As such, practicing educators and engaged researchers must become aware of the wider social and political contexts in which their educational work operates. This includes, for teachers, connecting subject matter content to real-world endeavors (e.g., see Terkel, 1995) and, for researchers, challenging first the binaries of quantitative and qualitative methods, and secondly, the pressures of academic publishing and institutional rankings. For Biesta, ethical and political purposes of education should encompass diverse, pluralistic ways of knowing.

Reducing research to competencies and technical expertise cannot provide a holistic description of the mindsets, processes, and procedures required to carefully and systematically study education. Over time, the study of education has become increasingly complex. Investigations may require feminist, Indigenous, aesthetic, or machine learning models, each of which has had a cumulative, if not significant, impact on research ideas and methodologies. However, before delving deeper into educational research methodological debates, we need to turn to the specific questions raised by using *currere* as theory/method.

What is Currere [to us]?

We continue to approach *currere* as an act of discovery, of ourselves and who we are as experienced educators and academic researchers; what we have experienced personally and professionally; and making sense of whichever self-identified experiences in our careers were turning points or points of frustration. As we engage in these acts of discovery through dialogues with one another, we remain cognizant of their relationship to both state-mandated curricula (i.e., as sequential and rational) and to global events (i.e., as non-linear and irrational). In so doing, we hope to locate our unique roles as educators *cum* citizens working democratically - within and beyond educational institutions.

In our academic circles, *currere* is considered both a [curriculum] theory [of inquiry] and a [research] method. Thus, as a theory/method, *currere* offers a counterhegemonic praxis (see Schoorman, 2025), an ongoing critique of past and present processes/procedures/actions, so as to engage with others to both improve teaching and learning, as well as a framework for discovering how to live well together in societies. For us collectively, curriculum inquiry takes center stage, not so much as a sequence, spiral, or reform, but rather as a way to intellectually connect learning in specific contexts with their larger communities and societies. Such thinking, as reflected in the past work of Dewey, Rugg, Schwab, Eisner, and Greene, among others, including William Pinar, is out of step not only with educators' educational preparation but also with their socialized obedience to bureaucratic authorities. To quote Eisner (1984), invoking the thoughts of Joseph Schwab, "the processes themselves require skills in deliberation and in the arts of the eclectic that very few policy-makers and school curriculum leaders or principals possess" (p. 205). How we address and respond to current situations is part of the unfolding and unpredictable nature of education, as well as influences our ongoing engagement with the field. For us, rather than having a template of how to act, we seek, in our research, to advance a situated response each and every time we have a new significant encounter. That is, our research is about an ongoing commitment to raise issues and, when the opportunity arises, to challenge them.

Decades earlier, Rugg (1927) had warned that "Curriculum-making is a bone of contention to be chewed upon and not a platform to stand upon" (p. 8). And yet, curriculum researchers continue to speak atheoretically and ahistorically in terms of reductive remedies (i.e., reforms), suggesting to educators/policymakers that cross-sectional, fragmented empirical findings matter. Instead, *currere* seeks to discover how different deliberate educational experiences shape our identities and beliefs, which can lead to (or not) social and pedagogical actions. As such, these experiences trigger (and are triggered in the moment by) emotions, which we remember, question, and seek to understand better who we are, what we did, and why. In rediscovering the past, *currere* is decidedly reflexive, opening up the mind to new insights, challenging (and potentially disrupting) previous assumptions and actions, by asking: "What was I thinking?" "Why did I react as I did?" "Could I have acted otherwise?" Such questions insert a more elemental, visceral, primary emotion of feeling into the processes of *currere.*

William Pinar (1975) named these process moments as: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetic. The self-actualizing nature of *currere* is evident in its four phases: (1) *Regressive:* The researcher looks back at their past educational experiences and records them, creating a life history of learning. This helps the researcher to understand how past events have shaped their attitudes and beliefs. (2) *Progressive*: The researcher imagines future possibilities for their educational and personal life, considering future aspirations and desires. (3) *Analytical:* The researcher analyzes the relationships between their past and future selves to understand their present educational experience within a broader historical, social, and cultural context. (4) *Synthetic*: The researcher integrates insights from the previous three phases to create a transformed understanding of their present. This enables the researcher to apply their newfound self-understanding to engaged pedagogical or social action. Research serves as the vehicle for self-actualization. The researcher is not an objective observer, but rather the central subject of the inquiry, and the research method itself serves as the engine of personal transformation and growth. This process addresses four crucial dimensions of *currere*: historical and political contexts, a lens of moral responsibility, agency to act (or not), and, lastly, the individual in service to the public good. *Currere* is self-actualizing research.

At least two critical turns are required: (1) bringing our memories of the past into our present situations, and (2) understanding how our past and present actions/thoughts relate(d) to others going forward. We can see how both quantitative and qualitative research methods would be helpful tools, right? However, we should also consider how these binaries – all binaries? - might limit the comprehensive accounting of our experiences (i.e., assumptions, emotions, and events) into generalizable/convergent elements. The whole, meaning ourselves, others, and human interactions, is described analytically. As in the case of Humpty Dumpty, the whole can't be put together again. Pinar recenters the role of educators in curriculum studies, who, during the four phases of self-other discovery, consider taking responsibility for their actions and making a deliberate and moral decision to act in one's best interests, inclusively. It is the philosophical turn from pure phenomenology to seeing oneself in the world (Grumet, 1975) and deciding when, why, and how to act. Pinar and Grumet refer to this re-centering as curriculum studies.

Curriculum Studies: What's in a Name?

In a previous study entitled "Forging the Needed Dialogue Between Educational Leadership and Curriculum Inquiry," Bogotch et al. (2017b) wrote:

> … school leadership and curriculum studies have been slowly neutralized and moved from "scholars and intellectuals to technicians in service to the state" (Pinar, 2004, p. 2). That is, school leaders were converted to managers unable to lead complicated conversations, and curriculum theorists were converted into curriculum designers allowed only to produce materials aligned to the dominant narrative. (p. 285)

Pinar sought to rescue the meaning of curricula from state mandates and, in doing so, Bogotch et al. examined how the term "education" lost its meaning and whatever status it might have generated for the public good. They wrote:

> Our two fields (educational leadership and curriculum and instruction) not only come together and separate contingently, but also are separated from constituents – i.e., practitioners within public education. We have professors of curriculum, professors of school leadership, teacher educators, public school teachers, and public-school

> administrators, each operating independently within their distinct spheres of influence. As if these five constituencies were not complicated enough, there are within each group ideological divides, those who seek to maintain old values and norms (e.g., stratification and homogenization) and those who take a counterview (transformation), or critical perspective (social justice), asking different disciplinary questions. (2017b, p. 286)

If we are to recapture the meaning and future of education, we must consider how reinventing lives can be both an educational theory and a method. To feed our curiosities, the authors decided to engage with the phases of *currere,* using personal/professional narratives. As critical researchers navigating difficult times today, including censorship, book banning, attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion, we understand concretely the need for educational researchers to think and act differently. Revisiting *currere*, therefore, by reinterpreting the four phases of past and present experiences, we anticipated that it might guide us as we persist, resist, disrupt, and seek to offer hope. The narratives illustrate how we each selected memories of past events, sought to make sense of them, and contextually outline how and why what we were feeling, thinking, and doing is relevant not just personally but also professionally as educators.

As we each embraced the gravity of our current contexts within the United States and/or the United Kingdom, we drew on *currere as a method* to examine our past practices so as to guide the next steps in our curriculum as *currere*. Our individual reflections are more than autobiographical; they also contribute to collective remembrances of the past, supporting creative and imaginative thinking for the future. They also support individual and collective accountability. How did we—collectively—get here? What were our individual and collective roles in hastening or disrupting the steady march towards educational authoritarianism? We foreground the individual, the self, our agency, and thereby our role in the perpetuation or disruption of curriculum. Each of us brings different entry points for content and context. Leadership and the quest for bridge building with curriculum (Bogotch); literacy and the quest for clear communication (Peart); and multicultural education and education as emancipatory (Schoorman). Yet we all share a commitment to a vision of curriculum that is at once political (emancipatory and justice-oriented rather than (re-)colonizing) and experiential (felt as visceral, joyful, intellectually or socioculturally engaging, rather than as mind-numbing zombification).

Sheine Peart: **Being Damned and Double Damned:** *I am confronted by the words of my Dad, who was clear that education* **was** *a passport to lift him and others like him out of poverty. Poverty, here, is being used in the broadest sense of the word in terms of ephemeral and tangible wealth. Wealth is another slippery word and definitely means more than money alone: more an enrichment of the mind, body, and (dare I say?) soul. I am also wondering if this is tied up with 'the other.' Within a global context, my Dad was (past tense used because he died some time ago) (and I am, very much present tense) part of a minoritised culture. As such, the idea of being 'out' and 'looking in' persists. In this respect, education became a tool of empowerment; it gave me the language and skills to understand and to confront those who sought to marginalise and exclude me. I am struggling for words here, and I am not sure how to say this, but it was about the chance to use education as a tool or lever for social justice and to find ways to disrupt dominant narratives. Education became the means of finding and using agency to deconstruct and reconstruct worlds and realities.*

And yet, education was not always the friend I wanted (and needed) it to be. Education as I knew and encountered it was built on layers and layers of history. A history which routinely and repeatedly excluded me. A history intent on emphasizing my position as an outsider, and reinforcing the idea of me being the other. During my early school years, a system which appeared content to label those who

looked like me as (using the terminology of the time) Educationally Sub Normal (ESN), sent us wholesale to schools where we were not taught, but rather contained. I was not a sought-after and welcomed innovator who might bring new perspectives to the school community, but a blight, more of a dis-ease, a disruptor to accepted norms. If I was lucky, education would configure me as an exotic, but each and every time I was less, and each and every time, if I was to find a space at the table of knowledge, it would only be through extraordinary effort. As my father would often remind me, I needed to 'work twice as hard to get half as far' as peers who were, by association, members of the group who controlled the systems of power.

I've read and re-read this. It is what I want to say, but I am not sure I have used the best words, and I am very conscious that it may seem angry, even aggressive. While I once may have had these feelings, in my later years these feelings have changed. Though I remain conscious of injustice and lost opportunity for whole communities, my feelings now are more focused on what I can do now to support future generations and communities to gain the best possible experience of education.

Hence: The Promise of Understanding Through Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing: *For as long as I can remember, I have delighted in language. From a child, one of my absolute joys was being read to by anyone who was willing to do this. If I think about the idea of the human voice, this is not a surprising concept. While not wishing to adopt an exclusive ableist agenda, hearing is recognised as one of the traditional five senses and for many develops early. Infants, as they grow in the womb, can hear what is happening around them and become aware of sound as a means of communication, enjoying happy sounds such as laughter and perhaps experiencing angry sounds such as shouting. Indeed, to try and support their child, many parents choose to read to their children before they are even born. I became aware that the marks on paper, cereal boxes, newspapers, and signs on the street were a form of communication. I had no idea what these mysterious squiggles meant, but I knew when big people (adults) looked at them, they were able to work out a message; the squiggles had meaning and told them something. Books were full of these squiggles, and if you could understand them, you could interpret the meaning and unlock the message. I did not know what literacy was, but I understood it was an important form of communication, and I wanted to be able to decode and understand those squiggles. I desperately wanted to be able to read so I could unlock the treasures it held. Once I learned to read, I became aware there were different sorts of writing; some was clear and accessible, other writing was dense, intractable, and painful to read.*

When I became a teacher, I decided that one of my primary goals was to try to teach people things. As a corollary to this, I truly wanted my students to learn and for that learning to have meaning. Although it may sound obvious, this necessarily meant I needed to be an effective communicator. It was my job to explain information in as many ways as the students needed, so that ideas and concepts were understandable. I needed to be multilingual, use technical language, student language, and formal language, and switch between registers to support students in developing their understanding. When writing, I used available tools to help me produce clear, accessible text and frequently used the SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledygook) to check the accessibility of my writing. When speaking, this meant I adopted a practice of verbal simultaneous translation; I would use a technical word and immediately translate it into another more commonly used word. While this slowed verbal exposition, and though I have no empirical data to support my belief, it seems to me that this helped to demystify ideas. When I listened to students as they explained ideas to each other, they appeared to demonstrate good understanding and had come to own the learning.

Learning and Feeling: *My parents were my first, and I believe the most impactful, teachers I ever encountered. My Mum often told a story with great affection of how her grandmother (my great, great*

grandmother) supported reading and would actively encourage my Mum to read, while her own mother (my grandmother) was more dismissive and would direct my Mum to do something useful like clean the house. It seems to me my great, great grandmother was keen to look at the stars, whereas my grandmother was more focused on immediate concerns. Neither was wrong, neither was right, both were products of their context, time, and environment. However, my Mum is clear about the warm glow reading gave her and how escaping into a book was a moment of immense joy. It is that which stays with me.

When I began teaching, I was bound to teach a prescribed curriculum. This was demanded, and I remember telling my Mum of a particularly good lesson I had taught, telling her, 'we all had great fun and time went quickly.' I was surprised when my Mum responded by saying 'they are not there to have fun, they are there to learn' and remember thinking that having fun and learning are not necessarily mutually exclusive; it is possible to have fun and learn at the same time. I also knew how much my Mum enjoyed reading and learning and wondered if this was an echo of the schooling she had experienced. In any event, for me in my working life, the curriculum cannot solely be about content; it has to be about feeling and finding ways of making learning memorable and enjoyable, recognising too that enjoyment may not always arrive in the moment of learning. Sometimes it arrives after the event when learners reflect back and acknowledge their achievements: a moment I want to happen, though I have come to recognise I may never know if this has ever happened.

Dilys Schoorman: **Building within and beyond the margins.** *Immigrating to the US, leaving behind racial and political unrest in my own homeland, I knew we were entering a whole new world of uncertainty. It was a compounded set of new beginnings – newly married, pregnant, and admitted to Graduate School; my only "certainty" was that US laws would offer protection for whomever it was that I/we wished to be. I wrestled with concerns about how what I was studying made a material difference in the lives of anyone. I did not see myself as being "good enough" for much until I heard Dr. Geneva Gay (a curriculum theorist, leader, and pioneer in the field of multicultural education) speak against the "one-size fits-all" approach to teaching and learning. The instant connection was visceral. I was hooked by multicultural education and have stayed committed as a professional educator.*

Finding/building my home: *Multicultural education (MCE) is not just a subject area; it offers (and requires) a way of life and being in how we engage with people, but particularly those historically marginalized. These MCE scholars reminded me that our work was not just about what we taught and the high expectations we had for ourselves as teachers and/or students, but also how we taught, for what purpose, and the relationships and institutional climates fostered. When I moved to Florida, I realized that, despite the state's rich diversity, multicultural education was "tolerated" (at best) but largely marginalized in the college. I embraced the opportunity to* ***thrive in the margins****, adding new courses, revamping old ones, immersing myself in the communities and schools that were richly diverse, and for whom my classroom practice had to be relevant. I commented to my out-of-state friends that South Florida had become my "lab" where the "real work" of multiculturalism was being forged each day in every classroom. Moving beyond historical "ivory tower" disconnects, relevance "on the ground" became my quest. I devoured theory but critiqued it against the daily grind and joys of school-based realities, and soon obliterated for myself the theory-practice dichotomy that had haunted professorial work of the past.*

As a multicultural educator working in/against/beyond marginalizing spaces, I always saw my work as both leadership and curriculum, which today I might label currere or praxis. Within the academic institution, leadership came in different ways for me, but fundamentally it required a belief that I could

and should act on my agency at the macro and micro levels of professional practice. A prodigious departmental restructuring effort launched the opportunity for a new department—called the Department of Curriculum, Culture, and Educational Inquiry (CCEI) —where we committed to building the department we wanted to be. Herein was currere in institutional practice. I was eager to implement the principles of multicultural education in faculty governance, such as the value of multiple perspectives, deliberation and debate, inclusion, and collective consciousness.

With time (and our active engagement), multiculturalism began to influence institutional perspectives. Diversity and critical thinking were central to state and professional accreditation for pre-service and in-service educators. Multiculturalism was infused into our daily functioning, from the way we made decisions and engaged with one another, to our interactions with institutions, as well as curriculum development and pedagogy. As a department, we proudly espoused a mission grounded in social justice, welcomed debate and deliberation, practiced inclusion in explicit and intentional ways, and demographically represented the most culturally diverse unit at the university, that is… until we were disbanded.

Institutional dismantling: *The demise of our department came suddenly in 2021, with no warning and with finality. We were told that the Florida Board of Governors required it, but for no apparent purpose. This signaled a downward spiral into institutional submission and compliance with political entities that governed the state and the university, registering yet another notch in the national/historical trend of destroying something that had worked well with and for racially diverse/underrepresented groups. Despite my impassioned claim that the constitution of the Faculty Assembly that I had a role in developing had been violated in the restructuring, the merger was pushed through, abetted by those who had previously supported the democratic values that had been violated. The times (and the people), they were a-changing.*

Right before our demise as a unit, ever-so-briefly, the focus of my professional work had become mainstream. Diversity and social justice, if reluctantly, had been espoused and required by the state, necessitated by the demographic shifts of our service communities. In the face of the horrific death of George Floyd, institutional commitments to anti-racist education were ubiquitous. As the state Board of Governors called on all universities to make anti-racist work central to our mission, our department (CCEI) stepped into the breach, responding to the university's needs for workshops on racial justice. The need for multicultural education for ***everyone*** *became clear if we wanted to live in an equitable, socially just society. The university committed itself to the integration of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in all academic programs. I applied for and received a sabbatical to support and study those efforts.*

Meanwhile, university leaders convened "listening sessions" to hear from historically minoritized individuals about their concerns; in retrospect, an act largely performative rather than substantive, driven by marketing logics rather than justice orientations. As chair of the College Diversity Committee, I transcribed students' concerns about the lack of access to courses that addressed racism and bigotry, and the need for faculty professional development, and placed these concerns on the record in our Faculty Assembly, should anyone want to "listen" to them. I also raised the question about how we – as professionals and programs – had been collectively culpable in the violent deaths of so many Black men and women. What have we taught that has led to this death? What about the education of our current leaders? Who taught them the lessons that yield their current decision-making as leaders? Might the world have benefited from some DEI in their (leaders') education?

Currere in the face of educational authoritarianism: *Today, we confront an assault on democracy, education, and multiculturalism where the work of multicultural educators is targeted and marked for erasure. What does it mean to lead, lead whom and for what, in this context? Currere comes in multiple dimensions. It is the political consciousness derived from a critical understanding of our past juxtaposed wth the justice-oriented aspirations of our future that recognizes and names the contemporary assault, its purpose, and counters it with a moral responsibility towards present and future generations yearning for justice and equity. As a researcher, I have pivoted to studying the hegemony in the form of critical policy analysis. Knowing what is and isn't in the legislation designed to censor curriculum has helped me as an instructor and fellow citizen. I have begun to create space for what is "allowed" and, through dialogic pedagogy, continue to engage in education as emancipatory praxis. Insights gained through my counter-hegemonic struggles, I readily share with local communities of practice; no longer do I wait for dissemination through journal publications. As a citizen, I recognize my critical agency both as an individual and part of collectives, be it labor unions or governance structures. Leadership has meant showing up and asking the right questions that educate the collective to make significant shifts in policies and practice.*

Ira Bogotch: ***Currere*** **on the Interplay of Circumstances and Choice:** *Many things in life are unavoidable, among the most memorable, for me, were having parents who could not afford to contribute to my college tuition; an immoral war and the Selective Service (i.e., military draft); staring at a death threat for just doing my job; Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose, being unprepared for the demands of tenure and promotion; and trying to bring together two fields in education - Curriculum and Instruction and my chosen field of Educational Leadership. In each and every instance, I had alternative life choices available, even as the above circumstances felt like they were closing in on me. I am not sure, as I write, that my past conversations were complicated enough.*

Early on, I was forced to accept that circumstances could dictate the next unplanned steps in my life. Of course, it was still always my life, my choices, but unless I was able to negotiate within and beyond circumstances as they appeared, I might have ended up "waist deep in the big muddy" (Seeger, 1967). This Vietnam War reference is deliberate, as college and this particular war sent me on a path of political radicalism (as far as the US government was and is concerned). To avoid the US military draft, I became, by chance, a university administrator working to promote the new City University of New York Open Admissions program that sought to transform the four-year public colleges in its municipal system from elite entrance requirements to providing access to higher education for all high school graduates in New York City. This was the decade of the late 60s and early 70s. Looking back and trying to be honest, I did not handle the situation well. I remember being angry all the time! And I know, from hindsight, that I missed out on living life well from 1968 through 1972. Being angry is not an emotion that enables complicated conversations.

Upon reaching the age of 26, I was free to "escape" and rediscover who I was and who I wanted to be. I chose to move to the island of Puerto Rico, where my wife secured a position teaching English as a Second Language at a rural university while I tended to a large plot of land, organically growing vegetables to feed ourselves and our jibaro neighbors. By necessity, I learned to speak Spanish and began my own cultural re-education project: the one CUNY administrator who took time to mentor me was Allen Ballard, who had previously earned a Ph.D. in Russian history. I purchased a semester's worth of Russian literary classics to read and reread. I did so while also baking bread from stone-ground flour and listening to how much my wife enjoyed teaching her students. After a year, I was determined to take control of my own education. But control in life is never total; we are still subject to life's circumstances.

First Academic Home: *On returning to the mainland, I enrolled in the exact same ESL master's program from which my wife had graduated. The new degree "took me" to Guatemala. In addition to teaching ESL, I administered the country's educational testing exams for graduate, law, and medical schools. It was then that I fell in love with education, but this time, to be the kind of educator who makes changes to the field. However, before I could put this plan into operation, a death threat was delivered anonymously to the binational center where I worked, and the U.S. Embassy suggested I leave the country.*

My first stop was Washington, D.C., where, still as an ESL teacher, I sought to unionize local and national ESL teachers to secure higher wages, tenure, and benefits. I spent three years working with migrant farmworkers and Native American tribes so that they might return to their own communities and fight for their human rights.

More Circumstances: *Moving from job to job, city to city, I settled on the notion that by obtaining a doctorate in educational leadership I might still change the world. I came to this conclusion without any idea of what it meant to be a university professor. Upon securing an academic position at the University of New Orleans, the only integrated public university in "the city that care forgot," the Promotion &Tenure challenge emerged: I remember thinking that I did not want an institution to decide my fate; I had a wife and a young family. Nevertheless, the question, "What was I thinking?" was a wheel turning in my head. By my third year, the College of Education Dean unilaterally terminated my multi-year contract and placed me on a series of one-year probationary contracts until I demonstrated progress toward tenure and promotion.*

Theories of Action: Full Stop: *My career has been replete with many unsuccessful attempts to redefine the field of educational leadership. I had decided that what was needed was to bring curriculum studies and educational leadership together. Year after year, I would bring graduate students from the two fields together for "open and honest" collaborative discussions of important educational problems. Yet, looking back, I hadn't thought through how I would facilitate the necessary "unlearning" and "relearning" that Kurt Lewin (1947) had brilliantly described decades before. My own naïve efforts resulted in graduate students asking out loud why they had not been exposed to the many ideas from the "other" field. For curriculum and instruction students, they recognized that understanding leadership and laws was a topic relevant to all educators, not just administrators. For school leadership students, remembering classroom management and scaffolding content knowledge resonated. When siloed, separate, apart, none of these integrated insights were found in the respective curricula.*

What I was experiencing, however, was much more. From the beginning of these integrated discourses, the students' predispositions towards "the other" filled the room with antipathies. I had clearly overemphasized the idea of the university classroom as a "safe place." They chose to sit apart from one another; they answered my questions and those of their colleagues defensively rather than inquisitively; they extrapolated and then generalized from their specific experiences within the school in response to statements made by "the other." I discovered that my many extemporaneous, conversational classroom skills were not inclusive enough. I continually struggled to redirect and find common ground. As a result, I, too, became defensive and not educative.

In retrospect, could I have acted otherwise? Of course. And I should have. Why hadn't I taken to heart the historical example of Elsie Clapp, who moved her entire Brooklyn Friends School faculty to Appalachia at the request of Eleanor Roosevelt (i.e., in support of FDR's New Deal agenda in the US (see Bogotch et al., 2017a)? She defied tradition as well as the silos between educational leadership and

curriculum inquiry. Instead of just opening up a new school, Miss Clapp and her faculty spent a full year studying the community and learning. She (and they) understood that leadership and curriculum content must come from the community's own needs/wants. In our first currere-like dialogue (2017), my colleagues and I proposed a progression from: curriculum for stratification, curriculum for homogenization, curriculum for individual transformation, to curriculum for social justice, and a curriculum for democracy/multiculturalism (Bogotch et al., 2017a, 2017b). Each step slowly builds away from the other.

Lingering Questions

None of us can rewrite history, but educators are tasked with making sense of history. In so doing, can educators find new pathways for collaborations across curriculum, administration, special needs, counseling, and policies? Can we complicate conversations within schools and the Academy?

Previously, we wrote:

> Each field, left to its own frameworks, results in incomplete explanations/conceptual frameworks. Evidence of this state of affairs has not only been the successive school reforms without materially affecting the public good, that is, the education of all children, but also the positioning of one of the two fields in terms of implications, rather than as a full integration of the two fields, curriculum and leadership. (Bogotch et al., 2017a, p. 304)

Collectively, educators have not taken the time to study the reasons for discomfort and dissatisfaction. As academics, our default is to write our way out of a dilemma. But sometimes, writing back and talking back (Dei, 2024) is not sufficient. Words and language need to be translated into actions.

Which brings us back to searching for our home and reassessing circumstances, contexts, and cultures. By all educational measures, the Elsie Clapp experience was a success. But, as Dewey (1897) reminded us, education is not merely a preparation for life; it is life itself. For the residents/students/parents in Appalachia, the loss of jobs in the region necessitated the end of this brilliant New Deal/educational reform. No jobs, no people. No people, no students. Circumstances matter, and until education aligns with students' and communities' lived realities, we will continue to go from reform to reform with little to no meaningful change in people's lives.

From the beginning, we never claimed to be experts. Our ideas about *currere* stem from our unique backgrounds as well as numerous satisfying and unsatisfying experiences. One thing to remember within our personal and professional stories is how hierarchical thinking works against prioritizing students' needs. Structural silos within education work against collaborating on prioritizing society's needs. Can *currere* offer educators a needed Copernican revolution? Certainly, the word "leadership" connotes a privileged place in the sense of its proximity to sources of power. At the same time, having direct contact and influence over students and families in terms of curriculum and instruction makes a legitimate case for reframing what we mean by educational leadership in action. But it seems that we must have winners and losers. Today, political and ethical questions revolve around the attacks on public education: shouldn't these attacks be the right circumstances for us – educators - to come together?

Whither Currere, Part One?

Despite 50 years since the introduction of *currere*, all that Pinar and Grumet (1975/2026) were writing against remains: not just dominant/mainstream ideology and curricular practice, but now national and state policy, punishable by firing individual educators or defunding institutions. Despite previous pledges towards the support of diversity, equity, and inclusion as guiding principles in the pursuit of social justice through education, an aspiration best met through the engagement of curriculum as *currere*, curriculum censorship, scripted and prescribed curriculum – including acceptable and unacceptable vocabulary – are swiftly erasing the few spaces in which *currere* might have existed. This is particularly true in the US state of Florida, where the first two authors are based.

As a prototype for curriculum censorship and the incubation center for the ideas that inform the Heritage Foundation's blueprint entitled Project 2025, Florida is now both a lab and a battleground. It currently serves as a site for nationwide copycat legislation for multiple targets: Blacks, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, women, educators, librarians, unions, all those categorized as "woke." The targeting has been happening in a McCarthy-esque wielding of unbridled power, rampant abandonment of due process, and credible threat of firings and funding cuts. Courses are being stealthily wiped off the books with no historical record of who said what to whom when. Inclusion is being deleted from the lexicon of Special Education. Yet Florida (and indeed other sites of educational authoritarianism) could also emerge as a prototype for the pushback against ugliness and inhumanity. Unions (themselves targets of legislators) and governance bodies have issued statements (e.g., UFS/UFF-FAU Resolution, Oct. 6, 2025) reminding us of our ethical commitments to academic freedom, professional autonomy, and the truth: rejection of the state's bigotry. It is a message—and a public teachable moment—that institutional leaders have failed to articulate, opting instead for silence and compliance in the face of tangible threats (Heilig et al., 2025). It is now up to professors individually and collectively to engage in the defense of curriculum through *currere*: actions that are counter-hegemonic, dedicated to the collective public good.

The phases of *currere* outlined by Pinar can be framed as co-occurring dimensions rather than stages. For instance, while the "regressive" is a backwards dive into history, such historical knowledge is a grounding for future dreaming as well as for current action, a notion embodied by the African concept of *Sankofa.* That is, a concept originating from the Akan people of Ghana that means "go back and get it", signifying the value of learning from the past, recovering memory to better inform the present and future. Such autobiographical examination also serves to "enlarge the pool of memory" (Pinar, 2012, p. 45), a particularly radical purpose in the face of current epistemological erasure as dominant political strategy and curricular policy.

Considering our past and how we got here, imagining a future where education is unambiguously justice-oriented and making decisions about our own praxis in the present as disruptors of limiting views of curriculum is not merely autobiographical. It is a public accounting and an act of moral responsibility to ourselves and our communities of practice. Such self-study underscores that everyone has agency, including those who choose not to act. Our choices impact the decision-making of others. If teachers, principals, school leaders, and curriculum specialists have not been exposed to or experienced *currere*, then we, as their educators, must examine the extent to which we have paved the way for the demise of

democracy, as Pinar has warned. Similarly, the three of us have recognized the importance of the four dimensions of *currere* for future researchers: disrupting zombification and the decontextualized reproductive nature of research methods; understanding one's place in the history and future of our research fields, and the moral responsibilities and choices we make in advancing self-knowledge as public service (Pinar, 2012, p. 47). The bars on the iron cages of prescriptive research methods must be dismantled, too (Bogotch, 2023).

Currere, as theory/method, is a vision that will ultimately come to fruition through the collective and individual efforts of ordinary educators and citizens in their daily actions. While professors might no longer be "allowed" to teach multicultural education or leadership for social justice as a requirement, we embrace every opportunity to teach those who wish to learn the lessons that were historically inadequately taught in K-12 education. This ordinary, everyday leadership will require courage, resilience, a sense of urgency, and commitment to ongoing efforts at micro and macro levels, by educators, students, community members, and citizens concerned about the education of their future leaders and the preservation of the promise of an inclusive and multicultural democracy.

Whither Currere, Part Two?

In living our lives, there is no one timeframe for finding one's place in life, for recognizing our purpose in life and in education, for learning how to struggle and overcome personal and professional challenges, or for stumbling our way towards a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, educational research, in general, and *currere*, in particular, necessitate careful and systematic progressions. Our methods impose order, allowing us to pursue truths through descriptions, explanations, clarifications, interpretations, and calculated predictions.

Thus, for Peart*: I will do my best to use that agency in whatever way is available to me. Things may take longer and be harder, but disengaging seems less attractive. That is not to say this is a pursuit of every moment of every day. As I said above, I am older, slower, and more tired, but to quote Elton John, 'I'm still standing,' and while I am, I will do what I can in the spheres I operate in.*

For Schoorman*: My question remains: do the attacks we are facing allow us to come together as educators? If so, how? Does the personal become political and our micro expand outward? As we engage in critical consciousness about our past, our desired collective futures, and our engagement with the current circumstances, how do we ensure that our levels of introspection and critique don't fall short through compromises and the pragmatics of doing work that is "good enough"?*

For Bogotch*: Can professionals who have spent decades crafting their arguments and identities consider doing otherwise? For me, I found opportunity in unpredictable circumstances. These propelled my growth as an educator, allowing me to make connections with others around the world (as humanity).*

Our minds are racing in terms of how to bring this work to a discussion without a definitive conclusion. Yes, we must respond to today's attacks on public education, but how varies greatly. Peart finds spaces in language, in teaching, and in learning. For Bogotch, he cannot let circumstances alone dictate destiny. For Schoorman, every challenge is an opportunity for counter-hegemonic praxis.

We began with the hypothesis that *currere* has never fully emerged theoretically or methodologically because it asks educators to engage in complex conversations in and out of

uncomfortable spaces. Yet, as practitioners, we discovered rules, mandates, and norms, and as researchers, we discovered prescribed, sequential methods; thus, education, as experienced, became a privatized (manipulated and selfish) commodity.

For fellow-travelers: Our writings, as colleagues and as pilgrims, critically reflect on the place of *currere* in education research, thirty-eight years after Pinar and Grumet's 1975 text. As teachers and as academics, it is our responsibility to work towards an improved curriculum and school system together with our colleagues and administrations. As Pinar (1994) writes, "we cannot expect to meaningfully participate in the transformation of the nation and its educational institutions if we fail to authentically participate in the constitution and transformation of ourselves and our work" (p. 74). *Currere* is still needed as we move into the middle part of the 21st century. The self-transformational work that *currere* enables can empower us with the agency and the momentum required to bring about social transformation.

Equity and the power of learning (and feeling) are needed, even as educators, we push against the odds and against the grain. It is good that we are where we are; that is, having left the door open for further debate and reflection and for the possibilities of things being better through hard work and kindness. There is nothing more educational than leaving the door ajar to further discussions, debates, and discoveries. To quote Oscar Wilde (1892), "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

We have not so much ended this discussion as we have shared our lives, articulated our core values, and taken risks. We were not deluding ourselves or seeking to hide. Rather, our engagement was less about being at a journey's end and more about keeping true to our beliefs, hoping that our shared and individual paths will produce better outcomes for us all. In this regard, the destination of self-actualization paradoxically becomes less significant. And, although simply being is not enough (personal agency allows us to choose to act), it is because we have described our moral compasses and maps that we are now in a better position to steer a course ahead, which may (or may not) bring us and others towards community-actualization, the Siksika (Blackfoot) way of life (Ravilochan, 2021). *Currere*, as an instrument of self-discovery, is heuristic; that is, its phases (regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetic) seek to relate one's personal experiences to broader humanistic experiences. In understanding oneself, the insights speak to human experiences more generally. Can we, as educators, reassert our place in communities and in the world?

The End?

Declarations

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End Note

[1] Even as we write about educational foundations, it is necessary to pause as we recognize how Indigenous worldviews demonstrate, for us, the limitations of Western ideas.