

What Was, Is, and Can be Pedagogically Possible?

Employing Currere in Educational Events

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WHETHER BY CIRCUMSTANCE OR BY [SUBCONSCIOUS] CHOICE, I seem to always find myself back in the comfort of pedagogical and inquiry method(s), technique(s), and sequence. Since the start of my short academic journey—and even before that, I’d eventually relearn—the few courses I would consistently teach, term after term, were courses premised on method, procedure, and skill. I found myself leaning into course names (e.g., “methods” and “research”) to not only ground my pedagogical positionality, but also to conceptualize the course path. Students—both undergraduate and graduate—generally found the coursework, topics, and assignments meaningful and tethered to their individual teaching placements or scholarly journeys, respectively. And so, I would make a few text, assignment, and modality adjustments for incoming groups, acknowledging the importance of fine-tuning instruction to anticipate students’ needs (Hansen, 2021), feeling more and more optimistic each term that I was pulling further away from the limits of doing, of technique and procedure.

However, other onto-epistemologies will inevitably “pierce a hole” (Badiou, 1998/2001, p. 9) in our comfortable, settled curriculum and pedagogical narratives, fostering a transformative “educational event” (Piazza & Heyer, 2022) that can illuminate not only other possibilities, but also repressed moments and versions of our educational selves. This paper unpacks how currere cultivated reexamination of my “educational event[s]” (Piazza & Heyer, 2022), inspired by lived-planned curricular and pedagogical tensions of teaching an undergraduate education methods course and a graduate research course (Aoki, 1991; 1993). I outline how my curricular and pedagogical positioning cultivated instructional and ideological tension, underscoring a subsequent reevaluation of how settled truths and entrenched positionalities that contour(ed) my educational past, present, and future obscure(d) more expansive understandings of other perspectives and possibilities—ontologies from which I’m still unevenly disentangling. This paper examines how teaching experiences can foster an “educational event,” and how currere can consequently inspire us to reexamine the intersections of our educational past, present, and future emergent in these surprising, and sometimes unpleasant, insecurity-laden, educational events.

Educational Metanarratives, Refrains, and Currere's Possibility

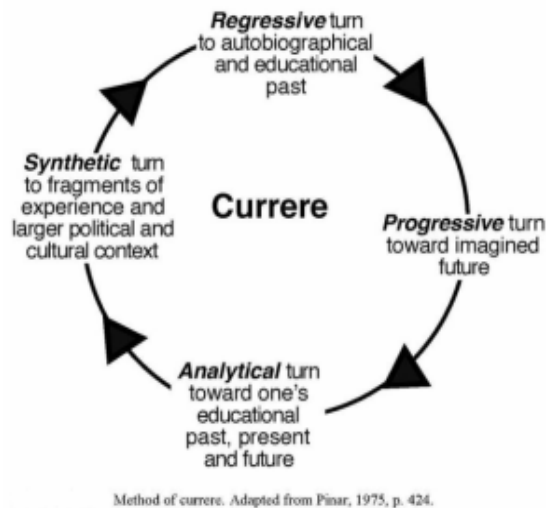
Metanarratives reflect institutionalized, sanctioned, confining patterns (Aoki, 1993; Sherbine & Hara, 2022). Occupying K12 and higher education (Giroux, 2010), metanarratives privileging technical scripts and sequential procedures creep into our teaching, as we revert to the importance of utility, skill, and marketability to gain perceived legitimacy (Tilley & Taylor, 2013), rendering it difficult to see beyond these sanctioned scripts. As vehicles of social reproduction, educational institutions and policies entrench particular metanarratives about teaching, schooling, and education, increasingly framing schooling as anthropocentric, managerial, and performative (Piazza & Heyer, 2022; Tilley & Taylor, 2013)—ontologies that underscore the planned curriculum. The planned curriculum, increasingly removed from educational institutions, represents a prescriptive, sanctioned, discipline-driven vehicle for stifling autonomy and possibility (Aoki, 1993; Lee, 2017; Maxwell & Roofe, 2020). While planned curriculum seems seductive through scripted, refrain-like comfortably routinized boundaries (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Sherbine & Hara, 2022), its limits not only obscure educational possibility; such limits consequently anchor existing, immutable educational narratives reforming educational bodies and institutions. Nevertheless, teaching beseeches an embrace of the unfamiliar (Ma, 2018). Expansive, more liberatory conceptions of teaching, curriculum, and education implore attention to and enactment of co-creating knowledge and co-constructing the educational process—conceptions and practices that transcend the prescriptive, content-tethered, tightly-bound planned curriculum.

Currere unpacks not the destination, nor the motivation, but the *running*, the moving, the oscillating. From an educational perspective, currere transcends conventional, prescriptive notions of curriculum and subjectivity toward synergizing these dimensions and exploring how one lives and experiences curriculum. While running suggests a quickening pace, currere implores us to slow down through deliberate examination of our educational past, present, and future. Currere prioritizes voice and personal storytelling in the reconceptualizing of our past, present, and future educational experiences (Rose, 2017; Slattery, 2017). This initially retrospective process reignites the unforgettable, taken-for-granted, insecurity-laden educational memories to inspire deep self-conversations about who we really are (Capó Garía, 2021). Although often overlooked, our educational pasts not only represent complex and formative entry points into making sense of our present and future (Pinar, 1975); our past exists *alongside* our present and future (emphasis added), reflecting how we live curriculum in the present.

Stages of Currere in the Educational Event

The regressive step inspires revisiting educational experiences, how these have informed current practices entrenched through trial-and-error (Dewey, 2012/1916), positionalities, and relations with others, as Pinar (2004) argues that one's past reflects a shared, collective experience. It is from this initial step that we progressively consider our educational futures and what these resemble as reimagined possibilities of deeper understanding. We then examine the lines of inquiry we pursue—and the ones we reject—that contour our educational present, probing the significance of our work and our place in it. The analytical step grounds us in the now, an acknowledgement and meaning-making exercise examining the intersections between our pasts, presents, and futures. Through these first three steps, we unpack our journeys through and relationships with education

and educational institutions—as student and as teacher. This culminating, synthetic be(com)ing process facilitates possibility and transformation of educational bodies and institutions. Currere is not linear; we often oscillate in between stages in varied sequence, separately and concurrently, particularly when surprising pedagogical and curricular moments torpedo us into [the] progressive thinking (Rose, 2017).



Manifesting as people, thoughts, and questions contouring a formative experience, Badiou's (1998/2001) conceptualization of an “event” represents an upending of one’s settled self-and-context understanding. An *educational* event (emphasis added) represents an experience that short-circuits our educational refrains (Piazza & Heyer, 2022), cultivating expansive conditions to reconstruct and reimagine entrenched notions of curriculum, teaching, and education. Educational events can torpedo us into currere’s “progressive” stage (Pinar, 1975; 1978; Rose, 2017), turning our attention toward the intersection between what is, and what could be, attention that often inspires a regressive turn toward our educational pasts and patterns. The educational events underscoring this paper represent transformative experiences that illuminated tensions inherent in our positions at the intersection of planned and lived curricula. Exploratory or technical pedagogies can consequently shape students’ pedagogical and scholarly futures (Rose, 2017). To this end, teaching an undergraduate methods course and a graduate level research course not only challenged the boundaries around my pedagogical and scholarly comfort zones; these experiences also illuminated how my settled practices and ideological orientation “locked [me] in a dogmatic orbit” (Hansen, 2021, p. 32) that obscured curricular and pedagogical openings in-the-moment—until I came to terms with my pedagogical past to keep running toward a reimagined pedagogical self.

The Technical Metanarrative: Reverting to Method/s, Refrains, and Control Writing Process, or Graded Product? (Undergraduate Methods Course, 2022)

Although many in this education program held previous teaching or educational support experience, the students enrolling in this course spent much of their higher education journey behind a screen due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, amounting to minimal, if any, prior

pedagogical experience. Therefore, I structured our course from an inquiry-based perspective on teaching writing, while acknowledging how teaching placements, individual student positionalities, and larger, external educational metanarratives—ones that I [thought I] recognized—shaped our pedagogies. Drawing from my experience as an aspiring-to-current teacher-to-teacher educator, I believed that students would be most critical of a course divorced from their own early-stage placement teaching experiences (Aoki, 1993).

Consequently, I aimed to structure the course as a series of check-ins on developing a writing curriculum encompassing elements of their choosing, so that students could explicitly envision curriculum and teaching as opportunities to foster connections between the academic course and teaching context. Learning of my students' incredibly diverse teaching placements—ranging from metropolitan to suburban, kindergarten to eighth grade, monolingual to dual language, straddling socioeconomic, cultural, and racial identities—I drew upon individual conversations, assignments-as-check-ins, and meetings with students to propose ideas to underscore their final course assignment, a student-centered writing curriculum that aligned with their school community context, their placement grade level, and placement students' backgrounds.

Further, I positioned writing-as-process, encouraging students to worry less about structure and more about effort and depth. I rationalized that my approach to providing students with writing strategies-as-ideas meant for reconstruction would supplement contextualized praxis. I prefaced writing activities I introduced, and that we practiced in class, as ideas meant to be squeezed, shaped, molded, and tweaked; and I encouraged students to come to our sessions with enacted ideas of their own to share with peers. However, our sessions that I anticipated might revolve around sharing ideas as a pedagogical community of practice often transitioned into collective affronts about their placements, perceived writing and practice-to-pedagogy deficits, or about the state of teaching during a constantly shifting pandemic. Bookended by targeted questions directed at me for how they could “resolve” these enduring, sometimes existential, issues, students voiced ongoing hesitations about whether loosely-guided writing curriculum creation was helpful at all in addressing these concerns or toward getting an “A” in the course—an explicitly noted, more pressing need. While I thought that I created a course—crafted *the* path on which to progress—that might provide space to chafe at the narrow conceptions of writing-as-product and the overarching instrumentality of planned curriculum (Hansen, 2021), to my surprise, fewer guidelines inspired more calls for concreteness that I made a choice to ignore, a perception and subsequent response I would be forced to face a year later, when a different experience “pierce[d] a hole” (Badiou, 1998/2001, p. 9) in latent, subconscious pedagogical narratives I would realize I hadn't yet sufficiently confronted.

Research/Inquiry and (Un)Comfortable Authority (“Research” Course, 2023)

Believing I'd learned from my perceived pedagogical hiccup in 2022, I decided to plan and prepare students for the possibility of scholarly vexation to come, lest I be found out as an alleged scholarly fraud for not standing firmly in my course pathway choices. I sent an email to the students enrolled in an inquiry course I would be teaching again (although the title and course catalog call it a “research” course, I'm just now learning to embrace, enact, and embody this distinction between research's instrumental scrutiny and inquiry's spacious exploration (Koro et al., 2022)). I firmly asserted that both I and the course would likely “frustrate” them, acknowledging my

growing penchant for fewer limits around guiding students through individualized projects, even as the metanarrative of technique enshrined the description of, and possibly perceptions around, the course. It was something I'd said to students before in other courses, as I became increasingly accustomed to students' cognitive (and sometimes, personal) frustrations when I shrugged off concrete, immediate answers to technical "how-to" questions. I was unaware how this electronic declaration would inspire some students to seek these very answers I thought I was learning to shed, and how these pursuits would manifest as my own pedagogical self-fulfilling prophecy, an occupationally haunting reminder of my own educational confinement. I received a few responses to the potentially pedagogical fate-sealing email; however, it felt as though this introductory email floated off into the void, now inspiring prospective students' skepticism of what awaited them. While it seemed as if some found the choose-your-adventure blurriness around their culminating inquiry projects captivating, others, indeed, found it baffling. This was particularly apparent when discussing analysis.

I thought I was letting students in on a worthy, reassuring secret: That, unless rooted in and demonstrating oppression, much like teaching, there were many ways they could analyze qualitative "data" and many forms that social-world information could take; one did not rule them all. Despite roles as educational practitioners acknowledging, enacting, and embodying the variability that comes with teaching and supporting educational institutions, the belief in a singular "correct" research pathway and method seemed to permeate the awkward silence that followed. In breakout groups, I found this suspicion to be accurate, as a few student-groups demonstrated *the way* [they learned] to analyze qualitative information. After amiable-then-assertive declarations that they would not, in fact, be penalized for different analytical representations, it felt as though the group breathed a [somewhat] collective sigh of academic relief. While anxious to witness students' diverse thinking, a few remained tethered to that initial email-provoked skepticism. It was my turn to be dumbfounded upon learning the expectation I would, as the instructor, provide specific, concrete directives of what to do and how. While I initially bristled at the idea of an exact procedure-list for research, I failed to realize how I was, in fact, enacting a narrative of my own. Although individually tailoring the course's culminating inquiry project felt, at the time, noble, I not only rejected some students' calls for additional clarity—thereby clinging to some semblance of authority to decide what knowledge, what [meta]narratives were valuable—I had, yet again, focused my pedagogical and curricular decisions on the "doing," the method, the technical/que, rather than on thinking with/in/beyond the procedures.

Regressing into What Was: Pedagogically, Who am I (Really)?

As a college student—at all levels—I grew to privately-then-more publicly question curricular choices of my instructors, and then professors—scrutiny I rarely, if ever, masked (even if I tried)—chafing at the boundaries of curricular and pedagogical authority. I would squeeze and shape the course for *me*, rather than the other way around, searching for openings, shortcuts around, and through generalized guideposts. I wanted to get it done, move on to doing something else, and thought or reflection would come later, if at all; there wasn't, I'd rationalize, enough *time*. I recalled my teaching of high school English, a core and heavily-tested subject, encompassing both content and pedagogical boundaries I learned not to reject, but rather, learned to squeeze into, make myself fit neatly into my role as a cog in the neoliberal machine (Ball, 2016), unsure of if—or whether—I wanted a way out. As a first-year high school teacher, students would ask me, "Why

are we doing this?” They’d similarly grate against the boundaries of ownership, learning, and power that contoured my student-experience, an experience happening concurrently alongside my teaching role. However, unable (or unwilling) to recognize glimmers of student-me in their inquiries, I would often dismiss these questions, believing that assumed pedagogical and professional authority and valued pedagogical efficiency eclipsed the need for additional detail—an ironic turn-of-the-proverbial desk. If it made sense to me and to the limited conception that I held for what constituted the course path creation, wasn’t that enough to keep moving?

In my third year as a teacher, I remember hearing the same question, “Why are we doing this?” peppering the hum and murmurs of the student collective. But this time, students followed up this interrogative with others: “What does this have to do with the rest of the year? With the rest of my life?” As the other students nodded in agreement, simultaneously enthralled at my upcoming response, I asked whether they’d all be interested in exposure to that information, the path-creation process, to which many replied in the affirmative. I brought my curriculum map to class the next day, and we made our class a working session: making changes, substitutions, erasures, and additions. The session opened up other questions from students about and with/in the planning process, and from me, about where I pedagogically stood—as other perspectives refocused the course path toward something else, more generative. Nevertheless, the embedded authority to carve out such an opportunity remained buried in my subconscious, a re-acquaintance I forgot amid the constant doing, the moving onto what was next.

Progressing Toward What Can—and Who Can—I Pedagogically Be

Consequently, as transformative and illuminative as that process was for students, and for me, it never happened again, pedagogical confinement of (maybe?) my own making. However, that level of personal responsibility might not be entirely accurate, as curricula and refrains should-ing about teachers and teaching are everywhere (van den Berg, 2023). The complex role of the teacher, one situated within and between preconceived notions of teacher-as-imperialist construct-and-as-pedagogical entertainer (Inayatullah, 2022), exists at the intersection of uneven, fragmented attempts to negotiate frequently levied occupational—and, consequently, pedagogical—boundaries. Educational events that scrutinize, challenge, or upend these boundaries propel us into progressive aspects of currere (Pinar, 1975; 1978; Rose, 2017), unearthing painful reminders of tensions in academic be(com)ing processes at any level; processes marred by oscillations between the instrumental and lived, the predictable and possible, enactment or resistance (Tilley & Taylor, 2013).

Although I [say that I] adopt a critical orientation, I wonder whether I truly embrace, enact, and embody this position. While I’m initially less inclined to believe that these courses represent the work I purport to do, I still sit comfortably in method(s)—the unquestioning dissemination and execution of refrains written and created by and for others—suggesting my cerebral peddling too distinct from my pedagogical past and present. How shall we proceed when we meet narrow and confining educational beliefs and practices in our students, and in ourselves? How can we imagine, demonstrate, and enact possibility for students and for ourselves? The nuanced position of the teacher-as-universal intellectual within confining pedagogical, professional, and social conditions unearths tension in how we navigate internally and externally imposed boundaries, rubbing against our desperate and radical hope for something different, something else (Gannon, 2020).

Analyzing the Pedagogical “Is”

Although I endeavored to create pedagogical space in these courses, I ignored how larger metanarratives “la[id] claim” on my pedagogical self (Lee, 2017, p. 24), reverting to the doing of, rather than the thinking in-between. I ironically project the latent fear and inherent skepticism of students’ possible pedagogical and scholarly confinement, while missing my own retreat to curricular and pedagogical refrains. Former students with whom I crossed paths sometimes expected scripts and plans, devoid of decision-making and contoured by directives and technicality (Rose, 2017). Some hoped for the reverse. In both cases, I chafed at requests for the opposite of what I constructed, or *planned*, missing the irony of having and eating my pedagogical cake. What could have been perceived as my intentional set-up for students to “fail” within the narrow boundaries of the course path was my retreat further into the neoliberal belief that doing-without-thinking amounted to curricular “freedom” instead of generating academic commodities (Okeyere, 2018). Asserting that success comes from being “most free” (Huddleson, 2019) to make [false] choices represents a turn toward the very im/explicit pedagogical refrains and plans I chastise in others but fail to recognize in myself.

Despite my hopes to position the course paths as invitations to embark on the run, I neglected the running, the navigating, the thinking through, often falling back on [just] surviving. I find myself lodged between practical skills and conceptual knowledge (Huddleson, 2019; Okeyere, 2018). I retreat to habits that privilege scholarly utility and academic capital accumulation through doing-method(s). In education at all levels, we walk tightropes between agency and complicity, structure and something else, comfort and possibility. Issues and metanarratives of power, knowledge, teachers and teaching similarly contour the university learning space. Narratives buried deep in our educational pasts oftentimes return us to what was, rather than short-circuit those narratives and reimagine what could be.

Synthesizing Pedagogical Was/Is/Not-Yet

We cannot force student learning or development, arguably both a pedagogical limitation and a “saving grace” (Hansen, 2021, p. 33) of our work that honors the multiplicity of experiences in learning spaces, all of us wrestling with/in our own agendas at the crossroads of sense-making and something else (Hansen, 2021; Piazza & Heyer, 2022). As accomplices to/with/in our own truth regimes (Foucault, 1975), we sometimes miss opportunities for be(ing) *with* in curriculum. This is especially true for those occupying positions of power from perceived high ground and removed from threats to our “safe understanding[s]” of teaching and curriculum (Tilley & Taylor, 2013, p. 422). These complicate reimagining transformative pedagogical and scholarly possibilities. As a result, settled and sanctioned hierarchies, binaries, and regimes reforming notions of pedagogy, curriculum, and inquiry remain obscured. We think of silences, initial skepticism, and tensions as impediments, forgetting the untold embedded in these quiet moments (MacLure et al., 2010)—and leading us, ironically, to communicating more, providing more instruction and more resources, gaining more control (Khan & MacEachen, 2021)—turning away from and sitting with currere’s possibilities. Reflective practice fosters self-awareness, and encourages us to “re-attune” (Pinar, 1975; 1978) to how institutional structures confine our practice and ourselves (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Like teaching’s dual science/art underpinning, we are always working with/in/against/through both the planned and lived curriculum,

with/in/through currere to soften the edges of temporality between our educational past-present-future, an enduring in-between our distance/proximity to educational im/possibility in un/explored celebrations, setbacks, and not-yets.

These educational events remind me that we are often [subconsciously] complicit in the narrowing of our work, exposing complexities that sometimes amount to missing short-circuiting our “dogmatic orbits” (Hansen, 2021, p. 32) that position larger, seemingly settled “truth claims” and metanarratives as comfortable and secure (Ball, 2016). Living in the educational, non-linear, always-evolving in-between, constantly navigating this delicate line between instrumental and prescribed, and poetic and lived (Aoki, 1993) is the running, the currere of dwelling with/in the tensions between planned and lived curricular landscapes, always recognizing our [possible] complicity (Pinar, 1978). Even with looming scripts threatening to claim our pedagogical selves, I wonder how we can free ourselves from metanarratives that shape what and how we teach, ones that we might reject in principle but revert to in practice. How can we make room for currere—the running, and not the road—to scrutinize our own complicity with/in settled truths? These questions illuminate important pedagogical and ideological tensions in the work-to-be-done, hopefully chafing against subversion “from the inside” (Maxwell & Roofe, 2020, p. 33). I am still negotiating my position within this curricular and pedagogical in-between the scripts, meta/narratives, pasts, presents, and futures, and how these intersect with, reform, and contour my pedagogical and curricular selves.

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