Beyond Dualisms
Interdependence and Possibilities in Education Today[1]

NINA ASHER
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

RACIAL SEGREGATION, COLONIALISM, GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION may, *de jure*, have ended, and we have been living for some time now in a digitized age of transnational flows of information and capital, gender fluidities, and cultural hybridities. While such interdependence and fluidities are not new, the present-day digital, global context puts us in unprecedented proximities with diverse individuals and communities, with bewildering rapidity. At the same time, as we well know (especially following the 2016 U.S. elections), *de facto*, we remain divided across race, gender, class, region (rural/urban, South/North, for instance) and nation, by physical and virtual borders, chasms and silences.

Over 30 years ago, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) so evocatively conveyed the power and possibilities afforded by a *mestiza* consciousness. And Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) invited us to consider "interbeing" on the path of mindfulness towards peace. Today, in 2019, in a context of extreme polarization in the U.S.—marked by such surreal, contradictory phenomena as Facebook and Nike activism and capitalism (Zirin, 2018); perennial and draining reports of violence in and out of school contexts; and an escalating discourse of exclusionary (and, I might add, entirely unrealistic) nationalism—the question of working through contradictions and dualisms; and engaging interdependence in order to arrive at new possibilities has gained new urgency.

I take up this question in four parts—Roots and Branches, Head and Heart, Here and There and Then and Now, and Present and Future. I draw on autobiography as well as illustrative examples drawn from literature, film, and other fields. I draw on curriculum, postcolonial, and feminist theorizing and work over time (history) and place (geography).

Roots and Branches

I trace the development of my intellectual work to-date via the following four sub-sections:

- (Post)-Colonial India

- Graduate School: Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York
- Towards and Beyond Tenure: Louisiana State University (LSU) and the Curriculum Theory Project (CTP), Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Bergamo and *the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (*JCT*)
- And now…: At the Intersections of Postcolonialism and Globalization

The roots and branches of my theorizing reveal my longstanding commitment to equity, justice, and the ongoing work of decolonization across different contexts.

(Post) - Colonial India

Born in postcolonial India in what was then Bombay (now Mumbai), I grew up hearing stories about struggle, loss, resistance, and resilience under British colonial rule. For instance, in an article titled "Writing Home/Decolonizing Text(s)" I wrote:

> Although born in postcolonial India, I grew up listening to the stories of my mother describing the terror she experienced, as a little girl, seeing British soldiers running children over in their tanks, leaving them dead in the streets of Bombay. As a little girl, my mother saw her home burning when there was a massive explosion at the docks nearby. She describes how chunks of metal, ripped from ships in the harbor, went flying through the house—taking the plate off which one of her brothers was eating lunch at that moment but, miraculously, not touching him. My mother also talks about her mother's courage and strength of character in gathering her children and a few items of clothing and getting them out safely, before the building was consumed by flames. These horrific and painful images her stories evoked are etched in my mind, as are the utterly delightful settings and events sketched in the scores of children's books, written by English author, Enid Blyton, which friends and I devoured insatiably, as children. Yes, for me, home and elsewhere, colonized and colonizer, past and present, oppression and resistance are necessarily intertwined. (Asher, 2009, p. 6)

More recently, Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) wrote in *Americanah*—a novel painstakingly crafted across multiple continents and countries and set in postcolonial, global times:

> The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. Yet he understood. It had to be comforting, this denial of history. (Adichie, 2013, p. 320)

And, seven decades prior—well before the mind-numbing, fruitlessly amplified, 24/7/365, digitized media cycle—African American poet Langston Hughes, able to "look deeply" (Hanh, 1992), spoke to oppressions across continents in his 1943 poem, *Gandhi Is Fasting*:

Mighty Britain, tremble!
Let your empire's standard sway
Lest it break entirely—
Mr. Gandhi fasts today.

You may think it foolish—
That there's no truth in what I say—
That all of Asia's watching
As Gandhi fasts today.

All of Asia's watching
And I am watching, too,
For I am also jim crowed—
As India is jim crowed by you.

You know quite well, Great Britain,
That it is not right
To starve and beat and oppress
Those who are not white.

Of course, we do it too,
Here in the U.S.A.
May Gandhi's prayers help us, as well,
As he fasts today. (Rampersad, 1995, p. 578)

Here then is the first set of "and's." Colonialism and postcolonialism, oppressions then and now, there and here, circumscribe our lives, thought, and work. The work of decolonization has been long and arduous, *and* it remains so today.

Graduate School: Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York

It was as a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia, that I had the privilege of working with strong, dedicated scholars (my major professor Karen Zumwalt, Celia Genishi, A. Lin Goodwin, Fran Schoonmaker, among others) who supported my excitement in engaging postcolonial theory to inform my dissertation research and writing—even if it was an area with which they were not terribly familiar. It was towards the mid-1990s and the discourse of postcolonialism was piping hot, following such other sizzling "posts" as poststructuralism and postmodernism which, in their turn, had also, of course, set the curriculum field abuzz.

For instance, it was Homi Bhabha's (1994) book, *Location of Culture*, that offered me the exciting, generative concept of "interstices"—in-between spaces—as I theorized Indian American high school students' negotiation of identities (their parents were immigrants from India) between home and school. And McCarthy & Crichlow's (1993) edited volume—*Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*—was one of the early works that connected postcolonialism and

cultural studies with the field of education in the U.S. I still recall the "A-ha!" moment when, in my advisor's office—discussing my "findings" as I grappled with the concept of interstitiality—I hit upon the title of my dissertation—*Margins, Center, and the Spaces In-between: Indian American High School Students' Lives at Home and School* (Asher, 1999).

Towards and Beyond Tenure: Louisiana State University (LSU) and the Curriculum Theory Project (CTP), Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Bergamo and *the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (*JCT*)

It was at LSU—from 1999-2011—where, as member of the Curriculum Theory Project, I developed my scholarship in *and* across the areas of postcolonialism, feminism, critical perspectives on multiculturalism, and Asian American studies—in relation to curriculum, teaching, *and* teacher education—as I went through tenure and promotion to Associate Professor and eventually to Professor.

As the new Bergamo and *JCT* leadership team takes the journal and the conference further forward, I also acknowledge and thank the co-founders—Bill Pinar and Janet Miller. As this paper as well as my earlier writings reveal, Pinar's (1995) conceptualization of *currere* and Miller's (2005) conceptualization of worldliness in curriculum studies as well as explorations of autobiography via post feminisms have informed my work.

Indeed, in my chapter titled "Decolonizing Curriculum" (Asher, 2010) in the *Curriculum Studies Handbook: The Next Moment* (Malewski, 2010), working with Pinar's (2004) concept of curriculum as "complicated conversation" that "keeps hope alive" (p. xiii), I wrote of the need to "ensure that curriculum work…does not become posttheory, postthought" (p. 398). And speaking to one aspect of decolonizing work ahead of us, I also wrote then:

> Similarly, instead of yielding to its perennial preoccupation with penetrating the "mystery" of the East, the West can focus on emerging from its own Cartesian colonization, to break out of divisive and limiting binaries, and reach into its own past for its own stories. (p. 400)

That chapter—which appears in the sixth section ("Cross-Cultural International Perspectives") of the volume—is the published version of my keynote talk at the 2006 conference—Articulating the Present (Next) Moment in Curriculum Studies: The Post-Reconceptualization Generations—held at Purdue University. I was one of several keynote speakers at that conference, where "junior" scholars (such as myself) had been paired with "senior" scholars, one responding to the other's paper. Grumet (2010) in her chapter, "Response to Nina Asher: Subject Position and Subjectivity in Curriculum Theory," thoughtfully looked back, then, at the three prior decades during which curriculum theorists—drawing, for instance, on extant discourses of psychoanalysis and phenomenology—had critiqued behavioristic approaches to accountability and argued for "humanistic methodology" rather than "social science inquiries" (p. 403). Observing the absence of discourses of "diversity" and "equity and multiculturalism" at that time (p. 403), she situated my work between "subject position and subjectivity" (p. 404). But then—isn't all work? Indeed, Grumet noted that in the questions I was discussing were echoes of the questions curriculum theorists had asked before—only now they were different, for instance, focusing on decolonization of the colonizer and the colonized.

At the same time, somewhat puzzlingly—perhaps even contradictorily—Grumet described my analyses as "sociological moves" (p. 407) that "would have important affects on curriculum. But they are not curriculum" (p. 407). Indeed, the three works that I cited above— Asher (2009), Adichie (2013), and Hughes' 1943 poem (in Rampersad, 1995)—speak to *currere* in (post)colonial contexts across the globe—be it the running of the course in terms of the life of the individual, the nation, or the larger human condition.

In concluding her response, Grumet thoughtfully noted that it requires persistence to "change habits of thought" (p. 409). I couldn't agree more. Such persistence remains critical to our endeavors towards equity and justice today. At the same time, Grumet dismissed "affixing of the adjective *post* to structuralism, modernism, colonialism, reconceptualization," as indicative of "an abrupt conclusion to thought and a repudiation of the lived world that spawns these theories" (p. 409). Nothing is that tidy—there are, in effect, no abrupt conclusions and there, indeed, are and have been through history multiple lived worlds that generate and are generated thorough multiple theorizings and representations. Only, some have been in the privileged foreground for some of "us" "here," while others have been in the shadows, at a distance, or absent from "our" dominant frames of reference. Indeed, as a critical, postcolonial, feminist scholar, I remind myself that I— and "we"—may well continue to engage and learn from these multiple theorizings and representations as we persevere with the recursive work of restructuring the discursive landscape in generative ways, foregrounding multiplicities, contradictions, contestations, *and* congruence.

And now…: At the Intersections of Postcolonialism and Globalization

In recent years, continuing to draw on both humanities and social sciences, I have worked at the intersections of postcolonialism and globalization in relation to education. Indeed, in 2014-15, as a Fulbright awardee and a faculty member in the Culture and Teaching program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, I returned to India—a globalized, hyper-digitized, capitalism-driven India, at that—to conduct my first research project (*Examining the Intersections of Globalization, Privatization, and Education after two decades of Economic Liberalization in India*) there as a U.S. academic. This lived experience broadened and deepened my interrogation of questions of location (e.g., "here and there," "East and West," "Global North and Global South"), identity and culture (e.g., "insider" and "outsider," "self" and "other") as a researcher and a scholar.

Head and Heart

The autobiographical excerpt I included earlier in this article cites my mother's childhood in colonial India. My mother was also a proud kindergarten teacher and unwaveringly committed, throughout her life, to equity and justice. Given this legacy, it is not surprising that my early introduction to Paulo Freire's (1978) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—when I worked on educational intervention projects in urban, rural, and tribal contexts in India from 1986-1988—shaped the questions that led me to travel the 10,000 miles to Teachers College. This was all, of course, before the internet era and the apparent ubiquity of cell phones.

It was also around that time that the Third Wave of feminism was rising—with the critical writings of women scholars of color (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Chandra

Mohanty, among others) talking back to the silences and lacunae evident in prevailing feminist discourses of the time. I found hooks' (1990, 1994) theorizing—including autobiographical theorizing across race, culture, gender, region, and nation—exciting and powerful, as I did Mohanty's now-classic essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1991). For instance, for hooks'(1994), theory was healing:

> I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me.... I saw in theory then a location for healing (p. 59).

For me, theory continues to be work that speaks to head and heart; past and present; contemplation and transformation.

As a doctoral student, I also read—alphabetically listed here—Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, Patricia Hill Collins, Teresa de Lauretis, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Diana Fuss, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Lisa Lowe, Adrienne Rich, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Ron Takaki, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Paul Willis—among other scholars. Similarly, in education/curriculum, I also read Michael Apple, John Dewey, Cynthia Dillard, Geneva Gay, Henry Giroux, Maxine Greene, Dwayne Huebner, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Patti Lather, Peter McLaren, Bill Schubert... And many others. Their labors and ideas informed my own as they evolved. It was exciting and affirming to read Anne Hickling-Hudson, Julie Mariko Matthews, and Annette Woods' (2004) edited volume—*Disrupting Preconceptions: Postcolonialism and Education*—published in Australia.

Also in the 1990s—as I was working on my dissertation research project, I realized that even as publications on multicultural education had begun mushrooming, literature on Asian American education was practically non-existent. This seems hard to imagine today. Donald Nakanishi and Tina Nishida's (1995) edited volume, *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Source Book for Teachers and Students*, and Stacey Lee's (1996), *Unraveling the Model Minority Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*, were in the vanguard.

Indeed, even at AERA 2019, Division B hosted a "highlighted session" titled "Curriculum Ignor(ance)e(s): Pan-Asian Identities in the Educational Industrial Complex." In their email note[2] inviting me to participate, session chairs M. Francyne Huckaby and Kirsten Edwards Williams thoughtfully noted:

> This conversation also serves as a reckoning with historical absences of the Pan-Asian experience in curriculum, curriculum history, and curriculum studies. Unfortunately, Division B's community has not been as attentive as we need to be to who we ignore, to what traditions and life experiences are silenced. (2018, October 10)

The works of the theorists, scholars, writers that I have cited so far have spoken to my head and my heart. It is both the intellectual engagement and the personal commitment that have allowed me to integrate curriculum and pedagogy with research and scholarship over the past three decades, as I organically crafted syntheses across postcolonialism *and* feminism; Asian American education *and* multiculturalism *and* globalization in seeking answers to enduring questions of equity and justice. The humanities *and* the social sciences, the arts *and* popular culture, in the U.S. *and* beyond, continue to fuel my thought and work in curriculum and teacher education. Such engagement with contextual and cultural specificities *along with* a focus on identifying and

working towards common goals serves as one way of dismantling the confines of monolithic constructions and us-them binaries.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) wrote of the necessity of both contemplation and action towards social transformation. Indeed, in an early paper, "In Contemplation: A Curriculum for Healing" (Asher, 2001), that I presented at the Bergamo conference (Bill Pinar had kindly invited me to participate on a panel), I grappled then with this question in relation to multicultural teacher education. Subsequently, I published a revised version titled, "Engaging Difference: Towards a Pedagogy of Interbeing" in the journal *Teaching Education* (Asher, 2003).

Recursively then, I ask: How might we continue today the work of engaging specificities and at the same time focus on achieving common goals across our different, multiplex identities and locations?

Here and There and Then and Now

I turn now to three distinct *and* interrelated works—drawn from twentieth-century literature and film, across national contexts—that engage race, gender, nation, and class and serve to illustrate the relevance of these considerations today.

Gay, African American essayist, James Baldwin—whose collected papers the Library Association of America will maintain in publication in perpetuity—wrote in *The Fire Next Time* in 1963, "I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn't love more important than color?" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 327). Approaching the conclusion, he wrote, "In short, we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity as men and women" (p. 342).

Some two decades later, British Pakistani screenwriter, Hanif Kureishi, wrote an essay titled "The Rainbow Sign"—the title a tribute to Baldwin's influence and the essay itself a companion to the groundbreaking film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Bevan & Radclyffe, 1985). He wrote:

> And the separatism, the total loathing of the white man as innately corrupt, the 'All whites are devils' view, was equally unacceptable. I had to live in England, in the suburbs of London, with whites. My mother was white. I wasn't ready for separate development. I'd had too much of that already. Luckily James Baldwin wasn't too keen either. (Kureishi, 1992, p. 9)

Kureishi, who was born in 1954 and is biracial, is perhaps best known in the U.S. for writing the screenplay of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Bevan & Radclyffe, 1985) featuring the unfolding of a gay, interracial love relationship—between a young, Pakistani, British man and a homeless, young, white man—in an England marked by heightened racial and economic tensions. In "The Rainbow Sign," (originally published in 1986) Kureishi reflected on his own experiences in school.

> Frequently during my childhood...When I was nine or ten a teacher purposefully placed some pictures of Indian peasants in mud huts in front of me and said to the class: Hanif comes from India. I wondered: did my uncles ride on camels? Surely not in their suits. (1992, p. 3)

Kureishi continued:

> I read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water. At school, one teacher always spoke to me in a "Peter Sellers" Indian accent. Another refused to call me by name, calling me Pakistani Pete instead. So I refused to call the teacher by *his* name and used his nickname instead. This led to trouble: arguments, detentions, escapes from school over hedges, and eventually suspension. (1992, p. 4)

Further echoes of these themes in relation to the British national context also reverberate through Kureishi's narrative about the decades leading up to the 1980s—Margaret Thatcher's England. Referencing the conservative anti-immigration Member of Parliament (1950-74), Enoch Powell, Kureishi wrote:

> As Powell's speeches appeared in the papers, graffiti in support of him appeared in the London streets. Racists gained confidence. People insulted me in the street. Someone in the café refused to eat at the same table with me. The parents of a girl I was in love with told her she'd get a bad reputation by going out with the darkies.
>
> Powell allowed himself to become a figurehead for racists.…
>
> Parents of my friends, both lower-middle-class and working class, often told me they were Powell supporters. Sometimes I heard them talking, heatedly, violently, about race, about "the Pakis." I was desperately embarrassed and afraid of being identified with these loathed aliens. I found it almost impossible to answer questions about where I came from. The word "Pakistani" had been made into an insult. It was a word I didn't want used about myself. I couldn't tolerate being myself. (1992, pp. 6-7)

So, yes, once again, here are themes with which we are all too familiar within and outside of our school contexts, just over three decades and about four-and-half thousand miles away. Colonization, transnational exchanges, and globalization are intertwined. And they shape identities, cultures, and curricula. It is, at the very least, an irony that empire-builders—imperialists, capitalists—reject immigration, when they have relied on it for their own gain, not only in terms of production and consumption of material goods but also production, consumption, and appropriation of knowledge and knowledge systems. (For instance, the marketing of "ethnic" goods, yoga, and travel destinations, and even the transnational peddling of accents to maximize profits are all too familiar to us.) Indeed, Frantz Fanon (1952/1967) wrote about such occupation of the body, the psyche, the tongue, and language over 60 years ago. These are the roots of present-day democratic, multicultural nations such as the U.S. and the U.K. The reification of the mythic "us" and "them" belies our interdependence. Little wonder then that in the education field today, we encounter the commodification and packaging of discourses and practices of multiculturalism, service-learning, and remediation, among others.

In concluding the "The Rainbow Sign," Kureishi wrote:

> So there must be…a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into seeing the necessity for this,…

The failure to grasp this opportunity for a revitalized and broader self-definition in the face of a real failure to be human, will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe.

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart.... Their futures will be intermixed....

This decision is not one about a small group of irrelevant people who can be contemptuously described as "minorities." It is about the direction of British society. About its values and how humane it can be when experiencing real difficulty and possible breakdown. It is about...what it really means when it describes itself as "democratic." (1992, pp. 36-37)

Yes, once again, all of this applies to us, here, today. And many others who are like us and different from us in many parts of the globe, I imagine. Yes, these are some of our persistent themes and they play out daily in our classrooms, communities, supermarkets, and airports; with our neighbors and on our television screens; and in our heads and hearts.

Present and Future

Following Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and others who have paved the way, we know that we continue to push against objectification, continue to talk back, and continue the work of dismantling the house of cisheteropatriarchy (to adapt from Audre Lorde). At the same time, so many of us—students, teachers, Southerners, Native Americans, refugees, immigrants, Dalits, those of us who are queer, of Color, rural, urban, suburban, socioeconomically marginalized, differently abled, white, and heterosexual—do go beyond this frame daily, through our writing, performing, teaching, in thought and action, through our very acts of living, surviving, working. To phrase it differently, we are both inside and outside the box—implicated, we resist and work towards transformation. As Kelly Oliver (2004) notes decolonization entails, along with large-scale resistance movements, "psychic revolts that can take place in the everyday lives of ordinary people who resist domination" (p. 35).

So, systemically then, why have we convinced ourselves that it is unrealistic, unaffordable to work through the binaries, the dualisms that divide us? To keep on breaking them down? Audre Lorde (1984) noted that a "profit economy" necessarily relies on an "institutionalized rejection of difference" (p. 115). And Peter Taubman asked us to consider how we have lost our way, having come to rely on "teaching by numbers," by following the "advice of salesmen, financiers, corporate lawyers, accountants, and millionaires" (2009, p. 128).

So, we face a lot of questions…

- Why do we continue to reify inequalities and dualisms—including in our perennially beleaguered public schools—despite our stated commitment to democracy?
- Given the apparent global sway of capitalistic expansion, how can we focus on fostering a culture that recognizes our interdependence and engages the enduring themes of our shared human fate, across different contexts?

- How can we declutter our minds, lives, and work so that, we may engage both our interdependence *and* specific histories and struggles as, with a steady focus, we seek possibilities in education today?
- How might we humanize curriculum (across the disciplines/subject areas) through creative arts and sciences, literature, film, self-reflexivity, and contemplation of our human condition and our shared global, multicultural future?

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) wrote, "Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (p. 87). And artist Maya Lin (2009) has given us her stunning, interactive, digital project (found at whatismissing.net) of context-specific stories of extinction and conservation—"a global memorial to the planet" bringing together art, design, science, and activism.

Former U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (2017, June 2), provided useful illustrative examples about transformation through meditation in a school. His own as well as the students' original skepticism notwithstanding, he described how Visitacion Valley Middle School, "hard hit by social circumstances in a tough environment," on the outskirts of San Francisco saw itself change:

> More than half of the kids had at least one parent that was incarcerated, rates of violence in the community were high, and in one year alone, before they started their program, they had 50 people that were murdered. They tried so many things to address the well-being of the students in school and they had a hard time. Suspension rates were high, grades were low, teacher burnout was through the roof. And they started a meditation program there, almost on a whim by chance, but there was a researcher who was focused on meditation, looking at the impact on children, and he began this program called "Quiet Time" at this school—twice daily meditation, it was approximately 15 minutes, twice a day. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

He described how, a few weeks into this program, the volume in the hallways started to go down, the list of teachers calling in sick started getting shorter, until one day no teacher had called in sick. In two years, the school had reduced the suspension rate by over 70% and students' grades went up.

Further, the Surgeon General cited some specific instances of students' own experiences. For instance, he said:

> When I talked to the kids I asked them, "Tell me what this actually did for you." And these two girls turned to each other, and they were actually on the basketball team, one of the girls said to the other: "You know after you started meditating you became a better teammate." And the other girl looked at her kind of offended and said: "I was a pretty good teammate before. What was wrong?" And she replied saying, "You know you used to kind of hog the ball, towards the end of the game. You were worried about not getting enough points up on the board, so you would try to shoot them yourselves instead of passing them to others. But after you started meditating, you seem calmer and more grounded, and you didn't get as flustered when things got as difficult in those basketball games." (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

In another instance, the Surgeon General described the background of a boy who bullied others, knew himself to be an "angry person," and encountered a "lot of discrimination in school." The boy's mother struggled with addiction and left when he was a small child, his father worked three jobs. Dr. Murthy noted:

> After he started meditating, he was skeptical in the beginning too, but he had this moment of calm, and it was very brief and lasted only a second, but it made him pause. It was his "aha" moment where he realized that he kind of felt good. He thought: "If that felt good, maybe I'm not an angry person, maybe I'm actually a calm person."… Eventually he found the kids he bullied and apologized to them, and today he's actually teaching meditation to other kids. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

Towards the very end of the hour-long conversation, when asked to share his 60-second idea to change the world, Dr. Vivek Murthy responded:

> We have to teach our children to be moral leaders. That will transform our country and our world. We teach our children about arithmetic and writing, but we do not teach them to be moral leaders—to live and stand up for the values that make our society work. Values of compassion and generosity, values of kindness. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

More broadly in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, for some decades, the non-profit U.S.-based publisher, Rethinking Schools has been publishing critical, equity-focused works useful in K-12 classrooms as well as in curriculum studies and teacher preparation programs. There is, in recent years, a push to humanize technology (Parry, 2014; Turkle, 2011) and science (Bailey, 2016) and approach curriculum through creative, multidirectional, de-centered networks (Williamson, 2013).

Per Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of interbeing, when we "look more deeply," we are able to see how we "inter-are." Learning from the experiences and narratives of others inevitably expands, deepens, enriches our knowledge and understanding. Kureishi speculated 30 years ago that a "new way of being British" might be difficult to attain. If we are going to take up the charge of embracing our interdependence and seeking new possibilities—if no individual is ever to use again the phrase "I couldn't tolerate being myself"—then we need to commit anew daily to looking deeply, healing the splits—including the splits between theory, research, practice, and policy—and forging new ways of interbeing.

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A "Race Course," "Running," and a "Chariot"

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

SUPARNA ROY
Queen's University, Canada

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 reigns) 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 (Bhajanananda, 2006; Vivekananda, 1893/2007). Attachments to pleasurable outcomes automatically bind us with fear to the possibility of its non-fruition. 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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Acknowledgement

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 c*urrere* 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 inspirited *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 Inspirited) 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 inspirited 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 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 inspirited 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 Inspirited 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 inspirited 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) inspirits 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 synthetical 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 inspirited *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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The Incompleteness of Standards and the Potential for Deliberative Discourse

PAUL T. PARKISON
University of North Florida

ACADEMIC STANDARDS REPRESENT AN ANCHOR POINT within education today. The development of curriculum, lesson plans, formative and summative assessments, and government education policy circle around the high expectations and rigor of academic standards. Whether considered from the vantage point of college and career readiness or disciplinary content knowledge, academic standards provide a content that directs schooling, if not education. How we understand academic standards indicates a great deal about how we relate to and embody education. What occurs in school and individual classrooms is shaped by the relationship we form with academic standards.

In many cases, we are tempted to approach academic standards as objects of inquiry and implementation and not as subjects of intention in dialogue. It is common to see academic standards as an object of study or as a set of restraining requirements for the development of curricula, discrete lesson plans, and assessment instruments. The consequence of not considering academic standards as subjects of intention, defined by our purpose in relation to them, is serious. Approaching academic standards from an orientation that appreciates their role as contextual actors has significant potential to transform education, schooling, the development of curriculum, and classroom instructional practices. If we maintain a division between the products or objects of academic standards and our purpose in creating curricula and educative experiences within a schooling context, then the culture will develop immanently, in ways that are unpredictable (Hirschkop, 1989). If we take a phenomenological approach to our study of academic standards, we may develop a mode of discourse that will convey the normative, value-laden connection between the lessons, curriculum, and assessments, and the standards as intentional subjects.

As Greg Nielsen's (2002) analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin helps to demonstrate, the answerability (Bakhtin, 1993) of our action in relation to academic standards is potentially critical:

> The accumulation of each individual act makes up my life history, my once-occurent-life. "To be in life, to be actually, is to act, is to be unindifferent toward the once-occurent-whole" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 43). If I am indifferent toward the once-occurent-whole, or if I am pretending to be someone I am not, then the fact of my uniqueness and answerability are severely jeopardized. In fact, if I ignore my active self and simply live the passive self

(the self who receives), I am by definition pretending. "I can try and prove my alibi in Being. I can pretend to be someone I am not. I can abdicate from my obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 42). But pretending means to risk being chosen by someone else. Even a little pretending, we might say, influences the possibilities of action across one's life history. (Nielsen, 2002, p. 36)

Teaching and curriculum development are particularly vulnerable once-occurent-life positions. The roles of teacher and curriculum developer are intimately engaged in the transcultural space of education, impacting the answerability of others through the exercise of institutional power (Parkison, 2014, 2015a). It is the intent of this paper to expose the potential of academic standards, like the Common Core State Standards, to serve as carefully constructed public projects—public projects laden with ideological, ethical, aesthetic, and axiological values that can be engaged in a studious dialogue.

Dialogic Orientation to Academic Standards

Bakhtin's theoretical contributions provide a critical methodology that connects authority, carnival, and knowledge in a manner that is useful to the analysis of academic standards. Authority (presented in the form of academic standards) and internally persuasive discourse (presented in the form of curriculum), and carnival (as embodied in the form of pedagogy), provide a horizon within which to develop a conceptual understanding and to reflect on applications in education, schooling, the development of curriculum, and classroom instructional practices. Approaching academic standards from a dialogical orientation has significant implications for the normative outcomes to be addressed and achieved. Bakhtin recognizes dialogue as composed of emotional-volitional, axiological perspectives that seek responses from other positions that can embody a space of shared, but not necessarily conflict-free, exchange. Dialogue, within this perspective, is a way of being rather than a technique or type of communication (Rule, 2011). Dialogue becomes creative embodiment, a generative presence, that actively engages and accompanies responses from diverse axiological positions (Nielsen, 2002).

Creating spaces in which the generative presence of these diverse axiological positions can emerge and be embodied in action is a collaborative, social enterprise. What is intriguing about the concept of generative presence is its temporal, as well as spatial, significance. Generative presence is relational—it is about being positioned in relation to multiple others and to multiple future potentialities. As we take a position, we embody a potentiality for ourselves and for others. It is this responsibility (Levinas, 1981), answerability (Bakhtin, 1990), or concernful thrown-ness (Heidegger, 1962) that has the power of generating, originating, producing, or reproducing possibilities. Our bearing, carriage, or air as a person within the eternally recurring moment of presence makes the difference. How we occupy a relationship determines its generativity. Our presence is an opportunity and choice every time.

This is not a new idea within education. We have considered the relationships involved in education as the central concern throughout the history and philosophy of education. Teaching and learning, curriculum development, instructional efficacy, and policy are all viewed within a system of relationships among and between significant stakeholders. As we find ourselves in a place and time, in relation to others, including academic standards, we bring commitments with us. How we relate to those commitments—political, social, cultural, and economic—determines the power and

freedom we have in that context. Prioritizing specific and exclusive commitments, making them ideologically constraining, reduces our generative presence to one of reproduction. If we have not considered the relationships these commitments generate, then we are making a choice to continue a state of being for ourselves and for the potentialities available to others.

Consideration of the generative presence of dialogue is about drawing attention to the possible meanings and relationships that are often in dispute and to the idea that these disputes cannot be resolved by simply deciding for others to learn and embody the same commitments. Academic standards, when conceived as objects of inquiry and implementation, become static commitments. Our commitments can inhibit or prohibit the generative presence of dialogue that would allow for the emergence of otherwise foreclosed positions—positions that have the potential to bring about enhanced possibilities for education, schooling, the development of curriculum, and classroom instructional practices. Such foreclosings are easy to recognize in cases of obvious conflict (testing, charters, vouchers, etc.), but in cases where conflicts are found in relationships in which power and commitments operate through dominating discourses and refuse to respond, answer, or be concerned with the presence of others, we become stagnant and restrict our shared human potential. When academic standards are approached as objects of inquiry and implementation, the threat to the generative presence of dialogue is significant.

Cosmic Terror as a Frame for Discourse

Bakhtin views the world as in a permanent state of becoming, continually constituted within a dialogue between human beings, as well as between human and non-human forces. The process of becoming is one of co-creation characterized by struggle between humans and "other" forces beyond our control. The event of struggle is both ontologically significant, as the way we are constituted as human beings, and ethical in the way we ought to be (Rule, 2011). Our relationship with the other is not guaranteed nor certain; it is an ethical and moral task, a space of struggle, and a site that requires constant effort, attention, and renewal.

Emphasizing the imminence of relationships within the educative context, there is value in inquiring into the potential of what Martin Buber (1970) called "supra-contradictory relations" to generate a public space that is always in a state of becoming. From this perspective, it becomes evident that public space emerges within dialogue. In a dialogue about academic standards, we create a supra-contradictory relation that enables a space for education. This interactive generation of a public space is embodied in study (Agamben, 2000, 2007). Hannah Arendt adds support to this construction of public space by emphasizing the necessity of an "in-between" or a "common project." An "in-between" is made up of a set of common issues that must be approached by multiple, authentic individuals without abdicating their identity so that those who are brought into dialogue see sameness in diversity (Arendt, 1958). The "in-between" is the role of academic standards. This dialogical encounter forms the common project to be accomplished within education. Academic standards, as a subject acting within the network of participants, perform the role of the in-between not as an end in themselves but as a means of engaging in the generative dialogue that embodies a public space.

Bakhtin (1991, 2008) presents the concept of "cosmic terror," which stresses the radical asymmetry of the struggle between humans and the other within this generative dialogue embodied in public spaces. Cosmic terror plays a key role for Bakhtin in the instrumentalization of fear of change that lives in each event or experience. This fear is also the contextual factor that effectively

limits or marginalizes discourse. Within education, we are faced with the critical dilemma of protecting the newness, or innocence, of childhood, while also preparing future actors within public and social spaces (Arendt, 1958, 1954; Elshtain, 1995). Understanding cosmic terror helps to clarify the obstacles and challenges that need to be engaged in order to jump toward meaningful, embodied, and generative discourse.

How we relate to the world, according to Bakhtin, is through a process of co-creativity, which he calls "authoring" or "co-authoring." This process binds us to the other in a Janus-like manner; we are never ourselves with the other, as we are constituted by it (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 2). Bakhtin's theory of self is characterized as a transgredient (passing across or beyond; objective) relation in which diverse individual orientations interact. For each Self, there is a normative construction embodied in action. Bakhtin asserts that human awareness needs to be stretched beyond immediate experiences and surroundings in order for the Self to comprehend its situated-ness. Situated-ness, our temporal and spacial presence, is critical because of the impact of place on subjecthood. Subjecthood refers to the individual's sense of self and that sense's impact on the individual's autonomy and agency. Where an individual stands in relation to their peers, colleagues, and those in positions of authority and power impacts the view the individual has of the world. Both dimensions of contextual identity (sense of place and interpersonal politics) establish this positionality.

For Bakhtin, action is embodied in the expression of the I-for-myself, I-for-the-other, and other-for-me conceptualizations of our situated-ness that we each develop as emotional-volitional, axiological orientations (Nielsen, 2002, p. 38). Michael Holquist (2002) helps to clarify the role of subjecthood when he identifies the speaking subject as the site of meaning:

> Bakhtin translates Dostoevsky's dictum that the heart of man is a battleground between good and evil into the proposition that the mind of man is a theater in which the war between the centripetal impulses of cognition and the centrifugal forces of the world is fought out. I can make sense of the world only by reducing the number of meanings—which are potentially infinite—to a restricted set. (p. 47)

Though involved in historically and socially situated contexts, we are unique, each of us being the product of different kinds of co-constitutions. This difference, but simultaneous intra-relation, is what Bakhtin calls dialogue—a struggle we become involved in when we encounter another person or force, which in turn has been affected by others (Bakhtin, 1993). It is a mutual transformation we cannot escape from, a continuous struggle with new concepts formed by the multitude of negotiations that make up and evoke our cosmic terror. This engagement is educative—it opens space for future engagement and continued struggles.

For Bakhtin, dealing with cosmic terror implies a re-evaluation of our relationship with the world. For teachers within this frame, it would mean a re-evaluation of our relationship with academic standards. Bakhtin contrasts two different kinds of relationships: small and great but abstract. The small register of experiences includes the "secure and stable little world of the family, where nothing is foreign, or accidental or incomprehensible" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 232). For teachers, this small register relationship is experienced in the planning and implementation of lessons aligned to individual standards or indicators designed for our specific classroom and students. The work of our relationship to standards is completed in each lesson. This register represents a narrow, close at hand, experience of life, an illusion of permanence and stability erected against the imagination of a large and abstract world. The great but abstract register is experienced within the

set of academic standards and the aligned standardized tests that hold teachers accountable within this relationship. The horizon of the great but abstract register is a broad vista that draws us out of the comfortable close at hand into the cosmic.

There are two common temptations and potentially negative outcomes in these registers for those involved in educational pursuits. The first comprises a withdrawal from the greater world through nursing or cultivating an unrealistic imagination of life. Education is seen as a series of isolated events that accumulate. The absence of these events gets translated as a deficit—either on the part of the learner or on the part of the teacher. Such a state leaves the teacher vulnerable to shock and surprise when the deficit-laden, other-for-me is present in the learning setting. The second danger follows from this, in that the teacher makes themselves susceptible to forces that promise to maintain or return stability by remediating the deficit. Bakhtin observed that, to the person who inhabits small experiences, there is one cognizer (everything else is an object of cognition), one who is living and unclosed (everything else is unresponsively dead and closed), and one who speaks (everything else is unresponsively silent). In Bakhtin's view of great but abstract experiences, everything is alive and speaks.

The Case of the Common Core State Standards

Withdrawal from the great but abstract world does not have a liberating or protective effect but, instead, makes one more manageable and controllable. Where loss of stability is equated with loss of meaning, there is a will to give over control. Academic standards and high stakes accountability or standardized assessment systems gesture towards an "official culture" by creating the illusion of maintaining control, and this official culture gains power by nourishing a desire for an unchanging environment. Indicating the role of official culture (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 336), Bakhtin demonstrates how power is achieved and maintained by addressing our desire for an unchanging environment or context, a focus on the close at hand and small experiences. This is the role that academic standards, when treated as objects, perform. We can see this in the move to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the standardized testing that accompanies them (Parkison, 2015a, 2015b). In a review of the development of CCSS by LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, and Lang (2015), the adoption of CCSS is linked to policy termination, a policy that effectively ends dialogue and provides a stable small experience set of guidelines for states and schools. Bakhtin finds that human awareness needs to stretch further than one's immediate surroundings in order to understand one's situatedness. While the shortsighted view of small experience only allows us to see the immediate destruction and personal loss and the great but abstract experiences make us desire a potentially unrealistic conception of meaning, Bakhtin's alternative contextualizes our relationship to everything else.

Confronted with a depersonalized and technocratic small experience schooling system governed by a totalizing system of academic standards, testing, and accountability, teachers face an oppressive system that does not encourage authenticity. Authenticity and dialogue free from monologic ideological narratives like the CCSS depend upon intentional and empowered participation in the dialogical processes of curriculum development and instructional decision-making. The relational nature of learning and the classroom require a teacher who is engaged, has made meaning of, and has ownership of the content, processes, and products of the curriculum (Parkison, 2015a). The dialogical relationship between teacher and student is one founded upon an intersection of authentic identities or relational horizons—not roles put on by actors within an

institution. By controlling the horizon within which classroom relationships develop, the depersonalized and technocratic schooling system has effectively denied authenticity and dialogue a place within this system.

The politics of academic standards, in particular the CCSS and their related assessments, represents the hegemonic assertion of power over the voice of teachers within the education discourse (LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015; Parkison, 2015a, 2015b). This hegemonic assertion is also seen in the form of scripted lessons and out-of-the-box curriculum. There is nothing dramatically new in this assertion (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2012; Popkewitz, 1997; Taylor, 1999). What a focus on dialogue offers to education involves the call to politically engaged participation, by intimately involved stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and local communities in generative, public dialogue.

Interpreting Bakhtin to bring his work into the context of curriculum, instruction, and the immediacy of schooling, he seems to steer between two visions of this struggle for politically engaged participation; while clearly tying meaning and creative agency to human consciousness, he opens up at least the represented world of academic standards to the productiveness of matter. These academic standards as objects become "attracted into life's orbit; they become living participants in the events of life. They take part in the plot and are not contrasted with its actions as mere 'background' for them" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 209). Academic standards cease to be background and act. This view of CCSS would highlight their other-for-me role in a transgredient dialogue. In the world of schooling, standards would appear to be active participants in a manner similar to the way materiality is presented as objectively valid. The motivation for Bakhtin, and one shared within this analysis, is not necessarily to demonstrate material agency, but to show the relationship between our visions and representations of the world, and materiality in general, and our capacity for action and creative imagination—two abilities that are essential for challenging monologic or closed narratives. Interpreting academic standards as embodied through a transgredient relation opens the space of dialogue. Recognizing academic standards as subjective actors, embodied, normative, and value-laden, makes them a co-author with the potential to transform education, schooling, the development of curriculum, and classroom instructional practices.

To engage with the prevailing rift between academic standards and text of schooling in the imagination, embodiment—as a composite of curriculum and pedagogy—emerges as a vital feature analogous to Bakhtian dialogue. In its materiality, our bodily set-up prevents us from perceiving ourselves and instead forces us to remain directed towards the Other (past and future), but its distinct material and temporal dimensions turn the "given" world into a world that we need to respond to ourselves. This imagination of body-world relationship could be compared to Emmanuel Levinas's (1981) notion of embodiment, in which to have a body means to be unable to escape the need to respond. Bakhtin emphasizes that the body negotiates word and world. The organic nature of the living body could further be regarded as the material expression of unfinalizability—of continuous openness to transformation and becoming. In terms of schooling, the struggle between material academic standards and embodied curriculum and pedagogy, enacted publicly by teachers and students, is inescapable and characterized by continuous openness to transformation and becoming: embodied in the expression of the I-for-myself, I-for-the-other, and other-for-me conceptualizations (Nielsen, 2002, p. 38).

At first glance, the conditions of this transformation between academic standards, curriculum, and pedagogy seem to entail a set of academic standards that is not an equal partner in dialogue: it lacks consciousness and, therefore, cannot create context (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 351).

In Bakhtin's writings on Francois Rabelais (Bakhtin, 1984), he seems to offer the possibility of a different significance for the Other, nonhuman set of academic standards; the other-for-me is too vast and incomprehensible as a totality for teachers and students to be in equal exchange.

> We must take into consideration the importance of cosmic terror, the fear of the immeasurable, the infinitely powerful. The starry sky, the gigantic material masses of the mountains, the sea, the cosmic upheavals, elemental catastrophes—these constitute the terror that pervades ancient mythologies, philosophies, the systems of images, and language itself with its semantics. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 335)

A characteristic of human-nature dialogue in Bakhtin is that both parties, while involved in a process of co-authoring, should also be considered adversaries; to act and to be involved in dialogue does not mean there are no asymmetric power relations or desires of actors to win or triumph over one another (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 282).

I have asserted in other places that teachers' refusal to accommodate a dialogical materiality with academic standards stems from a significant degree of experience of material processes as not only dehumanizing and inhuman, open and messy, but as over-actively co-authoring of human lives, without teachers having any control over this inhuman authorship (Parkison, 2014, 2015a). Conscious dialogue with and about the academic standards, on the other hand, would imply not so much an anthropomorphic animation of the academic standards or the levelling of the human and inhuman, but a dealing with the shock of difference resulting from being open to it. Rather than envisioning this dialogue with the academic standards leading to more humanized and ethical curriculum and pedagogy, this use of Bakhtin challenges us to affirm and overcome the shock of the perceived distance and meaninglessness of the academic standards for ourselves. The key question within Bakhtin's challenge is the need to negotiate the vulnerability of those who seek to disconnect from the academic standards or those who seek to stabilize the academic standards, thus, gaining a false sense of permanence or mastery: our alibi in Being, our abdication from our individual obligative (ought-to-be) uniqueness (LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). To refuse to engage, through a denial of the subject-hood of the standards either through blind rejection or objectification as permanent and settled, is to capitulate.

The empowerment of teachers that would result from a reconceptualization of the discursive processes that are embodied within and that should inform curriculum development has significant transformative potential for education and the schooling experience. A dialogically reconfigured forum would have the capacity to achieve a worthwhile democratic discourse resulting in a "fusion of horizons" between the need for responsive and inclusive curricula and the political push for standardization. Given the potential transformative impact of a dialogically reconfigured generative discourse embodied in a public space to enhance the prospects for the emergence of creative new solutions to educational issues, such a dialogical reappropriation, is needed to ensure the re-empowerment of teachers and as a process for revitalizing the schooling experience in our pluralistic, multicultural, and dynamic society.

How do teachers and curriculum developers relate to the actual curriculum implemented in the classroom? According to Bakhtin, we come to know phenomenon like implemented curriculum through a process of co-creativity, which he calls "authoring" or "co-authoring." The absence of separation, of distance and a zone of contact, are utilized within education in a different way than in other phenomenal arenas. In place of our often tedious, contentious, and inclusion oriented development of responsive curriculum, we are offered a surrogate. This surrogate comes

coded as "evidence-based," "rigorous," or "focused on college and career readiness." We can implement this replacement curriculum that is identified with research, with standards, and with best practices simply by reading the script and distributing the worksheets. It follows that teachers and curriculum developers might substitute our own lives and axiological yet-to-be responsive curricula for an obsessive reading of standards, or pre-packaged and marketed out-of-the-box curricula. This substitution is equally framed within a small experience and misses the opportunity to participate in a generative, public dialogue.

There is a temptation to reject CCSS and the standards movement altogether in favor of an unqualified celebration of the everyday, small experiences—a gesture often associated with a move toward democracy or inclusion. Such celebrations have only a tangential relation to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue and arguably none at all to democracy. Like a novel in Bakhtin's framework, educational experience, cognition, and practice determine the curriculum, which indicates that curriculum is meant to do more than reproduce the intentions and images already available in everyday life. Such a perspective reduces education to a matter of reproduction of scripts and roles, disconnecting it from the needs for accurate knowledge of social forms. Learning becomes reactive to set stimuli, rather than responsive to lived experience. The emphasis on curriculum experimentation leads in a different direction, towards a conception of education as a collective, public learning process, dependent on cognition as much as on open expression. The comprehension of complex, modern societies requires knowledge of a sophisticated, even standardized, kind. If the great but abstract experiences of public life appear impersonal, the prerequisite of education and the task of the curriculum is to find some way to connect these processes to the kind of choice and decision already present in the narratives of private and social life (Agamben, 2007; Arendt, 1958; Bakhtin, 1993, 2008).

Bakhtin raises the central issue of the relationship between discourse and power. Any sociopolitical project of centralization and hegemony like CCSS has always and everywhere to position itself against the ever-present decentralizing forces of the near at hand. Carnival is the concept Bakhtin presents to address these decentralizing forces in so far as they are expressed in intentional, parodic representations across a range of signifying practices. Parallel to this opposition of carnival to official culture is another opposition between whole, national cultures, which are presented as complete, achieving a coherence branded as common sense, and those local cultures that are no longer isolated and secured from global influences. The contending forces seem to be starkly polarized and to operate in abstraction from the institutional sites in which the complex relations of discourse and power are actually negotiated. Schools and education are caught in the middle of this struggle—hence, the focused impact of cosmic terror.

Implications for Education

In carnival, official culture and normal life are suspended, including the hierarchical distances between people produced by associations, institutions, traditions, standards, and the society. What Bakhtin calls a "frank" exchange occurs, or an exchange governed by internally persuasive discourse that is outside any propriety and convention. Carnival places academic standards, like all factors of official culture, in suspension, essentially freeing academic standards from their objective role and providing a forum in which they become co-author of the educational experience. Academic standards in carnival promote an in-between that creates the space of the generative presence of all stakeholders. Education, like carnival, should not be standardized. In

carnival, authority is decrowned, we engage in the laughing side of things, separate from cosmic terror, and there is a profound and collective engagement with alternative approaches and objectives of education. The monolithic concepts embodied in CCSS are viewed as death (Parkison, 2014). As such, carnival should not be viewed as moments of complete disorganization but much more as epistemology—one where we sensuously interact with truth from many angles. We do not ignore academic standards, nor do we place them on a shelf, in a script, or a box. This type of foreclosure is a denial of the space for generative presence. The role of commitments to academic standards is significant. Our view of the importance and priority of relationships with academic standards orient us differently if we want to occupy a point or moment, or alternatively if our goal is to generate a space for humanity. We interact with them as co-author and subjects in the educational context.

Hannah Arendt (1958) captures the implications of the idea of generative presence in her introduction to *The Human Condition*:

> To these preoccupations and perplexities, this book does not offer an answer. Such answers are given every day, and they are matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person, as though we dealt here with problems for which only one solution is possible. What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. (p. 5)

As we think what we are doing, we collaboratively open the space of generative presence. Working to disclose rather than foreclose the potentiality of educative experience would seem a worthy goal. Avoiding the delusion of "a solution" or "truth" remains the challenge, recognizing in the process that the project and the end are linked. In education, in pedagogy, in policy, we must think what we are doing.

Prioritizing the relationships that open the space of generative presence mediates the possibility of foreclosure. Entering a discussion, conversation, or testimony with the development of relationships with academic standards as a priority changes the encounter. Our condition as human, as full participants in humanity, presents us each with a choice at every moment and in every place to be present. We can occupy that space in a manner that is generative of potentiality and opportunity for ourselves and others or in a manner that forecloses those opportunities. We can build walls around our commitments and be carefree and secure for a while, but what kind of isolated slave to our commitments will we become (Makiguchi, 1989)?

Whichever direction we take with countering the standardization of education, Bakhtin alerts us to the necessity of taking into account that materiality and meaning are closely entwined and that the relation between the two can be interpreted for different ends. Curriculum should not be the bearer of a particular political content; it should be a means of imagining the truth that no rule is absolute. Its only politics is the insistence on the necessity of politics, of dialogical struggle, of power as struggle. To understand the radicalism of applying Bakhtinian thinking is to have seen that, in his concepts, the border of the sociopolitical has always already been crossed.

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Teaching and Research as Blurred Translating

SHANNON K. MCMANIMON
State University of New York at New Paltz

TODAY, MY JOB TITLE IDENTIFIES ME as faculty member in a university school of education. But unlike many of my colleagues, the experiences that most shape how I approach both teaching and research were not in PK-12 schools or a teacher education program but in hallways, in community centers or church basements, and around kitchen tables—spaces usually not even considered classrooms. Over the past decade, I have expended enormous time and energy trying to explain how communicating across different social, cultural, and economic worlds, identities, and experiences *is* education, as much so as what happens in fourth grade social studies or high school chemistry. My shorthand for these practices: *blurred translating*.

This conceptualization has been born out of both practice and theory as I made meaning of experiential knowledges that far exceed the bounds of school; it has been a form of *currere* (before I knew the term): "an autobiographical process of reflection and analysis in which one recalls [their] educational experience and examines it…as a source of energy and direction for the journey" (Grumet, in Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 142). *Currere* draws on multiple tools (e.g., psychoanalysis, literature, experience) to ask "why?" about remembrances of the past and to ponder the future; *currere* requires "learn[ing] to take ourselves as data" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015, p. 23) so as to articulate individual and social understandings of the work of educational settings and to deepen agency. This reflection and analysis is part of an "ongoing project of self-understanding" to ethically mobilize "for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual—with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere" (Pinar, 2004, p. 37).

The purpose of this article is, thus, to trace my journey to understand myself as an educator and educational researcher and to outline how I approach what Freire (1970/2000) named the ontological vocation of becoming more fully human—what to me is the most important part of the journey of teaching, learning, and research. To become more fully human, we must recognize the vast diversity of humanity; this requires working through and discarding ways in which we are encouraged to see each other as less than human, based on differences such as language, gender, race, ethnicity, or place of birth. While we share a common planet, we do not live in the same worlds or speak the same words; our experiences—all education—are framed by different histories, identities, locations, and understandings of the world. To see each other as fully human, then, requires translating—meaning "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or

appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster)—across these different worlds. This is rarely easy or clear—it is blurred. For me, teaching and research are about *blurred translating*[1]—ongoing, in motion, and always incomplete attempts to move and to speak across different worlds and words. These internal and inter-personal processes and moments of practice foster understanding across our multiplicity of languages, identities, knowledges, and voices, while acknowledging power and positionality.

This article could also be understood as a selected pathway through this immense responsibility, my working through of experiences from different worlds I have lived in or traversed and drawing on (educational) experiences—as articulated through poetry, essay, translation theory,[2] and more—that move me. My thinking, "intertwined with neighborhoods, errands, bicycles, antibiotics, and begonias," has also been clarified through interpretive acts with others and with theory so as to "penetrate the schemas that organize curriculum and teaching" (Grumet, 2000, p. 87).

Currere—reflecting on and analyzing such educational experiences—is about motion, but this does not mean it is straightforward—there are twists and turns, doubling back and getting stuck. A nonlinear story I tell myself about myself (and, thus, a story I live), my story has no clear beginning, middle, or end—it shifts and reshapes as I live and as the reader or hearer interacts with it. Intentionally fragmented writing decisions that leave much unsaid require that readers at times "boundary-skip between multiple conceptual and experiential worlds" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 175) and engage in meaning-making *with* the text, thinking *with* its stories. As with language translation, my work is not linear but may require being "present simultaneously at various points of a text" (Biguenet & Schulte, 1989, p. xii). In this presentation, I attempt to live out in writing the complexity and multiplicity of teaching and research as blurred translating, practices that center social justice.

I write of my own experiences (Grumet's "neighborhoods, errands, bicycles, antibiotics, and begonias") throughout, beginning with stories about two new students: Simone in my high school and myself in graduate school. Drawing on an essay by novelist Zadie Smith (2009), ideas from educator Lisa Delpit (2006), and an article by sociologist Christian Churchill (2005), I trace the evolution of blurred translating as a way of conceptualizing teaching and research. I argue that the modifier "blurred" is essential in an era of standardized curriculum and for those with social justice commitments. Drawing on language and translation theories, I then turn to exploring how the *practice* of blurred translating can transform the distances between the languages we live (using imagery from a poem by Loris Malaguzzi, n.d., as well as Sherod Santos', 2000, writing about the Jewish story of Babel) even as it remains an impossibility, as we are always lost in translation. Ultimately, I argue that the messy risk of blurred translating enables us to engage a multiplicity of worlds and words as we work in relationship toward what Smith named Dream City.

Ponytails, Pain, and Pressure

One year, a new student started at my nearly all-white high school. I had never been to school with a Black student before. In the locker room, a group of white girls talked about how weird—inappropriate even—it was that Simone[3] had short hair one day and a ponytail the next. Of course, I never talked with Simone about it—and I doubt anyone else did either.

A year later, I sat in a hallway in a college dormitory, having my first interracial conversation about hair: what it meant for us and what was necessary for its care. I had no idea. I

had never talked—or thought—about these differences. I was riveted—and intimidated. So riveted, in fact, that my body carries a physical reminder. Entranced in learning about hair care products and extensions and comparing how often we could (or needed, in my case) to wash our hair, I didn't notice the terrific storm brewing outside. Running to shut my dorm room window, I slipped in the rain water already puddled on the floor, jamming my toe into an immovable desk.

Perhaps I should have noticed before this writing that I have been physically marked by this foray into understanding the lives of "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006)—and that an unyielding school structure was responsible for this marking. Might there be parallels between my physical pain that night as we sat in the basement waiting out a tornado, my elevated foot surrounded by ice packs, and the pain Simone may have felt in high school as (white) others cavalierly judged her hair? While I will never know, in retrospect and drawing on innumerable conversations, scholarly writing, and popular and social media, I can guess why Simone might have stayed at our (yes, "our") school only a short time. Despite good intentions on the part of most students, faculty, and staff, I doubt anyone was attempting to translate between her life and the norms and hidden curriculum of the school. The school didn't (to my knowledge) have "ice packs"—or the language of microaggressions—to assuage the likely pain of being in an environment where something as simultaneously simple and complex as a ponytail was subjected to hostile judgment. Unlike that college hallway, there were no spaces in which those of us who were white were encouraged to "learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness" (Delpit, 2006, p. 47). A ponytail was "just hair"—not a marker of unacknowledged differences in lived realities that resulted in ingrouping and outgrouping.

Years and yet only a moment later, I became the new student. I naïvely began a doctoral program not knowing how much I would be asked to leave behind and how much I would struggle to have what I knew—what I carried in my body and mind—validated in what can be unyielding structures. My first semester, floundering in new discourses, the changed landscape of a different city, unfamiliar work, and new relationships, I read Smith's (2009) lecture, "Speaking in Tongues." She wrote of acquiescing to what Delpit (2006) terms the culture of power. Thinking she was gaining something, Smith let go of her childhood voice—which had been judged as unacceptably (according to school) raced and classed—to speak with that of the culture of power: "at the time, I genuinely thought this was the voice of lettered people, and that if I didn't have the voice of lettered people I would never truly be lettered" (Smith, 2009, p. 132). Later, she regretted this change: "I should have kept both voices alive in my mouth. They were both a part of me. But how the culture warns against it!" (p. 133).

That same month, presenting in a research methods course on my work with other white people to challenge racism in informal learning spaces, another graduate student questioned my presence in our program, implying that these experiences—how I had spent the previous decade-plus, such as those conversations about hair—were not really what education was about. "If you aren't a teacher," she demanded to know, "what *are* you then?" Perhaps she was simply echoing the common conflation of education and schooling. Her narrow conception of teaching—as something that happens in particular buildings, with set lesson plans and standards, at specific times—likely reflected how she had learned to understand education in an era of high-stakes accountability, standardization, and privatization: teaching distilled into concrete, decontextualized methods and research pressed often into narrow definitions of empirical data and methods. Yet, her question jarred me profoundly.

Only months into graduate school, despite being white, raised middle-class, and

understanding the culture of power of school and, thus, able to speak—at least somewhat—with its voice, I felt some tiny part of the pressures Smith and Delpit wrote about. Did entering the academic discipline of education mean letting go of my own identities, including the ways I conceptualized teaching? Was the other student correct—was this really not a place I should be? Should I learn to "speak identically" (Smith, 2009, p. 132), to conceptualize teaching (and learning) narrowly and instrumentally? To ignore my conversations and experiences?

For years, I had intentionally placed myself where I felt uncomfortable, was an outsider, or was not "supposed" to be; without having the words for it, I was developing a double image—a consciousness of how my white self was viewed and raced by people of color, situated at "the intersection of complex understandings of the historical and political context[s]" (Seidl & Hancock, 2011, p. 690) of race, racism, and racialized relationships. At times, others journeyed with me, offering insights or asking me to consider voices and identities different from my own. I *knew* this was teaching and learning. So was that storm-filled conversation about hair in which I practiced learning across words and worlds—a conversation I remember today when I hear my majority white undergraduate students' indignation upon discovering that wearing one's hair naturally violates dress codes in many U.S. schools. And, I wonder about Simone. Inside my shoes, my permanently crooked toe reminds me of the pain (and the joy) of understanding others' lives—and what happens when this comes up against unyielding school structures.

The Evolution of Teaching and Research as Blurred Translating

As a graduate student, I needed a way of articulating the knowledges of these lived experiences—and what they demanded of me in my new roles as university instructor and researcher. I wrote my way into an understanding through putting Smith's "Speaking in Tongues" and Delpit's (2006) "The Silenced Dialogue" into dialogue with my own thinking. What I had been doing—in dormitory hallways, in community centers, on buses—was translating across words and worlds, both for myself and for and with others.[4]

Translating is communicating between words and worlds—movement across different ways of understanding the world, of understanding from different vantages, of using different tools to make meaning. Yet, as translation theory argues, translating can only ever approximate—something is always lost. This might be as minimal as a word or gesture—or it can be as great as our very selves. We will of necessity lose nuances as we enter from different locations and stories. This practice is, thus, blurred. Or, as Lather and Kitchens (2017) write, translation is "a knowing disruption, dissemination rather than containment…another creation that addresses that which is untranslatable" (p. 7). As much as I try, I can only ever experience the world from inside my own body and mind—and so can every other person. Rarely clear due to the different cultural worlds in which we live, these processes are incomplete and in motion—hence, blurred.

This modifier is particularly important as public education and teachers are under assault (e.g., Watkins, 2012) with narratives of failure used to justify more standardization, "teacher proofing," and scripted curricula. Such formulaic conceptualizations leave no room for contexts, for students' lives or experiences, or for the artistry and humanity of what we do. Teaching (and research) are squeezed into neat categories that don't name the messiness (and joys) of our everyday lives. We then impose the "reality" of these categories on students and colleagues—calling them truth. These conceptualizations are violent and oppressive, denying our shared humanity as well as critical dialogue. While educational systems, media soundbites, and many

research methods frequently demand sharp edges, "blurred" implies imprecision, partiality, change, meaning-making practices that are not and cannot be fixed in position.

Further, social justice commitments require me—and, ideally, students with whom I work—to counter oppressive status quos and to be an accomplice in struggles for social and educational justice. This is not possible without attempts to understand lives and realities other than our own. Working with current and future educators, it is my responsibility to encourage these translational processes of understanding that students come from slightly or vastly differing worlds—and that these worlds are often deformed by injustice and inequity.

These processes of blurred translating are dialogical, necessitating being with each other and our stories (even though sometimes removed in time and space or continuing across printed pages or electronic screens). For example, my dismissal of Simone—participating, through silence, in talking *about* rather than *with* her—began for me a dialogue about hair that is ongoing, decades after the last time I saw her. While my later learning could not undo the violence we committed against Simone, I now challenge assumptions such as those we made through practices that translate lives and experiences—such as my students' conversations about unjust dress codes. Blurred translating is, thus, a political practice in which we can create change, cracks in the culture of power that can transform lives and knowledges.

While blurred translating began as a way of making sense of how I (could) live as a teacher, I ran into another entanglement as I began researching teaching. As Grumet (in Pinar & Grumet, 2015) wrote,

> I never knew whether to call what I did research or pedagogy. When I worked with students it was pedagogy. When I wrote about the work it was research. As I responded to student narratives with questions, the functions of research and teaching blended. (p. 226)

My participatory and critical work had no clear lines either. It all blurred, even as putting research into written words required some linearity.

I started thinking about how translation as a metaphor applies to research. For instance, Churchill (2005) argued that the human actions an ethnographer witnesses are like an original language text whose translation the ethnographer undertakes. Making choices for written reports, the ethnographer shapes (selected) events into larger patterns, while acknowledging that "any single aspect of the data has as many possible translations as there are ethnographers to observe and collect it. There would be no point in doing ethnography if the data were not malleable and open to multiple translations" (Churchill, 2005, p. 20). An ethnographer must be "able to inhabit two vernacular territories" (p. 6).

This habitation—which I argue is more a polyphony (Bakhtin, 1984) than a binary—is not easy. For example, classroom voices might include me as a researcher, me as a teacher, each student, the classroom teacher, and surrounding contexts. All have independent vernacular territories. Further, how each aspect of myself reads, positions, and interprets others—and how they read, position, and interpret me—is relational and contextual. However, although these many voices and their vernacular territories inhabit the "data," research is (usually) written in a singular voice ("illuminated by a single authorial consciousness" [Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6]). Rather than remaining polyphonic, standing on their own, these voices, even when presented in their own words and quite possibly dialogic, are often instead blurred by the researcher as she translates action, discourse, bodies, identities, space, and more into a written text; voices from various

vernacular territories are merged by/into the researcher's. Like teaching as translating, researching as translating is blurred.

Blurred translating for me, then, describes not just teaching or research, but also the entanglement of writing, researching, and teaching. All inform each other and learn from each other; their messy, subjective blur is generative and artistic. There is no teaching without learning and "no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other" (Freire, 1998, p. 35). This also fits my own experience of education as far exceeding school; acknowledging these interrelationships, Freire (1998) argued, would make clear the import of "informal experiences in the street, in the square, in the work place, in the classroom, in the playground, among the school staff of both teachers and administrative personnel" (pp. 47-48). Lived experience and theory mingle when we welcome these interactions. Blurred translating as lived practice, thus, attempts to preserve complexities and tensions and to foreground the work—the practices—of teachers, students, and researchers. Blurred translating recognizes languages that fit with what we know, what we feel in our bodies. At other times, it requires that we stretch—pushing past what we think we know.

Transforming the Distances Between the Languages We Live: The Messy Risk of Impossible, Unfinished Practices, With the Help of Translation and Language Theories

In the middle of a meeting, someone called a caucus, stopping the conversation. Our antiracism team had agreed that any time people of color and white people needed to process separately, we could do so, and thus, the half-dozen of us who were white went to another room. The call for a caucus was precipitated by something Jim had said but didn't understand and I don't remember. But, I do clearly remember Jim, tears in his eyes, trying desperately to understand how 70 years of living in the body and having the experiences of a straight, white, middle-class male shaped the ways he experienced the world and, thus, how his words had stopped the meeting. In caucus, Jim wanted to focus on what he *meant* by his words. But translating is not solely—or even mostly—about words, but about socially and culturally situated ways of being and the ways in which meaning can be lost or distorted (e.g., Toury, 2000). We examined the valuations and nuances of Jim's words. In relationship with people he trusted, Jim came to recognize the pain his words had caused, particularly for people of color in our group. He needed other white people, such as me, to translate how whiteness—and its valuation—was creating rifts in our interracial group. This was practicing blurred translating—of our lives, experiences, and actions, our words and our worlds.

Such processes are desperately needed in schools, also a space where words and worlds are differently valued. "The child," declared educator Malaguzzi (n.d.), "has a hundred languages," but school and the culture steal 99 of them, separating the head from the body, teaching that work and play are separate and that reasoning and dreaming "do not belong together" (n.p.) In schools, this happens through refusing access to or speech in familial languages or positioning those languages as deficient; through focusing solely on written, academic language; by making school a place of silent mouths and still bodies; and on and on.

These thefts are, of course, not confined to schools—meeting spaces such as the one I shared with Jim often attempt to exclude languages of emotion, of poetry, of song. Such fracturing is an age-old human practice of the abuse of power and the misuse of language. Language, a primary tool we use to mediate our relationships and activities, is ideologically saturated and

socially constructed (e.g., Vološinov, 1973). The hundred languages of children—and of adults—are differently valued. Our words themselves are "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist…shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276); they may resist translation or transformation.

But language—through translation—also offers hope. Writing about the Jewish story of the tower of Babel, Santos (2000) asserted that

> translation begins with a story…a story which carries the unspoken belief that language contains the essential unifying element of community…and that language is a power that serves to divide those whom it originally united. (p. 10)

While language can divide, the Babel story also reminds us to dream of, to "re-imagine that place where everyone was welcome, and where everyone was understood" (Santos, 2000, p. 10). Language can also unite. Translation is, thus, about not only language, but about community, about speaking *with*, rather than against, for, or to. Like the communities dispersed from Babel, much divides us; schools and other learning spaces often recreate conditions that debar the hundred languages of children and communities, especially based on language, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and social class. Challenging these conditions takes practice. It requires the intimacy of knowing others—and their stories and histories. It requires building relationships.

Relationships encouraged Jim to learn from other white people; desire not to harm relationships with people of color pushed him through pain. In relationship lies the possibility of working across the distances between the languages we live. In teaching and research, blurred translating can only happen when a teacher or researcher has an actual—not assumed—understanding of other('s) cultures and lives, while also knowing that these are always partial.

Translating is an ethical task, always influenced by ideology and power and demanding that we make choices. Translating is "equally capable of crossing or reinforcing the boundaries" between languages and cultures and "the hierarchies in which they are positioned" (Venuti, 2000, p. 491).[5] To cross rather than reinforce, blurred translating requires understanding that who we are and how we think is a function of our cultures, social contexts, relationships, and identities, mediated by language and the practices of learning (e.g., Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Each of us is a finite, historical being who sees the world from a unique position. We do not share some or all of these positions—and we likely do not know where others are coming from until we enter into relationship. As the antiracism team did with Jim, blurred translating moves between communities to translate unfamiliar contexts and previously unshared words and meanings. As cultures and languages are not static or singular, translation is always moving, attempting to connect between changing people and knowledges. Translators must seek to reconcile these differences, while maintaining the uniqueness and situatedness of both.

While necessitating a myriad of ethical choices, translating the hundred languages is a hopeful practice that anticipates the creation of community (Venuti, 2000). Blurred translating offers opportunities to overcome clashes and power imbalances between worlds, cultures, and languages that often lead to silence or disengagement rather than self-appropriated learning. When we negotiate blurred translating, we create community that acknowledges how our histories and social positions influence how we see, hear, and understand each other. When blurred translating is a classroom practice, the community creates a space where each person is present, recognized, and heard in ways that are true to self.

Yet, because we live in different worlds, translating will always be incomplete. Consider plugging text into an online translation program: the result reflects the original meanings but is not directly printable or sayable. It's a mess—meanings blur. Blurred translating is similarly difficult to negotiate, requiring considering when and how to take on its weight. Translating requires never getting too comfortable; it requires resisting a temptation to think that fully understanding someone else's lived experiences is possible. As often as I have translated in the practice of teaching, I have fought understanding of other ways of being in the world, preferring the comfort of my own understandings and values. Or, I have been unwilling to question what I think I know or to critically dialogue between my positions and those of others. Or, I have been incorrect or assumed too much about someone else's experiences.

Blurred translating, thus, means negotiating between saying, "I don't know," being willing to change bodily, emotionally, and intellectually, and holding on to one's own sense of self. It requires pushing myself into spaces of discomfort, of unknowing. It would be much neater to compartmentalize. Yet, the more I live solely or mostly in one world—whether that world be social, institutional, or role-oriented—the more the languages I live are restricted. Perhaps, then, one of the difficulties that attends both teaching and researching is that the more comfortable one becomes with them, the less one feels acutely a need for translating. Maybe one "language" becomes prominent, and so that language is the one of comfort—and others fade away.

Practicing blurred translating, then, is not without risks, nor does it come easily. Without continual effort, we may accept that one voice is who we are; we may not push to continually renew our ability to go outside ourselves, especially when in positions of power, privilege, or authority. It may become easier to acquiesce to either speaking within the culture of power or believing in some part of ourselves that it is normal, just, and acceptable, internalizing it as *the only* discourse, the only acceptable identity, giving up or losing—voluntarily or involuntarily—our multiplicity of identities and voices. As Smith (2009) said,

> We feel that our voices are who we are, and that to have more than one, or to use different versions of a voice for different occasions, represents, at best, a Janus-faced duplicity, and at worst, the loss of our very souls. (p. 133)

We may learn that "getting ahead" (a value the culture of power cultivates unquestioningly) necessitates relinquishing a multiplicity of voices and adopting the one acceptable voice (while knowing that for some people this is not possible). We may cede space to the imperial voices of the culture of power, allowing that culture to delineate structures that contain or sanitize "Other" voices. Seduced by the culture of power, we may hide or hoard our own power and participation in these processes and claim authority as official translators; having gotten a taste, we may be unwilling—or unable—to fight its existence. Trapped in fear and uncertainty, we may become cut off from both ourselves and others: "A hesitation in the face of difference, which leads to caution before difference and ends in fear of it. Before long, the only voice you recognize, the only life you can empathize with, is your own" (Smith, 2009, p. 148). Dwelling in this discomfort is a risk—and requires taking risks.

Recently, I guest lectured on the history of whiteness in the United States. Having spent years working with antiracism activists and with critical whiteness studies, my analysis is firmly grounded in both lives and literature. I feel confident that I can translate difficult—and painful— concepts and histories. But this day, I floundered. This began with a Black woman reflecting back to me my own words that I have had a choice about whether or not to attempt to dismantle white

supremacy and her reminder that she and her children never do. She was correct, but rather than simply acknowledging that, I heard her words as accusation of my whitely valued words. I felt the need to justify myself. After stumbling through more questions, I left the classroom feeling incoherent and profoundly upset with myself for getting defensive. I had forgotten that my pedagogical efforts are firmly rooted in my own life experiences and that translating is never fully possible. It is blurred. While such moments of missed communication (here, heightened because I had no prior relationship with these students) occur in every classroom—in every conversation, interaction, and text—they became glaringly obvious when culture, social class, and race were brought into the open. And, it was a student who pointed this out. Years of experience, the dozens of books I could cite, I could not hide behind them.

As in this classroom, my experience of practicing blurred translating is often one of failure. I cannot answer the unanswerable:

> How does one teach when there's no way to say it—and yet something must be said? How does one employ language that knows, but does not tell what it knows—language that is *in-formed* by its ghost, by its Other, yet cannot speak that Other? (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 187, italics in original)

This feeling is probably just my encounter with the limitations—the impossibility—of translating. But, worse than my own feelings of failure, it often feels like a betrayal.

As my teaching is built on relationships, I often have opportunities to attempt to repair such betrayals or losses. In research, this may not be so. At my desk, for instance, trying to translate fieldnotes into comprehensible analysis, I am frequently aware of how writing about a learning environment is very different from participating in its lived experiences. While writing, I am scared by how students and teachers become more like characters in my head and on the page than the living, breathing, conflicted human beings they were in the social space of the classroom. My "findings" feel like a failed translation, even as I am not sure it is possible to translate a life into words on a page. What, then, might it mean for our teaching and research to actually acknowledge—to believe—that translating the hundred languages is impossible?

I return to what I have learned from translation theory: Many languages have a saying that translation always betrays. Venuti (2000) wrote that in translation, "communication will always be partial, both incomplete and inevitably slanted toward the domestic [source] scene" (p. 487). A translator (in qualitative research, a writer) always domesticates interpretation; even with the help of theory and other research literature, she or he writes from a positionality and to other, unknown positionalities. Thus, a translation of what happened in a research site by any other researcher would read completely differently; translation is always partial, resulting in space between the practice of education and the research of education. At the same time, my ethical and political beliefs impel me to write and act with integrity, acknowledging partiality, loss, and the potential incommensurability of languages.

The flawed, impossible practice of blurred translating can only ever be unfinished and ongoing—we are, as Benjamin (1968) noted, "lost in translation" from the beginning. Yet, we are not completely lost, for as Freire (1998) asserted, we can be educated only if we recognize ourselves as unfinished; this unfinishedness is "essential to our human condition" (p. 52). Thus, our teaching must acknowledge uncertainty and center questions, recognizing that "we may know in fragments" (hooks, 1994, p. 174), and our research must be conceptualized as "a staging of our stammering relationship to knowing" (Lather, 2006, p. 48).

There is hope here, too. The impossible, unfinished practice of translating does more than communicate: it reinvents (Venuti, 2000). It is "a transformation and a renewal of something living" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 73). Research and teaching are *practices* of blurred translating. I use practice in both meanings: as something we do regularly and as doing something again in order to do it "better." Both are embedded in a relational and contextual way of being that is self-reflexive and risky. Practice is required to connect research data with larger stories of theory, history, and culture; practice is required to hear the hundred languages of each learner. Both reflect a utopian hope of dialogue and community in tension with lived realities of power imbalances and ideologies. Teaching and research as blurred translating depend on the interaction of bodies, of languages, of cultures. We ask each other to experience our truths, partial and limited as they may be.

In a Doorway, Practicing Reclaiming the Hundred Languages of Dream City

At a research site, I stood in the doorway to the sixth-grade classroom, greeting students after lunch. As usual, Jacob half-ran, half-stumbled through the door, his chin bruised, his lower lip cut and swollen. The classroom teacher commented that he liked to wrestle with his siblings and consequently, this week's collision with a coffee table. I sensed an uneasiness from the other adult in the classroom—something about this story didn't sit right with her. I knew she was wondering if something else was happening in Jacob's home.

I remembered a conversation with my friend, Afiya, early in our relationship. She told me how she learned as a teenager to accompany her mother to the hospital when her youngest brother did things like break his arm while jumping on the bed. She knew that multiple ER trips for her Black family with state health insurance might be interpreted not as the accidents of an active child, but as child abuse. She also knew that her education had taught her a language of power that her mother's had not. At the hospital, she translated to protect her family.

I thought of my own younger brother, bleeding profusely after a metal toy gun struck the back of his head during a cops and robbers game. Or, the time when kids throwing rocks at the lake didn't have quite the aim they thought they did, resulting in another head wound, another ER trip for stitches. It never occurred to my teenaged self or to my mother, unlike Afiya, to worry about what translation might be necessary in my family's ER trips.

I considered Jacob's swollen lip, Afiya's brother's broken arm, my brother's bleeding head, and then, less visible wounds, those caused by outright failure to try to understand other lives and cultures or the assignation of blame, shame, or judgment—like that of my high school self in talking about Simone's ponytail. Sometimes, as with Jacob and with Afiya's and my younger brothers, these hurts are accidents; sometimes they are caused by those—like myself—who are considering only the world directly in front of them. Those I worry about come from the carelessness or refusal of adults to understand the lives of other people's children. I know now— the more worlds in which I travel or skirt the edges of—how often our lives make no sense to each other. How then, to read—and to translate—bruised bodies and minds, located within and among our separations in an oppressive world? And, even more importantly, how then to read—and to translate—the strengths and knowledges students also carry into the classroom?

I return to where I started this theorization. Despite, or perhaps due to, the loss of one of her voices, Smith (2009) envisioned a "Dream City": "a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion…. In Dream City everything is doubled, everything is various. You have

no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues" (pp. 137, 138). In Dream City, we speak with a multiplicity of voices and see from multiple perspectives. Here, we understand that everyone does this and that the claims of each voice have a piece and only a piece of truth, and also that many truths have been deliberately silenced. This very act of speaking with or valuing multiplicities challenges the hegemony of the culture of power, the abuse of language used to isolate.

Whether in the classroom or in research literature, Dream City is only possible if we work to translate and live in differences, rather than subsume or erase them. Dream City, a reclaimed Babel, is not based in sameness but in negotiated collectivity. For, as Santos (2000) asked:

> What if the real value of our relationship to the other resides in the *impossibility* of reducing the other to ourselves, of two subsiding into sameness?... The ideal model for translation becomes that which creates the simultaneous experience of both proximity and separateness, intimacy and alterity. (p. 14, italics in original)

The dream of claiming classrooms as profoundly communal and connected spaces means not attempting monologue that fits for all people, but understanding that we are all shaped by multiple, intersecting cultural stories and lives, a polyphony that must also make its way into our research and writing. In teaching and research, the practice of blurred translating finds connections as well as disconnections or separations, to not only translate into our own cultures or conceptual systems, but to build connections as we work in, through, and with these multiplicities.

This takes work—difficult and painful work. Blurred translating requires being continuously critical and self-reflective. I have learned to listen so as to glimpse the wisdom of different stories, voices, and identities and then to choose when and how to use my voices. I challenge myself to sit with—not run from—discomfort and to connect with different communities. I am on guard against the material and spatial realities of a faculty position and social identities that trap me into forgetting my own living curriculum more often than I want to acknowledge. I must be aware of values and positions others (may) assign to me based on their identifications of me and how these might be limiting.

Yet, while risky, blurred translating can build a Dream City and reclaim a community grounded in both difference and shared humanity. When practicing blurred translating, we can incorporate a hundred languages spoken, lived, and embodied; we can remember that not just children, but we too have "a hundred worlds to dream" (Malaguzzi, n.d., n.p.) and can use these hundred to play and to labor toward and in Dream City, educational spaces where everyone is welcome and everyone is understood in their multiplicity of voices, cultures, and languages and research is filled with hundreds of languages of playing, of speaking, of loving, of dreaming.

Again, I think about a student like Jacob. In September, I sat with him as he looked at the blank pages of his writing notebook. He told me he didn't know how to start. A month later, knowing he was struggling, a teacher invited Jacob to imagine a conflict with his mom over playing video games. Invited to take on a character, Jacob's body language changed; he became a person I hadn't seen in the classroom. He stood at the front of the room, arms crossed, posture stiff and defiant, re-enacting—re-voicing—an argument with his mother. He knew how to start; he knew how to use language for expression. The teacher had found a way to translate—albeit blurrily—between Jacob's knowledges and experiences and the work of the classroom; pedagogically, she asked him to "to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or appearance to another: transfer, transform" (Merriam-Webster) his life experiences from home to school and from the

language of acting into the language of a written story. Beginning with putting his acted-out dialogue—a language that made sense to him—about video games on paper, Jacob filled his writing notebook.

Blurred translating, in the work I have done—or fallen short of doing—is about accessing the hundred languages and worlds of all learners, regardless of age. It is about what students are telling us they know, worry about, or are attempting to figure out. Blurred translating means helping students like Jacob translate their worlds and languages into learning that schools, adults, and state standards might recognize; it is about keeping multiple languages alive in our mouths (Smith, 2009). Blurred translating is about the experiences of families like Afiya's and mine—and about the ways in which schools and other institutions harm due to failures to listen and to translate. Blurred translating challenges structures that keep people like Jim and me from understanding how our languages (even when unintentional) cause harm in meetings and school locker rooms, on buses and around kitchen tables. Blurred translating helps learners of all ages—in classrooms and in research journals and presentations—to understand the words and worlds of others, to reconsider a ponytail or video game.

Still, I think about all we cannot and do not know about our students, whatever the classroom site may be, even as all of who we are enters these spaces. Too often, these multiplicities of languages, knowledges, and experiences are silenced, even as they inform what happens in the classroom. When we as teachers don't ask questions (and try to let go of preconceived notions) about students' lives, when we don't attempt to translate between their knowledges and school knowledges, when we don't wonder about their struggles to make sense of schooling, when we do not attempt to translate between our positionalities and ideologies and those of our students and their worlds, when we do not practice these partial—blurred—translations, we fail our students. My responsibility as a researcher and teacher is, I believe, to translate stories of lives and different lived worlds and to build relationships, even when this is scary, unpredictable, or not fully possible. Even—and maybe especially in those times—when I fail. Practicing blurred translating is just that—a *practice* that requires continually engaging and recognizing power while working toward social change and relational classrooms.

I think of—no, worry about—Jacob's swollen lip and bruised chin; I worry about how his life and knowledges are or are not translated in public spaces such as classrooms or nurses' offices; I worry about how to translate what I have learned from and with Afiya, from and with students and teachers in classrooms of both school and my life, from and with engagement with writing and theory. I am, as the saying goes, lost in translation, in the infinite distances between my worlds and the worlds—the words and hundred languages—of others. I am practicing blurred translating. Trying to reclaim the hundred languages of Dream City, I am always in between.

Notes

1. Translating is in process—a gerund rather than a noun (translation).
2. While much of what I write about here may be more analogous to the practice of interpretation than translation, I draw on translation as it has its own body of theory. Further, I am using "language" expansively, as the poet Malaguzzi (n.d.) does in "The Hundred Languages of Children." Language is not solely linguistic, but also encompasses ways of understanding and moving in the world—in other words, the languages we live, not just those we speak.
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Education as translation (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2006) is not a new concept; many others have conceptualized similar educational processes or roles, such as code-meshing (e.g., Young & Martinez, 2011), cultural brokers (e.g.,

Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983), or dialogical education (e.g., Sarid, 2012). Further, education is awash in metaphors that make sense of teachers' work, beliefs, identities, and knowledge (e.g., Sabah, 2006).

5. See Venuti (2000) for more on the ethics and politics of translating.

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(Re)acquaintance with Praxis
A Poetic Inquiry into Shame, Sobriety, and the Case for a Curriculum of Authenticity

SARAH K. MACKENZIE-DAWSON
Bucknell University

IN THEATRE THERE IS A WARM-UP ACTIVITY where each member of the troupe moves into the circle and shouts at the top of their lungs, "I am available." It is a simple act, but it is also incredibly difficult. To open ourselves up is an act of vulnerability, where one enters into a space of uncertainty, risking the chance for judgment, rejection, isolation. However, as Brown (2017) suggests, it is also "the birthplace of love, joy, trust, intimacy, courage—everything that brings meaning to our life" (p. 152). They are not words—love, joy, trust, intimacy, courage—that we often hear within education, but they are words we need to begin to reach for as we seek to facilitate curricular spaces that encourage critical consciousness, that disrupt idealization and myth (Freire, 1973), and move toward a way of being and knowing that is grounded in our humanity. It is within such spaces that, by allowing ourselves to be seen—both the beautiful and the broken aspects of what make us who we are—we learn to embrace authenticity as a means of praxis, possibility, and hope. Authenticity allows us to be with our (im)perfections, to acknowledge ourselves as whole. It is within this acknowledgement that we might begin to learn to revisit definition, not as truth, but rather as simply another reflection of human yearning to be seen and heard, to be valued, to be worthy of love.

We exist as profiles
students
    teachers
 negotiating upon
with/in a landscape of survival
where only the shadows
seem to speak our names
The buoyancy of our (im)perfection
caught in shrouds
  patterned with inscriptions of shame

we cover
our bodies
 minds
sel(f)ves tangled
          in a cloak of
dependency and definition
that strangles the voices of
                authenticity
until no more
can
we
breathe

I am an educator, a mother, a daughter, a partner, once a teacher of children, now a teacher of teachers. I am also an alcoholic, now in recovery, but an alcoholic who spent a long time living in the shadows of shame—an unavailable specter of performance. Across the space of this article, I weave poetic inquiry and *currere*—those artful, spiritual, reflexive, and connected processes of meaning making—as I seek to (re)consider my experiences in active addiction and recovery as a metaphor for the possibilities that exist when we acknowledge ourselves as (im)perfectly whole, entering into relationship with one another, ourselves, and our knowing. This acknowledgement of imperfection allows us to enter into a curriculum of authenticity, where it is our humanity rather than definition that propels us forward toward deep understanding and knowing and toward meaningful relationship with the self, one another, and with content. Palmer (1999) remarks, "we all know that what will transform education is not another theory, another book, or another formula but educators who are willing to seek a transformed way of being in the world" (p. 15). I would like to suggest that this transformed way of being in the world requires a new level of presence in relationship to self and practice, a way of being that embraces imperfection and acknowledges all the facets that make up who we are as educators—as people. It is my hope that, through authenticity, we might begin to transgress those definitions that bind us and move toward a curricular landscape that welcomes imperfection and those messy stories that shape who we are, what we know, and what we do.

Poetic (Un)certainty

Poetic inquiry allows us to enter into a space of uncertainty and authenticity where "our action is our knowing" (Lather, 1991, pp. x). It is within these motions where we might be moved beyond definition, entering into experience in a manner that is mindfully present and consciously aware of the layers that shape our ways of being with and in experience. Seidel (2017) suggests, "poetic inquiry reminds us to cultivate uncertainty, to slow down, to reconnect with life and one another," creating at the same time a means of transgressing, while also acknowledging those fragmented patterns that leave us rushing toward what she identifies as the "market-driven commodification of universities" that fail to acknowledge the fragility of the human experience (p. 153). Irwin and Springgay (2008) remark, referencing Nancy (2000), that "meaning is constituted between beings" (pp. xxi), beings, I would add, who are seeking a sense of self and purpose within their lives and work. Within education, Martusewicz (1997) advises, "we search

for others who will affirm our lives, share our aspirations, our questions, who will care that we are alive and help connect the 'me' to the world" (p. 101). There is no certainty in the relational, simply possibilities and openings that allow us to moved forward. Poetic inquiry embraces uncertainty, allowing multiple meanings and understandings to exist within a word (i.e. imperfect becoming (im)perfect), a poem, or the research itself. It is within this multiplicity of meaning that we might find ourselves negotiating upon a landscape of reverberation and identification. To find even a glimpse of one's own story upon the layers of another's telling opens hope. However, society has imprinted upon us a dangerous catechism of difference, which, rather than addressing our core needs as humans—as educators and learners—rather creating space for dialogue, for identification, recognition, and a celebration of our difference, instead, becomes an egotistical armor of shame that leaves us disconnected and unaware upon our search. Poetry, as Neilson Glenn (2012) notes, "holds up the mirror and rips off the mask" (p. 19). This ripping is not a violent act, but rather a necessary one as we are often so deeply attached to the stories we have been told and the stories we tell ourselves (Brach, 2003; Brown, 2017), those stories that leave us feeling trapped and alone.

Poetic inquiry allows us to enter into a space of relationship with self and experience in a manner that does not enable attachments, but rather allows us to reconsider where they come from, what they mean, and enter into a space of movement where new possibilities are revealed. Poetic inquiry moves us beyond an attachment to knowing and toward a place of being. Leggo (2008a) quotes Griffin (1995) who suggests that "poetry does not describe. It *is* the thing. It is an experience, not the secondhand record of an experience, but the experience itself" (p. 93). The past echoes within the experience, but the relational nature of poetry moves us beyond stagnation as we enter into a place of knowing and being that is shared, where our understandings are multi-faceted, layered, and fluid, reflecting a life that is neither predictable nor perfect.

Stillness
  watching
waiting
like the breath
held between my lips
a body, mind
contortioned toward
a place
  of being
(un)recognizable
our utterances
  only echoes of another time
another moment
that crosses
upon the space
of now

Like poetic inquiry, curriculum is the text of experience, a living document of human expression that is always evolving and open to interpretation. It is within such a space that we might enter into deeper ways of knowing and authentic ways of being.

Mythical States of Being

My story begins on the outside, a little girl who moved from town to town, school to school, caught up in the shame of her family, the stories she was told, and stories she told herself. They were stories about not being enough, of expectation and disappointment, and within the hollow gaps, when there was an opportunity for breath, there was hope, too, that existed within those stories. It was that hope that brought me to the classroom, that allowed me the opportunity to teach and to think that I might see the child who felt invisible or hear the child who had lost their voice. Long ago, I had been that child, and it had been teachers who had created the space for me to see some glimpse, some beauty within myself, and my experience, that I had not been able to see on my own. Yet, that sense of lack laid a heavy burden upon my sense of self and practice. Brach (2003) intimates, "when we live our lives through this lens of personal insufficiency, we are imprisoned within…the trance of unworthiness. Trapped in this trance, we are unable to perceive the truth of who we really are" (p. 2). Unfortunately, as opposed to challenging these perceptions, the current culture of education often contributes to this sense of lack and insufficiency. When I began teaching, I arrived broken, wrapped up in the stories I told myself about my past, myself, as well as an idealized vision of what it might mean to be a good teacher. This vision was not a result of a psychotic break with reality, but it reflected layers and layers of history within the field of education, layers and layers of my own personal history, all contributing to my brokenness and sense of discomfort and disconnect.

She gathers
     a circle
       patterned
       with the echoes of love
   shunned ordinariness
   filtered by the rosiness
   of children's laughter
   all those images
   of who
   she
     we
   they
      should have been
       linger violently
      imprinting
     lovingly
    lecherously
  lasciviously
impressions of who
   she
     we
   they
should
be

Our understanding of what it means to be a teacher is shaped by numerous contradictory and colluding images. These images are reflective of deeply imbedded myths and meaning that often leave us confused and conflicted, seeking and ashamed. We find ourselves negotiating within a reality of broken images, expectation, and desire. Britzman (1991) suggests:

> What makes this reality so contradictory is the fact that teaching and learning have multiple and conflicting meanings that shift with our lived lives, with the theories produced and encountered, with the deep convictions and desires brought to and created in education, with the practices we negotiate, and with the identities we construct. (p. 10)

When I think of my teaching journey or consider how my pre-service teachers (re)present themselves within practice, I find myself bombarded with images. There is the image of teacher as "a passive body, a conduit of knowledge, an empty jug to be filled with the curriculum that is proportionally doled out to students" (Sameshima, 2007, p. 34). There is the strong but loving disciplinarian, who hints toward the days of the common school movement when teachers "demanded order in the name of sweetness, compelled moral rectitude in the name of recitation, citizenship in the name of silence, and asexuality in the name of manners" (Grumet,1998, p. 51). We are told, a teacher must be someone who can "nurture and challenge [students] coach and guide, understand and care about them" (Ayers, 1993, p. 8). Yet, we are also burdened by a neoliberal agenda that demands accountability and a creates a sense that one is always being watched and must prove oneself as sufficient—efficient—performing according to external definitions of best practice. Beyond all those images exists a human desire for connection, purpose, worth—desire that exists both beyond and within our images of teacher. However, even within that desire, "we seek transcendence from this imperfect 'humanity,' this essential emptiness of being" (Martusewicz, 1997, p. 102).

There are whispers in the doorways
fragments of a body
mind
   soul
fragments
of our being
told
  caught within a shroud
of ghostly trepidation
we speak
  (our)selves unrecognizable

Teaching is at once both autobiographical and political, it serves different purposes for different bodies and institutions, and these purposes are not fixed; rather, they are always in motion. Sloan (2005) comments, "every educational practice implies some underlying image of the human being" (p. 27). What is it that we are really teaching pre-service teachers in relationship to the social—to the soulful—to those aspects that allow them to enter into authentic and meaningful interactions with their students, themselves, and one another? Miller (2005) comments, "our culture and education systems, have become obsessed with acquisition and

achievement…[we are] not interested in educating the whole person" (p. 1). When the focus exists within a space of conformity and mechanistic outcomes, we are all lost.

In her hand
she holds
    an apple
rotten
rotting upon her palm
    the stench echoing
an absence
she cannot
name
outside
    abomination

What is the image that we offer when we focus so distinctly on mechanistic outcomes? What happens to us as educators in our own ways of being, when we get caught up in proving our mastery of these outcomes, within practice? It is not transcendence, but rather oblivion.

The window cracks
across a reckoning
absence
where the shadow
of longing
condenses upon doing
the image
        lost
in a kaleidoscope of doubt
where even in the fractures
where they say the light
shines
we are blind
breathless
    and alone

Moore (2005) asserts, "Our current focus on facts and science and skills highlights a certain dimension of human reality but over looks others. An emphasis on the mind has generated a neglect for the soul" (p. 9). When we find ourselves so focused on proof of outcomes and checking boxes, we forget to take time to consider who we are as educators, who we are as people, and we fail to acknowledge education as relational. Instead, we fall into an egotistical space of fear where emptiness collides with survival.

The echoes
of inconsequential
absence
linger

leaving crevices
   upon the caverns of our
consciousness
    self(ves)
      swept silently
like unwanted cinders
collecting
   in piles
We stumble toward
    becoming
unable to recognize
  obstructions
   to want
to what?

Learning is a deeply human endeavor that requires us to move beyond the cinders that light definition upon our consciousness and enter into a practice of authenticity. Palmer (1999) asserts:

> We can no longer afford a system of education that refuses to get engaged with the mess. We must be willing to join life where people live it—and they live it at this convoluted intersection of the sacred and the secular. (p. 20)

When we fail to acknowledge our humanity, when we fail to consider the impact of our own experiences on our practice as educators, we end up contributing to a culture of alienation, shame, and discontent. When we begin to reconsider the purpose of education, recognizing that it is not a process that can be defined within the limitations of the institutional, political, or even the personal, we create an opportunity for presence and connection where we might begin to see education as an act of eros as we learn how to be with ourselves and one another, how to be in the world. Freire and Freire (1997) note, "to be in the world necessarily implies being *with* the world and *with* others" (p. 32). When we enter upon the landscape of curriculum, recognizing it as a space of shared encounters between (im)perfect beings, we create new spaces for knowing and being with and in the world. Such a process calls on us to engage holistically, lovingly, and authentically with every being and moment that we encounter—recognizing that the idea of perfection is simply a reflection of our (im)perfection.

A Collision of Consciousness

When I began teaching, I found my consciousness wrapped up in an image. I imagined myself, a teacher sitting in a circle with her young students, being present and available while supporting them as they grew both in knowledge and awareness in relationship to themselves and the world. I also imagined myself full of energy and love, always well prepared, organized, and ready to inspire. Even within those images of what I perceived to be positive—images of my own potential success as an educator—I found myself afraid. I, like Brach (2003), "lived with the fear of letting someone down or being rejected myself" (p. 1). I had bought into the myth of meritocracy, which, as Boler (1999) intimates, "places success and failure squarely on the

individual, decontextualizing the student from any mediating factors of social or cultural context" (p. 47). I was no longer the student, but the myth was deeply imprinted upon my sense of self, my sense of worth. I believed that, if I worked hard enough, I could be successful as an educator—as a person, but if I did not meet up to the expectations I set for myself or those that were set for me, then I was a failure, and it was my fault.

Don't step
   on the cracks
those essences of
wondering
wandering
       self
  caught
in the lines of erasure
that define
   and refine
self
along the uneven
tracks of hope

I remember, student teaching, sitting in a circle with my fourth graders. I remember soft voices that were barely audible as each child read every word of the stories they had written and how uncomfortable I felt. I wanted to give each child the opportunity to be heard, yet at that moment, I was deeply aware that not only were they not really being heard, but I was losing the attention of the group. I was afraid that they were in fact actually getting nothing out of the experience. I also remember a sense of queasiness in my stomach, exhaustion in my body, and a feeling of shame as I thought about the previous evening. Leggo (2008a) suggests "that the personal and the professional always work together, in tandem, in union, in the way of complementary angles" (p. 91). These angles are not always soft and supportive, but rather they can be jagged, eating away at one's sense of self and worth—professionally and personally. I was at the commencement of my career as a teacher and beginning my journey into alcoholism. I was entering into what would end up being a long and deeply isolating experience. I wanted so desperately to make a difference in the lives of my students, to have a grasp upon my own life and choices, to do the right thing, to be a good teacher and a good person. Instead, I found myself wrapped up in a cloak of failure that strangled any sense of hope. Over the course of my early teaching career, I continued to search for something to fill the absence of what I felt was lacking. In my mind, I listened over and over again to the stories that I had been told, of not being good enough, and I believed them. I spent hours trying to perfect each lesson, reviewing curricula to determine which might be the best, the holy grail that might ensure my success as a teacher, that might allow me to move beyond the shadow of failure that seemed to follow me with every step. In my obsession, I found alcohol, first as a partner who helped me relax in my quest for perfection and then as the abuser who reinforced all my fears and lead me to slowly disconnect further and further, from even the self I thought I knew.

The body drips
mind bound
 drowning beneath an
intoxicated grip
where whispers hide
beneath a veil
that slides across consciousness
weakened by the echoes of
never
never
enough
   always
        less
my hand reaches for
the mirage of a life pre-server
      a bottle
          that floats violently
within absence
carrying me out to sea

I was caught up in what Brach (2003) refers to as the "mistaken identity," where we are caught up in stories, stories we have been told, stories we begin to believe, and the "stories we tell ourselves. We believe that we are the voice in our head, we believe that we are the self-character in our story, and we believe our view of the world" (p. 21). I wanted desperately some answer, some sense of direction that would free me from myself, my story—my shame. Yet, the shame of my own failure to do what I thought everyone else could do, in my classroom and in my life—my inability to perform according to the image I had established for myself in the classroom, my failure to stop after one or two or three drinks, my failure to be good enough—left me feeling alienated and alone. It was a viscous cycle. I wanted so to be seen but was so afraid of what, of who, it was that others would see.

     The bottle breaks
yearning
as emotion floods
upon the floor
the foul stench of
shame sticks to our feet
stepping
   upon
stepping
toward
   breath
open
breath we cannot
quite catch
lost

within a trance
hope and
      humiliation
affixed
   upon consciousness
images drip upon the floor
blurred by fearful
intoxication
   and the (im)possibility of becoming
a self
  we cannot
quite imagine
possible

Delusion

Alcoholics live is a world of delusion, where we drink to escape a pain that is immense, yet the fear of being found out is also so profound that sometimes it feels like the only option is to enter further into the pain. We lie to ourselves, and we lie to everyone else around us.

My breath
aches
  upon a lumbering melancholy
bottled up
by shame
  echoing
within veiled movements of longing
beyond
consequence
   a tree falls in the forest
but no one
listens

Knapp (1996) offers that, at first,

the drink feels like a path to a kind of self-enlightenment, something that turns us into the person we wish to be, or the person we think we really are…alcohol makes everything better until it makes everything worse. (p. 66)

When I first began drinking, it was about escaping into a world where I could imagine my best self: creative, energized, emotionally aware. Even when things began to get out of control, I still wanted to believe this, and I wanted desperately for others to believe it too. I remember once going to a school concert. It was my first year with my own classroom. I had spent hours trying to find the perfect outfit. As I prepared myself for the concert, I had a couple of drinks; it was only a couple; that was what people did I told myself—they drank a beer with their dinner, listened to

music, and had another while they got dressed. I wasn't drunk when I got to the school, but there was a hole burnt into my dress, the remnant of ash from a clove cigarette I never would have smoked had I not had a few drinks. I was standing by a little boy that evening, a first grader I didn't know. He looked at me and said, "you smell like beer." There I was, perfectly put together in my black linen dress with the hole only I could see, and a little boy I didn't even know saw through that hole and saw my shame. I smiled and said "hmm it must have been something I ate for dinner." Yet, for the rest of the evening, as I listened to children sing, I felt naked and afraid that someone else might see what that little boy had seen, and then, they would know me—they would know my failure. Shame painted each step I took. I was unable to deeply engage, unable to enter into relationship with myself, other, earth—I was unable to grow. I wanted desperately to figure out how to cloak the gaping hole inside myself so that no one would know, and yet there was a part of me that was frantic to be seen—to know that I was not alone.

A light flickers
on the bedside table
time does not stand
still
within an empty sleep
   where hope creeps with/in
agony

      I was deeply bound by shame. I desperately wanted connection and a sense of direction, but I feared what would happen if I acknowledged my needs, and so I hid within my own perceived performance of normalcy. When I finally acknowledged that I had a problem, that I had lost control and needed help, a new world of possibility opened to me.

In whispers
the children speak
hidden in the echoes
      of unuttered absence
the unseen
circling their utterances
with the darkness of illacquaintance
until in the distance
the
whip-poor-will
calls

Suddenly, I did not have to perform as if I fit within the definitions I had played to. I remembered my students from long ago who whispered stories no one could hear and realized the possibility that existed in what I could not say then: "this isn't working, let's stop and try something else, find another way, that works for us." I was reacquainted with myself and began to acknowledge those definitions and influences that had left me so deeply enveloped and alone. It was when I allowed myself to be seen, when I finally put down alcohol and began to embrace myself—my living as messy, imperfect, and whole—that I began to find peace. Through sobriety, I began to recognize that my imperfections did not need to be a source of shame, but rather they were what made me

human. Sameshima (2007) suggests, "[t]hrough experience, we create our understandings of life and who we are, what we stand for and what our conceptions of the world are. Our experiences create who we are" (p. 11). We are human—(im)perfect, and when we learn to embrace our wholeness, no longer ignoring the shameful aspects of ourselves within experience, we create space for connection and the opportunity to see ourselves beyond shame. It is here where we might enter into deeper spaces of relationship, insight, and being—here, where we might enter into authenticity.

Speaking the Unspoken

As educators, it is experience that shapes the ways in which we perform upon the curricular landscape of being and doing, teacher—human. These experiences are not limited to the classroom, nor can they be explained by someone else's script. However, far too often our perspective, our sense of self, our understanding of experience, gets caught up in the ghostly whispers of the stories we have been told, those stories we begin to tell ourselves about who we are and who we should be. We are isolated within the frays of someone else's definition, afraid to move outside the shadows, to be recognized as anyone other than who we "should" be. We are afraid of our own imperfection, our own humanity, and far too often we remain silent. Brown (2017) suggests that, "sometimes the most dangerous things for kids [and I would add all of us] is the silence that allows them to construct their own stories—stories that almost always cast them as alone and unworthy of love and belonging" (p. 4). What would happen, within education, if we began to speak of our discomfort, if we began to acknowledge our fears, our feelings of inadequacy? What would happen if we began to acknowledge that things didn't feel quite right and learned to move in a spirit of authenticity that allowed us to share the many facets that shape who we are and what we do?

    Split performance
        the self remains
A disrupted fragment
   figment
   of my imagination
feeling
     nothing
distortion
crumbles
reality
  slivers
of the impossible
leave splinters
upon
my cognition
  a self (dis)integrating

The practice of authenticity calls upon us to enter presently into knowing, "waking up our true self" (Brach, 2003, p. 25), becoming open to the moment, to ourselves and one another.

Sameshima (2007) offers, "being open in the moment means listening intently, simultaneously seeking relationality, acknowledging connections and appreciating the fullness of presence in the present" (p. 35). There is often discomfort when we become honestly present within experience—it is messy, unpredictable, and at times painful as we come face to face with the revelations of our own imperfection. However, Ketcham and Kurtz (1993) respond, "[t]o deny imperfection is to disown oneself, for to be human is to be imperfect" (p. 43). As educators, our actions reverberate across the landscape of our classrooms and our lives. As Brown (2010) notes, "our unexpressed ideas, opinions, and contributions don't just go away. They are likely to fester and eat away at our worthiness" (p. 53). The unexpressed self lingers in a space of communal isolation. Authenticity disrupts that isolation, creating opportunity for connection and communal transformation. There is nothing comfortable about this practice; however, as Snowber (2006) intimates, "it is these uncomfortable spaces which hold the fires of transformation" (p. 220). Authenticity is an act of eros—an act of love. To love, hooks (2000) suggests, quoting Peck (1978), is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (p. 10). This act begins as Brown (2017) offers, when we learn to "to stand alone…[to brave the wilderness]…the wilderness of uncertainty, vulnerability and criticism" (p. 31). Standing alone, we are exposed—no longer hidden by the shroud of shame—it is here where we find connection, hope, and possibility—it is here where we find love.

She crouches
A body burdened
wounded
in the shadows
by a warping sense
of insufficiency
    desire lingers
in her isolation
reaching
toward
      eros

When we learn to love within experience, we are no longer bound by fear, we are instead able to acknowledge "the human life-as-a-whole," (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1993, p. 45), we are able to move into authenticity. Moving beyond the shadows of expectation and shame, we no longer have to waste time caught up in the agony of isolation and yearning. It is through authenticity that we may move into a space of connection as we begin to accept ourselves as whole, as imperfect and evolving, as relational beings making sense together of experience, of life, and the lessons we learn across that great expanse.

Broken pieces
  shattered
across arrangements of longing
a self
(un)spoken

Many years ago, before I stopped drinking, I remember working with a student teacher; she was creating an identity collage, choosing images that she felt reflected her sense of self and her student teaching experience. She was immediately drawn to a wine glass—the beauty of the droplets, the burgundy liquid, the allure of the escape. She talked about how overwhelmed she felt in the classroom, how a glass of wine helped her relax and let everything go. I saw myself in her picture.

Enough exists
    when the sun sets
upon the stacks
of evidence
    A body
remembers
            to breathe

I wanted to share my story with her. I wanted to share how that escape felt when my relationship with alcohol went sour. I wanted to talk about my own sense of disappointment in teaching, how exhausted I felt, and how often I felt like a failure. But, I remained silent, fearful of judgment—afraid to be seen, to be recognized as the person I believed I might really be. Through the silence, I remained, caught—still disconnected. I wonder, what might have happened to myself, to that young women—my student, if in that moment I had spoken my truth? While I cannot answer that question, what I do know is that, when I finally admitted that I was an alcoholic, I opened the door not only to rediscover myself, but also to open myself up to relationship, connection, and praxis. My sobriety allowed me the space to enter into authenticity, and it is through authenticity that I have slowly regained myself, becoming present to the physical, emotional, and spiritual worlds around me, accepting life as fluid—something that can neither be defined nor manipulated, but rather experienced. Knowing is grounded in compassion and availability of self, an availability that is grounded in authenticity. It comes with awareness and acceptance of self as evolving and (im)perfect, situated both historically and in the present.

When I was drinking, I was lost, a self-disconnected. However, admitting my disease was a tremendously frightening experience for me. It required that I face my shame directly. I could no longer pretend or hide within the hollowness of someone else's approval. Instead, I had to own my pain—my imperfection—I had to acknowledge my humanity and enter into the "wilderness" (Brown, 2017). This was an act that was counterintuitive to everything I had learned. I had spent much of my life hidden, afraid of being discovered as unworthy—as the unlovable person I believed I was. To speak my truth was a suicide of sorts, as I entered into a space of vulnerability and authenticity where the ego cannot survive, where the self I had claimed to be could no longer exist, a space where my (im)perfect self was now forever exposed. However, despite the discomfort, it is authenticity that facilitates a curricular space of breath—freedom, where learning becomes the work of being human, of living inquiry as opposed to a simple acquisition and performance of purpose and perfection. It is living inquiry that allows us to respond to experience, engaging with knowing, seeing, doing in a manner that is relational and fluid—temporally grounded in our common and individual humanity, rather than the ego. Buscaglia (1982) offers that each one of us has

a need to be seen, a need to be known, a need to be recognized, a need for achievement, a need to enjoy our world, a need to see the continual wonder of life, a need to be able to see how wonderful it is to be alive. (p. 32)

These needs cannot be met within a space of should, but rather they are met when we embrace our humanity, our (im)perfection and enter into authenticity—into a space of reality, a reality that exists outside definition. Palmer (1993) notes, "Reality's ultimate structure is that of an organic, interrelated, mutually responsive community of being. Relationships—not facts and reasons—are the keys to reality; as we enter those relationships, knowledge of reality is unlocked" (p. 53). To live within reality means living connected and communally, authentically, and (im)perfectly.

Shared Possibility

Within human nature, learning is complicated, complex, and always evolving. Possibility does not exist within definitions of perfection, but rather within the stories of our (im)perfection. Authenticity allows us to engage reflexively across the landscape of our shared stories, stories of longing, loss, shame, hope, stories of our experience of being (im)perfect—human. It is vulnerability and the intentional entrance into this space that create the opportunity for one to enter into the practice of *currere* (Pinar, 2004). Through this practice, we move toward what Sameshima (2007) describes as a "dialogic and dialectical space [shared] between learners and others" (p. 287). It is within such practice that we begin to engage in relational autobiography, sharing experience as an epistemological process. Leggo (2008b) reminds us, "we are always located in an intricate network of relationships that shapes our stories and identities, our desires and hopes, our ecological connections to one another throughout the earth, always breathing with the heart's rhythms" (p. 23). When we begin to move beyond reflection, toward the reflexive dialogic, our experiences of (im)perfection become part of a living aesthetic—a temporal movement toward possibility.

I remember how utterly alone I felt when I was drinking, desperate to be seen, while at the same time so afraid that I might be found out. I was wrapped up in something that took me away from experience, from myself, from relationship, from knowing. Fearful and numb, I remained static until the pain began to break through the wall I had created for myself. The night I finally admitted that I was indeed an alcoholic was both excruciating and liberating for me. In that moment as I faced my fear, I no longer had to hide in shame, and I opened myself up to possibility. As I began to honestly engage with experience, to admit what had happened and was happening to me—in my life and my teaching, I was able to finally move forward. However, this did not happen in isolation. It is important to share autobiographically—authentically—reflexively as a means to reconsider experience.

Beyond brokenness
  a body
mind
  self
rebuilds
   stronger in those spaces
where emptiness crept

Pinar (2004) comments, "The point of *currere* is an intensified engagement with daily life, not an ironic detachment from it" (p. 37). There is no need to "edit life" (Snowber, 2006); it is within our lives where we derive meaning. When we begin to embrace experience with a manner of authenticity, we enter into a space of meaning that is shared. It is here where we might come to better know ourselves and one another.

Communion
we arrive
selves exposed
within the fluidity
of life's breadth
waking outside
      intoxication
arms outstretched
with the (im)possibility
of breath
  across a line of whispers
we are
you are
   love(d)

      Authenticity elicits feelings of vulnerability as we acknowledge our personal (and worldly) imperfection and risk rejection. I admit, when I began writing this article, it was with a sense of great hesitancy. I do not advertise my alcoholism; however, it is a part of who I am, it shapes my lens, and the experience within active addiction and recovery shape how I live and teach. I cannot detach myself from the text nor can I detach myself from my experience. I must embrace the truths of my experience of longing, defining, and disconnection as a means to create a space for relational engagement. This does not mean we divulge our darkest secrets to everyone we encounter, rather it means we make ourselves available, even those aspects we fear. We exist as educators, as (im)perfect beings, trying to make sense of ourselves and our practice amidst discourses that define and positon us as less than. When we begin to acknowledge the power of those discourses, when we begin to admit our (im)perfection, our shame, and the sense of isolation that exists when we try to perform according to those discourses, we move further toward our own humanity, further toward transgressing those practices that leave us isolated. We are (im)perfect—human, we are educators who entered the arena with intention, people who live within and outside story. It is through the practice of authenticity that you (I) might return, reflexively, to y(our) own pedagogical negotiations and yearnings, (re)turning to self, to community, to the thoughts and actions of body/mind/spirit, to shame and failure and hope, all moving us further toward praxis and possibility.

reflections
upon the circle
fluid reverberations
  of authenticity
and a beckoning self
reunited

Brown (2017) offers, "you will always belong anywhere you show up as yourself and talk about yourself and your work in a real way" (p. 25). As we become real, acknowledging ourselves as (im)perfect, as well as the influence of those stories that have led us into isolation, we become reacquainted with the wholeness of who we are within our lives and our practice. It is here that we might enter into a space of living inquiry. It is here that we may respond to experience, engaging with knowing, seeing, doing in a manner that is relational and fluid—temporally grounded in the spirit, rather than the ego. It is the presence of this spirit, that authentic, (im)perfect self who exists in relationship, that transcends personal and intellectual boundaries and definitions, that moves us toward a communal space of knowing, becoming, and accepting—a space of praxis and belonging.

And so, I step
  with imperfect motion
into the circle
    and shout,
        "I am available!"

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Promising Truths, in Fiction & Teaching
Sincerity

SCOTT JARVIE
Michigan State University

What am I but the inter-
section of these loves?
—Dean Young, "Luciferin"

Mixed media collage of one preservice teacher's aspirations as an English teacher.

RECENTLY, IN AN ENGLISH METHODS COURSE, I asked my preservice teacher-students to create mixed-media collages representing the English teachers they aspire to be. I set out a

variety of disparate texts—old photographs I'd taken and collected, favorite poems, children's books, pages ripped from novels and literary magazines—gave them the prompt, turned them loose with the scissors and glue sticks, let them be. The point was to open the students up to multimodal approaches to reading and writing (New London Group, 2000) in order to get them thinking about the purposes of their work, the values they bring to the English classroom, and just how they might begin to make a life in the profession. Looking over what they made afterwards, I was startled by what I saw.

The collage above repurposes two images I'd provided—a photograph of a pond near campus I ran by every day and a whimsical illustration of a bear a girlfriend gave me once—in working through the student's understanding of the English teacher this student aspired to be. It was startling to see my deeply personal images taken up by the student and recontextualized to an entirely different end. That shouldn't have been surprising, as I'd provided materials I had lying around for their use on the assignment, but it surprised me anyway. There were other moments, too, in scanning across the collages that gave me pause and transported me away: one student cut up an image of a stained-glass window from a conference I'd attended and arranged it into a triptych; another, lines from a Billy Collins poem ("I am not the bread and the knife / you are still the bread and the knife") I'd taught to my own English students years before on the Texas-Mexico border; others haphazardly pasted lyrics from songs and snippets from old *New Yorker* issues that had been sitting out for months on my coffee table and needed to go. All the materials—*my* materials—had been thoroughly repurposed as aesthetic matter for imagining students' own future lives as English teachers. The activity makes an apt metaphor for pedagogy: teachers bring material (texts, novels, objectives, prejudices, experiences) into the classroom and to students, who take it up and do something with it themselves.[1] The alchemy of that process is at the heart of what I'm interested in with this essay.

As the type of grad student well-versed[2] in critique, it's easy, instinctual even, for me to read this exercise critically, as a narcissistic imposition of myself onto my students, the activity as metaphor for the type of problematic and unjust reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990; Freire, 2000) that deserves criticizing. That may be true. In addition to that critique, though, I'm interested in the way the activity also demonstrated something different from reproduction, in that students repurposed materials in new and surprising ways, suggesting, as per the collage, that the material "belongs to all of us." Not only am I interested in that latter, more hopeful reading, I'm interested in examining the extent to which the two readings can coexist, the critical and the hopeful, and how an awareness of both might cohere in pedagogy. I'm curious about what happened to me, the teacher (and to myself) as well as the students, my others, who encountered this material that mattered so much to me and made of it something of their own, refashioned for *their* self in ways that spoke affirmatively to the teachers they aspired to be. As the novelist Italo Calvino (1993) asks, "Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined?" That this encounter, happening in a classroom, might be read as both critical and hopeful—that's what I mean when I speak of what follows as *sincerity*.

I believe I was sincere in sharing these materials with my students pedagogically, personal though they may be and problematic as the act may be read critically. I genuinely felt that who I was and what I brought in, things that meant so much to me, would matter to my students. In this essay, I make the case for teaching as a sincere act. By that, I don't mean the conventional notion of operating without "pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy" (OED), but instead a more radical uptake drawn from literature—fiction (e.g., Egan, 2010; Eggers, 2001; Wallace, 2001)—and literary

theory (Kelly, 2016) that understands the concept as "always contaminated internally by the threat of manipulating the other…this sincerity depends not on purity but on trust and faith" (Kelly, 2016, p. 201). Such a sincerity offers educators ways of teaching hopefully, bringing forth themselves in conversation with students. The point is not to avoid or move past critique but rather to preserve hope alongside the critique: a conviction that what we do as teachers, in bringing ourselves into the classroom, is worthwhile, even while bearing in mind the very real reasons we should be critical of the ways we inevitably and always exercise power. Drawing on that collage again: I don't want to give up trying to be a good teacher, a really good one even,[3] despite being trained as a critical scholar to read the work of teaching as inevitably an exertion of power and will, authority, colonialism, latent prejudice, etc. To that end, sincerity offers a way of rethinking teaching as primarily and problematically a manipulative and impositional act, a mode of imagining pedagogy beyond the dichotomy between oppressive transmission pedagogies and liberatory critical ones. Moreover, the concept provides a different understanding of the pedagogical relationship that complicates the taken-for-granted-ness of student-centered approaches, which too often privilege the student while downplaying or outright ignoring the humanity of the teacher. I suggest that if we're going to humanize (Paris & Winn, 2013) our work as educators and scholars of education, taking seriously the notion that there is "no education without relation" (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), a renewed theorizing that affirms the role of the teacher as relationally important, as having something to offer through the communication of their selves, can enrich the work of teaching— as an extension of teachers' lives, as creative and communal, compelling, complex, and deeply personal work—in ways that prove fruitful for both teachers and students.

Sincerity, Authenticity, Sincerity (Again): A Literary History

I've come to say exactly what I mean, and I mean so many things.
—Joe Pugg, *Hymn #101*

Sincerity has been largely eschewed in education research, beyond a few early experiments in alternative and democratic schooling (e.g., Neill, 1960) that equate the concept with honesty, a moral and behavioral virtue to be instilled in children. Yet there is a long history that considers sincerity in literary theory (See the work of Kelly, 2016, for a more thorough telling of that history). My theorizing here will work through that history in order to more robustly establish sincerity as a concept of value for the work of educators.

A major early study (Trilling, 1972) surveyed sincerity in literature dating back to Shakespeare. There Trilling defines sincerity as "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling," citing *Hamlet* as a central text and particularly the famous lines:

This above all—to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
(Shakespeare, 1.3.78-80, as cited in Kelly, 2016, p. 198)

In that understanding "truth to one's own self should be conceived of not as an end, but as a means of ensuring truth *to others*" (Kelly, 2016, p. 199, emphasis mine). By the 20th century, literary sincerity had gone out of fashion, replaced by a Modernist (e.g., the works of T. S. Eliot and James

Joyce) ideal of authenticity that conceives of truth to the self as an end rather than a means. As Kelly explains:

> Whereas sincerity places emphasis on intersubjective truth and communication with others, on what Trilling calls the "public end in view," authenticity conceives truth as inward, personal, and hidden, the goal primarily of self-examination rather than other-directed communication…which is less and less willing to take account of the habitual preferences of the audience. (p. 199)

This Modernist shift to authenticity rejected two central components of any conception of sincerity: (1) intention, which was denigrated by the New Critics[4] as a fallacy in studying literature, and (2) the privileging of a public self, which "became associated with bad faith or an artificial dishonesty" (Kelly, 2016, p. 200).

A number of literary movements followed adding to the privilege of authenticity, including existentialist and absurdist literature in Europe and Beat writing and confessional poetry in America. During the 1960s and 70s, the pendulum swung again, as the arrival of postmodern (particularly French, poststructural) theory (the work of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, etc.) called authenticity into question. Postmodern authors in the U.S. like John Barth, Don Delillo, and Thomas Pynchon, as well as abroad—Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino—troubled authenticity themselves, publishing fiction that put notions of selfhood under pressure (Kelly, 2016, p. 201). A subsequent generation of writers who came of age during the 80s and 90s, steeped in those postmodern fictions and theories in college, again took up questions of self, sincerity, authenticity, and truth in their fiction, leading critics to dub them "The New Sincerity."

That term has been used to describe authors of fiction like Michael Chabon (e.g., 2012), Junot Díaz (1997, 2008, 2013), Jennifer Egan (2002, 2011), Dave Eggers (2001, 2003, 2006, 2012), Ben Lerner (2011, 2015), David Mitchell (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer (2002), George Saunders (2014, 2017), Zadie Smith (2000), David Foster Wallace (1996, 2001), and Colson Whitehead (2007). In varying ways, these writers narrativize, interrogate, temper, and test issues of the self and the other, sincerity and truth, relational connection and its (im)possibilities.[5] Theory taught them that sincerity in their writing, communicated through a language in crisis, could never be entirely pure, nor exist outside of the problematics of power, colonialism, and various other -isms, normativity, authority, etc. But rather than devastate their projects, this impossibility came to fuel their writing:

> The promise of truth to the other that marks sincerity is always contaminated internally by the threat of manipulating the other, and this threat cannot be eliminated through appeal to intention, morality, or context. Yet this threat should not be understood as the privation of sincerity, but as its very possibility. That sincerity can always be taken for manipulation shows us that sincerity depends not on purity but on trust and faith: if I or the other could be certain that I am being sincere, the notion of sincerity would lose its normative charge. (Kelly, 2016, p. 201)

The New Sincerity, then, is both impossible—in that it works with and through the varied crises of a post-Theory worldview—and at the same time affirms "the possibility of a renewal of our common world" (Hodgson, Vlieghe, & Zamojski, 2018, p. 18) through that very language.

This complex and contradictory ethos shows up in fiction writing in varying ways. Often, sincerity is marked by an anxious hyper-self-awareness, particularly of the commercial forces that shape relationships between the self and the other in writing, as when Eggers (2001) includes an itemized statement of payments received for writing his novel. Additionally, newly-sincere writing typically depends on a privileging of the uncertainty that comes hand-in-hand with language, wherein operating means "never being certain whether you are sincere, and whether your struggle to transcend narcissism, solipsism, irony, and insincerity is even undertaken in good faith" (Kelly, 2016, p. 204-205). The narrator of *Everything is Illuminated* (Foer, 2002) exemplifies this sentiment: "It was impossible to remember what one meant, what, after all of the words, was intended" (p. 261). New Sincerity writing also often makes direct appeals to the reader, as when Wallace (2001) concludes "Octet" with the command: "So decide" (p. 136). As Smith (2003) notes, by leaving the story ambiguously in the hands of the reader, sincerity depends on what happens "off the page, outside words, a curious thing for a piece of writing to want to do" (p. xx).

Across this story, we can understand sincerity in the contemporary milieu as an affirmative relational mode of writing that embraces rather than resists Theory and its critiques, nevertheless persisting in engaging others with the desire to tell the truth helpfully, demonstrating concern with questions of human emotion, sentiment, ethics, etc. It is marked by a self-awareness informed by Theory and wrought by critique, a persistent uncertainty, and a persistence, nevertheless, to reach out sincerely to the reader, the writer's other. It's unclear, however, what it might look like to think about this sincerity in the context of pedagogy. One note before I begin: Obviously there are different ways of understanding Theory and criticality, and a distinction should be made between utopian, liberatory approaches and those constituting what Foucault (1983) calls "a hyper- and pessimistic activism" (p. 232). I'm interested in the latter[6] and in what sincerity might do to reinvigorate the work of a critical pedagogue committed to pessimism: how it might help resist the fall into cynicism and make teaching affirmatively complex, creative, personal, and meaningful work.

Sincerity in the Classroom

In what follows, I theorize how we might think with this new understanding of sincerity, culled from literary theory, in our work as teachers. I begin with my own story, which I do not take to be representative of the stories of others, per se, but rather as providing an opening to consider possibilities for sincerity in education. In that sense, I practice what Gallop (2002) terms "anecdotal theory," in which she considers her own anecdotes for the theoretical insights they afford. "The anecdotes become 'interesting' precisely for their ability to intervene in contemporary theoretical debates" (p. 2), Gallop writes, and here I think an analysis of my own stories helps illustrate the promise of sincerity as a frame that can intervene in some impasses in pedagogy today. Or, put differently, I think my story is one example that offers insight into what Petersen (2018) calls "the specific and the possible" (p. 7) in pedagogy. Rather than make a claim as to its representativeness of the field, I follow Petersen in asserting that "the example happened and that in itself makes it interesting" (p. 7) and useful for thinking with the ideas and implications of New Sincerity fiction.

Beginning with Theory

> We all come to be cured of our sentiments in the end.[7]
> —Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*

Before I entered graduate school, I read Foucault's (1995) *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. His treatise on the exercise of disciplinary power throughout modernity and its pervasive use in institutions like prisons, factories, hospitals, and—most provocatively for me, a high school English teacher at the time—schools, was mind-blowing in the original sense, before the term lost its force and turned cliché. Reading theory for the first time is, for many, a trip. I was fortunate to read Foucault just as I was exiting the classroom and heading off to the sheltered enclave of doctoral work, where, buoyed by fellowships, I could think about power-knowledge and poststructuralism without the trouble of just what I should do with it—how I would live with it—as a teacher in a classroom and a person in the world. I came to absorb critical theories as a way of thinking, a transformation that, Hungerford (2008) notes, "seem[ed] less a critical movement than a simple assumption about work…not a wave, but a tide, or even just the water we all swim in" (p. 416). Critiques of power, privilege, oppression, and injustice became reflexive; nowhere were these easier to apply than the classroom, where I had so much experience being and acting in relationships of authority and subordination. This mindset served me well in coursework and at conferences, where critique was welcomed both as a mark of competency and of moral correctness.

It did not make it easy to teach. In the third year of my graduate studies, I re-entered the classroom, this time as a teacher educator in the aforementioned English methods course. For the first time since critique had come to subsume the way I looked at nearly everything, I had to advocate affirmatively for something: my pedagogy needed to provide a vision for what good English teaching should be, what my students should do, or how they should think and approach their work. In this, my problem resembled that of the protagonist, Adam, of Lerner's (2011) novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*, whose inability to reconcile his understanding of language with the vagaries of experience leaves him unable to write:

> When I read *The New York Times* online, where it was always the deadliest day since the invasion began, I wondered if the incommensurability of language and experience was new, if my experience of my experience issues from a damaged life of pornography and privilege, if there were happy ages when the starry sky was the map of all possible paths, or if this division of experience into what could not be named and what could not be lived just was experience, for all time. Either way, I promised myself, I would never write a novel. (p. 64-65)

Dames (2012) points out that Lerner's references to critical theorists—"Adorno's *Minima Moralia* ['damaged life'] and Lukacs' *Theory of the Novel* ['happy ages']"—should be understood as "not just grace notes but essential aspects of the dilemma: Adam has been thoroughly educated in a school of symptomology"[8] (p. 165). Like Lerner's Adam, I struggled as an educator with critical theories that left me uncertain, tentative that whatever ground I chose to provide students would inevitably, immediately prove fraught with contradiction and problematic with power.

I want to be careful here not to turn my story into the too-easy cliché of a conversion towards belief. That is, I am not turning my back on critique; it is a part of how I look at the world,

and it's inspired much of what I find important about teaching and scholarship. The point of my story is that critique, in its extremity, came to undermine the ground on which I tried to stand as a teacher and scholar (and, honestly, a person). It made me forget that, as Latour (2004) put it—in a statement that I've spent so much time arguing vehemently against the last few years—the point was "never to get away from facts but closer to them" (p. 231), or, as Eggers (2003) would have it, "All I ever wanted was to know what to do" (p. 303).

Mine is also not a unique story. I share it to draw a parallel between my tale and the experience of New Sincerity writers who similarly absorbed critical theories that could be paralyzing (How can a fiction writer write meaningfully without believing in the ability of language to carry meaning? What would be the point?) but who found a way to write anyway. That story is inspiring to me; here, I'll attempt to read it in the context of teaching for the insights it might provide as to how we can go on teaching fruitfully, even as we question the ground on which we stand.

Sincerity & Student-Centered Teaching

One common way we see critique manifested in pedagogy today is in the philosophy and practices of student-centered teaching. Rooted in the critical pedagogy of Freire, the progressive approaches of Dewey and Montessori, and the constructivist learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, student-centered teaching attempts to de-center the teacher in the classroom, placing emphasis instead on students as agents for their own learning. The approach is a deliberate intervention in a traditional mode where teachers transmit their knowledge to students, imposing upon them a set of values that critical pedagogues have compellingly critiqued as an unjust relationship. As an alternative, student-centered approaches to teaching have been taken up widely across content areas. In my own field of secondary English, for example, recent work on "assets-based approaches" (e.g., Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017; Kirkland, 2013; Knight & Watson, 2014) foregrounds students' literacy practices, especially those taken up *outside* schools, as assets to the work of teaching English *in* schools. That work is important for the ways it recovers and recenters students marginalized by teaching as traditionally conceived (e.g., Kirkland, 2013, considers the literacy practices of black male youth). Such approaches assert that marginalized students are abundantly talented readers and writers capable in their own right. The work concretizes Eggers' (2001) sincere sentiment that "we see the beauty within and cannot say no" (p. 6). It's inspiring, and I want to be clear that I align and inform my own teaching with it. As such, my aim is not to be dismissive of the work but rather to push back against one of its implications for pedagogy—that teachers are the problem and centering students is the answer. It's worth pointing out then that in the classroom we can notice how Eggers' line cuts both ways—teachers may see the beauty within themselves, too, and may not be able to say no to sharing that with their students.

My point is that there may be a contradiction in the ways student-centered, assets-based pedagogy gets taken up. If the underlying assumption of the move towards seeing students' lived experiences as assets is that all human[9] beings have gifts to contribute to the educational project, then the notion that those other human beings in the pedagogical equation—teachers—don't also possess assets worth including doesn't make much sense. But rather than get into a competition of which humans matter more in the classroom, I want to, instead, reorient the conversation away from pedagogy as conflict and competition between teachers and students vying for control.

Teachers have assets themselves to contribute, surely, but I wonder to what extent teachers can understand themselves as having something to contribute *while at the same time* maintaining an awareness of the critical problems of their contribution as figures of authority. That's what sincerity, of the type theorized in New Sincerity literature, might look like in the classroom: attempting to act sincerely while also "never being certain whether you are sincere, and whether your struggle to transcend narcissism, solipsism, irony, and insincerity is even undertaken in good faith" (Kelly, 2016, p. 204-205). What I mean is: sincere pedagogy, as I try to think with it here, is an inherently uncertain mode of teaching, one that maintains hope while asserting the need for criticality, one that brings the self affirmatively into community with others even though the project is always already fraught, one that promises to try to tell the truth to students despite the problems or impossibilities of doing so. Sincerity is a belief in the promise of the (critical) teacher and what that affords students; it is not naïve or willful ignorance of the problematics of power, prejudice, history, and imposition.

As an example, I draw below on one of my own experiences with text selection in the English classroom, an issue long fraught by critique for the ways it blatantly reifies the violence of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, colonialism, etc. I agree, and I attempt to show in what follows how, in addition to the truths those critiques point out, text selection can also mobilize students towards something else: setting them on generative trajectories of their own. In doing so, I hope to illustrate the mechanics of thinking with sincerity, of the type outlined in the literature above, in the context of a classroom. I provide both critical and affirmative readings of the anecdote in keeping with an understanding that a New Sincerity might embrace both of those approaches.

Teaching a Favorite Text

> How odd I can have all this inside me and to you it's just words.
> —David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*

I'm not sure I've ever been as excited to teach anything as I was to teach Cormac McCarthy's (1991) *All the Pretty Horses* for the first time. When I need to talk about how literature became so important to me, I tell the story of encountering McCarthy's virtuosic coming-of-age tale of life on the Texas-Mexico border. My father gave me the book—importantly, not my teacher—and I alternately reveled and struggled through it on my own time, finding in it more compelling alternatives to the bloodless parochial-school curricula I'd been subjected to my whole (brief) life. I saw the prison-hardened protagonist, John Grady, with his laconic confidence, somehow containing all the literary philosophizing of McCarthy and his stand-in, the matriarch Alfonsa, gallantly a-horseback, violently in love—which is to say I saw my idealized self. What I learned from reading *All the Pretty Horses* at 17 years old, an apathetic if bright student, was that literature and its appeal were larger than what my high school teachers offered. McCarthy's novel introduced me to the "glowing orchard" of literature; like John Grady, I felt myself a thief "newly loosed in that dark electric…loosely jacketed against the cold and ten thousand worlds for the choosing" (p. 30).

I assumed, naively maybe, that my students would have similar experiences to the one I'd had: transformative, enthralling, electric. It would make (literary) readers of them. They were high school juniors, as I had been; this was in Brownsville, Texas, even closer to the border than I was

growing up in Dallas. And they were nearly all fluently bilingual, having grown up Mexican American on both sides of the border. All of which should've made, I thought, *All the Pretty Horses* a hit. As it turned out, most of them struggled through the unit: discussions dragged, essays underwhelmed, many clearly didn't do the reading at all. The unit was, in that sense, a disappointment, and I felt I'd failed at the time. But there were successes too. One student, Carlos, passionately defended the text amid criticism from his peers during our discussions. And on the last day of the unit, he stayed after class to ask for something to read next; I remember giving him my copy of Vonnegut's (1959) *The Sirens of Titan*.

Reading Pedagogy Sincerely

In taking up the lens of the New Sincerity, I'll read the example above both critically and affirmatively. Looking back on it now, there's clearly a nostalgia at work that lends itself to an immediate critique. I gave those students the book that had mattered most to me, when I was their age. In doing so, I projected a future in which they connected with the book and were launched on similar trajectories as my own. Such nostalgia is, of course, idealistic and naïve—I grew up a nine-hour drive north of Brownsville, in suburban Dallas, and as such, my community had little in common with the largely bilingual and ethnically fluid borderland of the Rio Grande Valley.[10] I also largely missed the point of who the work of teaching should be for: my students. Instead, I participated in the problematic reproduction of Canonical literature, offering students a novel[11] by a straight, white, male, American author, about a straight, white, male protagonist (a cowboy!), that falls squarely within a masculinist tradition of the Western literary Canon, which can be traced back through Faulkner and Hemingway and Joyce and Dostoevsky all the way to Shakespeare and the Bible.[12] Through a critical lens, then, this example constitutes a familiar moment in a long line of problematically uncritical reproduction. My students were encouraged by my teaching and the text I put in front of them to receive (read: conserve) knowledge that their forebears felt they deserved; that is, they were inducted (read: indoctrinated) into an Anglo-European, literary culture long privileged despite the systemic violence wrought by that very culture—the erasure of so many black and brown voices, queer voices, indigenous voices, the sanitization of the few deemed acceptably unthreatening, the elevation of the white, male voice at the center of it all as the epitome of genius rather than of tyranny, violence, and oppression. If I, as the teacher, had gotten out of my own way and avoided the temptation of teaching a book I loved, I might have avoided these problems and instead chosen a text that better attended to who my students were, then—or better yet, let them choose the text.

Understanding this anecdote through the lens of the New Sincerity, though, means remaining open to the critical reading above—and to its importance in the work of pedagogy—while also considering the ways the text I brought in, my beloved teenage novel, might have mattered, affirmatively, to those students. On the opening page of his memoir, Eggers (2001) writes:

> First of all:
> I am tired.
> I am true of heart!

And also:
You are tired.
You are true of heart!

Taking these lines as a type of mantra for a sincere approach to pedagogy suggests the importance of the teacher (I) in the context of this story, enthusiastically affirming that the teacher is indeed sincere ("true of heart"). But importantly, Eggers immediately points to the other, the You: for him, the reader; for myself (as the teacher in this example), my student. If a New Sincerity is located anywhere, it has to be located, as Kelly (2016) explains, "intersubjectively" (p. 199), in the relational space across writer and reader or teacher and student. From the teacher's perspective, my sharing this novel, which resonated so strongly with me, is another way of asking Wallace's (2001) question in "Octet," for Kelly (2016) a central New Sincerity text: "This thing I feel, I can't name it straight out but it seems important, do you feel it too?" (p. 131).

What I'm interested in, then, is the way the book resonated in this story with Carlos, too. That he came to me after class to ask for a recommendation speaks to the potential of sincerity as a generative approach to teaching. What appeals, I think, about the promise of telling the truth about yourself to your students, in spite—or perhaps because of the critiques noted above—is that sincerity *propels*. In Eggers' (2003) second novel, two young men travel quite literally around the world with the aim of giving away a windfall settlement received after a friend's death. They feel, too much, the weight of loss; sincerity becomes a way of moving on:

> —Nobody told me about the weight. Why didn't our parents tell us about the weight?
> —What weight?
> —The fucking weight, Hand. How does the woman Ingres live? The one from Marrakesh? If we're vessels, and we are, then we, you and I, are overfull, and that means she's at the bottom of a deep cold lake. How can she stand the hissing of all that water?
> —We are not vessels; we are missiles.
> —We're static and we're empty. We are overfull and leaden.
> —We are airtight and we are missiles and all-powerful. (p. 315)

Playful use of missile-as-metaphor aside,[13] Eggers' project with respect to sincerity is about, to use his word, *velocity*: the direction we come to move in and the speed with which we go. Carlos asked for another novel to read, a recommendation from my own experience. It mobilized him as a reader and writer, em-powering him as he moved on from that class. As his teacher, I recognize, like Eggers' characters, that "there is a chance that everything [I] did was incorrect, but stasis is itself criminal for those with the means to move, and the means to weave communion between people" (p. 298). So sincerity in pedagogy preserves and acts upon the promise of moving students, of affirmatively pushing them onward, of weaving communion between us and them, when we try to tell the truth—when we share who we are, as truly as we can—even when doing so is problematic and especially since, as critique via theory has taught us, any action is inevitably problematic, is essentially an imposition:

> Even good and democratic teachers…impose their views. Such an imposition is inevitable; it derives from the very act of teaching, of making choices among a variety of possible learning opportunities for one's students; choices that advance some knowledge, knowing, and knowers over others. (Segall, 2002, p. 98)

For teachers, sincerity in pedagogy takes the "all this inside me" Wallace references above and concretizes it, making it matter in the doubled-sense to students, as more than just words. Or, put differently, sincerity calls teachers to ask themselves the question Eggers asks at the end of his third novel, *What is the What* (2006), a question that reminds the teacher of the presence of the teacher's self and its value in the work of pedagogy: "All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist" (p. 535).

Thought differently, we might consider what sincerity offers teachers with regard to facilitating critical engagement in the sharing of the teacher's self sincerely. We may actually make critique more possible by foregrounding truths as teachers, promising to share them as honestly as we can (e.g., our politics), because in putting things on the table, these truths become discursive matter for students to perhaps more easily and openly contend with. Framing a set of political values as representative of the teacher in front of them encourages students to understand that political expression situatedly, as connected to the teacher's life and experiences, particular perspective and culture, and biases and prejudices. Such connections are essential to teaching the things critique helps us to see—how power operates in varying ways, as a manifestation of privileges and forces working on and through all of us. Moreover, in sharing sincerely, rather than, say, hypothetically, pedagogy becomes relational work—in the process of grappling with the teacher's sincere thoughts, students are establishing relational ties, even if they're antagonistic. Sincerity of this kind, then, becomes a way for teachers to assert, as Egan (2010) does in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, "that we have some history together that hasn't happened yet" (p. 345). This is work that understands that "teaching is building educational relations" (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7); that asks—relentlessly in the wake of Theory's revelations of schooling as an incorrigibly violent, colonial, racist, and oppressive project—"why do schools remain if not for meeting?" (p. 5).

Conclusions, Or, You Shall Know Our Velocity!

> That we don't know,
> but try anyway.
> —Alecia Beymer, "In the attempt"

To end, I offer two considerations provoked by this thinking of sincerity and pedagogy that may help going forward. The first is that sincere teaching, of the type that insists on critique while also preserving hope, may require an ontological, rather than representational, orientation towards pedagogy. What I mean is that, given the obvious contradictions, it may not be possible to represent sincerity in writing—with language, as the New Sincerity authors attest to—and, thus, in this essay or curriculum; that is, it's not a form of rational knowledge but rather something that we can only make sense of ontologically. Huehls (2016), in his discussion of literature *After Critique*, suggests that fiction authors might achieve their sincere ends—to "establish connection, produce sympathy, trigger change, affect the world"—not by "showing and revealing the world to us, but by being in the world with us" (p. 24). Or, to return to the preservice teachers I began this essay with, when asked what they thought constituted sincere teaching, they said they didn't know *how* to say it, but they knew it when it happened. Thus, sincerity might need to be thought of outside of language

and representation; nonrepresentational approaches to pedagogy (e.g., Leander & Boldt, 2012; McKenzie, 2017; Smith, 2016) may prove useful in this regard.

A second trajectory involves recognizing, as Hungerford (2012) points out in an essay on the pedagogical implications of Eggers' sincere fiction, that:

> School is not structured by love and friendship. Love and friendship are marked as the affective outside of the classroom, banished by the formality of pedagogical authority, by the commitment to impersonality as a literary critical good and as an intersubjective norm among the strangers sitting together in the classroom. (p. 655)

For Eggers, this is precisely the problem we face today, in writing and in pedagogy. As Hungerford notes, Eggers has pushed back against this in his writing (e.g., 2001, 2003, 2006), but more intriguingly for our purposes here, he's also done so in other venues, establishing a network of tutoring centers (826National), a publishing house structured around those commitments (McSweeney's), and a literary magazine grounded in a sincere ethos (*The Believer*). Eggers' school of "uncritical reading" (Warner, 2004, as quoted in Hungerford, 2012, p. 654) might serve as inspiration and sites of empirical study of what it means to teach sincerely, attempting to concretize the belief that "reading and writing [and teaching] are inseparable from the emotionally freighted relationships of love and friendship" (p. 653).

At the culmination of the English methods course referenced at the beginning of this piece, I asked students to write personal essays that said, "something substantive about yourself and where you're at now, as a person." Providing epigraphs from New Sincerity authors, I invited them to pair their essays with photographs and told them we'd share the writing on the last day of class. I told them I would write one too, as did the other instructor. What I wanted to say came easily, but for my co-teacher it did not. She grappled with what exactly she wanted to say to students before they left and how she might do so sincerely. In the end, she wrote a poem about failure and impossibility, describing what she'd learned from students—that as teachers, we don't know, but try anyway. Sincerity offers one way for educators and scholars, steeped in theory and critique, to move on in the attempt, uncertainly, critically, hopefully, to make the self's velocity known (Eggers, 2003), with the promise of teaching truths that matter to others and ourselves.

Notes

1. Conversely, students bring so much stuff of their own to the encounter as well. Throughout this essay, I focus on the sharing of the teacher's self as a sincere form of pedagogy, which is not to dismiss or downplay the importance of foregrounding students' selves—their lived experiences, identities, out-of-school practices, etc.—in the work of teaching, English or otherwise. More on this dynamic will be discussed later in the paper.
2. Or thoroughly contaminated, as it were.
3. Here, I interpolate lines from Ada Limon's (2015) poem "I Remember the Carrots," which the student chose as well in the collage above. Throughout this essay, I attempt to practice some of what I preach with respect to sincerity, bringing in textual matter that composes my self and my thinking, what matters to me (as well as to my students, in this case) into the writing in order to make the case more sincerely.
4. I'm moving fast through literary theory, here, I know. Briefly: The New Critics practiced a formalist brand of literary analysis, placing emphasis on the text itself and its formal qualities rather than contextual factors like the author's biography, or the particularities of the reader, etc. For better and worse, depending on who you talk to, New Criticism rose to prominence in the academy and has endured as a pedagogical approach—if nothing else, it is highly teachable—and that trickled down into secondary education; much has been made (e.g., Blake & Lunn,

1986; Santa Maria, 1999; Thomas, 2012) of the New Criticism at the heart of framings of reading in the Common Core and AP curricula, for example.

5. These preoccupations are additionally characterized as indicative of a New Sincerity movement in the arts broadly, including in music (e.g., Arcade Fire, Cat Power, Joanna Newsom, Neutral Milk Hotel, Sufjan Stevens), television (*The Office*, *Parks and Recreation*) and film (the movies of Wes Anderson & Sofia Coppola), which all (though any such grouping is obviously uneven) embrace sincerity as a possible antidote to cynicism engendered by modern life. For the sake of this essay, I constrain my focus to how the notion has been taken up in literature and literary theory, as it's been most thoroughly worked through there.

6. Rather than resort to the tired cliché that engagement with both approaches would be "beyond the scope of this paper" (though that's true) and that it's a conversation that "deserves more space than I can provide here," etc. I'll be upfront—sincere, even—and say that, as a thinker, it's the latter, pessimistic strain that has proved more resonant in my own experience, and so it serves as the focus as I read through my anecdote vis-à-vis sincerity. The cynicism engendered by that pessimistic critique when taken to its extreme, in which everything gets deconstructed and all foundations stripped away, all values questioned, as a lens through which to see everything, as a way of life—that messed me up, as a teacher and a scholar and a person, and that's reason enough for me to want to think with it. But also, conveniently, it's exactly the cynicism wrought by theory that New Sincerity fiction responds to. On the surface, it's a pre-occupation with language in crisis, how to write with words after it's been exposed that "it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say" (Foucault, 1994, p. 9); and there is no "pure signified" (Derrida, 1997, p. 159) that lies behind or beyond words. But more broadly, New Sincerity writers are concerned with, as Wallace memorably put it, "what it means to be a fucking human being" (as cited in McCaffery, 1993, p. 4) in a postmodern world where Truth is rendered impossible, and genuine, authentic connection with another a farce. These fictions are preoccupied over and over again with moral questions, about how to live meaningfully in a world in which certain ways of thinking (theory) have left them without a ground on which to stand.

7. Or rather, in the beginning—McCarthy is a longtime favorite, but no New Sincerist.

8. "Symptomology" here refers to a popular critical mode, rooted in the theory of Louis Althusser among other Marxists, "of interpretation that assumes that a text's truest meaning lies in what it does not say, describes textual surfaces as superfluous, and seeks to unmask hidden meanings texts possess…meanings that are veiled, latent, all but absent if it were not for their irrepressible and recurring symptoms" (Best & Marcus, 2009, p. 1). See also: Jameson (1991).

9. I am conscious here of the pressure put on this term by recent theoretical movements associated with nonrepresentational theory and the posthuman turn. It's worth admitting, then, that the New Sincerity is still a representational project (Huehls, 2016) that centers the human, albeit not so much in a rigid Cartesian sense; this is representationalism that pushes against the very limits of representation; it's writing with the knowledge of writing's inevitable partiality.

10. Not to mention differences in class, ethnicity, even the time period of my high school years and theirs, among, many, many other reasons why such a conflation doesn't make much sense.

11. The form of the novel itself may be a problem for the way it's been privileged historically. A growing body of education scholarship takes this critique even further to the privileging of textual matter itself, seeking to redress the centering of text in classrooms by pointing to the possibilities for new, multimodal literacies (e.g., New London Group, 2000).

12. It should be noted, however, that my thinking at the time was that the geographic overlap of the school I taught in and the novel's setting, as well as McCarthy's occasional use of untranslated Spanish, made it a fit with those particular students.

13. Admittedly, it's hard to put this aside, as if the metaphorical weaponization of students were no big deal. We know too well that it is and how literal that weaponization can be. But perhaps, strangely, that makes it useful here—it is a metaphor that unavoidably invites critique; it cannot escape its own deconstruction, and that's actually pretty apt for saying what I'm trying to say—that if the ideas represented in New Sincerity fiction are to be useful or compelling or worthwhile rendered in/as pedagogy, it will be because they can't attempt that escape; they're too close to it.

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