

# Illuminated Footprints of Nonviolence

## In Hongyu Wang's *Nonviolence and Education: Cross-Cultural Pathways*

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### Introduction

THE STUDY OF NONVIOLENCE pulls the diverse parts of my personal and professional lives together into a place of interconnection and personal growth. In this essay I unpack Hongyu Wang's (2014) text, *Nonviolence and Education: Cross-Cultural Pathways*, and my own *currere* writings, seeking the blurred footprints of nonviolence. These blurred footprints are present but may be nearly impossible to see unless someone looks closely by opening to their presence, recognizing, and embracing them. My engagement with the texts is influenced by my positionality as an educator, private readings, journal entries, and discussions with my colleagues and classmates. In my analysis of Wang's work and in my own experience of *currere*, I find that there is an illuminating characteristic in the storytelling of teachers that can help to make clearer the blurred footprints of nonviolence. When light is cast upon the darkness of violence, greater understanding of nonviolence can occur and can open the curving pathway of nonviolence education to exploration.

Responding to the teacher stories of Wang and her four participants, this essay blends with my autobiographical work to discuss nonviolence and the pathway of nonviolence education. The participants' life-history interviews, along with Wang's insights from her self-inclusion as the fifth participant, are treated as their stories and melded with my autobiographical musings; my story as it resides in my mind and was formulated through the writing of the phases of *currere*. My *currere* experience was based in the work of William F. Pinar (2012) and

involved the writing of my educational experiences through four phases: regressive, progressive, analytic, and syncretical. Taking my ‘self’ as a research participant, I explored my early, future, and present educational experiences and their meanings in my life. In the story writing of *currere* and the reading of Wang’s work, I found nonviolence as dim but present footprints in our experiences of living and of teaching. For me, the pathway of nonviolence education began to open with possibility.

Just as Wang (2014) views “the educational vision of nonviolence” to be a thread that connects her study participants to one another and to her, I view nonviolence as consisting of blurred footprints which can be illuminated in all of our lives (p. xiv). Through my writing and my studies I have come to conceptualize nonviolence as an active and positive force which playfully engages the interconnectedness and relationality of all living beings. I encourage the reader to write his/her own story, seeking the illumination of nonviolence that may reside within as explorations of interconnections with others are explored. Having done this myself, I can now juxtapose Wang’s position with my own “disruptive moments,” calling into question my particular assumptions regarding the inherent nature of violence and illuminating the blurred footprints of nonviolence instead (Wang, 2014, p.136).

In this essay, it would be impossible to attempt to encompass all the many aspects of Wang’s work; therefore, I encourage the reader to engage their own deep reading of this text to find the notion of nonviolence that exists within the ‘self’ (Nagler, 2004, p.76). Here I am going to first, focus on nonviolence and nonviolence education and discuss teacher storytelling through life histories and through *currere*. Then, I will discuss writing as a way of illuminating what lies beneath and the illumination of both emergent and playful footprints of nonviolence and finally, the curving pathway of nonviolence education. As I enter each section of this work I will present my story in italics and Wang’s words, those of her participants, or those of other scholars who write regarding the notion of nonviolence, as quotations.

### **Nonviolence and Nonviolence Education**

It is important to expand upon this notion of nonviolence before we go any further. Michael N. Nagler (2004) argues that nonviolence is innate to humankind and that violence is the result of societal “conditioning” (p.44). According to Wang (2014), “Nonviolence is a positive force that actively engages all parties through the interconnectedness of life” (p.12). Both Wang and Nagler ground their definitions of nonviolence in the Sanskrit term *ahimsa* which Nagler (2004) states means “the absence of the desire, or intention, to harm” (p.44). *Ahimsa* maintains a quality of positivity which engages those who seek interconnection and nonviolence. It is not an ‘absence’ so much as a means to ‘fill the soul’ and to build a bridge from the ‘self’ to the ‘other.’ Engaging the playfulness of nonviolence can further expand possibilities for positivity through internal and external opening to experiences previously ignored or misunderstood.

Interwoven with the notion of nonviolence and of particular importance to curriculum studies scholars and educators alike is the concept of nonviolence education. In her text, Wang (2014) broadly defines what she theorizes as the concept of nonviolence education as “cultivating nonviolent orientations from within, transforming internal negative energies into positive, life-affirmative awareness, and creating compassionate relationships with others within and across national/cultural borders” (p.180). The hope of nonviolence education is to create a change from within, a honing and refining of the ‘self,’ which will then lead to greater connection with others. Arun Gandhi (2003), grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, speaks of his education in nonviolence at Gandhi’s Sevagram Ashram as the learning of internal discipline and

the development of awareness regarding the “implications of anger” while also learning that “to think and act nonviolently does not happen without great effort” (p.76). Arun Gandhi (2003) speaks of the ease at which many people tap into their violent side instead of cultivating the discipline necessary to confront a violent world nonviolently (p.76). He quotes his grandfather as having stated that we must, “live what we want others to learn” (as cited in Gandhi, 2003, p.76). Therefore, in order to establish nonviolence education as part of today’s curriculum we must live nonviolently, putting forth effort when needed, letting the playful side of nonviolence emerge in our work and through our relationships with our students, colleagues, and communities.

How does Wang’s work help others to engage nonviolence and to explore the notion of nonviolence education? I found that the emergent nature of the organic research and writing in both Wang’s study and in my *currere* work, with the inclusion of the researcher as participant, were key to making connections that led to a clearer picture of nonviolence and nonviolence education. Research that is emergent is explained by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) as flexible and open to modifications; it builds understanding and may take a new direction as new knowledge is discovered during the research. Wang (2014) embraced an emergent approach through her questioning techniques and through detailed writings which she undertook in order to better understand her participants and herself through doubled stories and research journal entries. Reading about Wang’s nonviolence awakenings stirred something deep within me as I undertook a semester-long *currere* project. I found that beneath the dominant path of violence I had been carried upon as a child and had tread as an adult that there still lie the potential for nonviolence, in moments, in interactions with others, in dim and blurred footprints. Meeting my ‘self’ weekly as I wrote through the four stages of *currere*, facing the past, formulating the future, analyzing the present and synthesizing both the experienced and wished for ‘self’, *currere* provided a way to view the possibility of nonviolence to my ‘self’ and a bridge to walk softly toward nonviolence to others both personally and in my work as an educator.

This emergent writing process is playful, opening avenues not previously explored, providing a “playful curriculum” for life (Wang, 2014, p.181). Nonviolence embraces a “spirit of playfulness” which encourages one to move beyond separation and boundary to “reach a higher-level sense of interconnectedness” (Wang, 2014, p.14). To become open to this divergent pathway it may be necessary to undertake a “de-education,” a re-learning that makes it possible to invite playfulness into our lives (Wang, 2014, p.102). For example, Wang engaged playfulness as she approached her research when participant Fen insisted they walk around the track, talking with one another and with others during their interview. What emerged from this playful approach was nonviolence to both the participant and the researcher because the interview process was not forced. Through *currere* I found my sense of playfulness awakened as I found the presence of violence to ‘self’ in my past and present but also an underlying hint of nonviolence, especially in the future ‘self’ I playfully imagine as the illuminated person I will become. By teasing out the gentle moments within my anxiety-laden past, I could see light where I had only envisioned darkness. In this manner I became playfully open to what might emerge; possibilities previously ignored opened to nonviolence.

### **Life History as Teacher Storytelling in Context**

When participant and researcher become mutual participants in an open-ended inquiry, storytelling and analysis happen simultaneously (Wang, 2014, p. 72).

*The birds tell their stories, swoop into the birdbath and then into the dog's bowl to eat his food while the spiders build cobwebs to trap the other insects in a predation that is not violence but is simply the way that they sustain themselves. I settle myself into this moment, resting in the peace of this timeless story.*

*Nonviolence and Education: Cross-Cultural Pathways* is, at its most simplistic, the story of four university professors and the female researcher who found a thread of connection between them and herself during a research project on cross-cultural pathways in education. Wang's (2014) approach to her research and her subsequent book is "based on a life history, qualitative study" of two male and two female professors' "stories of encountering a culture different from their own" and how these experiences influenced their educational pathways and led to the unexpected stirrings of what Wang defined as nonviolence (p. xi). Each professor recollected their lived experiences in China and America and spoke about other aspects of their life story. I propose that we can look at these life history interviews, observations, and the subsequent document analysis, as well as Wang's own journal entries, in a broader sense as each participants' 'teacher story.' Life history and story share an emphasis on context, placing the interviewee in a fleshed-out narrative of their experience. Life history seeks to illuminate the "intersection of human experience and social context" while teacher stories *may* illuminate these intersections but does not force their explanation, rather allowing them to weave through the narrative (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 9). The social, cultural, political, and historical contexts exist in both life history and story but are often allowed to weave throughout in a behind-the-scenes manner in story.

Life histories are detailed explorations of participants' lived experiences. Wang (2014) explains that for her study she used a "life history approach because it is situated at the intersection of the individual, society, and history" (p.7). Teacher stories exist without the critical need to establish each aspect of the context in extensive detail. Ivor Goodson (1998) explains life history as a "triangulated account" with "one point of the tripod being the life story" (p. 4). Focusing on this point in the triangle gives an account of the person's life and their emergent story but doesn't require meeting the needs of the other two points of the tripod which include other people's testimony and archives that pertain to the person's life (Goodson, 1998, p.4). By seeking the story aspects of these life history interviews I can compare them to my own story from my *currere* project.

I am not arguing that the complexities of life history can be defined by the term 'story' but rather that story resides within the lived experiences of the participants' life histories. Life histories are shaped and unwind through what Cole and Knowles (2001) call an autobiographical endeavor "where the perspectives of two or more individuals converge and intersect" as the researcher interviews the participant (p. 10). However, teasing out the curving pathway of the teacher participants' stories from their life histories is a playful and nonviolent way to explore their experiences and to connect their experiences with my own work.

### ***Currere as Teacher Storytelling***

*Currere* is about the autobiographical pathways of educational experiences that temporally and spatially situate and transcend the evolution of self to open new possibilities (Wang, 2014, p. 5).

*Currere* has a restorative quality that lends itself to revitalizing one's sense of self. A process of unfolding, *currere* enhances the move towards excavating our interiority and understanding what is going on inside oneself (Hensley, 2011, p. 32).

*In my regressive stage of currere, I uncovered this broken person who had lived much of her life disconnected, invisible, ashamed, anxiously pleasing everyone around her.*

*Currere*, with all of its complexities and potential self-analysis, became for me the story of my past, my present, and an imagined future. As I wrote, I became the storyteller of my own life; illuminating the blurred footprints of my life experience, finding the notion of nonviolence that was previously hidden. This writing of the 'self' became the narrative project which laid bare notions and images both vague and fresh; an emergent and ever changing construction (Goodson, 1998). Anne Lamott (1994) in her book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* says that writing is when "you begin to string words together like beads to tell a story" (p. 7). Finding the beads, the footprints, stringing them together in my own curved pathway, helped me to write my teacher story.

I grounded my semester long *currere* project on the writings of William F. Pinar in *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2012). Pinar (2012) explains that "*currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of one's life (and vice versa)" (p. 45). It entails writing through four steps: 'regressive' in which the participant tries to re-experience the past, 'progressive' where one looks toward a possible future, 'analytic' where the participant follows the footprints of the past through the present and into the dreams of the future, and the 'synthetical' where the meaning of the present is synthesized from the previous work (Pinar, 2012). The focus of my writing was on my educational experiences throughout my childhood, adolescence, undergraduate and graduate school years, as well as twenty plus years of work as a public school educator and what I foresee in my future as a scholar. I analyzed how my earlier educational experiences inhabit the present and provide a bridge to the future as I attempted to assign meaning to my life experiences. Through my writings I found a blurred outline of violence that could not be ignored; violence that was not only structural and external but also spiritual and internal. However, hidden deeper, there was also a hint of nonviolence to 'self' that I had not previously taken the time to name or to follow, nonviolence that could be engaged through focused study.

I entered my *currere* project with very little understanding of the "subtly interconnected biosphere-of life" which Nagler (2004) argues exists among all living beings (p. 31). I had understood violence to be the dominant narrative of life and did not know that it was possible to embrace a notion of nonviolence (p. 31). As Anne Lamott (1994) suggests, when you get serious about writing "you will be dealing with the one thing you've been avoiding all along – your wounds" (p. 234). My wounds, caused by psychological violence to the 'self' and a 'you have to be better than everyone else' mindset, lay waiting within my subconscious. Facing my 'self' each week for an hour, throughout an entire semester, helped me to 'shed the weight' of these experiences (Gbowee, 2011, p. 113). Without the burden of these wounds the nonviolence that exists within could be more readily engaged. When I told my own story, when I debrided my wounds for my 'self' and others to see, I was able to glimpse the footprints of nonviolence that lie intermingled on my life's pathways.

## Blurred Footprints, Illuminated through Writing

*The educational present is currently in transition for me. This melding is essential as it provides a bridge that is not a bridge from the disconnected past and the calming future I envision.*

Both stories and dialogues can be read as a form of data analysis: When participant and researcher become mutual participants in an open-ended inquiry, storytelling and analysis happen simultaneously (Wang, 2014, p. 72).

*My progressive ‘self’ studies ancient principles of peace, writing in free-hand with paper and pen in order to physically experience the fruits of my mind through my body.*

I speak of Wang’s ‘threads’ of nonviolence as being blurred footprints, footprints that can be illuminated and can open the curved pathway of nonviolence education to exploration. Through the writing of ‘life history,’ a teacher story, or in a personal *currere*, nonviolent awakenings may occur. For me, the footprints have become more distinct and I can now more easily see what has been there all along. Knowing nonviolence lies within and can be engaged has allowed me to make the footprints of nonviolence more prominent among the otherwise dominant footprints of violence, leaving the option of playfulness in their interweaving.

How have the blurred footprints of nonviolence become illuminated? In the work of writing, analyzing, and rewriting it is possible to illuminate what lies beneath. Wang (2014) found much of her understandings through writing following her experiences as she transcribed her participants’ interviews and as she wrote and reviewed her research journals. In her book she describes the moment when she found clarity, stating, “all of a sudden, everything came together in my mind in a moment of revelation” (Wang, 2014, p. 1). In her book *Sounds of Silence Breaking: Women, Autobiography, Curriculum*, Janet L. Miller (2005) discusses how “academics need to imagine ways of using experience critically” and using personal writings as a way to reprocess our identities (p. 97). Wang used her writing as a way to work through revisiting places where she had had crucial emotional experiences. She wrote of her wounds from growing up economically poor after the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and being a fellow college student during the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 (Wang, 2014, p. 36). As Wang posed questions, her participants’ minds opened, reliving experiences in light of their present knowledge, and as they shared their stories she wrote them with respect to both their hidden and visible wounds and their personal and professional triumphs. She also allowed her participants to revisit their stories by sharing her writing with them so that they could share any additional thoughts with her. Writing our stories is a natural way for us, as participants in our own lives, to process and analyze our lived experiences.

My *currere* experience, coupled with reading Nagler, Hensley, Gbowee, and Wang while participating in class discussions, brought an inner peace that left room for new engagements. I found I no longer believed in the dominant narrative of a ‘violent nature of humanity’ and began to open my mind to what Nagler (2004) considers our natural (nonviolent) nature (p. ix). When a new thought entered, because I had ‘shed the weight’ in writings and in discussions, there was now room for a new notion and the more I engaged with it through writing the progressive phase of *currere*, envisioning an academic who moves with the grace of inner peace, the stronger the

pathway shone. I wrote of an academic who does not become defensive at the challenges of students or colleagues but instead connects to inner nonviolence, embracing connection in the moment, and approaching conflict in a calm manner. This translated to an immediate change in my practice as an educator despite my having theorized it for a future ‘self’. There was no reason to wait once understanding entered and I found that I faced less inter-personal conflict as I began approaching situations from a place of peace within my ‘self’.

I find an echo of this understanding of the evolution of ‘self’ in Wang’s research participant, Song. Song, who had lived what Wang (2014) calls a “chaotic childhood” (p. 72), has become a “hermit in a cosmopolitan city” (p. 90), seeking to “empty out instrumental concerns and to turn inward for existential insights and wisdom” (p. 114). What he found within belied the violence of his youth and adolescence during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Instead he has found, as he continues to practice yoga and meditation, that stillness speaks from within (Tolle, 2003) even while “nothing in the universe stands still” (Dreher, 1990, p. 11). Song’s disillusion with democracy, modernization, and capitalism led him to return to China after pursuing educational studies and academic positions in the U.S. (Wang, 2014, p. 89). Through inner work he has found a space to engage with nonviolence and now pursues a life partially separated from society but with a deeper focus on inner peace. Writing illuminated what lay intermingled, showing what lay on the curving pathway of the journey within.

#### **Illumination: Emergent Footprints of Nonviolence**

In following each participant’s pathway, this study has become an organic process that integrates body and mind, knowing and being, and East and West to generate insights” (Wang, 2014, p. 141). “Organic research as an emergent process is also nonviolent, following the twists and turns of pathways to curve multiple languages and cultures (Wang, 2014, p. xiii).

*I sat in the office of the ninth house that I have lived in and tried to call home and faced the regressive phase of currere with trepidation. What would come to light from an hour long tiptoeing into what once was and yet still is within the grooves wrought in my psyche? What threads were woven through the synapses and awaited a simple tug to pull free and haunt me with their truths?*

Stories can illuminate. If the writer or reader remains open to possibilities and pathways, illumination may provide detail of emergent footprints of nonviolence. Throughout the organic research process Wang used in her study, she found that analysis and writing became an emergent process as she allowed the nature of the participants’ stories to become the driving force behind the presentation of their stories in the text (Wang, 2014). She interacted with her participants in a “more or less participatory way” and incorporated her own voice with her participants’ stories in both the “data analysis and subsequent writing” (Wang, 2014, p. 143). The clearest example of this occurs in the presentation of Song’s interviews where Wang uses “an experimental style of writing” allowing “the narrative to speak for itself through juxtaposition,” presenting Song’s voice and then hers in a thematically related story (Wang, 2014, p. 71). Song and Wang are mutual storytellers as they revisit their pasts, foresee potential challenges in their futures, and interweave these moments with stories from their present. Wang (2014) states that the intensity of her own emotions, stirred up from revisiting emotionally charged locations from her youth, was “pacified by his [Song’s] dramatic stories” (p. 71). Although Song does not view his personal evolution through the lens of nonviolence, these are

the footprints that emerge as Wang travels throughout her interviews and discussions with him. Once illuminated, the footprints could not be ignored but instead rose to the top of her consciousness.

Song's experiences and the nonviolence understandings that emerge from them are not the only ones awakened through storytelling in this study. David's story is that of a young man who moved from America to China as a teenager and experienced the pain of displacement. It is also the story of his experiences as a professor during the June 4, 1989 bloodshed in Tiananmen Square. There is an emergent sense of nonviolence in his storytelling. Embracing his life experiences and remaining cognizant of the ways they have changed him he has "craft[ed] his experiences into scholarship," influencing others through educational exchange programs which enabled him to achieve greater clarity (Wang, 2014, p. 26). Listening to and then writing and reflecting on David's story provided a clarifying moment for Wang. From his story she was awakened to a "crystal clear vision of nonviolence" (Wang, 2014, p. 54).

During the writing of *currere* I also experienced emergent moments. The premise of my writings was to explore my educational experiences and I was surprised at what emerged from the past in the regressive phase. My childhood educational experiences emerged as moments of humiliation as my grades suffered during my parents' divorce and as an obsessive quest for perfection during adolescence. Early teaching experiences, viewed through my more mature eyes, emerged as power struggles with students and the casting of colleagues into parental roles. Disheartened at what I had found during my writing sessions, I debated discontinuing the process. However, as I read over my entries I discovered that if I deconstructed the violence of abandonment, emotional blackmail (both external and internal), and aggression there were blurred footprints of nonviolence in the kindness of teachers who sheltered a little girl from her classmates' comments, friends' parents who questioned the things I did to myself in the name of perfection, and teaching mentors who taught me how to be a better educator. What emerged from a deeper look was an understanding of the active and positive energy of those around me who had embraced our interconnectedness and carried me on the pathway of nonviolence.

A vision of nonviolence, which rose to the forefront during this study, became clearer as each participant's story and my *currere* phases were written. Through an organic research process, which was both emergent and nonviolent, Wang became the fifth participant in her research and remained open to nonviolence arising in her consciousness. In the same way, reading her work and writing *currere* allowed me to view my own experiences in a different light so that I gained greater awareness of the presence of both violence and nonviolence in my life. This encouraged me to pursue greater engagement with nonviolence and allowed me to see that what emerges from our stories is sometimes raw, sometimes painful, but also potentially healing and playful.

### **Illumination: Playful Footprints of Nonviolence**

Along the way, I have become more playful and more spontaneous in life, and a sense of flow has emerged more often in my teaching. (Wang, 2014, p. 175)

A playful curriculum about, through, and for nonviolence unites teaching content and methods and educational means and end. (Wang, 2014, p. 181)

*Opening to play, finding the joy in the study and the work, felt foreign in my mind.  
Where could I find a playful nature in this violent landscape which has been tread  
so deeply into my mind? Tapping deeper, opening further, the notion of*



*nonviolence, of playfulness, of flowing from experience to experience, began to seem more possible.*

Teacher stories may also show the playful nature of nonviolence threading its way through life experiences. Within each of the participant's stories Wang found a playfulness that can flow from and within nonviolence. Embracing play is grounded in a nonviolent approach to humanity and honors our interconnectedness (Wang, 2014, p. 132). Unfortunately, as I discovered from writing *currere*, play can be strangled by too great a focus on reason and 'truth' (Wang, 2014). However, as nonviolence emerged as a possibility I discovered that there were hints of playfulness threading through my experiences as well. As we remain open, a playful approach to difference can release us from the ties of a dualistic view of right/wrong and open us to the interconnectedness of humanity, allowing a flow and fluidity to life that can help us explore the pathway of nonviolence education.

When research participant Teresa, who grew up in the United States but has spent quite a few years teaching in China, told her teacher story, it became evident that playfulness was a large part of her life. Teresa experienced what she called 'serendipity' as a way of life (Wang, 2014, p. 106). Serendipity, in this sense meaning "unexpected, happy discoveries and good surprises in life," has a playful aspect because it leaves one open to the unexpected and surprising and does not set a linear pathway (Wang, 2017, p. 112). Teresa's belief in serendipity has shaped both her approach to life and the things that she has done in her personal life and in her career. She has used her work as an educator to promote service learning with her students, and has explored varied pedagogic strategies to create "life-changing" classes where her pre-service teachers sometimes experience a "whole-being change" (Wang, 2014, p. 122). Despite differences in pedagogical practices in her Chinese and American classrooms, Teresa has chosen to embrace "experiential learning" with her pre-service teachers (Wang, 2014, p. 120). By not forcing a strict pedagogical approach in her teaching, Teresa is allowing her classes to unfold nonviolently. This playful manner of working with future educators has opened both herself and her students to a different approach to curriculum and has enabled the playful nature of nonviolence to find a foothold in their practice.

In contrast, my teaching career was based in both studies of pedagogical practices and the physical and biological sciences, and I approached my teaching and curriculum development from the position of there being a 'fact' to be proven or disproven and there being only a few appropriate methods to teach the content. When I became a school librarian, I thought that I should be able to uncover the 'fact' or 'truth' that was behind the actions and reasoning of students and teachers. I thought that my life as an intellectual and as an educator meant that I had to maintain a serious demeanor and I felt guilty if an element of play entered my work. Prior to *currere*, I had not yet gone on the journey that would open me to nonviolence, where play is a part of life. Instead, I remained attached to my view of 'truth', of difference, of right/wrong, black/white, and spent more time trying to prove why I was correct than opening channels of communication with my colleagues or my students.

My focus on difference and my previous attachment to a dualistic understanding of right/wrong is not unique. Difference, according to Allan G. Johnson (2006), is a social construct which is often used to value or devalue others. According to Hillary S. Webb in the *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (2014), some theorists believe "binary opposition to be the most fundamental category through which the human mind organizes itself" and that the

“impulse to conceive of the world as split into a duality” may be “hardwired into the human psyche” (p. 539). However, those who practice Zen meditation disagree with this binary view and seek to suspend judgment and focus on non-dualism (Nagatomo, 2010). This approach suggests another way, a viewing of humanity as an interconnected whole that does not need to be categorized and set apart. Song works to cultivate “a non-dualistic mind and an interconnected heart” through mediation and stillness which helps him to find inner peace (Wang, 2014, p. 99). Both Song and I practice meditation which has helped to awaken in both of us a new spirit, less weighted by the violence we have lived and less delineated by socially constructed lines of difference. Rather than viewing difference as a basis for dualism, educators can view the pursuit of nonviolence as a space for seeking interconnection without elevating differences, allowing play to guide their actions.

Influenced by my study of nonviolence and Wang’s work, I wrote the analytic phase of *currere*, weaving my past and my future with my present. I found myself letting in the light of nonviolence and becoming less concerned about right/wrong or difference. My desire for ‘truth’, which I now knew would be tainted by the dominant narrative of violence, had waned and I began to desire a more interconnected view of humanity. In my journaling, scholarly writing, and in my practice, I began to turn instead to the knowledge to be found in mine and other’s lived experiences and stories, in the playful aspects of life. The experiences of Wang’s participants, who did not allow either scientific or cultural reasoning to derail their personal evolutions, echoed my own awakenings as I let in a new light of nonviolence. As educators and as interconnected beings, we opened to playfulness and the pathway of nonviolence education became clearer.

### **Opening the Curving Pathway of Nonviolence Education to Exploration**

*In seasons past I walked the walk of the searching. What lay ahead of me I could not know but what lay behind I had to flee. But in fleeing I missed the meaning, I missed the reasons. Stepping lightly, retracing old and worn pathways, I am able now to see the gentle outlines and find another way.*

In this chapter I tell research stories. An organic flow characterizes this study, although it does not mean that research is a smooth process. It is full of interruptions, contradictions, and unpredictable turns, but an organic whole is formed through a process of curving and interweaving (Wang, 2014, p. 134).

*I am in the process of reuniting the disparate pieces of my emotional ‘self’ and engaging in more authentic relationships with students and colleagues.*

Once the footprints of nonviolence have been illuminated, what is the next step? Wang, her participants, and I experienced illuminated footprints in our stories, and some of us used them to explore the curved and flowing pathways and to cross the bridges, narrow, wide, and non-existent, of nonviolence education. Our journeys, undertaken as both individuals and as interconnected human beings, have found us traveling across and over unfamiliar pathways. Pathways of nonviolence education flow in and out of linear space and time as our lived experiences influence our steps. The notion of nonviolence education rests both on and in this pathway and on and in the curved and flowing branches from the whole which open possibilities

for us to explore different pathways. These pathways continue on into an end which is not an end because the path is laid by human beings and human beings continue to grow and change. With necessary incompleteness, these teacher stories leave us open to hope because they do not “assume one singular, authoritative, and completed...version of self, identity, experience, voice and story” (Miller, 2005, p. 49). They are not the transparent or linear teacher stories which Janet Miller (2005) warns us about, but are instead recursive, ambiguous, and infinite.

The journey of nonviolence and nonviolence education can be navigated through writing and reflection. Writing, reflection, and eventual analysis create a conversation between the disparate parts of our ‘self’ and with others. In Wang’s study this conversation occurs between her and her participants; in *currere* it occurs between the ‘self’ from my past, my present, and my future. This pathway can’t be traveled without the bridges that provide a way to span the spaces between our ‘selves’ and others. Wang (2014) discusses these bridges, explaining that they can span the space between “internal nonviolence with the self” to “external nonviolence with others” (p. 180). This idea of a ‘bridge’ originates with Ted T. Aoki’s work regarding the give and take of authentic conversation. Aoki (1981, 2005) writes that conversation is “a bridging of two worlds by a bridge, which is not a bridge” (p. 228). Pinar (2005) interprets Aoki’s theoretical musings to mean that “conversation is a passage from here to there and elsewhere, but it is not ‘here’ or ‘there’ or ‘elsewhere,’ but in the conjunctive spaces in-between (p. 81). We can bridge these in-between spaces through our conversations with one another and in our complex understandings of the spaces in our own stories. As the pathway of nonviolence education is explored, it is possible that nonviolence may be found dwelling in those in-between spaces waiting to be engaged.

On the pathway of nonviolence education there are bridges to cross or not cross as well as curves to navigate or disregard. The pathway of nonviolence education is not smooth, nor is it straight but rather it curves and flows, unfolding, unraveling, and emerging in similar ways to the stories that we tell about the experiences that we have lived. This curved pathway, reminiscent of Janet Miller’s (2005) mother’s doubled spaces, with the gentle humming of her mind’s private musings interwoven with the sounds of her children playing, opens doors we may not have realized were there for the exploration (p. 79). As Miller (2005) writes, these “doubled spaces, overlapping and intersecting spaces that connect the many passions and commitments” in our lives call for us to construct moments “from webs of connectedness” (p. 81). Song, Teresa, and Wang all experienced curving moments in their life pathways. Song’s experiences during the Cultural Revolution led him to create a method of resistance to violence that was curved (Wang, 2014, p. 94). Teresa’s experiencing of her life as serendipitous and her view of serendipity as spiritual helped her to find “fluid and curved pathways” in her life and in her teaching (Wang, 2014, p. 125). This ability to embrace play and flow instead of following a linear pathway was evidence of engagement with nonviolence in her teacher story and within her teaching. Wang (2014) experienced curves and flow in her doctoral studies and as she allowed herself to become more playful and spontaneous in her life and in her teaching (p. 175). Educators who are willing to remain open to the journey can engage both nonviolence and nonviolence education.

For me, *currere* opened up a curved pathway that allowed a flow and playfulness in my practice as an educator, pulling the blurred footprints into view. Nagler (2004) states that violence “cries out to be repaired,” and I can see this happening in the current moments of my life (p. 35). In the present I am working to pull together my pieces; putting my professional and personal lives together as they have never been before. I write myself through the anxiety that

attempts to blind me from the pathway and which hides the footprints in darkness. As the steps are lit, I find myself better able to help my students and colleagues because I am more connected to them through better connection to my ‘self’. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1957/1986) said that “at the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love” (p. 8). This is where I find myself in this present moment, ready to love others by living a nonviolent life of service and to love my ‘self’ as well. As Martin (2009) tells us, “Living honestly and authentically means listening to, attending to, and living from the inside out instead of clinging to inauthentic outer expectations and appearances” (p. 105). Living authentically, living nonviolently, is now the most important part of my practice and my life.

### Conclusion

#### Nonviolence Education: The Pathway Lies Illuminated

*Through teacher storytelling, the blurred footprints of nonviolence are illuminated and can open the curving pathway of nonviolence education to exploration.*

Teacher stories make it possible to illuminate the blurred footprints of nonviolence which may lie hidden in our experiences. Once the footprints are illuminated, the curving pathway of nonviolence education opens to exploration, flowing and turning while remaining both recursive and open-ended. Telling and writing teacher stories and writing autobiographical teacher stories through *currere* open pathways of nonviolence education. In her book, Wang (2014) draws attention to aspects of nonviolence that are important for education, namely: a sense of interconnectedness with others, relational dynamics that draw human beings to rise above hate and conflict, a nonviolent relationship with the ‘self,’ noncooperation with violence, and a playful spirit (pp. 12-13). In Wang’s study she found aspects of these nonviolence principles in her participants’ teacher stories and I found them as well in my *currere*. Engaging nonviolence through these principles opens educators to opportunities to explore ways of living and interacting with others that can awaken greater understanding for nonviolence education.

The aspects of nonviolence education that Wang discusses in her text show us new pathways that may be explored in the future. A sense of interconnectedness opens up new relationship possibilities for educators with their internal ‘self’ and with others. Closer relationships with colleagues, students, and parents can be bridged through greater mutual understandings which help individuals learn from one another. As the teacher becomes the student and the student becomes the teacher, mutual understandings grow. Greater understandings can create healing relational dynamics that can help human beings to rise above hate and conflict (Wang, 2014). Interacting with others and being open to building relationships across differences enables us to see that all human beings deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Interaction ties us to one another in the South African tradition of *ubuntu* where it is understood that “a person is a person through other persons” (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). Through play, teachers may also find ways to be nonviolent with their ‘self.’ This playfulness, which leaves human beings receptive to self-analysis and to change, makes nonviolence possible because nonviolence to the ‘self’ leads to greater nonviolence to others. I have experienced this in my own practice; as I have become more engaged with nonviolence I have become better able to make connections with others because I am more at peace. This has created greater interpersonal bonds with students and colleagues and greater compassion and understanding when dealing with others.

A study of nonviolence may also engage educators in the notion of ‘noncooperation with violence.’ If, as an educator, I do not condone the structural violence of an autocratic educational system or the relational violence of the bullying of students by students or teachers by teachers, then I am setting an example for engaging nonviolence. Instead of remaining silent regarding the violence that continues as the dominant narrative in our educational practices of high-stakes testing and punitive teacher evaluation, I can embrace non-cooperation with de-humanizing tactics through conversations with those in authority. Finally, if I embrace playfulness with others rather than seeking a pre-conceived result or ‘truth’ then a flow and openness will develop in my practice. I have already seen small examples of this as I have opened myself to playful conversations that have turned into deeper connections. Working with students and colleagues without trying to control each aspect of the interaction has opened my ‘self’ and my practice to playfulness and light.

Throughout the *currere* process, in the gift that has been the finding of the footprints of nonviolence in my own curved journey to a more nonviolent way of living, I have found an emergent thread of nonviolence through writing. In my *currere* project, during the regressive phase, I wrote of my life wounds and the anxiety that drove me both academically and personally. The writing and storytelling process helped me to ‘shed the weight’ that had tied me to a past of violence and that kept me from being able to envision a present or a future of nonviolence. Into the space left behind I was able to write into being a new person who could rise from the pathway of lived violence and spread the notion of nonviolence to others. Teacher storytelling through *currere* can open the door for making connections and placing firmer footprints along the curved pathway of nonviolence education. I encourage educators to explore the telling of their stories, to write their experiences and to make room for the light to reach the blurred footprints of nonviolence so they can explore their own pathway of nonviolence education.

Hongyu Wang’s work in *Nonviolence and Education: Cross-Cultural Pathways* can be a lamppost on the pathway of nonviolence education. The rich interviews have provided the teacher stories of the four participants and the researcher and have opened a space for our own stories, whether through *currere* or teacher journals or other devices, to interweave and bring our own blurred footprints of nonviolence into the light. An awareness of nonviolence in our lives can lead us to greater connections with others and to nonviolence education which can create a better world for all.

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