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Article

Invoking educational subjectivity within Türkiye's centralized system: A *currere* perspective

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Abstract

As *Toward a Poor Curriculum* marks its 50th anniversary, this conceptual analysis examines the relevance of Pinar and Grumet's (1976/2026) autobiographical method for understanding subjectivity within the Turkish educational context. Rather than deploying *currere* phenomenologically, this paper engages its four moments as an analytical framework to examine the structural and historical conditions shaping educational subjectivity in Türkiye. The inquiry examines how examination culture, curriculum centralization, and limited teacher autonomy have shaped Turkish education, and considers how *currere* might function as praxis for cultivating reflective engagement and pedagogical intentionality within centralized, examination-dominated systems. Situating *currere* within Türkiye's relational cultural context, where selfhood develops through interdependence rather than individualism, this study explores how autobiographical methods might function under varying structural and cultural conditions. Beyond its Turkish focus, this analysis addresses questions facing educational systems worldwide as standardization increasingly constrains spaces for educational subjectivity and democratic engagement.

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Introduction

"Where are we now? With what are we occupied? Who is the 'we'?" These questions, posed by Pinar (2026a, p. 124), frame the central inquiry of this paper as *currere*—the Latin infinitive of curriculum, signifying the running of the course (Pinar, 2015). Questions of subjectivity become particularly urgent in educational contexts where standardization and centralization increasingly constrain the spaces teachers and students occupy (Pinar, 2026). Subjectivity, for Pinar (2026a, p. 124), refers to the existential and political space we occupy—the space of self-understanding, agency, and meaning-making within structures of power. In Turkish education, these questions resonate with special intensity, as the system grapples with tensions between modernization imperatives, examination pressures, and the lived experiences of the various educational actors. This paper examines how *currere* might illuminate both the suppression of subjectivity within the Turkish educational landscape and its potential reclamation.

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The concept of *currere* emerged in the 1970s as Pinar and Grumet developed alternatives to what they criticized as the "mind-numbing bureaucracy of the accountability trend" (Grumet, 2026a, pp. xiv). Their method proposed a radical reconceptualization of curriculum from noun to verb, from product to process, from externally imposed objectives to autobiographical reflection and self-understanding (Pinar, 2013). *Currere* consists of four moments: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical (Pinar, 1975). Grumet (2026b, pp. 60-63) conceptualizes *currere* as a reflective process through which individuals recover a sense of volition and agency. This recovery of agency and intentionality constitutes a praxis-oriented dimension of *currere*, enabling reflection to inform purposeful action.

In the five decades since its introduction, *currere* has influenced curriculum studies internationally, offering a phenomenological method for studying lived educational experience through autobiography and temporal reflection (e.g., Huber et al., 2013; Miller, 2014). Yet questions remain about how autobiographical inquiry functions in educational systems characterized by high centralization and examination dominance. Deniz and Pinar (2026) employed *currere* as a phenomenological methodology with Turkish teachers to examine how critical incidents shape professional agency and identity development. Building on prior autobiographical engagement with *currere* in the Turkish educational context (Deniz, 2024), the present analysis extends its application to trace the historical-structural conditions shaping educational subjectivity. In so doing, I deploy *currere*'s temporal structure differently, focusing in on *currere* as an analytical framework through which to trace how current constraints in Turkish education emerged historically. That will allow for examining the broader structural conditions that have shaped, indeed continue to constrain, educational subjectivity there. In Türkiye, school-level curriculum autonomy is significantly below the OECD average (OECD, 2019). The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) controls curriculum, textbooks, teacher appointments, and examinations from the central authority in Ankara. This centralization, combined with an examination-centered culture extending from secondary education through university entrance (Gür et al., 2012; Kavakci et al., 2014; Tansel & Bircan, 2006), constrains educational subjectivity for both teachers and students. While my *currere* analysis draws primarily on secondary and higher education contexts where examination pressures are most acutely felt, the structural dynamics described, including centralized curriculum control, limited teacher autonomy, and examination-driven pedagogy, characterize Turkish education broadly across levels, albeit with important variations.

The Turkish educational context offers a particularly revealing case for examining questions of subjectivity. Educational structures across different periods have historically shaped how political, economic, and cultural forces enable or foreclose on the space for self-understanding and agency (Kaplan, 2006). While the Ottoman-to-Republican transition provides essential context, this paper focuses primarily on the Republican era forward, from early modernization efforts through developmentalist reforms to contemporary neoliberal accountability measures. Each period has constructed the educational subject differently, privileging certain forms of selfhood while suppressing others (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2007; Üstel, 2004). Understanding these historical constructions and their contemporary manifestations requires an approach that can attend to both individual experience and structural forces, both past trajectories and future possibilities. *Currere*—understood not as a procedural technique but as phenomenological engagement with lived educational experience (Pinar, 2019, 2022)—has long provided such an approach by revealing how subjectivity is formed through historical forces while remaining open to transformative possibilities. In this paper, I engage with

currere's four moments as an analytical framework and organizational structure to examine Turkish educational subjectivity. The regressive moment traces how subjectivity has been historically shaped across reform periods; the progressive moment explores possibilities for engagement with *currere* within Türkiye's relational context; the analytical moment investigates present constraints through examination of culture and centralization; the synthetical moment proposes implications for praxis. This more conceptual analysis synthesizes scholarship on Turkish education, curriculum theory, and subjectivity through *currere*'s reflective structure. By examining *currere* within this particular context—the Turkish one—I aim to contribute to understanding how autobiographical methods operate across different conditions of practice. As standardization and Ball's (2003) "performativity" intensify globally, Türkiye's centralized system offers an illuminating case for understanding how reflective approaches might reclaim educational subjectivity.

Conceptual Framework: *Currere*, Subjectivity, and Praxis

Currere fundamentally reconceptualizes curriculum (Pinar, 2013), moving from course objectives to a complicated conversation with oneself as a private intellectual. This interior dialogue becomes praxis—not in the Freirean sense of action-reflection cycles but as what Pinar (2022) terms subjective presence: a heightened ontological awareness that transforms how one inhabits educational spaces. Critically, Pinar (2012, 2015) insists that *currere* is not a procedural technique to be applied mechanically but a phenomenological engagement with lived experience—a form of disciplined, reflective inquiry. This distinction matters because treating *currere* as a technique risks reducing it to another checkbox in teacher education or professional development, thereby missing its transformative potential. *Currere* should be understood as both a phenomenological approach for individual self-study and an analytical framework for examining educational phenomena (Pinar, 1975). As such, working with *currere* requires sustained engagement, intellectual risk-taking, and willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about oneself and one's practice, qualities that resist reduction to procedural steps. The regressive moment involves returning to one's educational past, recalling experiences, events, and feelings that have shaped present understanding. Memory here becomes not merely retrospective but constitutive, as it is through the recovery of lived experience that subjectivity becomes visible to itself, creating the conditions for transformation (Pinar, 2026b). As Grumet (2026a, pp. xiv–xv) emphasizes in her preface to *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, *currere* demands a difficult process of growth both inward and outward, a movement in which the subject revisits personal experience while critically engaging with the social and political world. The present analysis attends to this dual movement by examining the structural conditions that shape the terrain within which such inward and outward growth might become possible. The progressive moment invites imagining educational futures, envisioning what might be possible beyond current constraints. The analytical moment examines the relationship between past and future, analyzing how historical experiences and future imaginings inform present reality. The synthetical moment integrates these temporalities, transforming understanding into praxis as informed action that bridges reflection and engagement (Pinar, 2019). While *currere* originates in individual autobiographical inquiry, then, its temporal structure also lends itself to examining the historical and structural conditions within which individual experience unfolds, as Pinar's (2012) own engagement with historical forces and their educational consequences

demonstrates. The present analysis operates at this second level, engaging *currere*'s analytical dimension to clarify the structural terrain within which individual *currere* practice might emerge in Turkish educational contexts.

Working with *currere* in Türkiye's relational cultural context requires attention to how selfhood is constructed differently across cultural frameworks. *Currere*'s emphasis on autobiographical reflection emerged primarily from North American contexts. Though autonomous selfhood is culturally prominent in these contexts, Pinar and Grumet (2026) always understood the self as fundamentally social and historical. It is worth distinguishing here between individualism, individuality, and autonomy. Individualism, as a cultural ideology, prioritizes self-interest and independence from relational obligations. Individuality refers to the uniqueness of each person's experience and perspective. Autonomy, though, denotes the capacity for self-direction and agency. *Currere* draws on individuality and autonomy in this latter sense, not on individualism as an ideology. Kagitcibasi's (2005, 2017) model of the "autonomous-relational self" offers a crucial theoretical bridge for articulating how *currere* might function in Turkish contexts. Rather than opposing autonomy and relatedness as mutually exclusive, she demonstrates that they constitute complementary dimensions of selfhood. Kagitcibasi's (2005, 2017) framework illuminates how Turkish educators might approach currere as an articulation of relationality—one in which autobiographical reflection unfolds through networks of family, colleagues, and community. Autobiographical reflection here expresses the autonomous-relational self, where individual agency and relational connectedness are mutually constitutive rather than opposed. This cultural articulation becomes essential for *currere*'s meaningful presence in Turkish education, revealing how autobiographical reflection operates through rather than against the relational webs that, here, define Turkish selfhood.

Understanding *currere* as praxis requires clarifying the relationship between reflection and action. For Pinar (2022), praxis extends beyond the dialectic of reflection and action emphasized in Freirean pedagogy to encompass a more fundamental ontological stance—a "praxis of presence." Building on Aoki's (2005) phenomenological concepts of dwelling "in-between" the planned and lived curriculum and "thinking alongside" rather than simply implementing or resisting the mandated curriculum, Pinar (2022) reconceptualizes praxis as inhabiting the tension between what is mandated and what is experienced. This approach offers a way of understanding how teachers might cultivate presence within constraining structures. Similarly, Arendt's (1958) concept of natality—the human capacity for beginning anew, for initiating what has not yet been—provides an ontological grounding for understanding praxis as more than strategic action. For Arendt (1958), natality extends beyond biological birth to encompass the capacity to insert something new into the world through action and speech; as she argues, "each birth represents a new beginning and the introduction of novelty in the world" (p. 9), connecting directly to subjective presence as the ground for pedagogical possibility. Synthesizing these insights, Pinar (2022) develops what he terms "subjective reconstruction"—the ongoing process of reconstituting oneself through complicated conversation with educational experience. Such presence—a heightened awareness encompassing temporal multiplicity, where past, present, and future exist simultaneously in consciousness—enables conscious, deliberate pedagogical choices rather than habitual responses. Maintaining presence requires living within temporal complexity and refusing the reduction of existence to the instrumental demands of the present, refusing to have teaching changed from intellectual engagement into technical delivery.

However, praxis in highly centralized systems like Türkiye's faces particular constraints. When curriculum, textbooks, and assessments are centrally mandated, teachers' pedagogical agency appears to be quite limited. Yet praxis need not mean complete curricular autonomy. Even within constraints, *currere* can foster spaces for reclaiming agency. Pinar (2022) moves beyond binary frameworks of domination and resistance, arguing that cultivating subjective presence creates new ontological grounds for pedagogical possibility. Rather than merely resisting oppressive structures, subjective presence enables educators to inhabit educational spaces with a fuller consciousness of how constraints and possibilities coexist. A teacher who critically reflects on their educational biography develops consciousness of how institutional forces shape practice, creating possibilities for meaningful transformation. This consciousness itself constitutes praxis—not revolutionary transformation but cultivation of subjective presence within constraining structures. The question becomes: How might *currere* function as praxis in Turkish education? This requires considering how reflective practice might emerge within Türkiye's centralized system and relational culture. The following sections employ *currere*'s four moments as an analytical framework to examine this question, tracing how educational subjectivity has been historically shaped (regressive), imagining culturally articulated possibilities (progressive), analyzing present constraints (analytical), and proposing concrete implications (synthetical).

Regressive: Historical Roots of Subjectivity in Turkish Education

The regressive moment here examines not individual educators' lived experiences but rather the historical forces that have structured the conditions within which individual *currere* unfolds. Following Pinar (2012), we understand that individual autobiography is always historically situated; thus, understanding contemporary constraints requires tracing their historical emergence. Grappling with contemporary struggles over educational subjectivity in Türkiye requires beginning with the historical rupture represented by the transition from Ottoman to Republican education. This transition involved not merely administrative reorganization but a fundamental reconceptualization of education's purposes and the kinds of subjects it should produce. The 1924 Law on the Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) marked the formal beginning of this transformation, placing all educational institutions under the Ministry of National Education's control and mandating secular education. Republican education would require a different subject than the Ottoman medrese system had cultivated: secular, nationalistic, scientifically oriented, and committed to modernization (Akyüz, 2015). This centralization was deemed necessary for ensuring the uniform socialization of citizens into Republican values, establishing patterns of centralized curriculum control and teacher appointment that persist in contemporary Turkish education.

The tension between progressive pedagogy and nationalist socialization shaped Turkish education's approach to subjectivity from its inception. Dewey (1924/1983), during his commissioned visit to evaluate Turkish education, recommended progressive methods that would emphasize active learning and connection to students' lived experience. Yet his recommendations were filtered through the Republic's nation-building imperatives. The educational subject to be formed was not primarily the autonomous, critically thinking individual of progressive pedagogy, but the modern Turkish citizen committed to the Republic's secular and nationalist project. As Büyükdüvenci (1994) argues, Dewey's

progressive ideas were adopted primarily as practical methods rather than philosophical principles, emphasizing technical training while democratic values and individual agency remained secondary.

The Village Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri, 1940-1954) represented an example of significant experimentation with alternative models that integrated academic learning with practical skills (Stone, 1974; Vexliard & Aytaç, 1964). Yet their closure amid political controversy revealed how political considerations could override pedagogical innovation when perceived as threatening to social order (Arayici, 1999; Karaömerlioglu, 1998). The 1960s and 1970s saw the expansion of secondary and vocational education, with vocational high schools and technical schools established throughout this period alongside increasing consolidation of centralized educational control (OECD, 2007). This expansion was driven by developmentalist economic policies focused on industrialization and rural development, positioning education as preparation of the future workforce for Türkiye's planned economic transformation (Gürel & Selamet, 2025). While this period saw democratization of educational access, education's purposes remained instrumentally defined, setting the stage for the examination culture and market-oriented reforms that would dominate from the 1980s onward (Kaplan, 2006).

The period from the 1980s marked the institutionalization of examination-centered education, with profound implications for educational subjectivity. The centralized university entrance examination system, beginning with the Inter-University Selection Examination (ÜSS, 1974–1980), followed by the two-stage Student Selection and Placement Examinations (ÖSS–ÖYS, 1981–1998), subsequently simplified into the single-stage Student Selection Examination (ÖSS, 1999–2009), then restructured as the two-stage Undergraduate Placement system (YGS–LYS, 2010–2017), and currently the Higher Education Institutions Examination (YKS, 2018–present), represented more than an administrative arrangement for university admissions. It constituted what Foucault (1977) might term a disciplinary technology, the mechanism through which subjects learn to govern themselves according to external standards of measurement. Its origins lie in the massification of secondary education during the 1970s and the resulting pressure on limited university places. The centralized examination was presented as a meritocratic solution, ensuring university admission based on measurable achievement rather than patronage. This meritocratic rhetoric gained broad social acceptance despite its clearly problematic effects. For instance, the system's expansion and intensification saw selective high school examinations extending competitive testing downward to all learners across grade levels, while private tutoring centers proliferated as a parallel educational system devoted exclusively to examination preparation (Tansel & Bircan, 2006). As the system became institutionalized, politicians positioned technical adjustments, including rebranding examinations with new acronyms, restructuring grade levels, and revising curricula, as comprehensive educational reform, using international test results to justify changes (Gür et al., 2012). Fundamental structural problems within the education system itself, however, were left in place and unquestioned.

For understanding subjectivity, what matters is how examination culture tends to produce particular forms of selfhood. Examination culture, by and large, has the effect of producing subjects who know themselves through comparative performance; they internalize calculative technologies that reduce selfhood to numerical measures while education becomes about perpetual competition rather than collaborative growth (Rose, 2009). Teachers, too, are diminished by examination culture, experiencing examination pressures as determining their

pedagogical choices more powerfully than the official curriculum or their own professional judgment (Daşçıoğlu & Bümen, 2025). As Ball (2003) argues, this creates a situation that he called "performativity", which is not merely an external pressure but a technology of the self that reshapes teachers' professional identities, compelling them to represent themselves through data and outputs rather than through their pedagogical judgment and relationships with students. In Turkish education, this manifests as educators increasingly measuring their own worth through students' examination scores, internalizing the logic of the system they inhabit. The historical trajectory reveals how examination culture, initially presented as a technical solution, gradually colonized educational consciousness, becoming the organizing logic of Turkish education and re-shaping purposes, relationships, and subjectivities. This normalization has naturalized the system: what was once a policy choice now appears simply as 'how education works,' making alternatives difficult to imagine. Tracing this process enables us to understand how current constraints emerged—even as this critical understanding opens possibilities for imagining and enacting alternatives. As Pinar (2012) argues, the regressive moment's historical work is not merely descriptive but politically potent: in recognizing that current arrangements are historically contingent rather than natural, possibilities are opened for envisioning different futures. If the examined, centralized subject has been produced through specific historical processes, then other forms of educational subjectivity also remain possible.

Progressive: Envisioning *Currere* in Turkish Education

The progressive moment moves in the opposite temporal direction from the regressive, imagining possible futures (Pinar et al., 1995). Having traced how examination culture has colonized educational subjectivity, this inquiry asks: What alternatives might be possible? How might *currere* be experienced within Turkish educational contexts to reclaim spaces for subjectivity? This exercise in possibility, while grounded in present conditions, needs to be one conceived of in the progressive moment and that therefore refuses to accept current arrangements as inevitable. Envisioning how *currere* might emerge invites attention to teacher education, as teachers who develop their own capacity for autobiographical inquiry may be best positioned to foster such spaces in their classrooms and cultivate pedagogical presence (Moore, 2013; Palmer, 2019).

Current teacher education in Türkiye follows a centralized model structured according to national standards, emphasizing pedagogical content knowledge and curriculum alignment. While it has incorporated reflective practice components, particularly following the Bologna Process reforms initiated in 2001, the depth of this reflection often remains limited. The Bologna reforms harmonized Turkish higher education with European standards by restructuring degree programs into bachelor's, master's, and doctoral cycles and introducing credit transfer systems (Erdoğan, 2015). Yet reflection in teacher education programs frequently stays superficial, limited to completing compliance-oriented portfolios or template-driven journals as course requirements rather than engaging in sustained autobiographical inquiry that transforms understanding (Simsek-Rackelmann et al., 2026; Yenisoy & Tatar, 2025). *Currere* offers a more substantive approach precisely because it resists proceduralization. Rather than being 'applied' to teacher candidates, *currere* invites pre-service teachers into a disciplined practice of self-reflection that unfolds over time. They could engage with this approach to understand how they have been formed as learners and how this

formation shapes their emerging teacher identities. The regressive moment would invite critical engagement with what Lortie (2002) terms the apprenticeship of observation—the thousands of hours prospective teachers spend observing teachers, which profoundly shapes their assumptions about teaching—and which critical observation would have a certain poignancy in Türkiye, given the standardized curriculum. Building on this, the progressive moment invites candidates to imagine the kinds of teachers they *instead* aspire to become and the relationships they hope to create with students, crucial because learning to teach involves constructing professional identity (Britzman, 2003). Analytically, teachers would examine tensions between their aspirations and the constraints—centralized curriculum, examination culture, large class sizes, and limited resources—and how they might navigate these in their own lived practice. The synthetical moment synthesizes their insights, cultivating a teaching philosophy grounded in understanding—neither naive idealism nor cynical resignation but Henderson and Gornik's (2007) curriculum wisdom, a sophisticated understanding of a teacher's possibilities and limits within Türkiye.

Currere's inherently dialogical nature would resonate particularly well within Türkiye's relational cultural context, understood from the perspective of Kagitcibasi's (2005, 2017) framework of autonomous-relational selfhood. Approaching *currere* from this angle, Turkish educators might experience inquiry not as solitary introspection but as reflection embedded within social networks. In teacher education, this could mean moving through *currere's* four moments through dialogue with peers, mentors, and family members who have shaped one's educational biography. The regressive moment might involve interviewing family members about their educational experiences and expectations, recognizing how relational obligations inform professional identity. The progressive moment could envision futures that honor both personal aspirations and relational responsibilities—becoming an effective teacher while maintaining family connections and community commitments. This approach—what might be termed 'relational autobiography'—would not represent a departure from *currere* but rather an articulation of its social character within a Turkish context. It renders explicit what Pinar and Grumet (2026) long recognized, namely that autobiographical inquiry unfolds through rather than apart from social networks. By foregrounding how self-understanding emerges through familial, mentoring, and community connections, this approach of autonomous-relational selfhood would adapt *currere* to Türkiye's communal context without altering its phenomenological structure. While this 'progressive' engagement offers transformative potential, fostering it in teacher education would face challenges: time constraints, faculty unfamiliarity with autobiographical methods, and emphasis on measurable competencies (Mercan Kucukakin et al., 2026). Yet if teacher candidates experience *currere's* value for deepening self-understanding and informing practice, it is possible that they may carry this approach into their own teaching.

My discussion of teacher education assumes higher education preparation programs. What about professional development possibilities across primary and secondary levels? Examination pressures and institutional constraints manifest differently at each level of the educational system in Türkiye. For practicing teachers, professional development would provide spaces to work with *currere* amid daily practice. Current professional development in Türkiye usually takes the form of seminars on specific techniques or curriculum updates, valuable but limited in scope. *Currere*-based programs would invite educators into temporal reflection on their practice—not as a linear checklist but as a recursive, deepening reflective process on formative experiences, articulating suppressed aspirations, analyzing constraints,

and developing action plans that emerge. As Brookfield (2017) argues, critical examination of experience is essential for avoiding paradigmatic assumptions—unexamined beliefs that constrain practice. Tokgöz Can and Bümen (2021) found that Turkish teachers, despite perceiving limited autonomy in curriculum objectives, retain meaningful discretion in instructional planning and make adaptations based on professional judgments about student needs. Such programs structured around *currere* would ideally occur in ongoing teacher inquiry groups rather than in one-time workshops, creating what Henderson and Gornik (2007) describe as professional learning communities where participants engage in sustained forms of inquiry. By sharing their *currere* work with colleagues, teachers can create complicated conversations (Pinar, 2012, 2022), moving from private inquiry to collective engagement.

The classroom itself represents the ultimate site where *currere's* praxis dimension must be enacted. While explicit engagement with *currere* may be developmentally inappropriate for younger learners, elementary teachers can create classroom conditions that honor *currere's* underlying principles by: valuing students' lived experience, creating space for inquiry, and encouraging imagination of possibilities. For adolescent and university learners, more explicit work with the method becomes possible. They might use *currere* to examine their learning journeys, their aspirations for the future, and tensions between genuine interests and examination demands. Huber et al. (2013) report using life-writing assignments that invite students to consider educational experiences, an approach consistent with narrative pedagogy's emphasis on life history as a site of learning (Goodson & Gill, 2011). In the Turkish context, process portfolio assessments might incorporate *currere*-inspired inquiry, asking learners to examine growth rather than merely collecting work.

Whether or not students experience *currere* explicitly, teachers who have worked through autobiographical inquiry bring different sensibilities to their practice. As Pinar (2012) argues, *currere* cultivates complicated conversation with oneself that inevitably affects how one converses with others. Educators who have reflected deeply on their own educational experiences may be more attuned to learners' subjective experiences, more aware of how institutional structures shape learning, and more committed to fostering spaces for student agency within constraints. *Currere*-informed pedagogy might manifest in practices such as: discussing with students why particular content is required while acknowledging gaps between examination demands and genuine value; developing assignments connecting required content to their lives and interests; offering narrative feedback addressing learning processes rather than merely assigning scores. Such practices also attend to the temporal dimensions of learning, helping learners see connections across time and develop historical consciousness about their own learning. This consciousness combats the eternal present of much schooling (Pinar, 2012, pp. 239–240), where learning feels like the accumulation of discrete facts rather than developing understanding.

Perhaps most importantly, *currere*-informed teaching provides an exemplar of intellectual work for learners. Practitioners who share their own reflections, acknowledge uncertainties, and demonstrate genuine curiosity model being a student of education, opening possibilities for different relationships to learning. "Enacting such pedagogy within Turkish education requires what Pinar (2022) terms cultivation of subjective presence, working within constraints through both heightened pedagogical consciousness and purposeful strategic action.

Educators cannot simply ignore examination requirements without professional consequences, yet within these limitations, spaces exist for *currere*-informed practice, like: incorporating projects motivated by student interests, using examination content as starting points for deeper inquiry, and fostering classroom climates characterized by respect for subjectivity. For instance, inviting students to connect content to their own lives, honoring diverse interpretations, and making space for questions that exceed the examination syllabus. These possibilities exist despite the significant obstacles of heavy workloads (OECD, 2019), examination-focused administrators (Çelik & Gür, 2013), and centralized control (Tokgöz Can & Bümen, 2021). Yet Pinar argues that modest actions, multiplied across many educators and classrooms, can gradually shift educational culture toward more humane education grounded in respect for subjectivity—creating meaningful transformation through accumulated presence rather than revolutionary change.

Analytical: Present Tensions and Barriers

The analytical moment brings past and future into productive tension with the present, examining how historical forces shape current conditions and how structures enable or foreclose on possibilities (Pinar et al., 1995). Having traced the testing culture's historical emergence, this moment can examine barriers to reclaiming educational subjectivity. The contemporary Turkish assessment system operates across multiple levels, creating a cascade of evaluations structuring students' educational trajectories from early childhood through university admission. Learners face competitive exams for selective high schools (age 14-15) and university admission through YKS (age 17-18), each effectively constraining life possibilities. The YKS exemplifies the system's totalizing character, with scores directly mapped to program placements through a centralized algorithm where a difference of even a few points can mean the difference between studying medicine at a prestigious university or settling for a less desirable program. The exam thus becomes what Foucault (1977) terms a normalizing gaze—surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify, and regulate, with learners seeing themselves through the test's categories and internalizing its logic as their own self-understanding.

For subjectivity, the effects are manifold and profound. Testing produces a subject constituted through perpetual evaluation and comparison. Learners organize their entire educational experience around test preparation, with regular classroom instruction becoming secondary to exam-focused activities such as attending private tutoring centers and using study guides (Ergene, 2011). This instrumentalization of experience forecloses on other possible relationships to learning. Following Pinar (2022, 2023), we recognize how such instrumentalization undermines subjective presence—that heightened awareness of oneself in the educational moment that *currere* seeks to cultivate. In its place, testing culture reinforces what he terms "temporal narcissism," a consciousness that collapses temporal multiplicity. Rather than inhabiting past, present, and future as simultaneous dimensions of experience, temporal narcissism involves either a nostalgic retreat to an idealized past or a reduction of the future to an instrumental projection of present self-interest. This flattening of temporal complexity undermines the rich awareness that characterizes subjective presence. As Biesta (2010) argues, when education becomes primarily about measurable outcomes, its other purposes—cultivation of judgment, ethical development, democratic participation—necessarily recede. Learners develop fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006), understanding intelligence and worth as stable traits revealed through test performance rather than as

capabilities developing through effort. Those who score highly may develop identities dependent on continued high performance; those who score poorly may internalize failure as personal inadequacy thus developing learned helplessness (Kavakci et al., 2014). The assessment system also structures relationships problematically. Relations between learners become primarily competitive rather than collaborative, creating conditions antithetical to the complicated conversation Pinar (2012, 2023) views as essential to the cultivation of educational subjectivity. Teacher-student relationships are similarly distorted, becoming organized around preparation for external evaluation rather than focused on a mutual exploration of knowledge. Noddings (2003) argues that caring relationships are fundamental to education, yet such relationships require recognizing the other as a whole person rather than as a bundle of scores.

Turkish educators feel trapped between pedagogical beliefs and testing demands, experiencing cognitive dissonance as their espoused theories diverge from theories-in-use (Tokgöz Can & Bümen, 2021). Such tension is equally evident in differentiated instruction, where teachers report significant barriers between intended and enacted practice (Daşçıoğlu & Bümen, 2025). Turkish educators know that meaningful learning requires time for exploration, making mistakes, and pursuing questions beyond prescribed content, yet testing pressures demand content coverage and test-taking strategies that leave little time for such learning. This gap between professional knowledge and institutional demands creates dissatisfaction and burnout (Ingersoll, 2006).

The assessment system also constrains what knowledge is valued. As Eisner (2002) argues, what is tested is taught, but what is not tested is not taught. In Turkish education, this manifests especially in arts and physical education, which receive minimal attention despite their importance for human development (Yazar et al., 2014). The testing culture's hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) makes meaningful choices difficult to articulate or implement, yet even within this constrained landscape, spaces for reclaiming agency exist. Turkish educators continue to exercise agency through making curricular adaptations and finding flexibility within prescribed frameworks (Tokgöz Can & Bümen, 2021), as well as drawing on personal cultural backgrounds and reinterpreting prescribed content as starting points for deeper inquiry (Deniz & Pinar, 2026). However, without professional opportunities to practice *currere*, such agency may remain unreflective and ad hoc rather than principled and transformative.

Understanding this (lack of) pedagogical agency requires examining the broader context of centralization. Turkish education's centralization extends beyond examinations to encompass curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogical guidance (Deniz & Pinar, 2026). This centralization operates across all levels of compulsory education, from primary through upper secondary, though its intensity varies by school type and level. Vocational high schools face additional layers of standardization tied to labor market demands, while primary education is more directly shaped by MoNE's centralized textbook production. Beyond state-led centralization, broader global pressures have further reinforced standardization dynamics in Turkish education. OECD's PISA results have been instrumentalized to justify successive curriculum reforms, while leaving fundamental structural problems unaddressed (Gür et al., 2012). World Bank lending agreements and EU accession processes have similarly conditioned educational restructuring toward measurable outcomes and accountability mechanisms (Özdemir & Karakurt, 2024).

The Ministry of National Education determines the curriculum for all subjects and grade levels, develops and/or approves all textbooks, and provides detailed instructional guidelines. This system reflects both the Republican-era imperative to produce culturally unified citizens and contemporary governmental interests in controlling the ideological content of public education. Educators have no formal voice in curriculum objectives and content; while they perceive greater autonomy in instructional planning (Tokgöz Can & Bümen, 2021), even this discretion remains substantially constrained by testing requirements and detailed ministerial guidelines approaching scripted curricula (Yildirim, 2003). Teaching thus becomes curriculum delivery, reducing practitioners to technicians implementing others' decisions rather than intellectuals exercising professional expertise. Such centralization also affects the types of knowledge valued, with knowledge that resists standardization becoming marginalized. Local knowledge, cultural diversity, and students' lived experiences have limited presence (Aydin, 2020), while the Ministry's control over textbooks further limits possibilities for diverse perspectives (Çayır & Gürkaynak, 2007). Reforms have claimed to increase autonomy, yet these changed rhetoric more than practice (Altinyelken, 2011; Canbolat, 2020; Kırkgöz, 2008), illustrating how structural conditions limit reform possibilities regardless of policy intentions.

To bring *currere* into these contexts invites consideration of cultural dynamics. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions framework has been influential but faces substantial critique for oversimplifying cultural complexity and obscuring within-culture variation (McSweeney, 2002). Kagitcibasi's (2005, 2017) model of the autonomous-relational self offers a more nuanced understanding, demonstrating how relational cultural contexts, such as Türkiye, integrate personal agency with family and community networks. As Pinar (2012) emphasizes, autobiographical inquiry is never purely individualist but emerges through social relationships and cultural meanings. In this environment, educators might experience *currere* through dialogue with colleagues, mentors, and family, rendering inquiry's social character more explicit. Hierarchical authority structures also warrant attention. Research demonstrates that practitioners exercise agency within these limitations, with critical reflection occurring through informal conversations, private questioning, and subtle adaptations to prescribed curriculum materials and pedagogical approaches(Deniz & Pinar, 2026; Tokgöz Can & Bümen, 2021). *Currere* could provide structured approaches for this reflection, giving form and depth to the informal questioning that already occurs in staffroom conversations and transforming ad hoc professional exchanges into more sustained and critical autobiographical inquiry. In doing so, it creates spaces for more open articulation of critical insights.

The fact remains that structural limitations are not merely inconveniences but fundamental features determining what pedagogies are feasible. *Currere* requires sustained engagement that cannot be compressed into brief workshops. As Ball (2003) argues, performativity regimes leave no space for sustained thinking because time not producing measurable outputs is viewed as wasted time, a logic with roots in Bobbitt's (1912) scientific management approach to curriculum. These cultural and structural realities are not reasons to abandon *currere,* but they comprise the conditions that must inform how educators engage with it. Several considerations emerge when working with *currere* in such centralized, hierarchical educational systems: framing *currere* as relational autobiography that honors autonomous-relational selfhood (Kagitcibasi, 2017); creating spaces for reflection that acknowledge political and professional risks; respecting material pressures such as heavy workloads and time demands; and attending to power dynamics, including seniority and institutional position. The analytical moment within *currere* enables practitioners to understand their circumstances

more fully and thus challenges them to identify spaces for strategic action more systematically. Adapted appropriately (and where admittedly this may mean different things, depending on the exact context and actor), *currere* might become a responsive approach for reclaiming educational subjectivity.

Synthetical: Toward a Praxis of Subjectivity

Synthesizing insights from the previous moments will not produce a blueprint for "implementing" *currere*—such a blueprint would contradict its phenomenological character as a disciplined engagement with lived experience (Pinar, 2012, 2019). Rather, synthesis needs to be conceived as exploring conditions that might enable *currere* to unfold in Turkish educational contexts. Teacher education offers one site where *currere* might be cultivated. University-based teacher educators, who generally retain greater autonomy over course design than school-based practitioners, are particularly well positioned to introduce *currere* into preparation programs. Programs might make this approach a core component of professional preparation, integrated across existing coursework. For instance, Foundations courses could include assignments reflecting on educational experiences. Methods courses could examine how past experiences shape teaching assumptions. Field experiences could incorporate structured temporal reflection—for instance, asking candidates to analyze a critical classroom incident through currere's four moments, examining how their educational past informs their responses and what their aspirations suggest about future practice.. Critically, such work might frame *currere* as relational autobiography (Kagitcibasi, 2017), inviting candidates to explore their educational biographies through dialogue with peers, family members, and mentors rather than as solitary introspection. For instance, the regressive moment might involve writing about formative educational experiences that shaped one's relationship to learning, while the synthetical moment could articulate teaching philosophies honoring both autonomous professional judgment and relational responsibilities. Faculty members introducing education's theoretical foundations might support such work, though the form this takes will vary across institutional contexts. Experimentation in particular programs might demonstrate feasibility and reveal context-specific challenges. These examples suggest possibilities only; the method will unfold differently for each person depending on their particular circumstances and relationships.

Another possibility involves creating structures for ongoing engagement with *currere* rather than treating it as a one-time exercise. Candidates could maintain reflective journals throughout their programs, revisiting and revising their autobiographical analyses as they gain experience and encounter new ideas. Capstone experiences could ask them to synthesize their work, articulating teaching philosophies grounded in sustained reflection. Peer discussion groups could provide spaces for sharing reflections, creating conditions for collective inquiry rather than isolated introspection. These collaborative structures align with Türkiye's relational cultural orientations while creating what Scott (1990) terms "hidden transcripts," which are defined as discourse that takes place offstage, beyond direct observation by powerholders (p. 4). Yet, following Pinar (2022, 2023), we would understand these as spaces where educators would develop critical consciousness together, building solidarity for future collective action through cultivation of subjective presence. Assessment poses particular challenges: How can autobiographical inquiry be "evaluated" without turning it into performance? Programs wrestling with this tension might consider other forms of acknowledgment—narrative feedback, portfolio presentation, peer dialogue—that better

honor its phenomenological character. These questions resist formulaic solutions; again, each program must navigate this tension in ways responsive to its particular context.

A third possibility involves preparing candidates for cultivating subjective presence within constrained contexts. Rather than presenting idealized pedagogies disconnected from Turkish educational realities, programs might engage honestly with limitations—testing pressures, centralization, large classes—while also identifying spaces for agency through heightened pedagogical consciousness. *Currere* can help candidates understand restrictions without accepting them as immutable. For example, they could analyze case studies of how experienced educators navigate testing culture while creating meaningful learning opportunities, incorporating student interests through supplementary projects or employing narrative assessment alongside required testing. Such examples demonstrate that praxis within limitations is possible— achieved not by overturning structural constraints wholesale, but through the steady, cumulative reclamation of pedagogical space.

For curriculum studies as a field, this analysis raises questions about developing more culturally responsive theoretical frameworks that account for both universal insights and particular cultural realities. The core insight—that understanding educational subjectivity requires attending to lived experience across temporal dimensions—seems applicable across contexts, yet how subjectivity is understood, what counts as appropriate self-disclosure, and what forms of autonomy are valued vary culturally. Expanded engagement with reconceptualist curriculum theory, of which *currere* is an exemplar, would enrich scholarship in this context. Much scholarship remains dominated by technical-rational frameworks emphasizing curriculum design, alignment, and evaluation. While such work has value, it leaves important questions unaddressed: How do educators and learners experience curriculum? How does curriculum shape subjectivity? What are its political dimensions? Reconceptualist scholarship provides resources for addressing these questions, yet it remains marginal in local curriculum discourse. Greater engagement would enrich curriculum studies while contributing perspectives from this context to international conversations. Comparative research might examine how different educational systems enable or constrain subjectivity, placing this analysis in dialogue with analyses of other centralized and decentralized systems. Such inquiry would reveal whether patterns identified here in Türkiye are unique or characteristic of particular system types while providing resources for educational reform.

This conceptual analysis opens questions for further empirical inquiry. How does *currere* unfold in diverse Turkish educational contexts—vocational schools, rural settings, and early career teaching? Does collaborative autobiographical work function differently in Turkish relational contexts compared to approaches developed in predominantly individualist cultural contexts? How do teachers who engage with *currere* navigate examination-focused schools over time? How do policy structures in centralized systems like Türkiye's shape autobiographical practice differently than in decentralized systems? These questions suggest directions for phenomenological, comparative, and longitudinal research, though specific methodologies and foci should emerge from the researchers' own engagement with Turkish educational realities. *Currere*'s fourth moment encourages not closure but opening—not definitive answers but informed questions—that can guide future inquiry and practice. As Pinar (2026, pp. 143-144) argues, synthesis in *currere* is not a static state but a dynamic process of ongoing reconstruction. This paper's synthesis, then, provokes questions that resist easy answers: Can subjectivity be cultivated within systems designed to suppress it? Does autobiographical inquiry represent accommodation to oppression or groundwork for resistance? How might Turkish educators navigate the tension between honoring relational

obligations and asserting professional autonomy? *Currere* provides no formulae for addressing such tensions but offers a mode of dwelling within them with heightened awareness, transforming them from obstacles into sites of generative inquiry. The work of reclaiming educational subjectivity in Türkiye, as elsewhere, begins with this refusal of easy answers.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Educational Subjectivity

This paper has employed *currere*'s four moments as an analytical framework to examine educational subjectivity in Turkish education. The regressive moment demonstrated that current limitations are historically produced. The progressive moment envisioned culturally articulated possibilities framing *currere* as relational autobiography. The analytical moment examined present barriers, including testing culture and centralization. The synthetical moment proposed concrete implications for praxis within Turkish contexts. Any assessment of *currere*'s potential must confront legitimate questions about autobiographical methods in highly constrained educational systems. Critics might reasonably ask: Can individual reflective practice meaningfully challenge structural forces operating at systemic scales? Does focusing on subjectivity risk helping educators adapt to oppressive conditions rather than transforming them? These concerns must be taken seriously. The response, however, is not to abandon attention to subjectivity but to understand it correctly. *Currere* is not a substitute for structural change—working conditions must improve through smaller classes, reduced teaching loads, genuine curriculum autonomy, and testing culture's transformation through policy reform (Ingersoll, 2006). Yet attention to subjectivity is not a diversion from political struggle but a prerequisite for it (Pinar, 2023). Educators cannot challenge or transform oppressive educational structures unless they first understand how those structures have shaped their own subjectivities.

Testing culture produces subjects who know themselves primarily through comparative performance on standardized measures, creating educators who understand professional worth through students' test scores and learners viewing education instrumentally (Berberoğlu & Kalender, 2005). These subjective formations are not merely effects of testing culture but also conditions for its reproduction. By enabling sustained reflection on how one has been formed as an educational subject, *currere* creates possibilities for subjective reconstruction (Pinar, 2012, 2023)—understanding oneself differently and thereby opening possibilities for acting differently. This is not merely psychological work but political work: creating subjects capable of imagining and enacting alternatives to existing arrangements.

Beyond individual transformation, collective action requires subjects capable of collective consciousness and solidarity. Educators cannot act collectively if they understand themselves primarily as isolated individuals competing for scarce resources—yet this is precisely the subjectivity that performative accountability systems produce (Ball, 2003). *Currere* enables them to recognize their individual experiences as shaped by shared structural conditions, creating a basis for collective identification. When they work with relational autobiography through inquiry groups—sharing their work with colleagues, discovering that private frustrations reflect systemic problems—conditions for collective mobilization can emerge (Kelchtermans, 2005). As Kumar and Pinar (2023) observe in their dialogue on meditative inquiry—though emerging from different cultural-philosophical traditions—such reflective

practices cultivate not merely individual insight but a sensibility of presence that extends to collective engagement. These collaborative spaces cultivate collective agency: seemingly modest actions that, multiplied across many classrooms, accumulate into meaningful transformation. The choice is not between structural change and subjective work but rather recognizing their interdependence. What is needed is integration: practitioners engaging with *currere* while simultaneously organizing collectively for policy reforms; preparation programs developing both reflective practice and professional advocacy; research documenting both subjective experiences and structural limitations while proposing coordinated interventions.

While focused on Turkish education, this analysis carries implications for educational systems worldwide facing similar standardization pressures. Türkiye's case is distinctive in its particular historical trajectory and cultural context, yet the dynamics described, including examination culture, curriculum centralization, and constrained teacher autonomy, are recognizable across diverse systems, from East Asian high-stakes testing cultures to European accountability regimes. The global spread of high-stakes testing, curriculum standardization, and accountability-driven reforms creates conditions in diverse contexts that constrain educational subjectivity (Au, 2011; Zhao, 2014). This analysis complements and extends recent scholarship by Deniz and Pinar (2026) in providing the historical-structural context necessary for understanding the individual experiences that study documents. Where Deniz and Pinar's (2026) phenomenological work reveals how educators exercise agency through *currere* within present limitations, conceptual analysis of the kind just cited traces how those limitations emerged and evolved historically. Together, these studies illustrate *currere*'s dual function: as a phenomenological methodology for studying lived experience and also, critically, as an analytical framework for understanding the structural conditions shaping that experience. In this way, currere operates not merely as a method but as a mode of critical consciousness—one that illuminates both the lived particularity of educational experience and the structural conditions that make such experience possible or impossible.

The standardization and accountability pressures raise fundamental questions about democracy itself. Democratic societies require citizens capable of independent thought, critical judgment, and imaginative engagement with alternative possibilities—capacities that Dewey (1916) argued are cultivated through education or not at all. Contemporary democratic theory extends this insight further, emphasizing not only critical thinking but also recognition of difference, pluralism, and deliberative engagement across diverse perspectives (cf. Biesta, 2022; Fraser, 2009; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Young, 1990). A full engagement with these debates exceeds the scope of this analysis, yet they underscore the urgency of reclaiming subjectivity in education. Educational systems organized around standardization actively undermine these capacities, producing subjects incapable of democratic citizenship (Pinar, 2012, 2023), however, as I have tried to argue, using Türkiye as an example, *currere* provides an approach for recovering this volition—for transforming personal reflection into engaged pedagogical action that can reconstitute both individual subjectivities and collective possibilities.

The most important question confronting Turkish education—and educational systems globally—is ultimately about what we believe education is for. If education exists primarily to sort learners efficiently into labor market positions, then current arrangements serve their purposes. But if education aims at cultivating human flourishing, preparing democratic citizens, and enabling people to understand themselves and their world critically and creatively, then current arrangements stand as profound failures. *Currere* offers a pathway toward education that honors both human subjectivity and collective flourishing. Its core

insight remains urgently relevant: educational experience is inescapably subjective, and any educational reform ignoring this subjectivity is destined to fail or produce unintended consequences. The space we occupy, as Pinar (2012, 2023) reminds us, is political space that is also inescapably subjective space. The question is not whether we will occupy it—we already do—but whether we will occupy it consciously, reflectively, and with commitment to possibility. In Turkish education, as elsewhere, recovering this space represents both a pedagogical imperative and a democratic question.

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