

# Displacing curriculum normativity through teachers' autobiographical processes: A case study from Brazil

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## Abstract

This text engages with discussions on curricular normativity and autobiographical processes, challenging prescriptive discourses and subject-centered perspectives. The objective is to underscore both the fallibility of normative processes and the dynamics at play when curricular practices intersect with life stories, thereby displacing essentialist and efficiency-driven propositions. It presents a brief experiential analysis of *currere* with undergraduate Pedagogy students in the context of Educational Management and Supervised Internship in Brazil. The contributions of autobiography are viewed not as a panacea but as a potent proposal to disrupt rigid, expected, and quantifiable outcomes. The focus on autobiography stems from a preference for theoretical production within the field, representing a commitment to understanding the interactions that bridge universities and schools. Curricular thinking, through an autobiographical and post-structural approach, can broaden studies, contributing to a more profound understanding of the school environment and the support of teachers and their experiences.

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## Introduction

Although Brazil's public policies often overlook the contributions of researchers in the curricular field (Aguiar & Dourado, 2018), the country has accumulated a tradition of more than 50 years of studies that, as Macedo and Ranniery (2018) point out, has produced an epistemological diversity recognizing the school as an active participant in the curriculum construction process. Among the research, notable contributions include life history studies of teachers, interwoven with multiple contingent relationships (Gabriel, 2021). It is important to highlight that in Brazil, there are several research lines with very different theoretical foundations, such as the Studies of Everyday Life field<sup>1</sup>, which includes significant researchers from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES); the Interinstitutional Research Group Polyphony - GEPEC/UNICAMP from the State University of Campinas (São Paulo) and the Núcleo Vozes FFP/UERJ ([www.grupopolifonia.wordpress.com](http://www.grupopolifonia.wordpress.com)), primarily composed of researchers from Unicamp; the Thematic Project of Self (Auto) Biographies: Towards a Transnational History of Education at the University of São Paulo (USP); and the Research Group "Curriculum, Teaching, and

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Culture” (CDC) at the Federal Fluminense University (UFF), with which we have closer associations. We have previously collaborated with many researchers from these mentioned groups and projects. In other words, research produced in Brazil has gained national and international prominence through our researchers’ interinstitutional networks. We align with these researchers in exploring new and diverse pathways for teaching practices and, in this case study, diverge by adopting a post-structuralist theoretical framework that has underpinned our curriculum studies over the past decade. In this paper, we also seek to address the methodological challenges of currere through a theoretical dialogue and the daily realities of our undergraduate classrooms at the Faculty of Education.

Research such as that conducted by Maria Luiza Sússekind (Sússekind et al., 2020; Sússekind & Reis, 2015) has contributed to deepening and expanding the relationships between everyday life and autobiographical processes. We share various elements and assumptions, including the notions of unpredictability and the ungraspability of the curriculum, as well as the openness of the study to what “happens in the school.” However, we approach the complex discussion of the curriculum through a distinctly post-structuralist perspective, understanding emancipation as articulated through difference, that is, as a process always subject to revisibility, deferral, and discursive practice (Laclau, 2011). In this regard, similar to scholars of everyday life, it is pertinent to note that we have observed a rejection of prescriptive and imposing proposals regarding curricular practice and teacher training. According to Gabriel (2021), some investigations are perceived as social technologies that constrain and control individuals by tending to ignore or diminish the effects of broader problems in schools and society. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the complexity and richness of the curricular field in Brazil, which is characterized by epistemological approaches that are interconnected in many aspects but also thrive on the differences presented by the debates within the curricular field.

Among such studies, those focusing on teachers’ life stories stand out, interspersed with multiple contingent relationships (Gabriel, 2021). Notably, there is a rejection of prescriptive and imposing proposals regarding curricular practice and teacher training. According to Gabriel, some studies highlight how certain social technologies constrain and control individuals by ignoring or downplaying the effects of broad problems in schools and society. The rejection of curricular prescription and imposition has given rise to proposals advocating for agency in the face of structures, such as those utilizing (auto)biographical methodologies in education research (Gabriel, 2021), whether through a phenomenological or Marxist lens. Consequently, studies on curriculum and teacher training have acquired new meanings in recent decades. They focus on “reflexive professional identity” despite being haunted by efficiency-driven logic, the Tylerian model, and beliefs in abstract individualism, process control, and educational objectives. Despite criticisms, such studies support the notion of individual sovereignty and the establishment of rigid identities while attempting to overcome generalized projections (Gabriel, 2021; M. do S. dos Santos, 2021, 2023; Miller, 2021; Miller & Macedo, 2018; Pimentel Júnior et al., 2017).

Contrary to curricular prescription, our work on curriculum also encompasses cultural policy, as discussed by Lopes and Macedo (2011), adopting a post-structuralist perspective. Our reflections focus on educational processes and the different purposes in dispute that involve subjectivation, which can only occur in the presence of “the other” (M. do S. dos Santos, 2021, 2023; Pimentel Júnior et al., 2017). Thus, we adopt a post-structuralist conception that operates with the relational ontology of the individual and emphasizes difference as a disturbance in

the field of discursivity, deferral, and displacement. This perspective views “the teacher subject” not in an abstract and essentialist manner, but as a process of historical, performative, and political construction, never as a graspable totality. As detailed below, autobiography as a genre and research method is used in ways that allow for openness in diffraction and resignification (Miller, 2021). Based on this, the objective of this study is to highlight both the fallibility of normative processes and the potential of what emerges from the interactions between curricular practices and life histories. This involves shifting away from essentialist and efficiency-oriented propositions in order to enhance a praxis informed by the dynamics of the curriculum.

Considering the above, our argument, shared by other researchers in the curriculum field (Barros & Dias, 2023; Macedo & Ranniery, 2017; Miller, 2014; Ribeiro & Craveiro, 2017), is that public curriculum policy should not be conceived in a generic and prescriptive manner, imposed as a general rule to abstract individuals and projected “from outside the school” as a “magic formula” for the school context. We advocate for a curriculum policy developed based on the educational institution and the issues that arise from it, incorporating the experiences that shape us as teachers (Gabriel, 2021) and continually problematizing and rethinking our practice and performance with the curriculum. Macedo and Ranniery (2018) argues that one reason educational policy often takes on a prescriptive and imposing bias is a pedagogical discourse that tends to delegitimize what is not considered scientific. Therefore, beyond party polarities, many issues tend to be reissued and consolidated. Craveiro (2014) notes that curricular centralization has been central to the proposals of governments previously viewed as politically antagonistic. Thus, our interest is not merely in opposing curricular centralization but in presenting feasible local-level proposals (Pimentel Júnior et al., 2017).

This topic is further contextualized by the observation that in some of our teacher education programs, there is a pronounced focus on “models” for handling, teaching, or “knowing how to” work with children, as questioned by Ng-A-Fook (2015). Specifically, it involves training future teachers to “teach” appropriate behaviors. Consequently, we explore autobiography as a means to provoke new pathways by intersecting the personal experiences of future teachers with cultural and political values and/or interactions with other individuals. This approach aims to challenge the prevailing pragmatism found in universities or within municipal or state education departments.

In this context, we have sought to appropriate the autobiographical approach by inserting curricular activities using this approach into the teaching methodology of classrooms in the undergraduate Pedagogy course at the Institute of Education of Angra dos Reis of the University Federal Fluminense (IEAR-UFF) at the Angra dos Reis campus, city, Brazil. Angra dos Reis is one of the oldest cities in Brazil, having undergone various political organizational processes since the colonial period. It was established through the enslavement of Indigenous and Black individuals, not without resistance and struggle, becoming one of the central hubs for the transatlantic slave trade due to its potential for colonial maritime exploitation. The city experienced significant changes in the last century, influenced by federal government policies, and was designated as a “national interest” area. As a result, residents were deprived of mayoral elections, a situation that only changed in the late 1980s. The construction of the Rio-Santos highway, nuclear power plants, and the Verolme shipyard are some of the most significant developments that have transformed life in Angra dos Reis. Since the

democratization process in the city, there have been various governmental administrations. During the more progressive administration from 1990 through the early 2000s, there was a push for democratic management and political participation that addressed popular issues. In contrast, the city has increasingly consolidated opposition to such movements, aligned with Judeo-Christian religious thought and business interests, which have promoted discourses emphasizing family values, security, and economic concerns. The current mayor, in office from 2021 to 2024, a businessman well-known in the region, publicly supports these values. In previous studies, one of us has specifically analyzed the intersection of the city's educational policies with the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), a framework that emerges from national curriculum centralization aimed at standardizing and homogenizing curricula (Ribeiro & Mendonça, 2023).

We believe that the theoretical assumptions we adopt are powerful enough to challenge the "closed self" narratives and the notion of the "emancipated subject." We continuously review pedagogical activities with future teachers and pedagogues, as well as with teachers and school directors whom students interact with during the University's mandatory internship. The aim is to retroactively pose questions of interest to students about how we become individuals and how we can enhance our relationship with produced knowledge. This involves imagining the potential impact on public policies if they more closely considered the experiences and professional stories of teachers and, paraphrasing Pinar (2014), contemplating what might happen if we prioritized lives over numbers.

These reflections are part of ongoing studies in our research groups, highlighting the power of autobiographical discourses<sup>2</sup> within post-structuralist assumptions to rethink the curriculum in these challenging times. In Brazil, these times are considered challenging due to the colonialist processes of national curricular centralization approved in 2016. It is important to recall that colonial processes in Brazil did not emerge in the present day, nor are they limited to the end of colonial relations with Portugal; they are intertwined with the very history of Brazilian society, which was built on the invasion and forced exploitation of Indigenous peoples, Africans, and their descendants. Brazil, therefore, is a nation that has inherited genocides and epistemic that have been directed against everything that did not mirror European norms. In contemporary times, colonial traces are re-emerging, manifesting in arbitrariness and decisions driven by economic interests and territorial and educational domination. The emphasis on reinforcing a national curriculum, as previously examined (Ribeiro & Craveiro, 2017), in alliance with several other researchers cited in that study, appears to be not only unnecessary but also a colonialist device aimed at controlling and containing differences.

Given this context, the significance of autobiographical experience as a means for future teachers to reconsider their personal experiences of democracy and connect them to their professional practices is emphasized. This approach should not be seen as "something learned from outside in," but rather as an "experience" of constructing teaching identities that integrate with the self throughout the discipline. In this regard, it can influence how these teachers address ethical issues in daily life that do not have "manuals" for effective action but rather require growth in empathy and respect for "the other" in interpersonal relationships. These processes undermine teaching autonomy through curricular standardization and national tests, which alter daily teaching and student life by demanding specific learning outcomes.

In this essay, we acknowledge that the current situation results from numerous intersecting factors and discomfort with global policies and entrenched discourses of control that favor convenient and calculable responses. Our aim is to respond ethically and responsibly to the otherness that constitutes part of the educational process. We outline the theoretical foundation, discussing thinkers who utilize the autobiographical approach. We then present a case study as a possible but not definitive method for teaching. Finally, we discuss some preliminary empirical evidence and potential future developments of our studies. The method presented below explores the hypothesis of providing visibility to alternative interpretations of the curriculum that are either overlooked or impeded by curriculum centralization.

### Method

This section engages in a dialogue with scholars from various countries who address the theoretical foundations that problematize the commitment to curricular centralization and deconstruct efficiency assumptions in education. We challenge discourses that exclude the imponderable and unpredictable from educational relationships, reducing the meanings of education to mere teaching and marginalizing differences through both new and old strategies. Our study focuses on the effects of discursive formations and the alternatives that autobiography may offer.

Autobiography has been widely regarded as a valuable research tool in education, encompassing the fields of curriculum and teacher training. For example, Souza and Gallego (2010) utilize autobiographical research due to its potential to bring individuals closer to the dynamics of professional activity and its formative perspective as a process of becoming (self)reflexive. This represents a commitment to the subject's agency (Gabriel, 2021). Many scholars view this potential through the lens of the reflective and critical individual, who possesses self-awareness, and through the problematization of pedagogical and interventional practices that it challenges. This process involves intense self-questioning and the production of new relationships with research and professional teaching practice. In this context, traditions in Brazil and other countries that employ autobiography, particularly within the broad field of research in education, are noteworthy. These traditions, while not always post-structuralist, engage in dialogue with specific references.

From the perspective of North American reconceptualist curriculum traditions, such as those proposed by Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), "being self-conscious involves separation from a group, not as a chosen distance but as a result of fears and feelings that manifest as social incompetence stigmas" (p. 91). Thus, this approach is a reflective process that addresses the contingency of subjectivity and memory of the narrator, allowing the individual to be "shown" more or less within their context. Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 2015) highlights that the subjectivity emerging in autobiography is one that narrates "one's own" experience, constructing a "self-representation." This involves two steps: reflecting on past moments to understand and give meaning to events and presenting these events by narrating one's story to others. The autobiographical process may also prompt other types of analyses, encouraging studies in various fields; for instance, "the self as an object" in the study of subjectivity, "the self as a place" in the study of objectivity, and "the self as an agent" in the study of discipline, as teachers act within specific forms and signs (p. 94).

Regarding *currere*<sup>3</sup> as an autobiographical theory, the aim is to observe educational experiences by confronting subjectivity with the “objectivity” of the life story. This involves fragments of memories marked by experiences, producing provisional and contingent meanings of school. According to Pinar (2014), understanding the curriculum as an autobiographical text allows for theorizing and transforming the curriculum. Associating autobiographical narrative methodologies provides a relatively unexplored avenue for rethinking curriculum and curricular policies within the school context with teachers.

Goodson (1992, 1994) emphasizes viewing teachers as subjects of investigation rather than objects. This approach seeks to avoid what Selles (2015) calls the “sense of command,” where research criticizes actions or prescribes what a “good teacher” should be. In doing so, “research can also side with the authoritarianism of the policies it criticizes” (p. 114). Considering the above, another matrix of intelligibility for autobiography emerges, operating with the idea that the individual is decentered, historically constructed, and not a homogeneous totality (Miller, 2014; Miller & Macedo, 2018). This perspective assumes multiple forms of action in relation to politics as a contingent and procedural construction. Thus, viewing teacher training as addressing all conceivable problems or asserting that individuals lack something that can be solved with prescribed and projected calculations becomes problematic. Psychoanalytic and contemporary studies support the idea that every individual is a subject of lack (Ribeiro & Mendonça, 2023).

From a post-foundational political perspective, no given foundation or essence exists to be sustained. We are always amid discourses attempting to fill a constitutive lack. Therefore, researchers such as Gabriel (2021) are subjectively produced through our relationship with politics and experience. This implies that it is not the individual who has experiences but the experiences that shape us as subjects. This perspective challenges the notion of fitting subjects into ideals or exercising supposed emancipatory power. Instead, it focuses on understanding *how* individuals become what *they become*, the discourses that have sedimented in the collective imagination, and the extent to which they obstruct emerging local possibilities as a displacement of centralizing and colonialist policies. What matters are the actions and expectations of teachers in their processes and discourses of political action, their self-perception, choices, and decisions in response to the problems they face and the demands they accept? This challenge is central to our analysis.

We hope that an open view of autobiography (Pinar, 1975; Süsskind, 2014) enables dialogue with teaching activities. We aim to discuss subjectivation, emphasizing experiences, memories, and feelings produced in events, and problematize the ways we are or have been formed without viewing teachers’ stories as a totality, linear progression, or process of overcoming (Miller, 2021). By considering autobiography, we can weave our questions into the process without expecting linear self-reports or closure to a meaning, thereby avoiding prescriptive logic that reasserts the belief in a transcendent subject. Challenged by post-structuralist scholars, autobiography becomes a powerful device to focus on the in-between places of formation, assuming the centrality of language as instituting reality (Butler, 2017).

We consider autobiography a crucial instrument for curricular debate and teacher training, calling for constant review and study. Through the continuous estrangement from our identifications with assumptions and principles involving ethics and responsibility in research, we advocate for a commitment to otherness and the power of difference as deferral and openness. In relation to our case study, we found various analyses in specialized journals

on autobiography, both international (Bayat, 2021; Parker, 2017; Yahp, 2022) and national (Arenhaldt et al., 2020; Camargo, 2024), which sought to integrate elements related to autobiographical methodology and teacher education, particularly with undergraduates, thereby corroborating and reinforcing our arguments.

Parker (2017), for instance, examines the pedagogical potential of working with memory, approached from an interdisciplinary context. The “memoir book” is used as a tool in research conducted within a graduate seminar. The study analyzes disciplinary assumptions and affective aspects involved in the practice of life writing in support of a “pedagogy of memories.” Bayat (2021) explores the idea that women’s autobiographies can foster critical and multimodal narratives, contributing to cultural inclusion and diversity through stories of migration and change. The use of autobiographical elements in the classroom is based on Bayat’s teaching experiences. Camargo (2024) does not directly address autobiographies of undergraduate students but rather focuses on the narrative of the university educator, involving experiences and reflections on students’ reading habits. Our case study engages with the aforementioned research, reinforcing the notion that autobiographical methodology contributes to the process of praxis aimed at reconstructing social imaginaries, which, as Ng-A-Fook (2015) highlights, often aligns with standardization and colonialism in various curricular contexts.

Several studies highlight the potential of autobiography for self-education and educational research (Souza & Gallego, 2010). However, critical texts such as Cestari (2013) caution against viewing autobiographical methodology as a “belief” that reiterates data based on one’s experiences and resolves problems definitively. This so-called autobiographical belief is not an obligatory limit of the methodological proposal. Instead, it highlights problems with an autobiographical discourse operating from subject-centered perspectives supported by structuralist and foundational theories (Miller & Macedo, 2018).

Conversely, as M. do S. dos Santos (2021, 2023) suggests in dialogue with post-structuralism, autobiography offers the potential for opening up intersubjective processes and provides opportunities for curricular and educational theorization. It aims to engage with subjectivation and the unpredictable in the curriculum and various training experiences. Based on this, we present our version of “intervention” and autobiography, along with our theoretical assumptions, emphasizing that curricular policy does not need to be and should not be centralizing (Macedo, 2014). Ng-A-Fook (2015) elucidates this perspective. Therefore, we emphasize that the social is discursively produced, and language is not transparent. Consequently, we have chosen to reinterpret autobiographical methodology based on these principles and assumptions. The following section introduces what we refer to as “ways of escape,” which sustain the hope of preserving the political and democratic dimensions in the curriculum through autobiographical methods as a key approach to contributing to our futures. From the perspective that the social is discursively produced and language is not transparent, we reinterpret the autobiographical methodology following these assumptions.

## Proposal

Therefore, we consider the standardization of the narrative method as an important aspect of this study, not so much for the “methodological discussion of how to use it” (Pinar, 2016, p. 12), but for its relevance in the study of the curricular field due to the potential to theorize the

curriculum in new ways through teaching protagonism. This approach in the field of curriculum was initiated by William Pinar. As Pinar (2016) point out, few of these studies have stood out among Brazilian curriculum scholars. However, many autobiographical studies with a more structuralist view or theoretical foundation based on European authors have focused on teacher training<sup>4</sup>. Our studies, even though they analyze topics related to teachers' lives, differ in two aspects: the theoretical matrix we operate with and the focus on the curriculum. In this section, we seek to outline a path, not the only one, and highlight some threads that the theory-practice relationship in research has revealed to us thus far.

Our autobiographical experience was conducted in Educational Management and the Supervised Internship in Educational Management Educational Management courses at the Faculty of Education through writing activities and the narration of students' memories on topics related to the pedagogical functions of school management in which they might work professionally, without intending to evaluate this process of identity construction. Given that this was our first immersion in *currere*—in terms of “experiencing it” with our students and constrained by the limited timeframe of the semester (March to June with only one class per week)—we did not intend to delineate “the four temporal components of *currere*—regression, progression, analysis, and synthesis—as a research methodology to deconstruct and reconstruct autobiographical narratives that represent the current historical significance,” as thoroughly described by Ng-A-Fook (2015, p. 123). However, we recognize the potential of *currere* for future cohorts.

The course was structured so that each class allowed students to produce written material or narrate personal experiences, relating them to the foundational texts of the course or to practices observed during the Educational Management Internship at the school. Consequently, we organized the manuscripts of the ten students enrolled in the courses into three blocks of autobiographical narratives: on the understanding of democracy in the school, on the approaches of school principals depicted in the film proposed for discussion, and on the understanding of Educational Management (democratic) as a personal evaluation at the end of the theoretical course and Internship.

In this sense, we understand our process as the “*detour*” in the *currere* mentioned by Strong-Wilson (2021, p. 24). We bring students closer to the central topic of the course, critically discussing theory and what they observed in the field of Supervised Internship as well as in Educational Management through certain triggers (videos, debates, etc.). While we distanced ourselves through our own memories in a movement of constructing meanings interspersed with approximations and distances between past and present, we discussed another view of the school and ourselves in construction. “*Respect and generosity are the basis for a future in democratic management. I say this because respect begins with people, and if I do not respect myself, understand what I feel, my space, and who I am, how will it be possible for me to understand others?*” student Aline asked us<sup>5</sup> after a classroom debate on the understanding of democracy in the school.

Following the autobiographical processes of students who were trying to “understand themselves” to grasp how relationships take place in everyday school life and the relationships of otherness between school directors and the school community was a unique experience for those of us teaching the courses during the semester. At the same time, students began to realize the importance of management in the process of teaching subjectivity and the pedagogical functions in which they might act in the future. “*Today, I realize that management*

*is more present in everyday school life than I had imagined,”* commented Aline in a class on the understanding of democracy in the school. This reflects our theoretical approach, wherein the meanings of management in the school are linked to concepts of democracy.

From this perspective, we seek to reconstruct, in the sense of Pinar (2016), the way we have been problematizing the meanings in the course with our students, making them recall their past stories to reorganize different paths to deal with the senses they experienced in the Supervised Internship. These senses are also addressed in our theoretical course on school management based on “political” meanings in the curriculum, such as democracy in experiences that contingently constitute us, as told by our students in their memories of school and professional trajectories.

We view this path as a possibility of following a personal experience through a process of producing new meanings for curricula and considering the reconstruction/resignification of the meanings of their stories. The idea is to provoke feelings and memories using triggers such as films related to school and interviews with guests who narrate their early professional experiences at school. However, these are languages and devices that encourage self-reporting based on schooling without a commitment to origins, linearity, and salvationist closures. In other words, students were invited to write short manuscripts within a framework different from the predominant logic they were accustomed to at the university—“we studied how to ‘manage’,” paraphrasing Ng-A-Fook (2015)—and to reflect on what had shaped them as “perhaps democratic” teachers and what they might reconsider based on this reflection.

The ongoing experience involves studying the theoretical-methodological proposals and identifying discourses surrounding the training of school principals. The works are based on triggers for constructing autobiographical narratives, observing what they think about the school principal and the curriculum, and putting solutions into practice. We sought to answer the following questions from the School Management Internship field: What led the school principal to accept this role? What are the most meaningful memories for these school principals? What do they think about democratic school management? To what extent is it possible to think of school management as a pedagogical/curricular construction?

This proposal continues the work and studies we have already conducted. The option for autobiography is based on privileging theoretical production in the field. It represents a commitment to understanding articulations that bring the university and the school closer together, what motivates teachers and school principals, and what they discuss. It also seeks to survey mobilized discourses and explore how we can think about alternatives and demands for the curriculum field, rejecting the path of blaming teachers. We aim to understand what has already been constructed and to produce new insights to analyze educational purposes and the social and political consequences and perspectives for the future.

In this classroom experience, we sought to provoke our students to problematize the past and relive their memories by watching the movie *“Pro dia nascer feliz”* by João Jardim and providing texts related to democracy and triggering questions about disciplinary knowledge. For us, this film was considered a methodological document, supported by texts available on the course blog [www.gestao04.webnode.page](http://www.gestao04.webnode.page), which are related to themes of democracy and integrated with Chantal Mouffe’s concept of democracy, and were accompanied by probing questions about these disciplinary topics.

The film presents Brazilian realities intertwined with the everyday life of public and private schools, exploring themes such as social inequality, intergenerational and interracial conflicts, gender, and sexuality. In this context, issues such as violence, paternal figures, disinterest in school, loss of teacher authority, and, notably, in one of the schools, the pre-university culture of secondary education are depicted to provide an overview of inequalities and involved worlds. Our focus in analyzing the narratives was on the similarities and differences in the sense of democracy addressed throughout the course and on the students' critical appropriation of developing a "more democratic" teacher *self* that could convey respect for others as legitimate others, despite and through differences in thinking. Thus, we aimed to reconsider alterity and empathy in the formation of teacher identity and future school principals as crucial elements for building a more democratic society.

Through these devices, intersecting with the imagined realities of the students, we proposed reflections and debates using individual writings about these moments, such as free writing, writing based on questions, and brainstorming ideas. The proposal did not involve discussing the film itself but rather focused on what the narratives of the school principals featured in the film made the students think, remember, or feel, involving life processes as stimulated by the scenes. The proposal does not involve discussing the movie but presenting what it made them think, remember, or feel and relating life processes with the scenes that resonated with them.

In the social and cultural context of Angra dos Reis city, we operate with an autobiographical approach in the classroom and seek to rethink the curriculum in the municipal network with teachers and school managers. It is a "complicated" conversation, as Miller and Macedo (2018) highlighted, from a discursive and post-structural perspective considering Pinar's approach. The ongoing project aims to contribute to studies on teacher and school principal training policies and conduct further studies in the field to provide opportunities for valuing the memory and feelings of teachers, teaching practices, and defending autonomy, even if relative, in the context of school practice.

This proposal also aims to contribute to the development of professionals and curricular proposals in the school and the Municipal Education Department of Angra dos Reis city, expanding views on the autobiographical role of teachers and spaces for policy production at school. We use the *currere* methodology and dialogue with research in schools, such as that of Teresa Strong-Wilson, focused on our context. In our view, it is an innovative strategy that also contributes to the field as an emerging methodological possibility in our analyses of curricular policies.

This study brings curricular thinking closer to the autobiographical proposal to confront elements that have been articulated in policies in recent years without any claim to salvation, as we previously stated since such a claim is impossible and problematic. Furthermore, we present different angles to curricular practices, understanding experience not as something that happened but as an ongoing discursive practice characterized by the opacity of language. Consequently, this study does not adopt a "sense of command" (Selles, 2015) but is open to different readings and revisions by new studies.

Considering the context of curricular centralization in Brazil, this process seeks to broaden the meanings associated with our narrow "testing culture" (Miller, 2014), which signals an obsessive concern with numbers and results and aims at homogenization and control. This perspective has perpetuated the idea of "teaching bankruptcy" and the reproduction of educational inequality in Brazil. It has also fostered prescriptive arrogance and disregard for otherness, omitting the unpredictable and disrespecting the imponderable.

## Findings

The initial challenge of engaging our undergraduate Pedagogy students using an autobiographical approach stems from our dissatisfaction with current curriculum studies (Craveiro, 2014; Craveiro & Aguiar, 2016). Ribeiro and Craveiro (2017) and G. dos Santos et al. (2023) have questioned the increasing standardization driven by centralized curricular policies. Such proposals, influenced by international trends in Brazil, have long sought to outline performative curricular policies at various educational levels in different ways (Lopes & López, 2010; Lopes et al., 2024). These policies have reached university curricula through teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Drawing on Craveiro and Strong-Wilson (2019), our experiences with Teresa Strong-Wilson, and readings during her winter course in January 2020 at McGill University, Montreal (Canada)<sup>6</sup>, alongside texts by Pinar<sup>7</sup> and Grumet (2015), William Pinar at the School of Advanced Studies in Rio de Janeiro in 2019, Strong-Wilson (2008, 2021), Miller (2021), and Miller and Macedo (2018), we explored the possibilities of “re-signifying” aspects of the “complicated conversation” with our students, as initiated by Pinar (1975, 1999). As Lopes and Macedo (2011) note, Pinar’s statements, such as the “insistence that political action is theoretical, its commitment to difference” (p. 15), are echoed by the authors who inspired us to investigate dialogical possibilities in our classrooms. We understand student experiences as a means to provide new meaning to the curriculum through dialogue. Therefore, we believe that the autobiographical concept of *currere*<sup>8</sup> contributes to this experience of “provoking” new meanings:

It is a method for a subjective reconstruction project that takes on an allegorical character by telling one (social) story through another (individual). Because it is critical and personal, *currere* brings subjects together (emotionally, spiritually, etc.), but in a way that also creates distance. It allows critical and intellectual engagement with one’s own memories and stories (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 24). Thus, we sought to use autobiographical exercises in the classroom to explore educational management at school through students’ memories. As student Roberta writes regarding her search for personal “reconstruction,” she reflects on educational management:

The marks of my past on management are mostly negative and authoritarian actions of power. A democratic and participatory relationship between the management team at the school was not in my mind (...) I believe that during this semester, I understood that the school needs to relate to everyone in order to achieve its pedagogical purpose; now, I see the importance of the authoritarian/democratic relationships there (at school).

The student’s narrative on the understanding of democracy in the school, for example, aligns with Ng-A-Fook (2015, p. 123) and Pinar (1999), who argue that such study aims to challenge educational reforms that view teacher self-formation as merely an instrumental means to an end, or curriculum development as a set of institutional objectives. This perspective underscores that *currere* is a pathway for the discursive production of meanings in the school curriculum. The practical exercise of *currere* as an autobiographical theory encourages us to examine our own educational experiences and confront our subjectivity with the “objectivity” of our life stories. This approach focuses not on the chronology of facts but on our memories and the meanings conveyed by our experiences at school, albeit provisionally. According to Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), “to be self-conscious is to be separated from a group, not as

someone who enjoys a chosen distance, but as someone dominated by fears and feelings that emerge as stigmas of the socially incompetent” (p. 91). Therefore, this approach is a process of reflection that deals with the contingency of subjectivity and memory of the narrator, allowing them to “show” themselves in context. This was one of the most challenging stages at the beginning of the semester: getting our students to move from impersonal narratives to autobiographical writing. We identified and attempted to address this challenge in the students’ narratives by deconstructing in the Management classes the notion that solely focusing on managerial aspects in the curriculum and teacher education could make them more “competent” and/or “scientific” (Macedo & Ranniery, 2018). Instead, we emphasized reflections on the self in relation to others, as Pinar and Grumet (2015) describe: “in a fundamental way (...) to heighten my understanding of self, of the possible meanings of my life, and of others” (p. 137).

Initially, the experience with the film “*Pro dia nascer feliz*,” despite individual reflections and writing, revealed that few students were willing to share their personal stories with the group. Most students preferred to exclude the “*self*” from the narrative, resulting in what we consider “descriptive reports” that sought to convey “objectivity” and excluded personal experiences. The third person still predominated in narratives, as seen in Roberta’s account:

During the interviews (with school directors), we noticed different perspectives on the realities. Dona Nenê (principal) shows discouragement and tiredness due to the student’s lack of interest. Principal Maria Helena, with a smile on her face, when talking about an episode with a student, shows and ‘transmits’ the feeling that it was an unimportant situation, a common situation (...) in each case, it is possible to feel the pain and the difficulties faced by each principal.” Similarly, Maria writes: “my perspectives on daily school life based on the movie ‘*Pro dia nascer feliz*’ raise a series of concerns for us, aspiring teachers. The reality of schools shown in the movie confronts us with the different realities of schools in Brazil.

Despite reflecting on the social context of the schools depicted in the film, Roberta and Maria still did not fully write about themselves; the “*self*” was mixed with the “*us*.” We questioned whether our strategy was flawed or if the students needed more time for autobiographical reflection. We considered our prompts and directions for writing about memories. For example, Strong-Wilson (2008) uses specific prompts to begin and end the memories of teachers participating in her autobiographical workshops, such as memories about literature in childhood (literacy autobiography), memories about the place where they grew up (memory mapping), some object they were attached to (object), and the moment they taught social justice using literature (teaching) (p. 58).

However, as the semester progressed and the autobiographical experience developed, we noticed changes in the students’ narratives. There was a greater approximation to the “*self*.” In the classroom, we understood that the subjectivity emerging from a personal and sometimes slow process involving relationships of otherness and trust could be guided by two steps, according to Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 93): one of reflection about past experiences that leads to an understanding of that event, providing it with meaning, and another reflection that involves presenting that event to others as narrators.

Diana’s analysis of management marked a second moment of autobiography (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 93) in this experience, where subjectivity emerges from the autobiographical process of reflecting on the meanings of the personal context and begins to impart new significance both to herself and to the local context regarding this experience:

From my past, I bear marks of a more authoritarian education that reflects a lot on how I relate

to others (I even address this in therapy). I believe that with my evolution of thought during this course, I can see the world a little differently, and school management too. I think that democratic issues have gained space in my heart and an understanding of management that is linked exactly to that: democracy, relationships with people, and shared management. School management must always cast a critical eye on everyday situations.”

In our courses, where we worked with the autobiographical process, it was interesting to problematize the meaning of curriculum and democracy. We compared our experiences at school as students with the experience of the school management internship with public school principals. Through this process, we created meanings about democracy, an emblematic political concept in the daily lives of school principals with whom students will work in the future. Diana’s narrative stood out when she described her process of change during the course and how the topic contributed to her “daily life.” Studying specific theoretical aspects of the courses and understanding democracy, as defended by Mouffe (2003) and by us, involved showing respect for others as legitimate individuals and upholding the “right to speech” even when political positions differed radically. The autobiographical work in this educational management course underscored the importance of differences in everyday school life. Revisiting and sharing memories of classroom experiences allowed students to analyze democratic or non-democratic processes from new perspectives they had not previously considered, that is, “from themselves to the outside” (Pinar & Grumet, 2015), in a process that feeds back on itself, as Strong-Wilson (2021) explains,

Leading to the recognition of a reciprocal relationship between the self (implicated) and the other, opening to the understanding of a subject that is being actively worked on. The capacity to harm is never completely absent. However, it is offset by worry, a sustained worry based on complicated conversations with oneself and others (p. 155).

The proposal for this autobiographical “essay” in the course we taught this semester also aims to continue in the next academic period, as there are several aspects of the method we would like to explore. The experience of writing and the stories told to remain a learning process for us, a “*process of ‘excavation,’*” as Strong-Wilson (2021) describes, “with other layers of history: the teachers’ memories, the stories of other teachers, counter-stories, the teachers’ reports on how they are teaching with counter-stories from their classes, and the student’s responses to counter-stories and pedagogy” (p. 25). This presents us with different ways to address the subject and the “complicated issues” they bring with them.

We understand that the autobiographical process may contribute to the students’ teaching identification process and to reconstructing meanings hegemonized by dominant discourses in schools, universities, and the social/cultural context of each individual. However, in this initial essay of autobiographical work, and given the complexity of the development stages of the practice of juxtaposition and the autobiographical process<sup>9</sup>, we focused on the first layers of counter-stories (Strong-Wilson, 2008) and the challenges of encouraging our students to share their memories. This semester’s Management class was small, with generally no more than ten students. Nevertheless, those who accepted the invitation to narrate their feelings and memories based on the suggested prompts gave new meaning to the school context, “growing from the inside out” (Pinar & Grumet, 2015). This autobiographical experience in the Management course represented, for us, a sense of hope because, despite the challenges faced by education in Brazil, we were able to reframe the potential of teaching with these students.

As student Aline notes, being a teacher is a risk,

For me, the school needs to create a sense of responsibility and safety in students. We know that the future depends on each person, but the reality is different for everyone. Being a teacher in Brazil is a risk for me. A risk that leaves me divided; I must confess. But I hope, by working in education, to make the day of one of my students happy. I believe that education in Brazil still has a lot to do. Do for others what they did for me.

### Conclusion and Implications

The curriculum experience we set out to implement, using William Pinar's *currere* as an ongoing, dynamic proposal, is signified by language and by the meanings produced throughout the *course* in a provisional and contingent manner (Lopes & Macedo, 2011). This approach sought to elaborate on meanings within the classroom context as "experiences from the point of view of the other, be it a curriculum developer, a designer, or a teacher" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 23). As the authors state, this perspective is not about reorganizing schools or courses but about shifting our focus to the paths students choose and the meanings they construct along the way, as we did this semester.

As we observed in an initial literature review, both from international and national perspectives, the use of autobiography as a research methodology in curriculum and teacher education studies is promising. It integrates the intellectual development of students and teachers with the processes of subjectivation generated in life, which can be recollected and generate new imaginaries that distance us from those entrenched in colonialist discourses. Thus, our autobiographical understanding of curriculum theorization aligns with Ng-A-Fook (2015), suggesting that this approach for future teachers may indicate "to reconsider the various ways in which we might draw upon *currere* as a reflexive framework for grappling with our autobiographical-intellectual self-understandings of becoming teachers in and for the world" (p. 123). In this sense, Brazilian experiences can engage with Canadian and other contexts, as curricular paths and proposals may be reconsidered, reinterpreted, and reappropriated. This approach unites common aspects that mobilize resistance against the globalization of education and neoconservative forces that perpetuate silencing and articulate, in various ways, discourses that hinder the imagination of other possible worlds. Thus, our theoretical framework engages with Ng-A-Fook (2012, 2015, 2024) and other researchers through a post-colonial ethical-political commitment, as well as through connections to post-structural feminist theories and scholars addressing curriculum and colonialism in our country.

We seek to share this Brazilian experience of "provoking" future teachers by emphasizing democracy as a crucial aspect of teacher identity formation. However, different contexts may require different proposals. We also advocate for the importance of sharing successful academic experiences, as Meyer et al. (2018) highlight in their comparative study of two Brazilian universities and one Canadian university. They note that "while collaboration is valued in the discourse of teachers and educational managers and considered essential for triggering innovation in universities, it is the culture of isolation and individualism that permeates the work of teachers" (p. 2).

In addition to understanding curriculum as an enunciation of meanings (Lopes & Macedo, 2011), we view the curriculum as an autobiographical text, a possibility for theorizing and transforming meanings through a process of collective reflection, constructed individually by

each student. Along this path, we also re-signify meanings for the professionalization of future school principals in more democratic contexts, in addition to helping them recognize themselves as subjects. We understand the contributions of autobiography to the curriculum field not as a panacea but as a powerful proposal for those who can provoke the senses trapped in the sameness of expected and quantifiable results. From this perspective, we aim to give visibility to what does not conform to globalizing aspirations, as seen in educational policies and suggest other avenues so that teachers may continue their work with, perhaps, more autonomy and creativity. The discursive approach under study seeks to “complicate” the debate, adding autobiography to the process of elaborating thought, which we understand as simultaneously theoretical and political.

This method allows us to explore possibilities for meaning-making, overcoming obstacles, expanding processes, and contextualizing the space for debate and knowledge with teachers in training or already in the field. This is not about inventing a completely new theorization or “local,” as the importance of *self* in the *currere* methodology is already a tradition. Rather, it is based on experiences, memories, and narratives that we can identify and re-signify within the local context of our work, whether at the Angra dos Reis Education Institute or in our broader academic environment, including both research groups.

## Declarations

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the authors completed a master’s degree in the field of Everyday Life Studies under the supervision of Inês Barbosa de Oliveira. The research titled “On/With the Everyday Life at the State College Fernando Magalhães: Reflecting on Democratic Practices,” conducted in 2008 at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), initially focused on this area. Over time, however, the author became more involved with the curriculum studies of the research group “Curriculum Policies and Culture” (UERJ), coordinated by Alice Casimiro Lopes. This group engages in dialogue with Elizabeth Macedo’s research group, “Curriculum, Culture, and Difference”

(UERJ), where the author subsequently conducted postdoctoral research.

<sup>2</sup> We operate with the concept of autobiographical discourse as discussed in Craveiro (2019). Further details will be provided in the following section.

<sup>3</sup> The *currere* method, according to Pinar & Grumet (2015), consists of four stages: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetic. “Regressive: The first step of the method is regressive. It turns to the past to capture it as it was and hovers over the present” (p. 71); “Progressive: As the meaning of ‘pro,’ before, and ‘gradi,’ which means to take a step, to go, ‘(...) we look at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present’” (p. 75); “Analytical: Describes the biographical present, exclusive of the past and future, but includes responses to them” (p. 77); and “Synthetic: Together plus tithenai to synthesize place.” Set them aside. “(...) I conceptualize the current situation. I am put together” (p. 79).

<sup>4</sup> Ramos et al. (2017), and *International (Auto)biographical Research Congress (CIPA)*, which is already at its tenth edition in 2024, and features many works with theoretical foundations from European authors. This is also evident in the journal they organize, *BIOGRaph* (Brazilian Association of (Auto)Biographical Research), active since 2010.

<sup>5</sup> The students’ names are fictitious as the narrators permitted the use of their narratives under the condition of anonymity.

<sup>6</sup> This period refers to one of the authors’ postdoctoral research under the supervision of Teresa Strong-Wilson (2018.2-2020).

<sup>7</sup> One of us had the opportunity to meet Dr. William Pinar at the IAACS (International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies) conference held in Rio de Janeiro (2012) and at the Programmed Activities for master’s and doctoral students at *UERJ/ PROPED* School of Advanced Studies (2019), organized by professors Alice Casimiro Lopes and Elizabeth Macedo. At that time, XX was still a doctoral student (XX).

<sup>8</sup> Curriculum, “complicated conversation” between each individual and the world and themselves that must allow subjects to understand the nature of the educational experience through a “method” consisting of four moments: regressive, progressive, analytical, and temporal (William Pinar, selection, organization, and technical review by Lopes and Macedo (2016, p. 13).

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Strong-Wilson (2021) develops the notion of juxtaposition and its relationship with subjective reconstruction and allegory in “complicated conversations” to address heightened senses of themes from the past, with discernment in the present, predicting possibilities for the future (p. 21-24). However, at this point in our autobiographical experience, we have not yet reached these layers in the narratives students provided in our classrooms.