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Article

Working towards in-betweenness: A *currere* approach to the doctoral journey

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Abstract

To begin a doctorate is to enter a crossing. Institutions chart the journey through milestones and measurable outputs, yet the doctoral experience is often lived otherwise: uneven in its movement, rerouted by uncertainty, and shaped by moments of becoming that quietly re-form who we are as scholars. Situated in an Aokian space of betweenness, we—four first- and second-year doctoral students—formed a study group with our supervisor to dwell in betweenness as individually felt and collectively held, where subjective non-coincidence can become productive. Working through *currere* as an autobiographical method of subjective reconstruction, we attend to the inner experience of doctoral life in relation to the world of commitments, goals, and deadlines, seeking to reclaim this experience from narrow narratives of achievement. Using journaling, arts-based "rivers of experience," and collective dialogue, we develop theoretical and methodological languages of betweenness through juxtaposition. In doing so, we draw on sideshadowing and affect theory to attend to the partial and unresolved aspects of doctoral becoming and to name the intensities that shape this process. In this article, *currere* emerges as a praxis of presence that helps us move out of inwardness and into relation. We close by framing in-betweenness as an aperture: an opening through which new meanings emerge when narratives of betweenness are shared.

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Introduction

"Novelists have absolute control over their material—what to put in, what to leave out, how people are to behave, what is to happen"; however, continues novelist Penelope Lively (2005), "real life is quite out of control" (p. 2). The real life that concerns us is that of doctoral students. The doctoral journey, which occupies several years of one's life, is rarely straightforward. It is characterized by twists and turns, ups and downs, detours and rabbit holes, even as it can be among the most transformative experiences of a lifetime: a time of focused study, of developing a scholarly identity—and of being utterly changed through study. Curriculum theorist Dwayne Huebner suggests that it is no longer obvious what study is or does. In the case of the doctorate, over the past two decades, it has been subject to increasing rationalization and instrumentalization (Macaulay & Davies, 2019; Starke-Meyerring et al.,

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2014; Tennant, 2009), evident in the emphasis on completing 'in progress' forms and achieving milestones (Dowle, 2023), in accumulating research contributions in the form of presentations and publications, this even before students have barely stepped through the door (Paré, 2010).

"Stuck within ourselves we wither, disappear as subjectively present socially engaged persons, losing track of time," warns curriculum theorist William Pinar (2023, p. 3). He reiterates Huebner's concern that study (generally) has lost its meaning; in Huebner's words: "students study to do what someone else requires, not for their own transformation [or as] a way of 'working' on their own journey" (Huebner, 1999, as cited in Pinar, 2023, p. 42). For Pinar (2023), study ought to be the site of education, and subjectivity the site of study. Our research focuses on how we—a group of doctoral students, working alongside our supervisor—have reclaimed the doctoral experience for ourselves as a time of study; we have done so through the subjective labor of *currere* (Pinar, 1994, 2023).

The idea for such a project emerged from monthly doctoral gatherings led by our supervisor. Our supervisor had initiated the meetings as a way for her doctoral students to support one another, even as she supports and guides them. We shared our draft writing with one another (candidacy plans and papers, dissertation chapters, conference papers, papers for publication) for constructive feedback. The meetings were structured around discussion of three to four pieces of writing; they were also informed by exploring our journeys as rivers of experience. Shane Dowle (2020) used this creative method to collect data on critical events in the doctoral journey. A frequent topic of discussion in our gatherings was the doctoral journey itself and how to navigate it.

What we all shared, as doctoral students, was feeling the doctorate as a space and time of being between. Curriculum scholar Ted Aoki (1992/2011) used the concept of "between" to describe an awareness of being in the middle, the middle being an uneasy place, but also a productive space (pp. 271, 273), which is referred to in this paper as a state of "betweenness." Aoki (1996/2011) turned to various metaphors to describe this state, the most evocative being that of a bridge. Aoki had in mind certain Japanese garden bridges that encourage lingering—so, not crossing over right away—as contrasted with busy bridges in cities, like those in Seoul, Korea, whose main goal is to bring us from one place to another, quickly. The doctorate is a place of crossing: from doctoral student to candidate and from candidate to doctorate; from one place in a scholarly terrain to another; from the person we were to the person we become. However, the doctorate has also increasingly become like any busy bridge carrying traffic from home to work, work to home: frenzied; anxiety-ridden; with bursts of speed amid intolerable periods of feeling stuck in the slow lane. Our research acknowledges that to be in a doctorate is to be between places, and where, at times, we need to press on, and at other times, we want and need to linger, this for the sake of not missing anything important in the crossing. Betweenness may thus feel paradoxically both uncertain and destabilizing *and* exciting and transformative.

As four doctoral students at a leading research-intensive university led by the same supervisor and whose proposed doctoral research projects all involve some form of autobiographically-informed methods or memory-work, we decided to embark collectively on this research.[2] Drawing on a *currere* lens as well as method in our study group, we recursively

[2] "Bridging Betweenness: Navigating the Doctoral Journey" is the larger project of which our research constitutes one part; the project has REB [Research Ethics Board] approval. Conducted by our supervisor with her students, who are at different stages of the doctorate, Betweenness I (4 students) focuses on the early to middle stages: e.g., courses, candidacy papers, research

return to questions of: What kind of self/subjectivity are we becoming, and how might we become more present to ourselves in the process of our becoming? How might we narrate our stories so as to reclaim study as a place for being concerned with oneself (Foucault, 2021)—one's doctoral self—for the purpose of being more ethically engaged with the world? How are we experiencing betweenness during the doctorate? Our collective *currere* has allowed us to engage in study of a shared experience of betweenness, this as we press one another on "untold stories by asking curious questions that help thicken and deepen" our understandings (Etherington, 2007, p. 600). In this paper, we establish our theoretical grounding in betweenness. We discuss our methodology and research process, then share some of our betweenness narratives and how, through juxtaposing these narratives with one another, we listened for a shared language to reclaim the doctoral journey as a time of study.

Our Theoretical Grounding

Aoki used betweenness to describe a certain awareness of being between *different* states; thus, of being in a middle, the middle being an uneasy place (neither here nor there, or both here and there): a place *of* differences in which "multiplicity" could grow, a thought he borrowed from Deleuze (Aoki, 1992/2011, p. 269). Betweenness, for Aoki, was tantamount to thinking itself, which was aboutbeing interested in something, interest coming, as Aoki points out, "from "*inter/esse*" (esse: to be)" because

> "to be interested" is to be in the intertextual spaces… the spaces where "and" is no mere conjoining word but, more so, a place of difference, where something different can happen ... where whatever is created comes through as a voice that grows in the middle. (Aoki, 1993b/2011, p. 282)

Aoki (1993a/2011) was critical of binaries and dualisms (p. 294); he resisted pressure to align with a here *or* a there. One of the first places to which he applied this thinking was the teacher, who subsists, often uneasily, between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience, living in creative tensionality between government mandates of what to teach and the actual individuals present in the classroom. The experience of betweenness was also familiar to Aoki through being a hyphenated Japanese-Canadian and feeling being of both places, yet simultaneously of neither, caught between these different identities, where belonging was far from easy, this especially at a time when the Canadian government and society restricted where Japanese could live and teach. In applying Aoki's metaphor of the Japanese bridge to the doctorate, we are not saying: linger interminably. We are instead suggesting: to be in a doctorate *is* to be between and to want to linger, and to be allowed to want to linger so as to remain interested (*inter/esse*) and, as such, open.

Betweenness is particularly apt for describing the experience of the doctorate because perceptions about the doctorate often begin with rumors from family, friends, colleagues and especially, from the institution, regarding what might be expected of us and who we might become. Morson (1994) reminds us that "in the sea of rumor … possibilities carry more weight than actualities and feelings" (p. 123). We have needed to learn how to listen more to "the space[s] between" within ourselves (Aoki, 1993a/2011, p. 298), places vibrating with differences and possibilities "where new lines of thought can spring forth, running in many

proposal), Betweenness II (3 students) thesis writing. This paper focuses on the doctoral journeys of Betweenness I students.

directions simultaneously" (p. 299): to listen *those* rumors. Attending to these rumors is a way of coming to know how betweenness is *felt*: felt as a productive space of subjective non-coincidence (Pinar, 2023).

Early on in our discussions, the name of Alice in Wonderland came up. What Manguel (2019) observes about Alice also applies to doctoral students, who come "armed with ... one weapon for the journey: language. It is with words that we make our way through" (p. 17). However, words rarely come immediately. The process in the doctorate verges first on the unconscious and pre-conscious, much in the way that Bollas (1993) describes: before becoming fully aware of who we are and what we know, we wander around with a felt sense of our own significance. How, then, can we find language appropriate to recognize who we are while we are becoming? We turned to theories that could offer languages of betweenness, focusing on sideshadowing (Morson, 1994) and affect theory (Felski, 2008). Sideshadowing offered a way to enhance our awareness of our betweenness and to acknowledge that the doctorate cannot be told through a linear narrative. Sideshadowing opened up the possibility oftelling a different story:"In sideshadowing, two or more alternative presents, the actual and the possible, are made simultaneously visible" (Morson, 1994, p. 118). We also needed affect theory. Affect theory could help us better speak to the affective "intensity" that was contributing to our doctoral becoming (Massumi, 1995, p. 85). In what follows, we elaborate on the methodological approach to doctoral betweenness that we chose to take: *currere.*

Methodological Approach

The research project began in doctoral gatherings (led by our supervisor) in which we shared our feelings of being between based on our experiences. Since the research project involves our own experiences, we took an autobiographical approach, drawing on the method of *currere* (Pinar, 1994, 2023). As Pinar (2004) states: "*currere*… provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relation between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understandings and social reconstruction" (p. 35). This process demands multiple engagements of revisiting and reinterpreting our understandings so as to open up a space to examine our evolving identities. In other words, we were interested to move from any simple "once upon a time" stories being told about the doctoral experience to the ever-uncertain *now* (Grumet, 2015, p. 93), a *now* that was provisional but that represented a "biographic situation" that was our own (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). This *now* of *betweenness* where we dwell is a time of ongoing negotiation between past and future: a space where we are evolving into independent scholars (Dowle, 2022), and thus where meaning is being made, unmade, and continually being remade through study.

Currere moves through four modes: the first two are temporal (regressive; progressive); the last two more conceptual (analytical; synthetical), each intersecting with one another in ways that are neither predictable nor fully graspable at once. The regressive phase draws us back into our pasts to excavate educational memories through the doctoral journey and uncover layers of meaning embedded in experiences that we may have forgotten because, within the institutional mandates of the program, we feel as if "missing in action" (Pinar, 2011, p. xi). As the institutional structure of the doctorate often reinforces this fragmentation—with its emphasis on milestones, its relentless push towards efficiency, and its expectation that we leave parts of ourselves at the threshold of academic inquiry—*currere* offers a way to reclaim ourselves (Pinar, 2011). "Studying the past permits us to anticipate the future," Pinar (2015) writes (p. 192). The progressive phase extends our gaze forward, not towards a predetermined

outcome but to "let your mind wander to what could be" (Pinar, 2015, p. 76), imagining new scholarly identities while remaining aware of the personal, social, and political contexts that contribute to shaping them. The analytical phase disrupts this movement, pausing to examine lived educational experiences—past, present, future—through a phenomenological lens, making sense of our betweenness. The synthetical phase moves these reflections into a more integrated self-understanding, but one open to continual revision.

We combined *currere* with the rivers of experience, an arts-based method that allowed us to study our process in movement. Originally called the snake interview, it elicits particular facets of a person's life, capturing events, milestones, and critical incidents (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008). The river offers an analogy to life that (unlike the snake interview) is broader and more fluid (Pope & Denicolo, 2001), and has been used in recent studies to map complex trajectories of migration and post-genocide experiences (Denov & Shevell, 2021; Soaita, 2024). The method taps into powers of visualization, encouraging participants to see connections between experiences and patterns that might otherwise remain submerged (Bradley-Cole & Denicolo, 2020). Exploring the river as a metaphor for the doctoral journey, Dowle (2020) shows that while the river can hold and guide one's journey, it is just as much about the spaces in between (e.g., the different parts of the river; the river and the surrounding landscape; the river and its shores). We recursively drew rivers of our (doctoral) journeys during our gatherings as a way of reflecting on where we presently stand. Through the sharing and discussion of these river drawings, they became narrative forms through which the layered emotional and cognitive weight of doctoral betweenness could be further felt and expressed. The rivers' use within the research was to support a *currere* process focused on investigating betweenness, which was our main interest; the contribution of the river to a *currere* process may become the subject of a future publication.

Research Process: Writing Betweenness Prompts

Our focus on *currere* has allowed us to engage with ourselves as both agent and object of inquiry while simultaneously creating a space in which to distinguish between our lived experiences and our evolving self-perceptions. One purpose of *currere* is to cultivate and sustain non-coincidence (Pinar, 2023); in other words, an awareness of betweenness. We seized on *currere* as "an opportunity to study the 'sound of oneself'" (Pinar, 2023, p. 1)—here, the sound of our doctoral betweenness: individually felt, socially shared. But how to hear the sounds of betweenness?

At first, we began by writing to betweenness itself. These writings were very useful in helping us theorize betweenness. At a certain point, we realized that, to generate further movement, we would need to *excavate* the meanings behind the concept of betweenness, without relying on the word to name those meanings. In other words, we needed to produce wedges, prompts that could access experiences that felt like betweenness, but approached from different pathways. Laurel Richardson (1994) uses the metaphor of the crystal to point to the various ways of approaching experience. She notes: "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose" (Richardson, 1994, as cited in Ely et al., 1997, p. 35). If we were to try this angle of repose, that angle, in other words, this prompt, or that prompt, what might we see/excavate about our betweenness experiences?

Inspired by affect theory, we generated betweenness prompts in response to *feeling intensities*: feeling stuck, feeling a small realization, feeling a breakthrough, embracing a discomfort, encountering a threshold, feeling alone/not alone. We wrote short narratives—no more than about 300 words—narratives which lay close to the ground of our experience, as moved by each prompt. Our supervisor wrote along with us, thinking back to her doctorate but where her narratives were also informed by her present perspective as supervisor, as university professor, as scholar, as someone continually in the process of becoming. After sharing and discussing our narratives with one another, a process that typically concluded with generating new prompts (hearing bells; feeling belated), we rounded off with two: home and aperture. To decide which narratives to include in this paper, we attended closely to where the feelings of betweenness seemed most intense and the language most evocative. We also shared our narratives with the other students in the doctoral gathering to gauge their responses. From this shared process, we chose to address the following prompts: "Encountering Thresholds"; "Feeling Stuck"; "Hearing Bells"; and "Feeling Belated." In introducing next each set of narratives, we situate the prompt/feeling within the literature pertaining to the doctoral experience.

Encountering Thresholds

The concept of *thresholds* has been variously explored in doctoral studies (e.g., Keefer, 2015; Kiley, 2015; Meyer & Land, 2006). Meyer and Land, whose names are most closely associated withthe concept, have described the threshold as "akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 1). Thresholds describe, they explain, "something without which the learner cannot progress" (p. 1), for which Meyer and Land borrowed the term "liminality": a state of being "on" a threshold and feeling stuck *there*. Liminality has been used by others to capture the doctorate as being between two identities (Dowle, 2022). For Turner (1979), who first popularized the notion of liminality, thresholds constituted a transitional state. Learners have moved beyond their previous self but have not yet become the new self. Research focusing on doctoral students suggests that when candidates encounter liminal spaces—particularly when struggling to understand a specific threshold (pivotal) concept—they face significant intellectual challenges and feel a sense of repetition (useless iteration), confusion, and stagnation (Keefer, 2015; Kiley, 2015; Kiley & Wisker, 2010).

Ezgi:

For some reason, I find the concept of thresholds deeply captivating. In both life and academia, I often find myself standing at thresholds—pausing, observing, waiting until I feel ready to move forward. Sometimes I wonder if I'm waiting for someone to push me across. My lingering reminds me of a childhood superstition. Each room had a wooden threshold—gray in color, attached to the door frame, and raised about a handspan from the floor. I loved sitting on them. But the adults would always warn me, saying that if I sat there, I wouldn't have children. Whenever they scolded me, I would quickly move to the floor. Looking back, I wonder, is there truth in the idea that lingering too long at a threshold—staying in one place without moving forward—can hold us back? In academia, we often refer to thresholds as milestones and we are expected to cross them. The longer we hesitate at a threshold, the harder it becomes to take the next step. We risk becoming stuck, caught in a liminal state.

Elizabeth:

I went to a Sungazer concert, an instrumental progressive jazz/rock band. The lead bassist introduced one of their songs called "Threshold," a song that plays with the limits of perceptions of rhythm: thresholds that our brains perceive as too fast or too slow. The song starts with an almost painfully slow rhythm but is soon punctuated by percussive ad-libs. There is an uncertainty to how I sway and bob my head because of the counterintuitive rhythm, but I tryto find the rhythm. Around the time of the concert, I was toiling with my Candidacy Plan. I perceived that my progress was too slow compared to where I needed to be. At the same time, I was thinking too much about the next step, moving too fast towards my hoped-for threshold. To feel the pulse of where I am in my doctoral journey, I need to remain poised here at this threshold, rather than forcing myself to adhere to the limits of "*could be*" or "*should be*."

Teresa:

I remember where I was. I was taking a Qualitative Inquiry course, which involved journaling—or was I just writing because I needed to? My decision to return to graduate studies, this after six years of elementary teaching, was a pragmatic one. I didn't anticipate in the least all that it would bring in its wake especially with respect to writing. All during my undergraduate degrees, I had worked at producing clear prose, which (guided by literary critic Northrop Frye—his advice as well as his example at the time) entailed using the active voice: the exact words in the exact places. While this way of writing helped me become a better writer, it purged my writing of the pronoun "I." I clearly remember being in that room, copious tears falling, as I "gave" myself permission to cross this threshold and write in the first person about my own experiences. Unleashed was not just that torrent of tears but writing itself—in the first person, driven by this person who finally acknowledged that she had a voice: a writing voice.

Dina:

Suddenly I found my inbox overflowing with deadlines, grant applications, and unfamiliar terms stacking one over the other. Why? When? How? I had no idea where to start. I struggled the most with grant applications. Though optional for a first-year PhD, I wanted to prove that I could do it. Then came the preliminary feedback meeting in front of a professor, who skimmed through my application draft, lifted an eyebrow then asked, "Why would anyone fund your work? What does it add to society?"

The words got under my skin, knocking the breath out of me. I left pale. Back in my room, I locked the door. I couldn't hold back my tears. Why did I do this to myself? Did my research even matter?

Then, I read my supervisor's email: "Don't feel discouraged. You are courageous, juggling all you do. You have already made great changes to fully convey your research and its impact."

I wiped my eyes. Still, I applied. Rejected.

A year later, I applied again. Rejected.

But something changed. I could see it differently. It didn't crush me. The rejection had become a gateway, an opportunity to keep refining my work, shaping my identity as a scholar, grounding me in what I truly care about. The threshold is still there, but crossing it became more about learning where to stand.

Feeling Stuck

When Kamler and Thomson (2014) asked doctoral students what metaphors they would use to describe how it felt to develop a scholarly identity, several told of feelings of being stuck or paralyzed: "trying to swim with concrete blocks on my feet"; "trudging through a mangrove swamp"; "walking through a maze blindfolded"; "sinking in quicksand"; "getting caught in knots" (p. 33). Not unlike Sisyphus who in the Greek myth is punished by the gods, pinioned between a rock and a hard place by having to push a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back down every time he got close to the top, doctoral students often feel stuck. There are times when there is little to no sense of movement forward; we regularly confront feelings of self-doubt, as daunting as Sisyphus' boulder. French philosopher Albert Camus (1955/2000) used Sisyphus' story to exemplify absurdism—the tension between needing to have a purpose in life and the surrounding universe's seeming meaninglessness.

However, Camus also argued that the myth of Sisyphus could be interpreted differently, in light of process rather than result. So what if we have to start over or repeat ourselves? It is Sisyphus' determination that gives him dignity and ultimately, motivation, Camus argued. On this reading, places of stuckness become detours—and potentially very important ones—along the way of becoming. This was shown in our narratives where stuckness tended to morph into becoming 'unstuck'. This also explains the close relationship between stuckness and thresholds. Threshold concepts, Kiley (2015) explains, are ones where a breakthrough is preceded by not being there in the place one needs to be. But we needed to go through feeling stuck so as to push through to the next place somewhere further on.

Ezgi:

That feeling of being stuck, of not knowing where I truly belong: I know it well. Before my current PhD program, I was enrolled in another one. I was pursuing my doctorate at one of the top universities in my country and working as a research assistant at another. A highly prestigious, well-paid position that guaranteed a stable academic career,it was the ultimate dream. I could see the future it led to, though: a life of routine and ultimately of resignation, where I'd become just another uninspired academic, recycling the same lecture slides for decades. So, I chose the uncertain path. I still don't know if it was the safer choice, the better choice. But I do know this: I no longer feel trapped.

Zhiyun:

When I start thinking about the literature review for my doctoral research project, I feel stuck. I am interested in some themes, some theories, and feel that they might be connected to my research. However, these connections remain vague and chaotic, flying around in my mind like a dense flock of sparrows.

Dina:

I was that child who enjoyed squeezing herself into a small nook under a wooden console. The space was not much larger than a square, but just big enough for my body to curl in. The walls pressed tightly against me, but I would stay there for a long time. That memory, with its bittersweet blend of confinement and desire for discovery, mirrors my adult self during my PhD journey. The pressure now presents itself as the weight of scholarly pursuits, which I feel pressing upon me: the tension of expectations, deadlines, uncertainty, self-doubt, along with the intense desire to understand my inner self and true purpose as a scholar. What is the

meaning behind this pursuit, I ask myself. I dwell here in this space, feeling the echo of long ago, of being held, held in a space just big enough for me to dwell in.

Hearing Bells

From the bells of childhood and adolescence to those that structured our days in schools—whether as students or as teachers—we have all heard bells. Their presence is a temporal marker of order and discipline. Latremouille (2018) writes of bells and deadlines as "practical necessities" (p. 53) that discipline bodies—but also silence possibilities, a dynamic that finds its way into doctoral students' inhabiting of academic progress reviews, submission dates, and comprehensive exams—rhythms that call us back into order. These external bells gradually transform into *inner* bells: quiet but insistent impulses to produce something meaningful—and timely. Lovitts (2007) argues that "the dissertation is a rite of passage from student to professional/colleague" (p. 30), not just a set of deadlines but the purposeful construction of a scholarly identity. Writing to the prompt of bells became a way of drawing attention to the temporal signs that organized our doctoral lives, even as we consider how these bells may be better attuned: heard not as demands to comply, but as provocations to reimagine the tempos of doctoral study and prioritize what genuinely counts as meaningful work.

Elizabeth:

I have bells going off all day where I work as a secondary English teacher. There is a comfort in hearing bells: the collective rush of movement in a hallway. In my doctoral studies, there is no audible bell to tell me when to start or stop working. So, I set timers for myself to research or write. I block off mornings, afternoons, or evenings. But they don't have quite the same effect. I do not hurry in the same way I do at school. I need to be my own sense of authority. Even when I don't *hear* the reminders, a sense of urgent purpose remains.

Ezgi:

I still remember the sound of my middle and high school bells: Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Such a classical one. Every time I hear *The Four Seasons*, I can't help but feel it's recess time—proof of how sounds can condition us, just like Pavlov's dogs. Bells dictated our actions throughout our school years—elementary, middle, and high school. The bell rang, and we rushed outside for recess. It rang again, and we hurried back to class. To me, bells symbolize classical conditioning—mechanical, structured, controlling, confining. Education should be about more than just following routines. Innovation thrives in messiness, unpredictability, a touch of chaos.

Teresa:

To go to school is to hear bells—the bell for the start of the day, for recess, for lunch, for the end of the day. This carries on into high school, where there are even more bells, as the day is divided into classes, each transition requiring a bell, this in addition to start of day, end of day, breaks, lunch. When I became a teacher, I encountered those bells once more. I wasn't conscious of bells when I attended college and university, because there were none; only, on rare occasion, the fire drill bell. Time was surely a factor when I was doing my graduate degrees but early on, I slipped into a space that was my own and that I was free to explore. In the past decade, I have become more conscious of my *inner* bells, which tell me to hurry up, to

write, to produce. I felt them markedly when I was on sabbatic leave. I woke up each morning feeling the presence of a white rabbit, like the one in Alice in Wonderland, telling me that I was already late and I better get moving and write that book. I am wondering when the bells will stop, if they ever will, except with my passing into another realm, one without bells.

Dina:

The word "echo" lingered at the back of my mind for the entire drive home, amplified by the word "bell." Memories flooded back from elementary and high school, when ringing pierced halls and classrooms. How was this sound so vibrant? It guided me from one class to the next, offering only a small moment in-between for greeting someone here and chatting with another there—a fleeting sense of freedom before the next class began. And *yet*, there was an odd comfort in it, a sort of rhythmic punctuation that said: Done with this, now move on. But before moving, you had to know where to walk and in which direction to make the transition smoother to avoid being late. Today, I move in *segments*. Each segment must end before the next can begin. Deadlines, assignments, and milestones throughout my doctoral journey are nudges; sometimes, they ring smoothly, like a familiar hallway bell; sometimes, they're jarring, triggering imposter syndrome and I feel lost or uncertain. I can see it more clearly now: there is no standing still between rings. You need to move. It's time to keep going!

Zhiyun:

As a PhD student, I need to manage my time and decide on my own what to do. However, in elementary or high school, I only needed to follow the bells. At the PhD stage, there are milestones that, like bells, remind me of the main tasks, but the time between these milestones is very long. Most of the gaps need to be filled in with plans that I make. I am not very good at making detailed plans. I think I need to consciously set up bells for myself—not just designing tasks, but also planning the time required for each task and allocating it wisely each day, so that bells can ring in my life again rhythmically.

Feeling Belated

Discussion of belatedness is rare in the doctoral studies literature, yet in overt as well as subtle ways, it dominates the PhD journey, comprising part of its "invisible curriculum" (Elliot et al., 2020; Starke-Meyerring et al., 2014). Institutional timeframes emphasize finishing on time (Tennant, 2009) and there is a pervasive and deeply-seated belief that "to not achieve these milestones [in a timely manner] constitutes not a failure of time or the institution, but of the individual" (Macaulay & Davies, 2019, p. 168). Belatedness has been studied in great depth in the context of trauma, understood as the interval between experience and memory or understanding (Caruth, 1995). Freud used the word *Nachträglichkeit* to name the slow process through which traumatic experiences—which have been repressed—return. Postmemory is based on the recognition that traumatic memory is already belated (Hirsch, 2008). Belatedness can also refer to someone (a witness) who is conscious of coming late to a traumatic event, to "something that we wish, and we know should have, had a different ending" (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 62).

Many doctoral students, especially those who return to study after years of work, caregiving, migration, or other life events(often the case in Education) come to experience their PhD as a form of late arrival, feeling as if they are entering academia out of sync with expected rhythms and timelines. We are not claiming that the doctorate is or needs to be a time of trauma, and

that any doctoral trauma approaches the scale of other traumas, however the association of the doctorate with belatedness—a sense of being perpetually behind pressing deadlines and milestones; of not being 'current' with the most current literature; of not having read or written enough—can engender feelings of fear and anxiety that become deeply rooted, contributing to a sense of insufficiency and even failure—feelings that can linger even after a PhD has been successfully defended. Belatedness can also be tied to feelings of shock tied to experiences of fear, doubt, uncertainty, profound unrest, traumas (tied to the chosen topic or one's implication within it), manifested physically: accelerated heart rate, constricted blood vessels (Felski, 2008). By writing to the prompt of belatedness, we are acknowledging these feelings that haunt us, even as we are reclaiming the time of our doctorates as the right time. Perhaps because we come to the doctorate belatedly, that is, at a time later in our life (later being a relative term), this allows us to discern better what we are doing and why.

Dina:

According to the dictionary, belated means "delayed beyond the usual or typical time." But who decides when we're supposed to arrive? What make us believe there's only one right moment?

I've asked myself these questions many times in my life. I've often done things early—or at least "on time"—driven by a quiet ambition to be first. I got married early, had my children early, and continued my education without pause, completing a double bachelor's degree and a master's. I kept going until I arrived here, in this moment. When I started my doctoral journey, I felt late—especially around younger students. I kept wondering why I hadn't started earlier. I'm in my forties now, and I don't think I could have brought this level of clarity or readiness to the journey at any earlier point in time. Perhaps belated is just another word for being right on time—*inner time* (not borrowed time).

Teresa:

I started my doctoral studies later in life, as a mother, after nine years of marriage, after having taught elementary school full-time for six years. During my PhD, I never felt more alive and present to myself and everything around me. It felt as if I had woken up after a long sleep. One professor was of great assistance to me, encouraging me to present at my first conference. At one point, though, he looked long and hard at my greying hair and asked what I thought I could contribute; in other words, was I *too* late. Much, much later on, my hair white and my publication list long, I heard from him. He commended me on my many contributions. I didn't say anything except: thank you. Belated indeed.

Studying Our Narrative Juxtapositions through In-Betweenness

The classroom was large and quiet; the windows drew in the full moon and laid its light across the tables. The window made a middle of its own, neither inside nor outside, a light holding both—and our talk found that middle. It has been about a year since we began our *Betweenness* group—started one evening after a graduate class on autobiographical research methods with our supervisor, the idea inspired by our doctoral gatherings. We, four doctoral students, had waited for the class to empty so we could speak with her about shaping a conference proposal that could focus on naming what it feels like to be here, a PhD student, in the midst of *becoming*. We did not know where the research, once embarked on, would lead. We searched for

meaning within and between our meetings, drawings, discussions, and writings. Together we arrived at prompts that deepened our thinking and writing—promptingsthat helped us listen from within. Month by month, new threads held us and shifted how we thought about the research and ourselves in what became an in-between: a communal space that was more than the sum of our individual efforts.

At the beginning of our research, we experienced betweenness as a place where we each felt stuck, unsure of ourselves. However, through our shared *currere* process, this feeling started to change. In-betweenness emerged at the moment when we realized that we were not only between places but in terrain that was in turn shaping all of us. In-betweenness became the space holding our scholarly becomings.

Juxtaposition acted as our heuristic tool, helping us move toward this in-between that lay between our narratives. More precisely, juxtaposition worked to open an in-between space "where the pieces don't quite meet ... [and] the light comes through" (Grumet, 1981, p. 128). In fact, juxtaposition was what allowed an in-between space to take shape. We turned to the languages of sideshadowing and affect theory for words to articulate and share complex meanings tied to resemblances and differences across and between our experiences.

Affect theory helped us acknowledge as well as name how we felt within the experience of betweenness and then how we felt as we began moving within an in-between space. Massumi (1995) has conceptualized affect as bodily intensity, arguing that "intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things" (p. 85). Felski's (2008) understanding of affect is similar in attending to "somatic registers''—what the body feels and knows before the mind "registers what … is at stake" (p. 117). However, she also takes a phenomenological view of affect; phenomenology brings an "attentiveness to the first person perspective"—what the "condition of being-a-self involves" (p. 17), here (in our research) applied to a doctoral self. We each needed to notice our own emotional shifts and bodily sensations, taking them seriously as sources for critical self-reflection while taking our pulses: acknowledging what we were feeling and experiencing. Shock, for instance, was among the first sensations brought to the table. Felski identifies four modes of affective engagement (recognition, enchantment, knowledge and shock), which she applies to literary texts and here we borrow two of the modes, 'shock' and 'recognition', to explore how a language of affect can help mediate experiences of the doctorate as feeling between. We first comment briefly on enchantment, though, which was captured in certain of our prompts such as: feeling a small realization, feeling a breakthrough—ones that we opted not to include in this paper. Although we would not want to associate doctoral studies with a being enchanted (which can suggest a being mesmerized and even, befuddled), enchantment, as Felski notes, is a way to acknowledge states of "intense involvement"(p. 54), states in which "colors seem brighter, perceptions are heightened" (p. 55). As doctoral students, we cannot help but feel excited and fascinated by this subject that brought us here in the first place, that has become our reason for rising in the morning, and that can keep us awake long into the night. If we are truthful with ourselves, Bernstein says, "the dynamic/of absorption is/central to all reading & writing" (cited in Felski, p. 74). Enchantment, though, is precisely what falters, at least momentarily, when we feel stuck, or pinioned on a threshold, or interrupted by bells. Our betweenness prompts addressed more affects of shock and (lack of) recognition; we elaborate on each.

Jolts, jarring moments, fears, encountering something unexpected, in short, feelings of "being wrenched in an altered frame of mind" (p. 113), this in response to ideas, people, challenges, uncertainties, doubts, penetrating questions: these characterize shock, which can be both unsettling and exhilarating, yet also disturbing to the point of being self-compromising. Shock (like belatedness) maps onto an experience of *Nachträglichkeit*—the psychoanalytical notion of "afterwards," manifested through delayed response, accompanied by procrastination; in short, unsettling affect "diffused across a temporal continuum" so as to become an almost permanent condition of being (p. 119).

Recognition also has its corresponding affect, which is a feeling of "becoming known" (Felski, 2008, p. 25), with the emphasis on *process*. It begins in uncertainty with an inchoate and vague sense of significance, of having some kind of shape but not one that is clearly discernible, therefore gives rise to doubts, feeling haunted as well as stuck, existing on the cusp of something but feeling not quite there. As if speaking directly to the doctoral experience, Felski says: "one learns how to be oneself by taking one's cue from others who are doing the same" (p. 26). When we shared our betweenness narratives, we started to become more recognizable to ourselves; we could feel "amplified" (p. 25).

During the *currere* process, then, which was a shared research process, affective intensities circulated between us as doctoral students—as narrators, as readers—asking us to stay with what was not yet fully known, but that might become more apparent the more we looked for the words to describe what we were feeling. By juxtaposing 'ourselves' through sharing these narratives of betweenness, we gradually became aware of a space of *in*-betweeness opening.

Sideshadowing (Morson, 1994) helps dissolve the sense of inevitability that can obscure self-recognition, especially in a doctorate. The doctorate is characterized by many misperceptions, including the one that sees the journey as a single narrative: a linear one of crossing one milestone after the other, after the other, until the end: doctoral defence. Sideshadowing helps provide a narrative form for telling a different story, one predicated on pulling affect forward, noticing those moments in the doctorate charged with multiple possibilities. For instance, we might backtrack to a road not taken, or to another recommended but only briefly contemplated, or to still another that we deferred looking at because fearful or doubtful of our capacity to walk that road. We might explore what others help us see that we overlooked or discounted. We might explore the autobiographical interpellations of ourselves in our research. In short, we come to realize that there are many ways to narrate the betweenness that is the doctoral journey, not just one way.

At our own pace, then, we gathered our betweenness narratives and read them again and again, alone and together. Each rereading felt like a *detour*—a return that moved the work forward, bringing us to a place of in-betweenness. Juxtaposition allowed us to hold these narratives together as a constellation of moments, threaded in parallel. We let them press and pull against each other. While all narratives and all prompts remained on the table, we followed those narratives that seemed marked by or struck us with particular affective intensity—that seemed to get at the heart of the alternative story—the sideshadowing—that we were trying to explore and narrate. We began with *Feeling Stuck*, reading it with *Feeling a Small Realization*. These conjoined prompts didn't seem to generate any new insights. From their collision, though, we sensed other possibilities. Stuckness, for instance, felt like being

held in place by expectations, deadlines, uncertainty, self-doubt: feeling the air grow immeasurably heavy. Yet, at the edge, a fine light appeared in juxtaposing *Stuckness* with *Crossing Thresholds*. Zhiyun, for example, described her stuckness as "vague and chaotic, flying around in my mind like a dense flock of sparrows," while Ezgi recalled feeling "trapped," with a "crushing sense of helplessness." A certain paradox became clear as we read one another's narratives on *Crossing Thresholds*: feelings of immobility could persist even as the (inner) work quietly moved forward. We could then recognize stuckness *as* a threshold: not only as a trap (which it can also be).

Then we placed *Crossing a Threshold* next to *Belated*. Read together, both carried time inside them—time lies at the heart of this doctoral journey. The juxtaposition revealed two temporal affects, returning to terms we have borrowed from Felski: the *shock*, here of suddenly finding oneself on the other side of a threshold, and then the slower, delayed *recognition*, here of having arrived "late." A threshold can thus feel like a decisive moment, yet true awareness of its crossing comes belatedly, only when feeling and memory catch up with the experience. In Dina's words, crossing is less a destination than a lesson in where and when to stand. In contrast, "belated" is anticipatory—a feeling that lingers in the mind before the event occurs and becomes better resolved through awareness. Teresa's reminder that "there is no such thing as belatedness" slowed our hurry. The stress patterns of the doctorate belong here: they rise, recede, return. Crossing happens, but its meaning emerges in its own time, including by being poised, provisionally, in stuckness.

When we placed *Bells* alongside *Belated*, another recognition came into view: the way shock could be converted into knowledge rather than remaining a wounding experience. The bells, the deadlines, the milestones, as Ezgi noted, "structure and regulate our PhD lives," yet they also offer moments of *enchantment*: small lifts, like Dina's "done with this, now move on," or Zhiyun's wish to "set up bells" again to feel a rhythm, and Elizabeth's sense of bells as a quiet comfort. Here, reading our narratives side-by-side let us see how institutional bells of schooling echo into the self-imposed bells of doctoral life, where urgency is now internalized as "inner bells." Such shocks "do not just represent but make newly present significant shapes of social meaning" (Felski, 2008, p. 104); their affective force can become a new source of cognitive impetus.

In this *currere* process, juxtaposition was a way of arranging our narratives to let *affect* travel—not only individually but collectively. Affect's language became the medium through which we recognized sideshadowed moments: ones that we may have missed, overlooked, or never been aware of, within the pulse and passion of writing, reading, speaking, listening.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attested to the space of in-betweenness that opened between us as we studied and shared (by means of *currere*) the affect accompanying experiences of betweenness during our doctoral journeys. A *currere* process allowed us to critically reflect on how our pasts, presents, and imagined futures were shaping our becoming as doctoral scholars; however, *currere* is what also allowed us to come together. It helped us to focus on the "sound of oneself" (Pinar, 2023, p.1), and then, through juxtaposing our stories of betweenness, arriving at a more collective discernment of the sound of *in*-betweeness. We were "stirred" by hearing one another's stories,"yield[ing] to the grain of the voice" (Felski, 2008, p. 71).

What does felt discernment of in-betweenness signify in a doctorate, our own and others' journeys? *In*-betweenness represents an alternative narrative, a sideshadowed one, a space and time not to "do what someone else requires" (Huebner, 1999, as cited in Pinar, 2023, p. 42); rather, to go within, deeply, through study (inter-esse) and in so doing, to escape "self-enclosure" into an "expanded subjectivity" (Pinar, 2023, pp. 2, 3). To experience in-betweenness in a doctorate is to approach a subjectivity informed by aperture. Inspired by novelist Lev Tolstoy's works, Morson (1994) borrowed the concept of aperture to suggest the endless possibilities of life and the infinite ways of narrating possibility. Morson emphasized that aperture "requires unpredetermined futurity, which means an escape from all ways in which an end or structure can be already given" (p. 171). A *currere* process of narrating and juxtaposing our experiences of betweenness became precisely this: a way to acknowledge as well as renounce our disenchantment with the "already given" (p. 171) in the form of institutionalized and instrumentalized aspects of the doctorate (Macaulay & Davies, 2019); to instead study what we were feeling moment by moment—shock, enchantment, recognition—so to reclaim the doctorate as a time of betweenness: of lingering here and there so as tap into vital sources of movement and thought in our respective inquiries. What was needed, first, was sharing rather than isolation. Secondly, what proved transformative was study: the research of ourselves as we researched our respective topics and the experience of doctoral betweenness we shared. Through our sharing and *currerean* juxtaposition of our doctoral journeys, we found in in-betweenness the openings we didn't even know that we could have and that would allow us to breathe. We now end this paper, not with ending, but with affirming the in-betweenness that keeps possibilities open. This is something we will carry within us and between us, as well as in our work with others.

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