**Currere and Praxis**
Volume 2, Number 1, 2025, 3-14
DOI: 10.70116/3065457270
ISSN: 3065-4572
Article

# Living our subjective presence: An interview with William F. Pinar

**Ying Ma** [1]

[1] Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Educational Studies Faculty, Department of Educational Studies, Surrey, BC, Canada

## Abstract

This paper is a narrative account of the conversation that took place at Pinar's house, on April 4, 2023, focusing on a few themes that emerge from his 2023 book *A Praxis of Presence in Curriculum Theory: Advancing Currere Against Cultural Crises in Education* as well as the dialogue between us, including "subjective presence," "study," and "knowledge of most worth". This paper hopes to experience Pinar's calling not only in reverberating textual conversations but also in the author's embodied lived experiences in the interview. This paper invokes several lived moments the author shared with Pinar and gives a glimpse of *the person behind his text*, in other words, to *humanize the text*. This would echo the humanist emphasis embedded in the reconceptualization of curriculum studies. This interwoven feeling, reading, thinking, and writing, I believe, are in itself a very pedagogical attempt to "concretize" the abstract and go beyond and behind the text. This article concludes with a discussion of the implications of embracing the subjective presence for teachers' pedagogical praxis.

**Article History**
Received 05.05.2024
Accepted 12.12.2024

**Keywords**
Subjective presence; study, pedagogical praxis; *currere*

## Introduction

William F. Pinar[1] discussed with me the phrase of "Praxis of Presence," the title of his most recent book *A Praxis of Presence in Curriculum Theory: Advancing Currere Against Cultural Crises in Education*, published in 2023. The phrase "Praxis of Presence," Pinar told me, represents an emphasis on, an expansion of, and an extension of the current's autobiographical dynamic, highlighting one's subjective presence as a response to the crises of contemporary culture -- narcissism, presentism, technocracy. An emphasis on restoring and reconstructing human subjectivity in relationships through *currere* has been an ongoing theme in Pinar's works. In the first edition of *What Is Curriculum Theory?*, Pinar (2004) explains: "My work in curriculum theory has emphasized the significance of subjectivity to teaching, to study, to the process of education. The significance of subjectivity is not as a solipsistic retreat from the public sphere..... [It] is inseparable from the social; it is only when we—together and in solitude" (p. 4). For Pinar (2004), "our pedagogical work is simultaneously autobiographical and political" (p. 4). Human subjectivity is, then, always and already intersubjective: it dances to the dynamic and creative tension between the solitude and the togetherness in between. Also, the human subject and one's social identity cannot be simply equated. Pinar (2009) articulates: "identity both enables and constrains our capacity to articulate and thereby reconstruct our being-in-

**Corresponding Author** Ying Ma Ying.Ma2@kpu.ca Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Educational Studies Faculty, Department of Educational Studies, 12666 72 Avenue, Surrey, BC V3W 2M8, Canada

© 2025 by Symphony. This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license.

the-world. While something no one can do without, identity is no substitution for subjectivity" (p. 33). Thus, subjective complexity cannot be summarized in any form of identity; human subjectivity bears creative agency, enabling one to transform any socially conferred unwelcome identity propped up by systematic inequality (Pinar, 2009). In this new book, he emphasizes the far-reaching implications of one's "subjective presence" in responding to the crisis-ridden cultures and societies we experience. The presence of the human subject may free us from obsessive self-absorption or narcissism against presentism with its erasure of history and time and technologization of everything, including – especially – ourselves (Pinar, 2023).

This paper is a narrative account of the conversation that took place at Pinar's house – that he shares with his partner of twenty-eight years - on April 4, 2023, focusing on a few themes I identified that emerge from the new book as well as the dialogue between us, including "subjective presence," "study," and "knowledge of most worth". Within the limited scope of the paper, I have no ambition to exhaustly understand these themes. Instead, I hope to integrate my feelings, observations, and reflections, my subjective presence, with the 2023 text, experiencing Pinar's calling not only in reverberating textual conversations but also in my embodied lived experiences in the interview. This paper also invokes several lived moments I shared with Pinar and gives a glimpse of *the person behind his text*, in other words, my effort to *humanize the text*. I believe this would echo the humanist emphasis embedded in his reconceptualization of curriculum studies. This interwoven feeling, reading, thinking, and writing, I believe, are in itself a very pedagogical attempt to "concretize" the abstract and go beyond and behind the text. My article concludes with a discussion of the implications of embracing the subjective presence for teachers' pedagogical practice. Teachers, even in their own rooms (Woolf, 1929), may feel, ponder, pause, reflect on, and expand their own and their students' subjective presence in their animated teaching.

## The Orchid and the Forest Outside the Window - Embracing Subjective Presence

> On the way to Pinar's house, I was imagining what his house would look like, what the interview would be about, and what our schedule would be for the day. I didn't realize that two and a half hours had passed since we - Fang Wang[2] and I - left Richmond, Vancouver. Due to the need for fingerprinting at customs, the navigation showed that we would be half an hour behind schedule and would not arrive at the house until almost noon. The wheels rolled uphill on gravel, with what appeared to be Baker Mountain in the distance and a lawn and a few upright trees in the near distance. The trees were surrounded by clusters of just-blooming yellow daffodils. I knew that this would be home. In fact, that's why we chose this time of year: scheduling our interview for when the yellow daffodils were in bloom; he told me he would "keep an eye on the daffodils." I turned off the car and stepped out, and the scent of flowers mixed with the earthy smell of rain welcomed me. Then, it was time to see already walking towards us from the porch. "Welcome, welcome!" Pinar gave Fang and me warm greetings and big and long hugs. "Here, come in ....." He invited us inside, and green waterfalls of different shapes came into view; they looked like they had come out of nowhere from the sky. I was stunned for a moment before reacting to the variety of hanging plants: "Jeff climbs up the ladder daily to water them," Pinar told us both with a smile.

In the book, Pinar builds on the concept of *currere* (Pinar, 1975) as a praxis of presence; Pinar (2023) points out that "through this praxis of presence - the method of *currere* – the educator can teach as s/he struggles against … cultural crises" (p. 4). Pinar further explained in our

conversation: "Praxis of presence is both an emphasis on and an extension of the *currere* method". In choosing the term, he particularly wanted to emphasize "subjective presence." He continued after a brief pause:

> I worry that the shift to online learning in the post-epidemic era and the development of new media will encourage us to form profiles rather than experience the present moment spontaneously, improvisationally, oh yes, subjectively—physically, mentally, and in all other possible ways. Many of us may be in survival mode by performing our different roles, but we are not really being.

Subjective presence is "the person's 'being t/here' in one's singularity and attunement" (Pinar, 2023, p. 19). The human subject (as subjectivity) is not something solid or (pre)fixated. Its singularity and attunement mean that the subject is simultaneously coherent/incoherent and fixed/fluid. Pinar emphasized the creative tension between subjective coherence and fluidity a couple of times in our conversation. "You want to maintain subjective coherence in spite of the complexity and fluidity of our inner being," Pinar reminded. Embracing the subjective presence invites us to fully experience the nuances and complexities of the moment, to be who we are (not someone else) in that moment (not some other moments). It is a moment in which we do not expect to find the ultimate solution but a moment in which we connect with our present selves, more deeply with the past and the future, and, at the same time, with others. It is a temporal moment that is no longer flat but a temporal and lived juxtaposition of past, present, and future with multiple and intertwined layers. In this subjective coherence, of course, there is also fluidity and uncertainty. What you are at the moment may, at some point in the future, be lost again or even fall apart. But it is precisely these moments of confusion or disintegration that also harbor the possibility of subjective reconstruction," Pinar responded with an anecdote about alcohol: "That's probably why alcohol has always been so attractive to me, but of course, I'm not encouraging everyone to drink, because people can lose their minds when they're drunk. What I'm trying to say is that alcohol makes people 'lose' their minds and even break down and *become themselves in a different way*. So that's why alcohol can give people a sort of otherworldly spiritual experience."

In the first sentence of the preface to *A Praxis of Presence in Curriculum Theory*, Pinar quotes John Kaag in his discussion of Nietzsche: "Presence….connotes a particular place and time where something, perhaps something significant or singular, could be done" (quoted in 2023, viiii). "So do you see the presence, the place and time for different possibilities, as an anchor of our life?" I asked curiously as I sipped my tea. "Yes. But not really." Pinar paused a bit and said:

> Anchors can allow us to rest in a certain time and place. Attuning to the present moment can be desirable: you are in it, feeling its complexities, nuances, and subtleties. But you can also be pulled to the bottom of the ocean by an anchor; you can sink and disappear into it, never to surface again.

Especially today, with the marketization and technologization of our lives, we often find ourselves constantly surfing the web, responding to messages, dealing with a constant stream of emails, and being struck by breaking news everywhere. Such a present moment may risk flattening time (sinking us to the bottom of the ocean). You may lose a sense of your own life, and your awareness of the historical moments that are happening. This may be why Pinar emphasizes the "presence of the subject": it highlights *both* the subject's coherence and fluidity, with the experience of being "present" at the moment rather than being completely immersed in it or even disappearing from it. Pinar continued, "To be present means to be aware of the

present, to be awake." It echoes Maxine Greene's (1977) emphasis on being wide awake, being wide awake to one's own body, one's mental, emotional, and intellectual presence, to each other, as well as to those who are "not present, including that past and those not yet here" (Pinar, 2023, p. 4) with "attunement to embodied experience (Pinar, 2023, p. 15).

There is a world of difference between the "subjective presence" that Pinar advocates and the "presentism" that he criticizes. If you succumb to presentism, you may not be able to escape from the present; all you can do is think about what you can have now, what you can do now to prepare for the foreseeable future, and hence slowly be dragged to the bottom of the sea by an anchor. But subjective presence requires us to have an anchor that is not too heavy to experience the present historical moment with our whole being: to feel the nuances of the present moment, to connect with others, to witness our present selves, to connect with our past selves, and to imagine our future selves otherwise, without getting too caught up in the present moment and its projections into the future, succumbing to its demands on us, and being unable to extricate ourselves, or pull ourselves out of it. I find myself resting my eyes on the waterfall of hanging orchids which seemed to bring my senses back to the present moment. Pinar's voice was reverberating in my mind and touching my heart. I can smell the flowers and hear the birds chirping from the forest outside.

### The Sofa in the Living Room - About Study

> "This is now my study place," said Pinar, pointing to his coffee table and sofa by the window in the living room. We sat down around the coffee table. I pushed in the books stacked high on the coffee table with my hand and settled the China cup full of hot tea on the edge of the table. "It is a gift from a Chinese visiting scholar," Pinar told me. I noticed that I was captivated by the teacup adorned with intricate blue and white patterns. He continued, "I used to read and write in my downstairs study room, then that room became my online classroom during Covid, so here, the coffee table and couch that never made it into the video footage, became my new little study." My eyes landed on the stacks of books, only to realize that many of them had a small bookmark clipped inside, seemingly in an unfinished, to-be-continued state. "Would you read one book and then another?" I asked with curiosity, "Depends on the mood!" Pinar replied with a relaxed demeanor, hands casually resting behind his head.

We often think of "study" as focusing on learning something, whether it's rote memorization or skillful learning to improve performance or achieve a desired result. This is not the kind of "learning" that Pinar advocates. According to Pinar, the study is "subjectively structured" (Pinar, 2009, p. 44): rather than learning about the world, study helps us to be subjectively reconstructed so that we can understand ourselves better, live well, and act ethically in the world with others. Pinar quotes Dwayne Huebner (1999) here:

> The significance of the word study has been destroyed. Students study to do what someone else requires, not for their own transformation, a way of "working" on their own journey, or their struggle with spirit, the otherness beyond them… loosening of old bonds and discovering the new self (p. 411)

"When you study", Pinar said, "you can be more relaxed, and your reading doesn't have to be so focused. Here and there, what speaks to you, what calls to you, what you need to read now, what you need to learn. Often, a book seems to come at just the right time." Listening to Pinar, my gaze returned to the stacks of books on the coffee table, which seemed to be arranged in a

somewhat cluttered fashion, cluttered yet casually echoing the feelings and thoughts that rise up from the inner landscape at the lived moment. And the books seem to have the power to expand the boundaries of the internal space. Indeed, for Pinar, study allows and invites us to embrace our own subjective presence and helps us to continue to reconstruct ourselves. Study does not follow a certain pattern or procedure, yet it usually happens in the tension between dialogic encounters and solitude (Pinar, 2004, 2009, 2023). Pinar (2009) describes it as "a solitary journey in the company of others" (p. 43). It seems to be emobodied in Pinar's 'little study room' in the living room in which we were then chatting: it is part of the larger space connected to the kitchen and the porch, but it is also private, a space that is not invaded by webcam footage. The spirit of study encourages us to spend time with each other, to get to know each other, to understand each other's ideas, but at the same time to retreat somewhere here and now. In a sense, study is "a spiritual practice, as one becomes present to oneself through the prism of the ideas of others" (Pinar, 2023, p. 16).

The study, though solitary, occurs in dialogic relationships. Pinar emphasizes that "[r]elationship - to knowledge, cultural traditions, to self and others, to specific texts - structures study" (Pinar, 2023, p. 39). Both Grumet's and Huebner's texts are reverberating here: Grumet (1988) argues that knowledge evolves in relationships, while Huebner (1999) suggests that every learning takes place through relationships. Huebner states that every knowledge is also a relationship. Study sometimes encourages subjective presence and encounters with others when one renews or reforms one's firmly held ideological norms within dialogic structures, or in relationships. Pinar gave an example by saying: "you may bring George Grant (Pinar, 2019) back from history to the present by studying his texts or by bringing him back to the present through the words I have quoted from him." The dialogic and transformative encounters require one's subjective presence in the situated moment, attuning with sensitivity to the shared, co-creative moment. As Pinar (2019) observes, "Grant's communicative undertakings …. show sharp sensitivity to the situation, especially to those physically or virtually present (through print), conveyed by his subjective presence, his being present there, with others" (p. 12). The individual subject is constantly constructed and reconstructed under the influence of society, history, culture, and in relation to others, but it is worth noting that the reconstruction of the individual subject may also imply the further renewal and reconstruction of society.

The study encourages us to engage in continuous dialogues in relationships, to embrace the subjective presence in dialogues, to become aware of, to open up to, and to transcend the self. Where study resides is not a unidirectional relationship. It is rather a reciprocal, dynamic relationship, with a space for solitude and noncoincidence. Pinar (2019) further articulates it: "While the self is social, it can also be asocial, solitary, a private self, continuous through changing circumstances, including a changing self; subjective coherence comes from non-coincidence with the self itself, enabled by solitude, privacy, meditation" (p. 146). Study invites us to retreat in the sense of solitude, to do our own work in our inner landscape, and to keep it from being overly influenced or even swallowed up by external circumstances. Pinar refers to Tyson Lewis, Agamben, and other scholars' ideas of not doing and im-potentiality, emphasizing that non-coincidence and intransigence may open up and expand our internal space, allowing the seeds of freedom, transformation and transcendece to take root and germinate within the space of the subject. The study, then, is "ethical engagement with alterity" (Pinar, 2023, p. 37) done to create the unique space of the subject, and "freedom is exercised within the space of subjective non-coincidence with what is" (Pinar, 2023, p. 37). In

the afterglow, I noticed the living room we were in is also connected to a long, thin balcony, outside of which is a large forest. The treetops still looked bare from a distance in this early spring. For the moment, it seemed to me that the location of Pinar's house, ten minutes' drive from the town while in the mountains, and his study room *in* the living room, might be a lived allegory of Pinar's understanding of study: connected and alone at the same time; near and far simultaneously.

### Photo with Aoki - Knowledge of Most Worth

> Pinar led us down the stairs to the basement that connects to the courtyard outside. My eyes wandered over the high shelves, the stacked books on the black loudspeaker box, the framed photographs of Virginia Woolf hanging on the walls along the hallway. It seemed like every room had a wall or two of books. I wandered over to one shelf and was suddenly caught by a Pasolini book. Pinar seemed to recognize my curiosity and said with a smile, "Yes, this is my man!" Around the corner, we entered a small room, and from the bookshelf, Pinar gently picked up a picture with Ted Aoki and ran his hand over it as if he wanted to brush off the dust and travel back in time to a time and place many years ago.

"What is the most valuable knowledge?" For Pinar, the question remains the canonical curriculum question. Pinar (2019) articulates the reason behind his claim:

> This is an ethical question; it can keep us open - to the subject we study, to the students with whom we are working, to ourselves as we discover anew who we are and might become, to the academic knowledge we are labouring together and alone to understand and extend. What knowledge is of most worth invites us to discern what is at stake in time and place. (p. 189)

"George Grant made me focus on the spiritual dimension of 'most worthwhile knowledge,'" Pinar continued thoughtfully, leaning back on the couch and raising his eyes slightly to the ceiling. For Pinar, "most worthwhile knowledge" has many dimensions, not only spiritual but also ethical, not only personal but also political (i.e., interrogating with "whose knowledge is of most worth?"). The openness to the ongoing quest is the key to vitalizing the question. Unfortunately, the ethical dimension of exploring the most valuable knowledge with students with ongoing questions is often replaced by manipulation and control. Pinar (2009) emphasizes: "'What knowledge is of most worth?' is an ongoing provocation to study according to subjective preoccupations, collective concerns, structured by academic knowledge discovered and created in universities and elsewhere" (p. 43). An important condition for realizing the freedom of the soul is to know ourselves. A search for human subjectivity: understanding, exploring, and transcending the self - the search for the most valuable knowledge - constantly animated by study. Pinar (2023) quotes a passage from Dewey Huebner's *The Lure of Transcendence*, to express the relationship between study, most valuable knowledge, and understanding the self.

> The significance of the word "study" has been destroyed. Students study to do what someone else requires, not for their own transformation, a way of "working" on their own journey, or their struggle with spirit, the otherness beyond them. Just as therapy is work, hard work, but important for the loosening of old bonds and discovering the new self, education as well as study should be seen as a form of that kind of work. (p. 42)

In our time, in this place, *that* is knowledge is of most worth" (p. 42) Pinar (2023) writes firmly. "As I understand", I found myself voicing my understanding, "the most valuable knowledge is self-knowledge and for self-transformation and transcendence. How do we then gain the most valuable knowledge?". Pinar paused for some moments and said,

> Somewhere along the line, we seem to feel that a voice is speaking to us, that we are being told something (Being spoken to). I'm not talking about God. But it seems like someone is talking to you. I don't know where it's coming from. You have many voices inside you. You have to decide who you need to listen to in a given moment, and the feelings, the thoughts, the consciousness, and the spirit are intertwined in some way.

Pinar and Pautz (1998) have looked at the significance of 'voice' in curriculum studies: they recall the significance of the autobiographical voice (Miller, 1982) in exploring personal identity and the relationship between the subject and others and the choral sound as explored by Grumet (1988). Madeleine Grumet (1988) uses the metaphor of choral voices as a way to explore the interplay of multiple, often conflicting, voices within education. Listening to Pinar's gentle but powerful voice, not knowing when or where my inner strings would be touched, as it verberated and continued to verberate with the voice, interwoven and resonating. It seems that the acquisition of "most valuable knowledge" is often not a planned, predictable process, but rather a touch and a sound that comes to us with its spontaneity and improvisation. Touches and sounds that grab or seize you and help you to escape the confinement of your mind, body, and emotions for a while so that you catch some rhythms in the sounded ripples of a deeper understanding. "Unfortunately, we are often so entrenched in empirical science. The process by which we come to know the conversational world is actually complex, interwoven, and unquantifiable and programmable." Pinar went on saying,

> The pursuit of the most valuable knowledge is always a matter of interpreting and feeling. You always have to make discernment about different and even contradictory meanings and experiences, which can change in a matter of days (if not shorter). The kind of ongoing process that runs through everyday life.

Although there are no rules, by constantly opening ourselves up to a more spacious inner space, we can more easily catch the touch of the most valuable knowledge and attune ourselves to a multiplicity of voices in juxtaposition. Pinar refers to Janet Miller's (2005) worldly conceptualization of juxtaposition, Teresa Strong-Wilson's (2008) juxtaposition of stories as a process of bringing memories forward, George Grant's juxtaposition of immediacy and eternity animated in his teaching (Pinar, 2019), and Aoki's view of juxtaposition as generative (1986/1991, 1993) to open up the inner space. Grant, for example, calls for the juxtaposition of "intellectual histories and the present circumstances" (Pinar, 2019, p. 230); Aoki (1986/1991, 1993) advocates for the juxtaposition of "a space in between". Within this animated space of juxtaposition, we can at least have the possibility of non-coincidence "Juxtaposition can question both categories as it creates crevices between them, requiring reconsideration of each" (Pinar, 2019, p. 14). Pinar's understanding of curriculum as a complicated conversation and *currere* methodology as regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical circular movement echoes the notion of "juxtaposition"; *currere* juxtaposes the past, the present, and the future, reshaping the inner structure of the subject: "partaking reactivates the past within oneself, altering one's subjectivity, and not only with faces and ideas, as central as these are but with an altered inner structure" (Pinar, 2019, p. 19). Pinar (2023), in his new book, articulates the significance of juxtaposition in teaching:

> *Currere* is the concept that calls us to juxtapose the two in a generative tension that amplifies, intensifies, the reality of each (classroom as a civic square and a room of one's own), as disappearing into either means erasure of both (p. 88)

These juxtaposed moments allow us to unfold, understand, and transcend the self slowly through conflict, tension, integration, and expansion. This is the process of self-formation, self-reconstruction, and self-creation, with "a curricular juxtaposition of the historical, the cultural, and the spiritual" (Pinar, 2023, p. 194). Aoki (1986/1991) mentions a teacher named Ms. O who did not try to overcome the dichotomy between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experience but rather settled in the space of tension and reconciliation between them. In juxtaposition, we also need a simultaneous attunement, as Pinar (2019) interprets,

> Attunement [to juxtaposed tensions] is to be based on what we need to do, who we are dialoguing with, how we are dialoguing, and about what we are dialoguing. The process from beginning to end lingers on the central question of the curriculum 'what is the most valuable knowledge' (p. 405)

We need to realize that the most valuable knowledge is both a general question and a personal question. It seems that this cannot be separated in the first place. Just as with a fallen leaf, we know the coming of the fall; each individual is unique, but each individual can inspire a more panoramic understanding of our interconnected existence with one another in the world. We wander and explore our own seemingly ordinary lives with a deeper and possible transcendent understanding and reverence for the meaning of life. At this point, my eyes fell back to the biography of Pier Pasolini, The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini (Rohdie, 1995), on a bookshelf not far away, imagining that this post-World War II Italian poet, novelist, producer, and journalist had appeared in Pinar's essays and lectures. In his most recent lecture on Pasolini, Pinar (2023) describes a 2014 film about Pasolini, played by Dafoe, who re-experienced and reactivated Pasolini's past through imagination, a partaking that not only reactivates the past but also constantly reframes Dafoe's "presence of the subject", changing what he thinks and feels at the moment. In our respective words, between our hands and feet, when our feelings rise and appear, we quietly penetrate into each other's inner world, opening up a space of unimagined subjects.

## Implications for Teaching

At the end of the interview, we were already hungry, and looking at the clock above the fireplace, we saw that it was past one o'clock. But still, I couldn't stop asking about this topic. As a teacher, I have been thinking (and perhaps many of you as teachers are also concerned with this question): What does the subjective presence reveal to us in our daily teaching? Pinar started our discussion with two short stories of self-reflection and critique.

### *Attuning to the Lived Moment*

> When I was in China, a lot of Chinese scholars said to me that you are very "postmodern". I always objected to that. But I think I was wrong. The postmodernity of my scholarship lies in the fact that while I don't necessarily reject grand narratives as a whole, I've always been interested in all the fragments, the specifics, and the unique occurrences. You listen to them carefully, and they take you to places other than the narratives I present. For me, this is somehow *currere*.

Within our classrooms, what are we as teachers concerned with? Is it our lesson plans, our instructional goals, or our student achievement? Or are they the students in front of us, their thoughts, feelings, and our inner voices? As a former first-line teacher in a Beijing high school, I am well aware of the pressure on teachers and students brought about by promotion targets. But in the face of the pressure of schoolwork, can we allow ourselves and our students to be in the present moment as much as possible, a moment that embraces subjective presence with meaning, a juxtaposed moment that connects and re-invigorates a vivid history, a juxtaposed moment that leads to an imaginative or reimagined future, and a juxtaposed moment that honors students' and teachers' self-reflections, feelings, and spiritual worlds? Every student, every teacher, and every moment we connect to is unique, and as teachers, we need to tune into the complexity and nuance of our own voices and feelings in this unique moment. We listen to our inner voices and expand our inner space so that I can be me and you can be you. Instead of being chained to heavy anchors of teaching targets or discourses of accountability and taken to the bottom of the ocean, drowning in the demands of grades and promotions, teachers may still encourage study.

Teachers cannot encourage students to study by encouraging them to finish their homework, pay attention, and get good grades on tests. Rather, they encourage students to reinvent themselves through study. The study that Pinar advocates is not a fan of the testing system; rather, the study is a process of finding liberation, the freedom to think otherwise, to disagree, and to hold tension with what is required. Maybe for the student reading a novel in the math class, teachers may attune themselves more to the students' feelings and need at that moment, so as to give birth to not only more tolerance and understanding but also possibilities of "not learning what is required to learn"; maybe for poetry recitation, we may no longer feel compelled to pursue the result of memorizing more or memorizing well, but more concerned about whether to experience the ancient text which may have a unique revelation of who I am and whom I hope to become. Maybe for the exam review class teaching about "knowledge points", teachers may encourage different dialogues and interpretations of the "points of knowledge" taught in class; they may care more about the questions students ask even more than whether they have skillfully mastered the standardized answers; they may be more willing to take students to chew on a sentence over and over again than to fill in the blanks of reading comprehension questions, to feel the power of the words, to be empowered by the text. As teachers, we pay more attention to the subtleties of the moment. A word, a figure, a sound, a smell, or a feeling are all opportunities for study, and we may be transported to another place, to a moment in the past, in order to reactivate the past and reshape the present and the future: study occurs in every fleeting, lived moment.

### *Improvising*

> In my course theory, I have always deliberately avoided the topic of "how" we do things. In a conversation with Grumet, she was deeply critical of my unwillingness to explore 'how to do it in the classroom'. She said, "It's because you're a father. The traditional definition of fatherhood is usually just saying how things should be, but moms have to keep their kids busy and think about what's going on and how to do it. Now that I think about it, I probably do have a gender problem with my avoidance of the topic of "how to do it." In addition, and more importantly, I am not in favor of technologizing or modeling teaching. I think focusing on subjective presence means constant improvisation. Maybe you have a lesson plan, but how it is expressed and formulated can be constantly recreated.

As we close the door to the classroom, or in the room of the online classroom, regardless of the pressures of promotion and the weight of the teaching load, there is still room for teachers to improvise in the cracks, to not only pass on knowledge in their words and actions but also to link with their students, to share with each other their homework, "Who am I really? Who do I want to be?" Pinar encourages improvisation within the classroom, and we as teachers listen and improvise within the context of a prescribed syllabus and a vividly experienced classroom. Juxtaposition encourages teachers to improvise. The juxtaposition of past, present, and future brings more room for imagination; the juxtaposition of syllabi's requirements and lived teaching moments encourages us to walk and feel our way beyond the confines of the teaching plans and procedures, to hear each other's voices, to feel each other's silences, to see each other's faces. In the space between the juxtapositions, we were able to move with the flow, creatively unfolding the classroom and embracing the subjective presence with meaning.

Teachers are urging for tomorrow's homework and next week's exams, and students are anxious before and worried after the exam: they are both often stuck on a conveyor belt that keeps moving. The space of improvisation is to be in the present moment, not by using certain techniques or language, but by experiencing moments in real-time: a word, a silence, a smile, a physical expression: moments in which we are imbued with a richness of emotion, becoming alive and vibrant; moments in which we are more genuinely connected to others, expanding our own space; moments in which we are moved by voice; moments in which we are in our presence in/with the world. At that moment, we are able to understand ourselves better and more deeply. In the classroom, we can also greet each student with a serious "How are you today?" We hear the voices and silences of our students, we listen to the little stories they share about themselves, we respond to their frowns or smiles, and even in the online classroom, we notice the instant questions in their chat rooms and let the rhythm of the classroom discussions resonate with ongoing questions. We encourage our students to connect with nature, to breathe in and out of the morning dew, to feel the warmth of the afternoon sun, to touch the rough bark of a tree, and to listen to the chirping of insects and birds. Nature makes us feel the presence of the subject even more intensely, making it more sincere, open, and expansive.

### *Mountains in the Distance*

It was after 2:00 p.m. when we walked out of Pinar's house, and we were ready to go to a nearby Thai restaurant for dinner together. "That's Baker Mountain," Pinar said, pointing into the distance. The early morning mist had lifted, and her white summit was now clearly visible. I glimpsed the yellow daffodils blooming in the doorway again. Walking closer, bending forward, I sniffed the fragrance of these little blossoms. The sunlight poured down, on me and on the little gold petals of the daffodils.

## Declarations

***Acknowledgments:*** I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. William Pinar for warmly welcoming me into his home for our conversation and for his generous and encouraging feedback on this paper. I also sincerely thank Dr. Fang Wang for her invaluable initial comments on the Chinese version of this work.

***Authors' contributions:*** All aspects of this article were performed by the sole author.

***Competing interests:*** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

***Funding:*** This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

***Ethics approval and consent to participate:*** This research does not require ethical approval.

***Publisher's note:*** Currere and Praxis remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

## Orcid ID

Ying Ma https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7464-2768

## References

Aoki, T. T. (1986/1991). Teaching as indwelling between two curriculum worlds. In W. F. Pinar & R. L. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (2004, pp. 159–165). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Aoki, T. T. (1993). Legitimating lived curriculum: Toward a curricular landscape of multiplicity. In W. F. Pinar & R. L. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (2004, pp. 199–218). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Greene, M. (1977). Toward wide-awakeness: An argument for the arts and humanities in education. *The Humanities and the Curriculum, 79*(1), 119-125.

Grumet, M. R. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. University of Massachusetts Press.

Huebner, D. E. (1999). *The lure of the transcendent: Collected essays*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Miller, J. L. (1982). The breaking of attachments: Feminism and curriculum theory. *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, *4*(2), 10-20.

Miller, J. L. (2005). Sounds of silence breaking: Women, autobiography, curriculum. *Peter Lang.*

Pinar, W. F. (1975). The method of *currere*. Retrieved September 3, 2024 from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED104766

Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Pinar, W. F. (2009). *The worldliness of a cosmopolitan education: Passionate lives in public service*. Routledge.

Pinar, W. F. (2019). *Moving images of eternity: George Grant's critique of time, teaching, and technology*. University of Ottawa Press.

Pinar, W. F. (2023). *A praxis of presence in curriculum theory: Advancing currere against cultural crises in education*. Routledge.

Pinar, W. F., & Pautz, A. E. (1998). Construction scars: Autobiographical voice in biography. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Writing educational biography: Explorations in qualitative research* (pp. 61–72). Routledge.

Rohdie, S. (1995). *The passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini*. Indiana University Press.

Strong-Wilson, T. (2008). *Bringing memory forward: Storied remembrance in social justice education with teachers*. Peter Lang.

Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. Hogarth Press.

## Notes

[1] **William F. Pinar** is the Tetsuo Aoki Professor of Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Pinar has also served as the St. Bernard Parish Alumni Endowed Professor at Louisiana State University (LSU), the Frank Talbott Professor at the University of Virginia, and the A. Lindsay O'Connor Professor of American Institutions at Colgate University. He has lectured widely, including at Harvard University, McGill University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the universities of Chicago, Helsinki, Oslo, Tokyo, and Vienna. Pinar, the former President of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies and the founder of its U.S. affiliate, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, now serves as the President of the Association for the Advancement of Interdisciplinary Education Studies. In 2000, Pinar received the LSU Distinguished Faculty Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Educational Research Association; in 2004, he received an American Educational Association Outstanding Book Award for "What is Curriculum Theory?" the third edition of which was published in 2019 by Routledge. Most recently, with Anne M. Phelan, Pinar has been the editor of Curriculum Studies in Canada: Present Preoccupations (University of Toronto Press).

[2] https://educ.ubc.ca/dr-fang-wang/