

A “Race Course,” “Running,” and a “Chariot”

Using the *Katha Upanishad* to Inform a Curriculum of Selflessness

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Introduction: The Enduring Face of “Curriculum”

IT IS A ROUTINE WE COMMIT TO without question. Jackson (1968/2013) calls it “the daily grind.”

Few tears are shed...and few cheers are raised. The school attendance of children is such a common experience in our society that those of us who watch them go hardly pause to consider what happens to them when they get there. (Jackson, 1968/2013, p. 117)

Fingers crossed, we hope that the children learn something and are gratified when they return with evidence (a test perhaps, with a score neatly penned on the topic right-hand corner). Units are taught and then checked off. We lay our sympathies at the feet of the teachers as they struggle to *cover* required topics, remembering that, as students, we too were once subjected to the mysterious yet authoritative ministrations of the “curriculum.”

The significance of “curriculum,” has captivated educational theorists for decades. Jackson (1992) captured definitions for curriculum since the early 1900s. Collectively they can be summarized as *a plan for and learning experiences provided by teachers or the school* (Caswell & Campbell, 1935; Oliva, 1982; and Saylor & Alexander, 1974, as cited in Jackson, 1992). The ensuing questions, however, regarding the purpose of curriculum, (for example, what should be taught and how it should be taught), have fanned heated debates in the world of curriculum theory. For some, the purpose of curriculum is to manufacture citizens fit to contribute to the future economy, for others it is to help children uncover their latent talents that are unique to themselves as individuals, still for others the curriculum is meant to be a platform for social reform...and the list continues (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; McNeil, 2006; Schiro, 2013; Sowell, 2005; Vallance, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to integrate a moral perspective into curriculum as informed by Indian philosophical, particularly Vedantic, thought. My perspective was occasioned through Jackson’s (1992) forays into curricular definitions that went beyond those formulated by curriculum theorists. Jackson (1992) dug into dictionaries. Along with demonstrating that most dictionaries consistently defined curriculum as a “course of study,” he reached back into the late 1800s to show how *Cassell’s Latin-English Dictionary* (Marchant & Charles, 1904) rooted curriculum in “running” and as “the chariot used in races,” in addition to that of a “race course.” These additional translations triggered my curiosity, and I began thinking about how learning could be associated with “running” and “a chariot.” Pinar’s (1975) method of *currere* naturally precipitated out in conjunction with the “running” interpretation. My personal interest in and understanding of the Vedanta led me to consider the possibility of viewing curriculum through the eyes of the chariot analogy found in the *Katha Upanishad* that belongs to Indian Vedantic literature. Through discussing the significance of the chariot analogy, I present a morally motivated perspective of “curriculum” and open up an epistemologically oriented discussion in favour of a curriculum of selflessness.

Method and Data Sources

This paper takes the form of an analytic argument drawing upon a hermeneutic tradition. Specifically, the critical interpretive practice I use is genealogy as informed by Davis (2004), because it provides a method of organizing various discourses, here resulting from the definitions found in *Cassell’s Latin-English Dictionary* (Marchant & Charles, 1904), that constitute the practice of curriculum. As Davis (2004) describes, genealogy is a “record of emergence” and can “trace out several strands of simultaneous happenings” (p. 3). Davis uses the image of a tree with bifurcations (the first of which is the metaphysical and the physical realm) to organize and analyse his data of contemporary conceptions of teaching. In my case, the first bifurcation of the etymological curriculum tree yields one limb loosely dealing with practical aspects external to the learner (like curriculum objectives) and another that involves the internal aspects of the learner (like metacognitive aspects). The former branch focusing on the external learner leads to the dictionary definition of curriculum as “a course of study” (which I have already briefly acknowledged). The other limb, dedicated to the internal learner, first progresses to reflective practices like “running” (which corresponds to Pinar’s, 1975, method of *currere*) and then into “the chariot used in races” (the chariot analogy from Indian Vedantic literature). The method of *currere*, then, is a helpful precursor to applying the chariot analogy.

In the spirit of Davis’s (2004) process of genealogy, after briefly touching upon curriculum as a “course of study,” I focus on providing the context and description of both Pinar’s (1975) method of *currere* and the chariot analogy used in the *Katha Upanishad* separately. Although the latter precipitates out from the former, I compare and contrast these two characterizations of curriculum. My analyses culminate into an exploration of how the chariot analogy leads into the discourse of Karma Yoga, or the Yoga of Selfless Action (Adiswarananda, 2006) as disseminated primarily by Swami Vivekananda (1893/2007). Karma Yoga has the power to make visible our internal nature from a moral perspective that resonates with the ethos of the chariot analogy. Further, Karma Yoga provides a road map for practicing proper discrimination to guide actions. Together, the chariot analogy and Karma Yoga present a new curricular framework, which I call a curriculum of selflessness.

As for data sources, I will rely exclusively upon Pinar’s (1975) exposition of the method of *currere*. Since the original text of the *Katha Upanishad* is in Sanskrit, I will be relying principally upon three English translations: one by Swami Gambhirananda (*Eight Upanishads: Volume 1*, 1957/1995), another by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (*The Principal Upanishads*, 1953/2004), and one by Swami Nikhilananda (*The Upanishads: Volume 1*, 1949) referenced as (G), (R), and (N) respectively for brevity. To explore the concept of selflessness that emerges from it, I will primarily rely upon Swami Vivekananda’s (1893/2007) teachings.

A “Course of Study” (in brief)

Viewing curriculum as a “course of study,” related to the notion of a “race course,” is commonplace in our society. For example, a race has a winner. We tend to note who came in first or last at the end of the school year based on categories like “achievement” or “most improved” and reward the winner, indicating to others desired race course decorum. Our placement at the finish line foreshadows our performance on the “race course” of life as we struggle to win our bread. This particular dictionary translation also focuses on the characteristics of the race course, aligned with what curriculum theorists have described as *a plan for and learning experiences provided by teachers or the school* (Caswell & Campbell, 1935; Oliva, 1982; and Saylor & Alexander, 1974, as cited in Jackson, 1992). We may even look at a course of study physically conceived as an oval race track that is dotted with markers that clarify useful and measurable learning objectives (Popham, 1972/2013) acquired as the runner (the learner) makes progress on the track. Or, perhaps this track is accented by shifts in the terrain, encouraging a more formative process that evolves over time (Eisner, 1967/2013). Whatever the nature of the track, the course follows a trajectory that winds back upon itself. A learner travelling along the race track for the grade 5 course of study begins again at the starting line ready for grade 6 after having accumulated understandings from the year before. This time, however, the learner is ready to pick up more challenging markers or confront a trickier terrain (as outlined in the *plan*). Thus, this trusty race track, with a surety akin to the changing seasons, transforms ever so slightly every year (with scaffolded precision) and establishes a routine of learning that arguably guides the daily rhythm of our society—our daily grind.

One would hope that the learner who comes back to the starting line has changed significantly over the previous year beyond just having pocketed completed objectives. In fact, each classroom discussion, assignment, and interaction with learning artefacts has the potential to engage the learner in perspectival shifts that affect how they view themselves and the world. Such perspectival shifts, however, require a capacity for reflective thought. Curriculum as a course of study (as described above) is not purposefully mindful of the inner person. It is with the intention of delving deeper into metacognitive aspects that open up room for moral reasoning that I turn now to analysing the dictionary curriculum interpretations of “running” and “the chariot used in races.”

“Running” as Method of *Currere*

Whether by chance or knowingly, Pinar (1975) took up the *Cassell’s Latin-English Dictionary* (Marchant & Charles, 1904) interpretation of “running” and switched it to the infinitive

“to run” as “*currere*.” Pinar conceptualized curriculum through the method of *currere*, where a learner contemplates the past and the future, analyses both, and then re-synthesizes an understanding of the present. Thus, through *currere*, the learner becomes conscious of perspectival shifts attained throughout the “race course” of study.

The Context

William Pinar is well known for leading the Reconceptualist movement in curriculum studies. Reconceptualists add two important elements to curricular discussions. One element is that of a “politically emancipatory intent” (Pinar, 1978, p. 153), which rejects readily conceding to bureaucratic intentions that view schools as institutions, reducing interventions to a focus on protocol or social engineering (Pinar, 1999). The second element recognizes our “value-laden perspective[s]” (Pinar, 1978, p. 153) and refers to aspects of human agency and volition (Pinar, 1999) that play a role in how we (as researchers, theorists, or individuals) view and make an impact upon any field we enter. Perhaps the second element, that of recognizing our “value-laden perspectives,” is rooted in Pinar’s (1975) paper on the method of *currere*, where he explicitly expressed an interest to “reconceptualize the meaning of curriculum” (p. 8). In Reconceptualist thought, historical perspectives are considered, and there is a commitment to comprehensive critique (Pinar, 1978) and intellectual exploration (Pinar, 1999). Similarly, in the method of *currere*, Pinar (1975) describes a process inwards that begins with a journey backwards in time, where it becomes hard to separate the personal from professional and where there is a greater awareness of how intellectual interests evolve through time, “contributing to dominant themes in [the given] biography” (p. 4). Pinar (1975) was influenced by Zen Buddhist meditation as he conceived of his four-step method of *currere*, which will now be described below.

A Description of the Method of *Currere*

The first part of this journey inward, titled **regressive**, begins by “capturing the past as it hovers over the present” (Pinar, 1975, p. 8). An immediate discovery is that most of our thoughts and habits at present are a result of the past, influencing what we immediately perceive or want in the future. Pinar shows that the present is actually “veiled,” since our present is an “acting out of the past” (p. 9), and as such, we have misinformed ourselves in what being *present* actually entails. With this in mind, Pinar (1975) urges us to go back as far as we can. Since he traced the evolution of his intellectual interests in education, he went back to his earliest memories of school. We are to watch the memories that float before us without judgment or interpretation, as that would “interrupt our presence in the past” (p. 10). We are to capture these relived experiences with words on a piece of paper so that they “coalesce to form a photograph” (p. 11). We then consider this photograph and provide responses.

The next step, called the **progressive**, requires a projection into the future to imagine desired states without being fussy about whether they are reasonable. To do this, Pinar (1975) recommends to first attain a state of relaxation (with meditation techniques) and then guide attention to where educational experiences may lead. Just like before, these images are to be captured by the written word with subsequent responses. However, in contrast to the regressive approach, Pinar (1975) stresses the importance of conducting this part over a period of several

days, weeks, or months so that the resulting photographs are not “distorted by temporary emotive or cognitive preoccupations” (p. 12). Time allows the photographs to be more reflective of “lasting anticipations” (p. 12).

In the third step of *currere*, called the **analytical**, Pinar (1975) at first asks that the photographs created in the previous steps be put aside, keeping only the responses and the present. You have loosened yourself from “what was...and what can be” (p. 13). Now, creating an additional photograph through asking questions—like “What are your intellectual interests and emotional condition? What ideas and fields draw or repel you?”—you finally loosen yourself from “what is” (p. 13). With this air of detachment, all of the photos are brought out and studied for themes, interconnections, and epistemological relevance.

The final step in the method of *currere* is the **synthetical**. All of the photos are put to the side and you begin to find meaning in the present by asking questions like, “Are my intellectual interests biographically liberative? Do they permit ontological movement? Do they point toward increased conceptual refinement [and]...to deeper knowledge? Do they [point to] new levels of higher being?” (p. 14). At this juncture Pinar (1975) openly addresses the qualities he values (remembering that it is *his* journey that he is describing). Pinar (1975) values conceptual refinement, deeper knowledge, and a movement towards liberation and higher states of being. However, he does not begin his method by orienting his readers towards these values. The method of *currere* is like an open template to be mapped onto various situations and interpreted as desired.

Some curriculum theorists (Bogotch, Schoorman, & Reyes-Guerra, 2017; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Kanu & Glor, 2006) have taken up the method of *currere* as a means to awaken the teaching masses, including preservice teachers, to their roles as “catalysts of the knowledge society and its promises [and] counterpoints to the same knowledge society when it threatens community, security and public good” (Hargreaves, 2003, as cited in Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 118). Others, like Fowler (2003) and Kissel-Ito (2008), have either strewn parts of the method of *currere* in with narratives and hermeneutical analysis or have rigorously applied it to confront their own evolution as teachers at a personal level. In every case, however, the method of *currere* seeks to interrupt the mesmerizing flow of the daily routine and reconsider the routine itself by seeking new perspectives. In the process, the “operator moves and so the problem...poses itself differently” (Pinar, 1975, p. 5). No longer is it satisfactory to blindly follow the course of the race track without pause or questions. The method of *currere* demands cognitive awareness of what impact the prescribed *learning experiences* are making and how the *plan* meets the needs of the learner. Rather than focusing on the “race track” of a “course of study,” the method of *currere* refocuses the lens on the runner and how they make sense of where they have been on the track, where they are, and where they must go.

Is it possible for the learner to gain further insight beyond that which is offered by the method of *currere*? Pinar (1975) utilized the method of *currere* to see what role his intellectual interests, a manifestation of his experiences in education, played in his biography. At the end, he questioned the nature of this intellect and concluded that it “resides in physical form as part of the Self” and is “thus an appendage of the Self, a medium, like the body” (p. 15). He said further that “The relation between the individual and the universal exists although I cannot claim to understand it satisfactorily” (p. 15). The Vedantic lens, and here it will be the chariot analogy, offers insight into Pinar’s (1975) concluding ruminations through a careful study of the relationship between the intellect, mind, senses, and the Self. Further, the chariot analogy offers a moral purpose for such reflections.

The Chariot Used in Races: A Chariot Analogy from the *Katha Upanishads*

The *Katha Upanishad*, one of the 10 principle dispensations contained within Indian Vedantic literature (R), contains an analogy that compares the body and mind to that of a chariot drawn by horses. Through this analogy, a discourse evolves describing the tendency of the mind (the reins) to yield to the senses (the horses) if it is not informed by proper reasoning (the charioteer). Where the method of *currere* provides a process for cognizing perspectival shifts, the “chariot” analogy reveals the necessity of morals to guide and inform all actions, starting with actions in the empirical realm.

The Context Part 1: Overview of the Vedanta

There are two kinds of knowledge; that which is based on the experiences of the sense organs, falling within the realm of the physical sciences (knowledge denoted with a lower-case ‘k’) and that which is super-sensuous wisdom (Knowledge) (N). It is the latter that is the subject matter of the Vedas, a word that primarily means Knowledge (N). A portion of the Vedas, called *The Upanishads*, along with two texts, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* form the Vedanta because “in [them] the Vedic wisdom reaches its culmination (anta) [and] shows the seeker the way to Liberation” (N, p. 7).

The Principle Upanishads were written by various sages dating back to 800 to 300 B.C. who spoke “out of the fullness of their illumined experiences” (R, p. 22). These experiences are not reached through physical sense perceptions, inference, or reflection, nor are they “merely reports of introspection which are purely subjective” (R, p. 22). They are *seen* by sages who “have the same sense of assurance and possession of their spiritual vision as we have of our physical perception” (R, p. 22). The spiritual vision revealed to sages was, *Thou art That*. “In one word...you are divine, *Thou art That*. This is the essence of Vedanta” (Vivekananda, 1893/2009, p. 294). In other words, “the Self, the Atman, in you, in me, in everyone, is omnipresent. You are as much in the sun now as in this earth, as much in England as in America” (Vivekananda, 1893/2009, p. 255). Further, this all-pervading Self that is not limited by space is also eternal and not bound by a beginning or an end (Vivekananda, 1893/2009). The purpose of *The Upanishads*, according to the sage Sankaracharya (AD 788-820), who wrote commentaries on 10 *Upanishads*, is to “prove the reality of Brahman [Self/Atman] and the phenomenality or unreality of the universe of names and forms, and to establish the absolute oneness of the embodied soul and Brahman” (N, p. 14). Fittingly, the word *Upanishad* is based on the root *sad*, which means to loosen, to attain, and to annihilate, with two prefixes; *upa*, nearness, and *ni*, totally (N). In other words, Knowledge, “when received from a competent teacher, *loosens totally* the bondage of the world,...enabl[ing] the pupil to *attain...the Self, or completely destroy* ignorance” (N, p. 11). “The root *sad* with the prefix *upa*...connotes the humility with which the pupil should approach the teacher” (N, p. 11).

Liberation might be a lofty goal for public school students. *The Upanishads* outline it as the ultimate goal of life. This paper seeks to demonstrate how the teachings of the *Katha Upanishads*, that include the chariot analogy, not only serve to help people realize the divinity within themselves, but that the path towards realization necessitates a type of metacognitive alertness that is empowering. Trusting these sages of the past and present, I am operating from the perspective that every individual is potentially divine; we are much more than we think we are. I feel that viewing each student as having infinite potential (in secular terms) and providing them

with tools that might help them to not only manifest this reality themselves but to also see others as having the same potential is, at the very least, not a bad thing.

The Context Part 2: Overview of the *Katha Upanishads*

The *Katha Upanishads* speaks of liberation through a parable. Once upon a time, many years ago, a poor and pious man performed a sacrifice with hopes of gaining wealth and prosperity on earth and in heaven (N). His son, Nachiketa, was worried that his father’s offering of old and feeble cows to the presiding priests would undo any merit accumulated through the sacrifice (N; R), so he asked his father a few times “to whom will you give me?” (G, p. 104). Irritated, his father responded with “to Death” (G, p. 104). Dutifully, Nachiketa proceeded to the abode of Death, who, at that point, was away. After three days, Death returned and, embarrassed to find a house-guest waiting without any hospitality, offered Nachiketa three boons to compensate for any discomfort (R).

For his first boon, Nachiketa asked that, upon his return home, his father may be “freed from anxiety...and anger” (G, p. 110). It was granted. Note that this combined request, which guaranteed a happy reunion on top of being freed from imminent Death, establishes Nachiketa as a sharp young boy. For his second boon, Nachiketa requested that Death teach him the fire sacrifice that assured entry into the highest heaven. Death readily granted this request and, pleased with finding Nachiketa to be a bright student, even named the fire sacrifice after him (N).

Can any other request surpass that which grants access to the highest heaven? Yes, because according to the Vedanta, heavens are not everlasting and “vanish in course of time” (Vivekananda, 1893/2009, p. 317). So, Nachiketa put forth his final request rather delicately. He asked, “This doubt that arises, consequent on the death of a man—some saying, ‘It exists,’ and others saying ‘It does not exist.’ I would know this under your instruction” (G, p. 121). This question caught Death off-guard. Essentially, Nachiketa was asking whether there was an “immortal substance in a man that survived the death of the body” (N, p. 110). To answer to this question meant that Death would ultimately have to give away the secret of the Self/Atman (N) and show Nachiketa “the way to conquer re-death” (R, p. 593). So, Death replied that the answer would be too difficult to understand and asked Nachiketa to choose another boon (G; N; R). Nachiketa persisted, saying that no other teacher was more suited to answer this question (G; N; R). Death pushed back again, tempting Nachiketa with all sorts of the wealth and pleasures available in this world and beyond (G; N; R), ultimately testing Nachiketa’s worthiness to receive this Knowledge (N). Knowledge of this calibre can only be assimilated by a student with “keen discrimination, utter detachment, a sincere longing for Truth, and a tranquil mind” (N, p. 110). Nachiketa demonstrated that he was a fit candidate with the reply, “Shall we enjoy wealth when we have seen thee?” (R, p. 606). Nachiketa recognized the impermanency of life and wealth and looked for that something beyond—“that truest safety from the ills and anxieties of finite experience” (R, p. 606).

Death conceded and, even more, praised Nachiketa for choosing the preferable path that ultimately leads to Knowledge and requires an acute sense of discrimination (N). On the other hand, the pleasurable path sees people clinging to worldly pleasures (N) that benefit the growth and protection of the body (G), and unceasingly fall into the clutches of Death (R) through the Karmic cycle of rebirth. Then, Death, amongst other insights, enumerates the qualities of the Eternal Self as mentioned above, including that it is “Smaller than the smallest, greater than the

great, the Self is set in every heart of every creature” (R, p. 617). How does one realize this Self, which is apparently everything and everywhere; even us? Just like the rope that is mistaken for being a snake (N, p. 55), we are *mistaking* the Self. Our mind and senses need to be tranquil enough in order to *see* it (R), and they generally are not due to worldly desires (N). It is here that Death, with the intention of guiding Nachiketa to the Self, provides the analogy that compares the body to a chariot.

A description of the chariot analogy. Death chooses an analogy that compares parts of a chariot to the human body, senses, mind, intellect, and Self. Death begins by describing two selves residing in the heart (R). One is the Supreme Self, who is everlasting and ever free, and the second is the embodied/individual self who is totally entangled in the world (N). The Supreme Self is a detached witness, and the individual self/embodied soul enjoys (N) the fruits of this world. In actuality, it is the Supreme Self here that appears as the embodied soul, and this false superimposition is eradicated when the individual soul realizes its true nature (N). Based on sensory perceptions and responses of the mind and intellect, the embodied soul can follow two courses; it can perform action to fulfil desires and continue to experience the ever-changing universe of forms and names, or it can “cultivate Knowledge and become free” (N, p. 146). The chariot analogy illustrates *both* of these courses (N).

The supreme self. As already mentioned, the Supreme Self is a detached observer—an eternal witness to what is described below.

The rider: The embodied soul. The owner and rider of the chariot is the embodied soul (R) and experiences the world (N) through being associated with the body, organs, and the mind (G). The chariot rider gets to enjoy (or even be horrified by) the places the charioteer takes the chariot. The embodied soul has a sense of agency and enjoys the results of action (N).

The charioteer: The intellect. The intellect is the charioteer and directs physical work (G) by establishing where the chariot should go and where it should not go. In other words, the intellect determines what types of actions the embodied soul should perform and what ones should be not be performed (N). This discriminative and determinative faculty (N) is a function of what Hindu psychologists call the inner organ (N). The other functions of the inner organ are the mind, the mind-stuff, which stores past impressions (including memories), and the ego, which is characterized by I-consciousness (N).

The reins: The mind. The reins can either be controlled by the charioteer or dragged by the team of horses (R). Similarly, the mind can either be controlled by the intellect or dragged hither and thither by the senses. In other words, “Through the mind the [intellect]...directs the senses to their respective objects as a charioteer guides the horses along the right path by means of the reins” (N, p. 148). The mind is characterized by doubt and volition (G, N), which means that it has a hard time figuring out which path the horses should take.

The chariot: The body. The chariot itself symbolizes the body, which is pulled along by the horses, which represent the senses (G).

The horses: The senses. The organs of perception (the eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue) actually comprise one of the two groups that belong to the outer organs. The additional group is comprised of the organs of action including the hands, feet, tongue, the organ of procreation, and the organ of evacuation (N). The horses are the senses.

The paths: The objects of the senses. The objects that lie in front of our senses catch our attention and draw us towards them. These objects are like the paths that lie in front of the horses. Which one should the charioteer take?

The good charioteer vs. the bad charioteer. Death creates this analogy to make it explicitly clear to Nachiketa the makings of a good charioteer by differentiating between it and a bad one. A bad charioteer is devoid of discrimination (G), which leads to an unrestrained and impure mind because the senses drag it out of control (R). Out of control senses are like wild horses for the charioteer (R). On the other hand, a good charioteer has understanding and control over the mind and the senses (R). This charioteer can urge the horses along good paths and even stop the horses (G). A mind that is controlled and that can be concentrated is a mind that has become holy (G).

At this point we ask, “So, which path do we take? Which path will lead us to liberation, to a merger with the Supreme Self?” Unfortunately, the paths, or objects, lie in the phenomenal world, and following any path just leads to others opening up. Desires and attachments to results tether the mind, intellect, and ego to the world. The trick is to note that this Supreme Self, this divinity, lies *within* each of us. We have to move inward. Death says, “The wise man should merge his speech in his mind, and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect in the Cosmic Mind, and the Cosmic Mind in the Tranquil Self” (N, p. 155).

Essentially, Death is describing the practice of yoga (N). Yoga is derived from the root *yuj* which means to yoke/to harness and is symbolically connected with the chariot and the team of horses (R). Yoga is “complete control of the different elements of our nature, psychical and physical and harnessing them to the highest end” (R, p. 623). By saying “speech,” Death is referring to the activities of the senses and that they all should “be stopped with attention directed to the mind” (N, p. 155). The calm mind should be dissolved into the intellect, which then blends into the Cosmic Mind (an aspect of the Self that is qualified) and merged into the unmanifested Self. By moving inward, you merge into oneness.

The chariot analogy names the players in the cognitive schema that might help or hinder this path to oneness starting with how the senses interact with objects. The responsibility to act wisely and with awareness is placed squarely on the shoulders of the individual. It may well be that the individual yields to the sensory temptations leading to, perhaps, unfortunate circumstances, but the analogy provides full awareness of how and why the intellect was not able to steer the senses away from objects that wreaked havoc in the mind. The chariot analogy urges the individual to become more aware of the how objects are taken in by the senses and the types of thoughts proliferating the mind in response. The intellect must start to take an upper hand. It must study the nature of this mind and train the senses to receive preferable information and the mind to react in a way that is conducive to the aims of the individual (and in Vedantic literature, the aim is liberation).

What if you are not ready for liberation and would rather just live a good and honest life on earth? Would *not* wanting liberation automatically make us bad charioteers? Death provides a template of how we operate within the realm of the phenomenal world. Much of what causes us misery can be traced to the level of our mind and how our intellect guides our future decisions. We could seek to gain incredible solace from a mind that is at relative peace, even if we are not ready to merge it into the Cosmic Mind and beyond.

Karma Yoga (later described) makes Death’s instruction practical, helping us to train the intellect so that we can subdue impertinent and unruly horses. My intention here was to present the chariot analogy, authentically embedded within the *Katha Upanishad*, so that the profound subtext of liberation guiding Death’s instruction can be carried into the latter part of this paper. Now, I would like to compare and contrast the chariot analogy with the method of *currere* to see how both can inform learning in the sphere of the public school system. Oh, and just in case you are wondering, yes, Nachiketa did become a Knower of the Self.

Running the Chariot around the Track: Comparing *Currere* with the Chariot Analogy

In this section, I place both the method of *currere* and the chariot analogy in juxtaposition to highlight similarities and differences and dig deeper into their potential to inform curriculum theory. My intention is to reorient focus from a preoccupation with the track, or the race course of study, with all of its markers and objectives, towards the inner world of the runner as they make their way around the track. Pinar’s (1975) method of *currere* informs the runner of where they were, where they might go, and where they are right now. The Vedanta allows the runner to construct an understanding of why they did what they did in the past, why they may want to choose a particular way of proceeding over another in future, and maintains, without a modicum of uncertainty, that the runner was, is, and always will be divine with infinite potential. I will explore three areas: versatile interruptive templates, plans of action, and the human experience.

Versatile Interruptive Templates

Both the method of *currere* and the chariot analogy reveal a template that can be lifted and placed upon any aspect of life, whether personal or professional, in order to gain greater insight. Both templates seek to involve the runner in taking greater initiative in life, rather than putting life on automatic, following a prescribed course, and letting time pass by. These templates force reflection on the material being learned with personal context to encourage a purposeful integration. A sense of alertness accompanies the intake of sensory stimuli. If a school lesson is “boring,” then the runner alters how they are learning the material to suit their own purpose. In this way, the runner can recover a greater sense of volition and interrupt habitual patterns of thinking.

Each template, however, works on different time scales. The method of *currere* can dig far into the past and project years into the future with an eye on resynthesizing the present identity to conform to the desired effects. Our bored runner, submitting to the method of *currere*, might realize that they have always found the subject in question boring. Then, by applying the chariot analogy, which provides a template that works on a much shorter, almost moment to moment, timescale, the now watchful runner notices how “boring” sensory stimuli from the subject evoke pernicious thoughts in the mind and how the lax intellect welcomes the learner to take a long bathroom break. Every moment, as sensory information floods in, we train our senses through our intellect to focus on particular ones that fill our minds. In this way, the template derived from the chariot analogy informs the method of *currere* that works on a wider timescale.

Plans of Action

These versatile interruptive templates are tools that leave the future destination up to the individual. The chariot analogy, however, is clear about which option is the right one, (i.e., preferable). To skip class would be to succumb to the pleasurable path. However, is staying in class, wilting with boredom, preferable? Death’s chariot analogy is intended to grant the highest freedom—that of recovering lost Knowledge and realizing one’s pure divinity, and it is here that we pause and broach morality. Vivekananda (1893/2007) calls this struggle towards ultimate freedom the “groundwork of all morality, of unselfishness” (p. 119). Plans of action that centre on “me and mine” give the self pleasure. “Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal...that which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral” (Vivekananda, 1893/2007, p. 120). A perfectly moral person is perfectly selfless, and a perfectly selfless person is liberated.

As previously mentioned, past impressions are one of the functions of the inner organ (along with the mind, the ego, and the intellect) (N). The reactions (our feelings) to sensory stimuli come from this storehouse of past impressions. The method of *currere* allows the runner to grapple with these past impressions and track the moral content (selfish or selfless) of their future desires as they enter the analytical. The chariot analogy provides the intellect with full reigns to synthesize plans of action so that “every moment of...life [is] realisation” (Vivekananda, 1893/2007, p. 121).

Rather than skipping class, our “bored” runner, in order to progress towards liberation must think selflessly, beyond their own needs and desires. Of whom do they think? The runner thinks of what the teacher would want and tries to pay attention and participate. The runner thinks of the classmates and offers insights that might stimulate their interest in the topic. Whether or not the insights are good or the learner becomes popular is not the point, because desiring a fulfilment of those expectations would be pleasurable and not preferable.

The Human Experience

As mentioned, rather than focusing on the nature of the race course or course of study, in the method of *currere* and the chariot analogy, the runner begins to take more notice of their reaction to the course, which then sheds light on who the runner is. As the plan of action becomes less “me oriented,” the runner begins to take notice of what others want. By this time the runner, though still traveling around the race course of study, lets the body, as the chariot, do the racing and sits inside as the watchful learner.

“If the chariot analogy applies to me,” our learner wonders, “it must also apply to those around me.” Every classmate is viewed as a storehouse of past impressions and memories that compel actions and motivate future desires. Every classmate has the power to exercise a sense of volition to interrupt the daily grind with the method of *currere* and the chariot analogy. Every classmate is potentially divine and can move towards liberation. This belief in each other’s potential to manifest divinity, or their infinite potential, can serve to connect learners and establish mutual support. If the learner notices a feeling of boredom, they can look around and spot those who are not bored and learn with them. The resources required to overcome passive submission to the daily grind are within reach; it is only a matter of allowing the intellect to discriminate carefully with a purposeful mindset.

On a sombre note, I touch upon mortality of the body. It too is part of the human experience and both templates hint at this. A consistent use of *currere* forces us to consider how well we are using our time and confront signs of aging (through a growing set of memories and a need for judicious future forecasts). None other than Death wrote Nachiketa’s prescription for liberation, and many of us need refills. It is not easy to learn how to move towards freedom and be selfless. Time and practice are required. Weaving these understandings into the curriculum can help.

A Curriculum of Selflessness and Making it Practical

Working from a Vedantic standpoint, in line with the chariot analogy, Vivekananda (in Walia, 2011) states that “education is the manifestation of perfection already in man” (p. 49) and adds that the way to this freedom is through the practice of selflessness, the basis of all morality. However, is it possible to operationalize careful reflection and lofty ideas such as liberation and selflessness into a manageable approach for, say, middle school students? I believe that a curriculum loyal to the ethos of *currere* and the chariot analogy (i.e., careful reflection and a movement towards manifesting one’s own divinity) turns away from a “what can I get from you?” attitude and cultivates a “how can I use what I am learning to be of help to you?” orientation. It is a curriculum that blends inquiry-based learning with service-learning and weaves in explicit teachings regarding how to be selfless. In this section, I will explore Karma Yoga and the concept of selflessness followed by a description of a blend of inquiry-based learning and service learning.

Karma Yoga and Selflessness in Education

The word *Karma* is derived from the Sanskrit root *kri*, which means “to do” (Vivekananda, 1893/2007, p. 1). Swami Vivekananda (1893/2007) teaches that what we *do* in our lives has a tremendous effect on character because it leaves an impression on the mind-stuff, which may not be apparent on the surface but works in undercurrents subconsciously. Our character is a result of past impressions (Vivekananda, 1893/2007). To work selflessly is to be constantly aware of the motive power (informed by past impressions) that prompts us (Vivekananda, 1893/2007). Further, the mind can be trained by the intellect to be alert to the motive power behind actions and thoughts (Bhajananda, 2006; Vivekananda, 1893/2007). Attachments to pleasurable outcomes automatically bind us with fear to the possibility of its non-fruit. Selfish ambitions increase our vulnerability to competitive and calculating mindsets that burn away kindness in the heart (Vivekananda, 1893/2007). Service is a way to respond to another’s expressed needs without expectation of a reward.

Kurth’s (1995) work is the only piece of Western empirical literature that I have found with a comprehensive definition for selflessness informed by philosophy and religion (i.e., Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity). Kurth (1995) defined selflessness as:

1. Being and feeling connected to others and the remainder of the natural world through an awareness of and/or belief in a transcendent reality
2. An interest to enhance the well-being of others and transcend one’s own self-interested desires

3. Non-attachment to outcomes and personal rewards while in the process of performing actions (p. 15)

Kurth’s (1995) work applied the above definition to the for-profit industry. However, due to its resonance with Vivekananda’s (1893/2007) work, I have selected the same definition to be adapted to the educational context as explored in this paper. It addresses divine potential, the way of service, and the importance the intellect plays in non-attachment. An exhaustive search of educational empirical research using keywords from the above definition and the Vedantic ethos yields connections to growth mindset (Dweck, 2008), prosocial (Bandura, 2016; Lozada, D’Adamo & Carro, 2014), and motivational (Ryan & Deci, 2009) literature. Growth mindset links to positive self-concept and limitless potential, prosocial literature addresses both metacognitive and behavioural aspects of service, and motivational literature warns of the pitfalls of extrinsic rewards. A selfless curriculum combines these principles.

Making it Practical: A Blend of Inquiry-Based Learning and Service Learning

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is a “practice of extracting meaning from experience” (Audet, 2005, p. 6), where learners identify areas of inquiry around problems and questions in their world and then find the answers (Barell, 2003; Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2017; Temple, Ogle, Crawford, & Freppon, 2014). This process involves journaling, documenting thinking and wondering, field observations, and reflections (Barell, 2003). IBL encourages the posing of deep questions and ensuring that “tentative answers are taken seriously” (Wells, 1999, as quoted in Audet, 2005, p. 5). What makes IBL a powerful conduit for the method of *currere* is that learners get to choose their line of inquiry under an umbrella topic—a choice based on who they are and what they want to know. For example, if the topic of study was national identity and immigration, the process of researching a cultural community, guided frequent reflections, would make learners aware of how their own pasts (i.e., impressions, memories, and cultures) and curiosities are informing their choices and developing understandings.

Service Learning (SL) engages youth in a wide range of activities to benefit others and meet real community needs, concurrently using resulting experiences to advance curricular goals through structured time for research, reflection, discussion, and connecting experiences to learning and personal worldviews (Berger Kaye, 2010; Cipolle, 2010; Jacoby, 2015; McPherson, 2011; Waterman, 1997; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2007). SL can challenge learners to consider their roles beyond the classroom as citizens and leaders (Robinder, 2012), with teacher responses to learner reflections evoking critical thinking and social justice awareness (Astin et al., 2006; Richards, 2013). The obvious connection here with the chariot analogy is the movement beyond a “me” orientation and training the intellect to serve without an expectation of a reward. To be truly selfless (and not fall prey to a missionary zeal), learners must fulfil a need and not provide an organization with what they think they need.

A blend of IBL and SL, Learning to Serve through Inquiry (LSI), simply starts with IBL and transitions into SL. Here are five steps, inspired by Mackenzie (2016) and McPherson (2011):

1. **Explore a passion:** Learners are introduced to an umbrella topic, recall what they know, and dive into exploring an area that stimulates their curiosity. They then share what they have learned with each other.
2. **Identify a need:** Learners ask themselves, “How can I expand upon what I have learned to help meet a community need?” They could work in small groups on separate projects or come together, nominate, and refine one idea.
3. **Plan & Prepare:** Learners find out about the community organization, a partnership plan might be drafted outlining mutual expectations, and preparations are made for meaningfully integrating curricular understandings into a community context.
4. **Serve:** Learners enter the field and carry out their service project.
5. **Share:** Learners share their understandings with the organization and the community, possibilities for ongoing plans might be entertained, and community ties are strengthened.

The learners working on exploring national identity and immigration might reach out to immigrant settlement services to ask them what they need. If the settlement services require data on clients’ experiences post-settlement, then the learners can conduct interviews with the clients, provide the settlement services with feedback, and share findings with the greater community to build awareness and inclusivity.

Throughout LSI, a positive self-concept should be fostered, prosocial attitudes must be modelled, and learners should explicitly learn about what it means to be selfless through the attributes in Kurth’s (1995) definition (tempered to suit the age of the learners and the context). This can be done through building a wall display of words, phrases, and pictures associated with being selfless (including Kurth’s, 1995, definition), analysing books or videos the class has read or watched together through the lens of selfless attributes, and conducting a “selfless experiment” where learners carry out selfless action for family members in secret and observe their reactions objectively. Many creative approaches exist. As the intellect’s faculty of discrimination sharpens and personal propensities are explored through LSI and teachings on selflessness, I see growth and development of wisdom and a purposeful and assured approach to life. I feel that our learners deserve that.

Conclusion

Starting with an investigation of three dictionary translations of the word *curriculum*, I have ended up proposing: (a) a curriculum conception based on Swami Vivekananda’s interpretations of Karma Yoga and Kurth’s (1995) definition of selflessness and (b) a pedagogy to operationalize the conception based on inquiry-based learning and service learning. The method of *currere* (from the dictionary translation “running”) as informed by Pinar (1975) and the chariot analogy (from the dictionary translation “the chariot used in races”) taken from the *Katha Upanishads* were used to pave a pathway towards and provide insight into how a curriculum of selflessness might be conceived. Most importantly, the chariot analogy provides a profound philosophical context that grounds a curriculum of selflessness in the principle Vedantic belief that we are divine with limitless potential.

Why should we submit to living the imagery of the “daily grind” (Jackson, 1968/2013), like coffee beans pulverized to a powdery existence with our energies spread thin and a loss of

virility? Instead, let us lift the veils stitched by habits of thought that encase and bind us to the trance-like routines of the daily grind. With each selfless gesture, we lift a veil and step closer towards manifesting that perfection that already lies beneath—from the grind that binds to the focus that finds.

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