

# Inspiriting the Proleptic Spirituality in a Postmodern Curriculum to Advance Well-Being in Schools

ALYCIA ELFREICH  
*Indiana University*

The act of theorizing is an act of faith, a religious act.... *Curriculum theorizing is a prayerful act.* It is an expression of the humanistic vision of life. (MacDonald, 1995, p. 181)

NEOLIBERAL THEORY SATURATES CURRENT EDUCATIONAL REFORM efforts and touts privatization, individualism, competition, and accountability systems (Harvey, 2005) that support a corporate governance structure that constricts curriculum and dispossess people, spirit, and history (Fine, 2012). Further, our current authoritarian tactics in addressing curriculum ultimately instill an “order in society and discipline in young people by emphasizing ‘cognitive skills’” (Pinar, 2012, p. 17). Pinar (2012) states that “accountability” is not about “learning” per se, but about controlling what we teach our children and, thus, controlling curriculum. In the end, the control of the mind separates learning from both the social and the subjective, while teachers are nothing more than technicians managing student productivity and the schools are hubs for business and corporate acquisitions. Consequently, the measurement of student intelligence is viewed as the acquisition of knowledge through cognitive skills that further a means to an end (Pinar, 2012). Instead, this paper moves forward under the premise in which,

The point of public education is to become an individual, a citizen, a human subject engaged with intelligence and passion in the problems and pleasure of his or her life, problems and pleasures bound up with the problems and pleasures of everyone else in the nation, everyone on this planet. (Pinar, 2012, p. 228)

Thus, it is with fervent obligation to students who attend our public schools that they be provided with the opportunity to grapple with their own histories and experiences and be afforded the opportunity to subjectively understand themselves and the world through the curriculum they study (Pinar, 2012). Through this curriculum, students will nurture a subjective well-being brought about

by enduring questions of human experiences, instead of economic development and productivity (Spring, 2007).

Pinar (2012) further discusses the premise of “self-formation” through academic study, which is illuminated through *currere* and ultimately seeks to understand the relationship between academic studies and one’s life. Here, we move away from traditional understandings of education into a realm that allows us to explore ways to create new relationships. To truly know each other requires an openness and vulnerability that forces us to break away from present forms of knowledge that reinforce our current forms of past, present, and future. Indeed, it is through our vulnerabilities that *currere* fully embodies who we are and how we are in relation to ourselves and with others, particularly in regard to understanding ourselves through intersections of schooling, society, culture, and politics.

Specifically, *currere* points to autobiographical, self-situated study that illuminates a “subjective reconstruction of academic knowledge and lived experience” (Pinar, 2012, p. 45). Thus, it is impossible to detach the social from the subjective. The fluidity of this method is realized in the subjective understanding of ourselves in the world that draws upon our possible futures, our fears, and our fantasies of fulfillment. Indeed, Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995) parallel *currere* to Fowler’s understanding of “human faith” as a way of learning and constructing the meaning of life. Similarly, it provides a space in which we explore matters of faith in curriculum theory as “more verb than noun, faith is the dynamic system of images, values, and commitments that guide one’s life. It is thus universal; everyone who chooses to go on living operates by some basic faith” (as cited in Pinar et al., 1995, pp. 628-629). Finally, as Pinar (2012) and others (e.g., Dillard, 2006; Huebner, 1999; Slattery, 2013) acknowledge, this is always an introspective journey with ourselves, first and foremost, that ultimately gives us the insight and courage to engage with others.

It is precisely this complicated conversation that guides the rest of this paper in a theological approach to the necessity of well-being as a vital component of curriculum in schools. However, within this complicated conversation, I want to be very clear this is *not* a proclamation of faith, nor is this an allegiance to any organized religion. Further, this is not a testament of how traditional understandings of faith got me through anything. In fact, it is quite the opposite. My hope is that this conversation pushes us to move past conventional faith grounded in institutionalization that has oppressed, marginalized, and isolated. As Purpel and McLaurin (2004) remind us, these topics are uncomfortable for all of us because they carry emotional baggage. In the extremist sense, spirituality in a literal representation suggests that “the need for certainty outweighs the perceived need for inspiration” (p. 221). Literal representations aside, I hope to push uncomfortable notions of discourse into an understanding that a spiritual life is a conscious practice and one that unites the way we think and act (hooks, 2000). It is not grounded in a particular religion, but instead acknowledges a nonmaterial (beyond material) understanding that recognizes our own self-histories, “who we imagine ourselves to be, and our embodied relationships with others” (Somerville, 2007, p. 234).

### The Proleptic Task

Wisdom, Happiness, and Courage are not waiting somewhere out beyond sight at the end of a straight line; they’re part of a continuous cycle that begins right here. They’re not only the ending, but the beginning as well. (Hoff, 1992, p. 118)

Slattery's (2013) vision of postmodern curriculum development frames the examination of well-being, specifically addressing the integration of theological text via proleptic eschatology. The notion of the proleptic is cognizant of the past, present, and future and is accordingly "viewed as that which brings to completion what has already been set in motion and replaces the modern concept of time that denies the future and promotes immediate self-gratification" (p. 112). Proleptic eschatology further provides a nuanced perspective into well-being that creates possibilities to adopt curricular approaches that embrace diversity, eclecticism, and ecumenism. This "proleptic task" of well-being curriculum will endeavor to create meaningful moments instead of delaying or projecting meaning and purpose, as this is the "urgent ethical mandate of contemporary living" (p. 87).

Indeed, the reconceptualization of curriculum studies is a constant reminder that the personal, historically rooted, subjective experiences of students must be at the forefront of curriculum development. Yet, subjective experiences of religion and spirituality both inspire and alienate. Although we say our democratic principles embrace the separation of Church and State, religion is often a considerable factor in many school curriculum controversies. Undeniably, religion is a hidden (or not so hidden) curriculum that becomes contentious in subject areas such as sex education, censored literature, LBGTQ issues, and intelligent design proposals (Slattery, 2013). Thus, in order to unveil the religious impositions we see on curricular conceptualizations within schools, it is necessary to enact "philosophical investigation, critical evaluation, spiritual meditation, and historical analysis, which are the hallmarks of a theological curriculum in the postmodern era" (p. 82).

However, in order to embrace these facets of a theological curriculum, it is equally as necessary to recognize the modernist suppression of religious and spiritual educational approaches that have dominated public schools, which include an American history rooted in racism, sexism, militarism, and colonialism in the churches, the tradition of privatization of matters of the spirit within the United States, the rise of religious fundamentalism and the impact it has on our educational institutions, and "scientific empiricism and reductionism that denigrates religion as superstitious and enshrines materialistic atheism" (p. 94). Slattery (2013) further suggests that modernist approaches to curriculum deemphasize autobiography, ethnography, phenomenology, spirituality, ecumenism, and narrative research. Within this understanding of the current state of curriculum studies, students are focused upon individualistic approaches that induce a suspended time and space that does not favor the establishment of personal relationships or a comprehensive understanding of the influence of past experiences and actually promotes cultural isolationism.

To counteract this modernist approach to curriculum development, Slattery (2013) enacts the process of "curriculum of theological as text" (p. 97) as a movement or rumination. He does so through a revisionary postmodern view of religious education that is based upon a phenomenological understanding that is grounded in diversity, eclecticism, and ecumenism that embraces proleptic eschatology. Furthermore, diversity is needed in the study of world religions and scriptural texts, as:

the rebirth of theology in contemporary curriculum research is embedded in the spirituality, religious myth, and oral rituals, the *ruach ephphatha* (spoken breath) of communities and cultures that experience divine revelation, cosmological harmony, and the journey toward wisdom. (Slattery, 2013, p. 107)

Eclecticism supports this “rebirth” as it does not maintain a single set of assumptions or paradigms, but instead, draws upon multiple theories to gain particular insight into a subject. Additionally, eclecticism offers a de-centering approach to curriculum, subsequently moving away from truth at the core, and instead pushes towards the margins and borders, which becomes a vital component of this paper as we proceed. In the same manner, ecumenism advocates for dialogue and cooperation across differences of any kind within a global context. Finally, proleptic eschatology is cognizant of the past, present, and future, transcends linear segmentation of time, and creates meaningful connections in each present moment, rather than delaying meaning and purpose (Slattery, 2013). The proleptic also embodies a holistic understanding of interconnectedness, and the future is viewed as “that which brings to completion what has already been set in motion” (p. 112), and the past and the future are integral to a self-reflective spirituality. It is precisely this framework that embraces a postmodern approach to curriculum development and creates a space for spirituality within education and nurtures students to bring their whole selves to their learning environment, rather than leaving a part of themselves outside of the classroom (Dillard, 2006).

### **Reframing Theology, Religion, and Spirituality Within a Postmodern Educational Context**

We’re not supposed to remember such otherworldly events. We’re supposed to ignore, forget, kill those fleeting images of the soul’s presence and of the spirit’s presence. We’ve been taught that the spirit is outside our bodies or above our heads somewhere up in the sky with God. We’re supposed to forget that every cell in our bodies, every bone and bird and worm has spirit in it. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 58)

### **Defining the Spirit**

Up until this point, I have used theology, religion, and spirituality somewhat interchangeably. However, out of respect to a postmodernist perspective, each word has its own nuanced historical etymology and, thus, influences our present discourses differently. Indeed, there has been much written over the centuries attempting to explain the meaning of each word, and disagreeing interpretations have led to events such as the Crusades, inquisitions, witch burnings, and excommunications (Slattery, 2013). In addition, religion is usually associated with denominational practices and beliefs, while theology is considered more of a systematic and rational study of faith and the holy, especially in relation to patterns of meaning that exist within a particular historical period or culture (Cox, 1984). Noddings (as cited in Halford, 1999) echoes Cox (1984) and Slattery (2013) when she situates spirituality within an attitude or way of life that recognizes the spirit, while religion is the manner in which spirituality is exercised and usually requires an institutional affiliation. Spirituality tends to lie within the realm of personal faith and supernatural revelation (Slattery, 2013). As spirituality most fully realizes the proleptic and encapsulates theology as text, it is helpful to spend some time working through spirituality within a curricular context.

Huebner (1999) questions whether the words “spirit” and “spiritual” in education impose religious traditions within the educational enterprise. He then posits that the use of the word “spirit” has less to do with religious traditions or contexts but is often used to suggest “drive, optimism, hope, enthusiasm, acceptance of one’s condition” (p. 342). However, “spirit” and

“spiritualism” are associated with many diverse religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, as well as various Native American and African religions. Indeed, all of these religious traditions acknowledge the spiritual as an integral aspect of human life, as “to speak of the ‘spirit’ and the ‘spiritual’ is not to speak of something ‘other’ than humankind, merely ‘more’ than humankind as it is lived and known” (p. 343). Further, Purpel and McLaurin (2004) suggest spirituality is representative of the myriad ways people realize spirit and soul in their lives and “*transforms the human participant* in some profound sense for the better” (p. 221). If we accept this understanding of the spiritual, then we must understand that spirituality is not necessarily assuming ontological religious considerations. Indeed, spirit comes from the Latin word, *spiritus*, which means “breath” or “breathing.” With this in mind, spirit refers to that which gives life; it indicates life can be more; and there are aspects of life that make possible something new and offer hope in the possibility of new ways, knowledge, new relationships, new awareness (Huebner, 1999). These possibilities embody both the spirit and spirituality that Dillard (2006) suggests defy definition and “*is all that is*” (p. 41, emphasis in original).

### Knowing the Spirit

Is it possible to know spirituality? Huebner’s (1999) answer is no. For him, and for others who agree (Dillard, 2006; Hanh, 1987; Macdonald, 1995; Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr, & Kates, 2005; Palmer, 1966), what may be understood as the spiritual is an understanding of personal experience and the many transforming and transcending moments in one’s life. Consequently, knowledge of self allows an awareness in consciousness, a social fabric, a vulnerability, and an availability for others and emergent relationships to develop, all of which are within the realm of knowing the spirit. Indeed, Dillard (2006) further knows the spiritual through a consciousness that involves choosing to be in a relationship with the divine power of all things. From this consciousness and epistemological knowing of the spirit, this perspective illuminates the engagement of the human journey as long as we have breath—for knowing the spirit is becoming fully human, “the very work of being human” (p. 42). Once “it is no longer ours, the human journey ends. But our spiritual essence continues to work, in a different realm, unencumbered by the body” (p. 41).

Thus, we begin to see an understanding of the proleptic. We are not continuously waiting and looking out across a straight line, but are consistently engaged in a continuous cycle, both beginning and an end, constantly looking forward while engaging with the past, all the while focusing on the present (Hoff, 1982). Therefore, knowing the spirit engages in knowing the “narrative, historical poetic and mythical” traditions of people and communities and the sacredness in which they have allegiance to them and how they situate them in the life and history of the community (Huebner, 1999, p. 347). These traditions connect people to the experiences that allow them to remain open, available, and vulnerable so they can participate in experiences of transcendence. However, this is not a knowledge-producing discipline, and in fact, Huebner (1999) again reiterates that there are no modes of knowing the spiritual, and what we are really referencing is knowing one’s self, others, and their traditions. Accordingly, to claim spiritual modes of knowing is “to assume privileged access to realms of experience, knowing that would be free from the rules and warrants governing the forms of knowing” (p. 348). However, if we understand how modes of knowing permeate the construction of the spiritual, we also understand that they cannot be separated. Huebner (1999) states that every mode of knowing is open, vulnerable, available,

and forms of knowing are “always incomplete, always fallible” (p. 349). Every sort of knowing is also a manner of being in a relationship of mutual care and love, as well as a mode of waiting, hoping, and expectancy. The nature of knowing is participation in the continual creation of the universe and witnesses the transcending possibilities of human life (Huebner, 1999).

In keeping with the theological curriculum framework provided by Slattery (2013), curriculum development should be viewed “as a cyclical process where the past and future inform and enrich the present rather than as a linear arrow where events can be isolated, analyzed, and objectified” (p. 22). Likewise, if we are to be open and vulnerable to this interpretation of spirituality and curriculum development, we must open to new forms of knowledge and accept that “present forms of knowledge, which relate the person to the vast otherness in the world and which hold together past, present, and future, must be acknowledged as limited, fallible, insufficient” (Huebner, 1999, p. 350). Indeed, when these new forms emerge, old ways of knowing “must give way to relationship,” and “love takes priority over knowledge” (Huebner, 1999, p. 350). In religious traditions, we see the story of human life that celebrated openness, love, and hope, but this spiritual acknowledgement of life is not carried over into educational institutions. Schools are “not places of knowing, but places of knowledge.... Knowledge is form separated from life” (Huebner, 1999, p. 351). Thus, we enter into the realm of spirituality and curriculum.

### ***Currere(ing) the Spirit***

*Currere* of the spirit promotes Pinar’s (2012) complicated conversation within the realm of curriculum theory as it moves away from course objectives toward complicated conversation and further embodies who we are and how we are in relation to ourselves and with others. Additionally, *currere* offers a fluid subjectivity that calls for a conversation with oneself and with others “threaded through academic knowledge, an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized in engagement in the world” (Pinar, 2012, p. 47). Furthermore, by “threading our own subjectivity through the social forms and intellectual constructs” (Pinar, 2012, p. 229) discovered through learning, we draw upon our innate passions through participating in the world. *Currere* affords the capability, then, of having a conversation both intersubjectively and intrasubjectively. Indeed, consciously studying ourselves elaborates and re-forms our relationships with ourselves, as we are unable to detach the social from the subjective. Thus, an inspired *currere* promotes learning and constructing the meaning of life (Pinar et al., 1995), that embraces the human experience, that continually searches to “find our inner being or to complete one’s awareness of wholeness and meaning as a person” (MacDonald, 1995, p. 87).

As we search for this completion in meaning as a person in relation to others, we negotiate between the communal and ourselves; traditional temporal understandings transform from historical understandings of education into the temporality of the character structure of the individual. Pinar (2012) further elaborates,

Such a view of knowledge is congruent with the understanding of curriculum as a “complicated conversation,” disclosing, as that phrase does, the relational character ideas, in relation not only one to the other, but pointing as well to their embodiment and personification in individual lives, their origin and expression in social movements and trends, their rootedness in the historical past, their foreshadowing of our individual and national futures, and our future as a species as well. (p. 232)

Huebner (1999) echoes this same understanding of temporality in that the notion of time derives out of human existence, and thus, the future is looking inward in anticipation of a personal potentiality for being, while the present is the moment of vision that projects its own potentiality of being. In other words, life does not reside in the future, or lie grounded in the past, but rather is the present made up of both the past and future brought into the moment. Consequently, the current perspective on public education “recognizes, assumes responsibility for, and maximizes the consequences of this awareness of man’s temporality. Furthermore, the categories of learning, goal, purpose, or object point to this awareness” (p. 137). Thus, the goal of education must become the envisioning of our “own projected potentiality for being as it exists in the past-present-future” (p. 141). Once again, this is the proleptic task, which emphasizes both the knowing of the spirit as well as a cognizance that separating the spirit from learning creates an inert knowledge that does not place spiritual life with any kind of intentionality (Huebner, 1999).

Finally, *currere* of the spirit insists upon co-creation. That is, we must know each other, through the creation of new relationships that require an openness and vulnerability in order to break away from the present forms of knowledge, which hold together past, present, and future, and are, thus, limited (Pinar, 2012). Indeed, to allow new forms of knowledge to emerge, love then “takes priority over knowledge” (Huebner, 1999, p. 350). Freire (1970) further legitimates love as central to dialogue and relationships as it is an act of courage, a commitment to others, and a commitment to cause. Knowledge must be in-spirited and must be achieved through a complicated conversation of communication and emergent relationships with others that create a social reconstruction of the public sphere. Ultimately, self-knowledge and collective witnessing within education are projects of subjective and social reconstruction that enliven the spirit and move towards an understanding of

positionality as engaged with yourself and with your students and with your colleagues in the construction of a public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be discerned in, or perhaps even thought from, the present. (Pinar, 2012, p. 47)

It is here I will engage in my personal understandings that inform this paper, my relationships with education, my understanding of spirituality, and the ways these have shaped my vision of the proleptic within my own worldview.

## **My Proleptic Journey**

### **A Transparent (and Inspired) Transcendence**

This journey I am attempting to take through postmodern curriculum theorizing via proleptic eschatology insists on grappling with subjective, lived experiences to understand how our pasts impact the present as we look towards the future. Some of the most impactful moments of our lives often uncover a transparency and vulnerability that truly show who we are in the relationships we have with others. I cannot do this without acknowledging the pivotal, life-changing circumstances that occurred between my first and second years of teaching and, thus, provide a clearer perspective of why I am writing this paper. I wholeheartedly believe an inspired curriculum supports and nurtures the well-being of students and frees us from old ways of knowing

and gives way to the story of human life celebrated with openness, love, and hope (Huebner, 1999). It is here I engage in the complicated conversation that acknowledges the cyclical, interconnected nature of our histories, our current circumstances, and our movements towards the future. Indeed, it is this self-reflective spirituality that allows me to focus on my own well-being and draws upon Macdonald's (1995) conceptualization of centering. Further, centering as the focus of education embraces the potential of all students and places knowledge "in the base or ground from which it grows" (p. 88). Yet, centering is inherently spiritual. It is not an individual process, but a perceptual awareness that is communal, relational, and draws upon inner strength. Finally, a proleptic centering creates possibilities to adopt curricular approaches that recognize diversity, push towards margins and borders, and advocate for dialogue and cooperation across differences of any kind within a global context (Slattery, 2013). Below, I offer a brief description of the spiritual centering in my own life.

I run. Sometimes I am running away, and sometimes I am running towards something, but I always run. I run to escape pain. I run to feel pain. I run to get ahold of my emotions. I run because I feel great. I run to feel better. I run to have clarity. I run to write. Writing and running are intrinsically interconnected. I cannot do one without the other. These are an interwoven piece of my existence that primarily rely upon my embodied, physical moments. Indeed, there is a deeply embedded connection between my body and writing—in how I learn, understand, communicate, teach. It is how I make sense of the world. Both writing and running are cathartic, and tortuous, and things I cannot live without. Sometimes, I feel like I could run a marathon; the next day, I feel like my lungs will explode. Metaphorically, writing is exactly the same—I am either running the best race of my life or sure I am about to pass out from exhaustion.

There is a transcendence in both running and writing. I never listen to music when I do either, as I feel it is a distraction from the experience. Running and writing are not only beneficial for my health, they are also integral parts of my own personal well-being. The physicality of these practices requires an inward gaze that connects the body, mind, and soul. For example, when I visit a new city, the first thing I do is go for a run. It is a great way for me to geographically learn the city, but it is also how I make personal connections to the unknown. When I close my eyes right now, I can remember exactly what a city sounded like, what it smelled like, and how I felt in that moment of running. Alternatively, I can recall the breeze, the salty air, and the densely packed sand under my feet when I run along the beach the last time before I head back home. At any moment, I can close my eyes and draw upon the complete calm that comes over my body. Again, I draw upon my breath and my senses to further connect inward. These lone activities help me connect to the rest of the world in ways, I am aware, I don't fully understand as they integrate the sacred and the mundane. The connection to the outside world, the power or (sometimes) wheezing sounds of my breath, and the surge of my heartbeat entangles my emotions and my thoughts. Profoundly spiritual, it creates a space for me to think clearly, to languish emotionally, to introspectively understand myself with and amongst others. Yet even in the discomfort, I fully explore those feelings on my run in order to move on (or deal head on) with them. Running transcends time, place, and offers clarity in the present moment. And in this clearness, I write.

Again, writing often enters into dark spaces space that challenge conceptions of who I think I am, yet Anzaldúa (1987) suggests the dark spaces move us into a generative connectedness:

My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body.... For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative

power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth’s body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. (pp. 95-97)

As I have previously mentioned, writing can often be tortuous because it is so closely tied to who I am. For me, this is a description of the spiritual. When I am running, an awareness, or clarity, derives from the pounding of my heart, the quiet opportunity to think, and the material world around me. With this clarity, if even for a brief moment, I find an inner strength that helps me write more profoundly, communicate more thoughtfully, or just work through a really bad day.

Further, writing has strengthened relationships and healed in ways that have been central in my life. There is something to be said for recognizing the spiritual in the mundane, that which is easily taken for granted until life forces us to confront situations that quickly put things into perspective and often ignites possibilities for hope and transcendence that engage difference by digging deeply into ourselves to unearth relationships with others.

### **Unexpected Loss and the Reconstruction of Self**

In fall of my third year of teaching, I received a phone call early one Sunday morning that my brother was in a car accident in North Carolina. He had been drinking that night and attempted to drive to his apartment. The inevitable result was an accident that resulted in the death of his childhood friend. My brother was charged with vehicular homicide and was put in jail. I had moved to Indianapolis, so I taught at a public middle school during the week, and my family and I alternated weekends driving to North Carolina, sitting in jail just so he would not be alone. He and I wrote letters back and forth, all of which I have kept. In fact, it was our only means of communication. The following summer, my best friend died in a porch-collapse in Chicago. During this significant time of loss, both my brother in jail and my closest friend’s accident, he and I could only write to one another. Below, I have provided my brother’s words. This was his first response to me about the loss of my friend. At the time, it was quite surreal to have my brother in jail consoling me about the loss of my best friend. Here, writing became a creative act, one of humor and despair, but transformative in my relationship to my brother. I still read his letters regularly when I need to feel rooted in who I am. They are also a reminder of the inner strength that exists differently for so many, but ultimately, they speak to the shaping forces that connect who we are in relation to others.

I know I couldn’t be there for you when I should have, so I thought I would write you... Time will heal your wounds. I know nothing makes sense right now and you’re asking yourself, why her? I’ve found the only thing that comforts me was that it was God’s will. It was no one’s fault, but just part of God’s plan. You know, I’m not very religious. And I’m not saying a specific God, but something beyond you and I control these things. I truly believe that. If you can find some meaning, or a shred of positive light, you’ll understand. It took this [the accident] to believe in God again. There was a time when I didn’t have any faith. But that sign gave me hope. You must grieve first and then try to find meaning... You, as a person have to keep going. She would want you to keep moving. Once you find meaning in all this, you will be ready to move on with your life and hopefully be a better person for it.... I love you very much and think about you often. (Personal Letter, July, 2003)

This letter, and of course the events leading up to this letter, were life-changing for me and for the ways in which I looked at education and schooling, even though it would be years after when I finally made the connection and acknowledged the proleptic.

At that point in my own life, to use Whitlock's (2007) words, the "in-between spaces of balance, the inward striving simplicity with the outward movement toward community, a sort of mystical interconnectedness" (p. 20) made education and teaching profoundly spiritual for me. I made sense of my own life through the relationships I developed with my students while I craved a balance and simplicity in my life that often disappears as a result of overpowering loss. As I negotiated my own well-being, falling in and out of feelings of overwhelming grief, anger, and anxiety, the interconnectedness of my visceral need for both running and writing centered me in ways that directly impacted my teaching. Purpel and McLaurin (2004) describe this as a continued strength that pushes us beyond self-deception within ourselves and others—the perception and capacity needed to teach. In a very vulnerable space filled with grief and emotion, I finally realized the years I spent in isolation. It was also in that moment that I found a renewed commitment and altered perception of my students and their well-being. I knew what I was going through and consequently had greater compassion and empathy for the everyday struggles they faced. They were by no means the same, but I held on to the fact that our collective lives, within our classroom, gave us all some assurance that life could be enhanced rather than destroyed (Huebner, 1999).

Indeed, our lived experiences were intertwined on our journeys to self-realization (Pinar, 2004), but this is, of course, hindsight and reflection. If only I had made the connection sooner that the hope I was clinging to for mental and emotional survival could have the same transcendent effects on the students I was teaching. I now ask myself, what would have been different if I embraced the proleptic and the spiritual in the present moment and acknowledged our worldviews as interconnected histories that guide us in the spiritual work of love, healing, and transformation? I wish I could say I knew. But in reality, I knew that teaching was my space to breathe. It gave me life. My students offered me hope, new awareness, and new ways of knowing through their eyes, their experiences, and the relationships we developed in the classroom (Huebner, 1999). Although I do not know for sure, I would like to hope that I offered them some of the same. I do not know because at that point, in the face of tragedy, I was stripped down to my most raw and vulnerable self, not realizing the full impact an inspired curriculum could have on my students. However, it is also in that space that I fundamentally understood my place in education and explored "the most profound issues of the human heart and soul" (Pinar, et al. 2004). Thus, teaching was not about content and test scores, but about the well-being of my students. From my own personal experiences, it is impossible to separate the mind, body, and spirit, especially within the realm of knowledge and learning. As I desperately tried to make sense of my own life, I became more committed to understanding the lives of my students and their own healing.

### **Beyond the Secularization of Well-Being**

The healing power of mind and heart is always present because we have the capacity to renew our spirits endlessly, to restore the soul. (hooks, 2000, p. 210)

## An Isolated Incident

Generally, well-being is viewed separately and as less important than traditional modes of learning, which often include raising test scores. Again, curriculum as theological text via proleptic eschatology engages the body, mind, and spirit and acknowledges an interconnected path of education and schooling. Thus, curriculum theory embraces the truth of the present and insists on complicated conversation that moves away from the curriculum as status quo into a curriculum of theological text that supports transcendence and consciousness (Pinar, 2012). Slattery (2012) parallels Pinar's curriculum as theological text as he envisions education as a "projected potentiality for being as it exists in the past-present-future" (p. 141). Indeed, there is no room to isolate well-being, but instead we must integrate it as a fundamental aspect of our existence, as learning that does not place spiritual life with any kind of intentionality is inert knowledge (Huebner, 1999).

Likewise, Macdonald's (1995) conceptualization of centering as the aim of education requires both the completion and creation of the full potential of each human being, thus, drawing upon axiological, social, psychological, and epistemological components that nurture spirituality as an integral component of curriculum theory. He states:

Centering does not mean mental health. Though I have no quarrel with the intentions of people who want everyone to be mentally healthy, the term is too ridden with a psychologism that limits our perspective about human beings. It appears as a statistical concept, and those who are mentally healthy may in fact be "other-directed" persons, having little sense of a core or center. (p. 87)

Because of the dichotomy between well-being and academic knowledge, well-being is often difficult to address within American public schools. Consequently, there is no clear-cut definition, and this often leads to confusion and uncertainty in how to proceed in defining well-being within the school setting (Coleman, 2009). It is often defined as "freedom and choice" (Markus & Schwartz, 2010), "academic resilience and buoyancy" (Martin & Marsh, 2006), as well as addressing a general "happiness." Additionally, well-being in schools is often referred to as social and emotional learning (SEL), which is defined as: "the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably" (Zins & Elias, 2006, p. 234). Much of this work is founded on Howard Gardner's (1993) *Multiple Intelligences* and Goleman's (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*. Indeed, this seems to be the preeminent route American schools have taken when talking about well-being within educational environments. Other work surrounding well-being tends to be focused on addressing specific issues such as bullying and violence in schools and is mostly situated in school psychology work and publications (for example, Furlong & Smith, 1998). Furthermore, very few schools incorporate any meaningful curriculum surrounding well-being. When well-being is addressed in schools, it is most often done separately from classroom learning, and in my experience as both a teacher and licensed school counselor, it is the equivalent of a "pull out" program that addresses immediate crisis management or an intervention after a problem arises. Thus, a student's well-being becomes secondary to standardized exams and general content knowledge.

Indeed, it is clear that we do not value well-being over accountability, standardization, specialized knowledge, and the acquisition of cognitive skills. It is even more evident that, if (and when) well-being is addressed in schools, we “toe the line” and immediately begin to provide standardized, assessment-based approaches when addressing well-being in conjunction with social emotional learning (SEL). There is work coming out of Chicago through the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and they claim to be a “leading voice in studying, defining and promoting SEL for nearly 20 years” (Weissberg & Cassarino, 2013, p. 10). CASEL promotes SEL in schools that embraces self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, and reduces disruptive behavior, bullying, and emotional distress, such as depression. CASEL further suggests that SEL should be embedded in curriculum and instruction and should be recognized in the Common Core Standards. Furthermore, as stated by Weissberg and Cassarino (2013), “selecting an evidence-based classroom program is just one step in a multiphase school-wide process for sustainable SEL implementation” (p. 11), that necessitates “strong social and emotional competence among learners, including the ability to persist, empathize with others, and manage their behavior so they can achieve challenging goals” (p. 12). When we critically look at the goal of well-being and SEL in American public education, it is hard to ignore the ulterior motives to develop “social attitudes utilizable in the corporate sector” (Pinar, 2012, p. 38).

### **Towards an Inspired Curriculum**

When thinking about well-being and its implication in schools, mental health and well-being are most often terms that are quite subjective and socially mandated in relation to the “corporate sector.” Instead, if we thought about well-being in relation to spirituality, the result could be life altering as it offers a different set of values and ethics to live by. hooks (2000) states, “spirituality and spiritual life give us the strength to love” (p. 78). Not only does spirituality give us the strength to love, but truly “knowing love or the hope of knowing love is the anchor that keeps us from falling into the sea of despair” (hooks, 2000, p. 78). Now, as I look back on my teaching, I ask myself these questions: What happens if we take a different approach? What if we valued the spiritual and the proleptic? What if we looked towards other ways of knowing that recognize well-being as an essential component, not only of curriculum, but of life? It could very well look like this.

**Critical spirituality and interbeing.** One of the most integral components of well-being is the students’ feeling of connection to their teachers and overall school community. When we attempt to standardize emotional learning, it is difficult to take into account individual or cultural differences or life needs. If we truly embrace the well-being of students, we must have a kind of vulnerability that opens the door to a proleptic understanding of ourselves, a self-reflective spirituality that acknowledges the communal nature of our relationships with our students and the curriculum in which we teach. We are moving, running, seeking, and ruminating (Slattery, 2013). We do so by acknowledging the emotional in the spiritual by remaining actively present with our students as advocates who also consider the political and historical implications of our conversations and actions (Madrid, 2013).

As a teacher who has primarily worked in urban, predominantly African American schools, an inspired curriculum allows for the possibility to address issues of race, culture, and ethnicity in the classroom. A critical spirituality explores proleptic experiences that are relevant to both the students and teacher (Dillard, 2012), not embodying a unifying humanity, but instead acknowledging and welcoming difference. Only through trusting, authentic relationships with students can educators enact culturally relevant dialogues that address race and oppression across race and class in the classroom. Indeed, as educators move away from rigid and binary ways of thinking, they allow more authentic spaces for creating meaningful relationships with children (Augustine & Zurmehly, 2013). Indeed, “relationships rooted in honesty and compassion honor the children’s spirituality” (p. 11). Finally, if we embrace this understanding of spirituality and the ways it is situated within the classroom of culturally and racially diverse learners, we begin to realize the power of the transcendent to acknowledge the change needed in the manner in which we approach our current educational structures.

Likewise, spirituality in a pedagogical sense that directly addresses a curriculum of the proleptic creates opportunities for the integration of well-being and further acknowledges and addresses issues of race, culture, and ethnicity in the classroom. Asher (2003) inspires curriculum by engaging difference through a pedagogy of interbeing. In particular, Asher (2003) draws upon the work of Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) and bell hooks (2000) and suggests a transformative “pedagogy of interbeing” in the multicultural classroom. Hanh (1991) suggests the development of mindfulness as a way of being within the world that both nourishes and is aware of each moment. Indeed, Asher builds upon Hanh’s mindful contemplation in relation to curriculum that encourages us to “inter-be” in order to look deeply into “one’s ‘self’ that one can see the ‘other’ and recognize how one’s past, present, and future are linked to those of different others and *vice versa*” (p. 238, emphasis in original). On the other hand, hooks (2000) enacts an engaged pedagogy that requires teachers to bring both their intellect and their personal experiences as part of the classroom curriculum. From this perspective of teaching and instruction, a culture of mindful contemplation is cultivated so students are “able to engage their differences as well as their interconnected histories” (Asher, 2003, p. 239).

Finally, when we focus on spirituality and the transcendent as a power to transform our current understandings of well-being in schools and implement curriculum through a postmodern vision of the proleptic, we acknowledge the change needed in the way we approach current educational structures. We cannot dismiss our innate ontological perspectives, and thus, they should be a natural part of shaping our epistemological understandings of the world, informing our sense of well-being and ultimately impacting how each of us are hopeful beings who embrace the possibilities larger than ourselves.

### **The Synthetical Moment - My Subjective Experience**

Pinar and Grumet (1976) explain the proleptic moment of clarity as a synthetical moment in which there is a “reconstruction of self and an experience of solidarity of the intellect, the body, the spirit, and the cosmos, as well as an intrinsic coherence of time, place, and meaning” (as cited in Slattery, 2013, p. 68). The subjectivity of this moment is simultaneously psychological and spiritual and further reinforces the potential for social reconstruction. This perspective of knowledge is consistent with the understanding of curriculum as a “complicated conversation” that discloses the relationship of ideas, as well as with “their embodiment and personification in

individual lives, their origin and expression in social movements and trends, their rootedness in the historical past and their foreshadowing of our individual and national futures” (Pinar, 2012, p. 232). Furthermore, both the syncretical and (I think Slattery would agree) the proleptic moment reactivate the past, understands the present, and find and embrace the future.

I will end by saying the work that has gone into this paper has been an introspective journey amidst times of uncertainty, polarization, and dissonance seen and felt throughout the U.S. The writing, oftentimes redemptive, oftentimes tortuous, has allowed me to look into my past, into my history, that has ultimately shaped where I am today. However, this is a collective history and one in which educators have a prophetic responsibility (Purpel, 1989) to transform a country that is deeply fractured by white supremacy and patriarchy. Thus, a crucial part of the synthetic moment must be a vision towards the future. Only as I understand myself in connection to my students within the larger societal structure does an inspired *currere* come alive where we create a united vision in this pivotal moment in history—one that is built upon division and segregation, maintained through hegemonic ideology, and may be disrupted through personal growth and potential that further the building of relationships and commitment to something larger than ourselves (Macdonald, 1985). Indeed, it is through the spiritual and the transcendent that we begin to see the hope and possibility that compels us to address issues that isolate, divide, separate, and further limit ourselves and the relationships we have the potential to create within the classroom and beyond. Furthermore, spirituality opens doors to conversations that embody a unity and respect for humanity that acknowledges that there is something bigger than ourselves and in turn embraces the differences in all of us. It is a place to start. It is a common ground that promotes the complicated conversations that take place in order to give students the possibilities to live meaningful lives that cultivate new spaces of love and healing. At the conclusion of this paper, I am hopeful that knowing exists beyond us and is bigger than us, as Huebner (1999) describes much more eloquently than I:

Symbols of moreness, otherness, of the transcendent...there may be stories of relationships—of struggle, conflict, forgiveness, love—during which something new is produced, new life, new relationships, new understandings...they are symbols of wholeness and unity: of the body and mind, of self and others, of the human and natural world, of past and present and future. (Huebner, 1999, p. 344)

Finally, reconstruction of the self does not exist in isolation and is reflected in our relationships and the work we seek to do as educators. This is a time for educators to be at the forefront of a social movement, a revolution that changes the consciousness of those we teach (Macdonald, 1995) and moves beyond the socio-political stage drowning in tragedy, cynicism, hopelessness, and helplessness to the kind of hope and faith that guides us when we don’t know how to proceed (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004). It is this faith, grounded in the past, present, and future, that moves beyond a spirit of “competition, achievement, success, mastery that pits people against people” (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p. 263) and into spiritual power derived from “internal energy, hope and animation” (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p. 284). Spiritual power is what we collectively cultivate with our students, and in them, faith and hope reside.

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