



Pedagogy as *Currere*: We Teach “Who We Are”

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Abstract: Pedagogy as *currere* reimagines teaching and learning as autobiographical, recursive, and ethically charged acts of world-making. Drawing on William F. Pinar’s four-moment method—regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic—this paper reconceptualizes *currere* from a niche method of autobiographical research into a full-fledged pedagogical orientation capable of responding to pluralistic classrooms, digital entanglements, and the ongoing homogenization of education. Synthesizing contemporary curriculum theory, qualitative case studies, and critical autoethnography, the analysis demonstrates that when teachers practice pedagogy as *currere* they cultivate reflexive agency, foster relational fairness, and animate curriculum as a living text co-authored with students. In short, *currere* emphasizes we teach “who we are”—not just what method or technique. The paper concludes with a praxis model and policy recommendations for teacher education.

Keywords: curriculum theory; *currere*; autobiography; critical pedagogy; reflexivity; teacher education.

Teachers generally see themselves as being fairly autonomous—as being in control of what is taught and how it is taught—but when it comes to actual practice, they tend to depart very little from a single approach: standing in front of a class—telling, explaining or lecturing (Tanner, & Tanner, p. 308).

Introduction

In an age increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence, the educational landscape is shifting toward automation, efficiency, and data-driven

outcomes. While artificial intelligence can personalize learning, optimize content delivery, and analyse student performance at scale, it also risks depersonalizing education by reducing learners (humans) to data points and turning educators into facilitators of pre-packaged content. This is one reason why educators should be cautious to describe themselves as “facilitators” because facilitators are easily replaceable in a digital age. *Currere*—a reconceptualized, autobiographical form of pedagogy—offers a critical counterbalance.

In 1979, Pink Floyd released a song about education that became a timeless mega-hit: “*We don’t need no education.*” That famous line continues to spark debate among educators and offers much food for thought for anyone who has ever been schooled. Whenever I hear this song playing in a café or on the car radio, I find myself reflecting deeply on my own teaching vocation. Was I ever too authoritative? Did I unintentionally abandon or isolate children? In the future, what will students say about the education I provided? As teachers, we hold ourselves to bold standards—striving to create learning experiences that are empowering, inclusive, and meaningful.

However, the song by Pink Floyd depicts a schooling experience that is dehumanizing and alienating, depicting education as a system that suppresses individuality, creativity, and critical thought. They “don’t need no education and they [certainly] don’t need no thought control.” Using the double negative of don’t and no, and employing the word ‘ed-u-cation,’ the memorable statement had the suitable meter and timing to catch us all off guard; this is because we all had an education of some type, and so the song forces us to go back into the past and ask ourselves the question, was my education a good one, or could it have been better? However, maybe the question is not the right one to ask because the catchphrase “We don’t need no education” persuades listeners to overlook what the character-narrator is *not* saying, and that is—We don’t need *any* education. In the most general sense, educational experiences may be experienced as either affirming or harmful, depending on how learning is structured and lived.

A closer examination reveals that education is, at its core, a deeply human activity. At its best, education works against abandonment and isolation—two experiences that, when present, deprive individuals of the opportunity to flourish as happy, productive human beings. To be abandoned or isolated is to be cut off not just from others, but from the possibility of learning itself. It would be difficult to find someone who genuinely does not want to learn or grow in some form—even Pink Floyd, one might argue, would agree with that.

What matters most is *how* one is educated. Compassion, empathy, and the quality of pedagogy—not just the content—make all the difference. While the character-narrator in *Another Brick in the Wall* speaks from a specific moment in time and place, the song expresses a pedagogy of abandonment and isolation that, sadly, is not confined to any single era or location. It resonates across generations and contexts.

Pedagogies can also take many forms. Some of the most well-known are critical pedagogy, traditional pedagogy, Socratic pedagogy, slow pedagogy, identity pedagogy, and possibly the most recent pandemic pedagogy. Pedagogy can also be understood as the science of teaching children. Conversely, as noted, I want educators to think more about pedagogy in terms of *currere* which is a slow, meditative, looking back, and at-the-moment pedagogy. This is why I consider the importance of *currere* and pedagogy coming together.

The Concept of *Currere* and Four *Currere* Moments

Currere originated in the reconceptualist movement in curriculum studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s and provided an intellectual shift that challenged the dominant technical, objectives-based, and positivist approaches to curriculum that had defined the field since the mid-20th century. Drawing on its Latin root meaning “to run the course,” *currere* shifted attention away from curriculum as a prescribed plan to the lived experience of education.

Most closely associated with curriculum theorist William F. Pinar, *currere* was developed as an autobiographical method informed essentially by phenomenology and existentialism. In 1975, William F. Pinar published “The Method of *Currere*,” an essay that unsettled the then-dominant scientific-rational approach paradigm of curriculum advocated by educational pioneer Ralph W. Tyler’s. This paradigm of curriculum was regarded as an objective sequence of behavioural outcomes. As an alternative, Pinar offered educators a phenomenological invitation to curriculum to “run the course” of one’s own lived curriculum as a means of decoding the sociocultural forces that shape it (Pinar, 1975/2004).

Over the intervening five decades the concept of *currere* has been elaborated worldwide by scholars who locate curriculum not in the printed syllabus but in the recursive dialogue between the subjective and the social (Doll, 2012; Miller, 2019; Morris, 2020). Nonetheless, outside specialized

circles of theory and curriculum studies in higher education, *currere* remains marginal and only theoretical to classroom practice.

Since the concept of *currere* has received only sporadic attention (Garza-Fraire & Stark, 2023; D’Adamo, 2024), there is space open for educators to ask: What would it mean to teach as if *currere* were the fundamental language of pedagogy? How might the four moments guide instructional design, assessment, and teacher professional development? And how can pedagogy as *currere* respond to the professionalization of teaching, and the epistemic bias that so often characterizes the twenty-first century (Andreotti, 2021).

To satisfy these questions, a brief historical genealogy of *currere* is traced from its Latin etymology to contemporary variants in scholarship. A clarification is offered for the theoretical architecture of four *currere* moments, emphasizing lesser-known influences such as psychoanalytic temporality and liberation theology. Third, a conceptualization of pedagogy as *currere*, is offered to articulate the principles of curricular attunement, dialogic reflexivity, and ethical presence. Fourth, a survey of empirical illustrations is given from K-12 and higher-education contexts in Canada, Turkey (Türkiye)¹ and South Africa. Finally, a reflection suggests the challenges ahead and proposes future directions. The analysis is guided by three orienting assumptions: (1) subjectivity is relationally produced; (2) knowledge is partial and situated; and (3) education is an ethical-political project.

This critique aligns closely with the idea of pedagogy as *currere*. When adults reflect on their schooling experiences, they often recall not the facts they memorized, but the *way* they were taught—the relationships, the tone, the care, or lack thereof. Teaching, in this light, becomes a deeply personal and relational act. Indeed, every act of teaching is a “narrative in action,” an “expression of biography and history” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 184). It is through this lens that we understand pedagogy not just as a method or technique, but as a lived, autobiographical, and profoundly ethical practice—one that can either affirm or alienate, include, or abandon. In many homeschooling and Montessori learning conditions, education is naturally personalized. It is paced according to the learner, integrated with family or ethical values, and responsive to lived experiences. This context allows for deep, reflective learning—the very essence of *currere*. A child might not just learn history, for example, but reflect on how their family’s story fits

¹ In 2022, Turkey changed its official name in English to *Republic of Türkiye*.

into that history. They might write, speak, and create from a place of personal relevance—connecting curriculum to identity.

The pedagogy of homeschooling and Montessori learning often gives space for children to think about who they are, who they’ve been, and who they’re becoming. It can create space for *currere* in action—education that is not just about passing tests, but about shaping a person. As educators, parents, and scholars ask: what kind of learning matters most? Is it the memorization of content? Or is it the cultivation of self-awareness, critical reflection, and future-oriented purpose? The pedagogy of homeschooling and Montessori learning can align with *Currere* reminding us that learning is not linear. It’s a spiral of becoming within a pedagogy of togetherness.

There are four *currere* moments and are essential for understanding. They include the following: 1. the regressive (recollection), 2. the progressive (imagining futures), 3. the analytical (examining the present through past and future), and 4. the synthetical (re-entering the present with new understanding). Together, these four moments of *currere* are central to understanding the method and to its practical enactment.

In addition, with the four *currere* “moments” referred as above, I include four “aspects” of *currere* as applied to pedagogy and the following aspects are required:

1. A *slow* pedagogy.
2. A *meditative* pedagogy.
3. A pedagogy that is looking *back*.
4. A pedagogy at the *moment*.

These four “aspects” of *currere* are essential for both understanding and enacting the “moments” and are outlined below.

1. A Slow Pedagogy

I was recently fascinated by a talk about slow food. While I know something about fast food and it’s something I try to avoid despite its ubiquity—you might wonder what exactly slow food is. You might be surprised to learn that slow food and slow pedagogy have much in common.

Since many of us live fast lives we often teach fast. Just as fast food satisfies immediate hunger or momentary boredom, it tends to promote a desire for constant snacking, often on less nutritious options (Adriaanse et al., 2011). Although fast food (and fast pedagogy) often looks good and is

usually designed to be “tasty” and visually appealing, it often lacks the lasting nourishment needed to sustain our energy and well-being throughout the day.

In contrast, slow food emphasizes local ingredients, thoughtful preparation, and community connections. It values quality, sustainability, and the rich cultural traditions that surround eating. Slow food de-centers food as merely “fuel” and instead treats it as a shared experience that nurtures the body, mind, and community.

When we think about pedagogy in these terms, the contrast between *fast* pedagogy and *slow* pedagogy becomes clear. *Fast* pedagogy is time bound, often concentrating on rapid content delivery, standardized testing, and a one-size-fits-all approach—teaching that can feel rushed, fragmented, and disconnected from students’ lives.

Slow pedagogy, on the other hand, values depth over breadth, reflection over speed, and relationships over transactions. *Slow* pedagogy invites educators and learners to savor the learning process, connect with personal and cultural histories, and engage meaningfully with content in ways that nourish intellectual curiosity, emotional understanding, and practical skills.

2. A Meditative Pedagogy

Meditative pedagogy and currere have lost in common. Meditative pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes deep reflection, mindfulness, and thoughtful presence. It encourages educators and students to slow down, become fully aware of their experiences, and engage with learning on a more contemplative and meaningful level.

Some key features of *meditative pedagogy* include:

Reflection and Self-Awareness: It invites learners to reflect not just on the content but on their own thoughts, feelings, and assumptions related to the subject matter.

Mindfulness: Cultivating focused attention on the present moment helps deepen understanding and reduce distractions.

Holistic Engagement: It connects cognitive learning with emotional, spiritual, and embodied experiences.

Non-Linear Learning: Instead of rushing through material, meditative pedagogy values the unfolding process of insight, allowing time for questions and deeper exploration.

Teacher as a Guide: The teacher facilitates a learning environment that supports calm, curiosity, and openness rather than control or pressure.

In essence, meditative pedagogy nurtures an educational space where learning is not just about acquiring knowledge, although still important, but about cultivating wisdom, presence, and a deeper relationship with oneself and the world.

3. *A Pedagogy looking Back*

A pedagogy that can “look back” is a pedagogy that invites learners and teachers to reflect on past experiences, memories, and histories to understand how these shape learning and identity. Therefore, it values *reflection* as a critical part of the educational process, helping individuals to make sense of where they have come from to inform where they are going.

For example, looking back over my family’s history, I see the quiet strength, resilience, and values that have shaped who I am today. In particular, my mother’s sacrifices, struggles, and her stories are not distant relics of my past—they are living threads woven into my identity, my choices, and my vocation as an educator.

By honouring where I come from, I gain clarity about where I stand and the direction I am called to go. In this way, the past is not a weight or a photograph, but alive and a foundation—lifting me to see further, reach higher, and teach with greater purpose.

4. *A Pedagogy at the Moment*

A pedagogy “at the moment” resonates closely with curriculum as *currere*, which foregrounds lived experience in educational practice. Being fully present in the learning experience invites attention to the unfolding present—the present moment—as it is shaped by past experiences (regressive), future aspirations (progressive), and critical reflection (analytical).

Within this framework, presence cultivates mindfulness and deep engagement with what is happening here and now in the classroom, while acknowledging that the present is never isolated but always interwoven with memory, anticipation, and meaning-making. A pedagogy oriented toward *currere* thus attends not only to curricular content but to the lived, autobiographical, and relational dimensions through which curriculum is experienced.

Being fully present encourages openness, attention, and responsiveness to the immediate needs and dynamics of learners. It creates a space for deeper meanings to emerge, for questions to “breathe,” and for deeper understandings to take root. In an age dominated by multitasking and constant stimulation, being fully present is both countercultural and essential—it is where the “I and thou” meet (Buber, 1996). This could involve being fully present to a person, God, or nature.

Teachers are Autobiographical Acts: Curriculum, Content and Pedagogy

Several years ago, at an education conference, I listened to a speaker who confidently declared that “*pedagogy is more important than curriculum—every time.*” I later discovered that the claim is associated with the ideas of Dylan Wiliam, who said, “Neither the intended curriculum nor the implemented curriculum is the real curriculum... Pedagogy trumps curriculum.” While pedagogy is rightly acknowledged, Jansen emphasizes that content is equally important:

Content matters, and it matters a great deal when a Eurocentric curriculum continues to dominate and define what is considered worthwhile knowledge and legitimate authority in texts and teaching” (Jansen, 1998, p. 110).

All children and learners have an ethical right— a duty of care, to high-quality inspirational teaching. Just as teaching is a process, the ways we teach are not only influenced by context but our past, present, and future. Subsequently, teachers are autobiographical acts and so our pedagogy, far from being neutral, is influenced by all three realities—the past, present, and future.

So, should it be pedagogy or content that we place under review? And how should we define curriculum—more importantly, whose curriculum are we defining? Should pedagogy be part of that definition? Carr (1998) noted that, in the English context, the term *curriculum* was originally understood to refer specifically to the content taught in schools. Over time, however, this definition expanded to include both teaching methods (pedagogy) and assessment.

Content is an essential part of any curriculum, and teachers are expected to possess strong subject knowledge. But curriculum also includes procedures, classroom organization, learning activities, assessment, and

teaching methods—what we broadly refer to as pedagogy. Since the teacher is the one who makes decisions about how to teach, how to assess, and how to structure the learning environment, they become central to the curriculum itself. This is one way to understand the theory of a “teacher-centred” education.

In this sense, the teacher’s autobiography—their experiences, beliefs, and values—shapes both what and how they teach. Teaching, then, is an autobiographical act. I didn’t fully appreciate this attitude at first, but over the years, I’ve come to realize that even the most carefully designed curriculum remains lifeless without a valuable pedagogy. It is the teacher’s interpretation, desire, and delivery that bring it to life.

Of course, there are—and always will be—highly motivated self-learners and homeschoolers who thrive without a formal teacher. In today’s digital age, even podcasts and YouTubers have stepped into informal teaching roles, offering accessible learning to those who seek it. Yet, despite these changes, the presence of a reflective, intentional educator remains a powerful force in shaping meaningful learning experiences.

Curriculum does not stand alone but is enacted through pedagogy, which can be an intimate, reflective, and lived medium through which learning takes place. In this context, van Manen (1991) reminds educators that pedagogy and life stories are deeply intertwined. Pedagogy is not merely about transmitting content through technique or method, but about being oriented toward others through the lens of one’s own lived experience. Pedagogy, therefore, is shaped by who we are, while always remaining in relationship with those we teach.

Teaching involves an intermingling of past, present, and future. As educators reflect on their practice, they ask themselves: How does my past influence the way I teach? How do I teach with the future in mind? And how do the past and future together shape what I do in the present moment?

This is where *curre* becomes a powerful philosophy and practice. Rather than treating curriculum delivery as a mere technical process, *curre* embraces the autobiographical nature of teaching. It recognizes that educators and learners are products of history—and so our experiences, beliefs, and contexts inevitably influence how we teach. Education, in this sense, needs a “*curre*”—a cure—to counteract the de-intellectualization of education. It calls us back to thoughtful reflection, critical self-awareness, and a deeper engagement with the meaning behind teaching and learning.

Pushing Ahead Without Looking Back

How can we think about and practice curriculum in a way that truly honours what it means to be human? Many educators recognize the often-unhelpful dichotomy between the “head,” “heart,” and “hands” in teaching and learning. We teach to the “head” through lectures and information delivery—yet this approach has significant limitations, especially in an era dominated by AI and easy access to information. We are certainly more than our brains, though cognitive learning is one important piece.

We also teach to the “heart” through stories, empathy, and caring relationships. These human connections matter deeply, but I often wonder: how much empathy and storytelling are needed to genuinely move someone to learn? The answer is complex—because we are complex beings.

Then there are the “hands,” learning through concrete, lived experience. For example, visiting a dairy farm to milk a cow instead of reading about it in a textbook. These experiences resonate with our natural preference for learning by doing. But again, questions arise: how much experience is enough, and what experience types best serve different learners?

This is where the concept and practice of curriculum as *currere* offers a meaningful connection between these three ways of learning. Reflecting on my own educational journey, I realize how often I’ve been swept into a fast-paced, forward-moving view of learning—encouraging others to continually push ahead without looking back. Yet learning is rarely linear, rather it is a complex process involving past experiences, present realities, and future possibilities—many of which we cannot fully control.

Teaching and learning as *currere* invites us to embrace this complexity. It unites learning with the very essence of being human by honouring reflection, personal history, and the interplay of mind, heart, and hands. In doing so, it challenges us to slow down, look inward and outward, and recognize that learning is as much about who we are *becoming* as what we *know*.

Conclusions: Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Development

The translation of *currere* into teacher education necessitates curricular redesign at both pre-service and in-service levels. Preservice programs can

embed *currere* within foundations courses, linking autobiographical inquiry to critical theory. A cohort model at the University of British Columbia integrates weekly *currere* seminars that culminate in a “Pedagogical Autobiography” defence; exit survey data show heightened dispositions toward culturally responsive teaching (UBC Faculty of Education, 2023).

For practicing teachers, professional learning communities (PLCs) structured around the four moments create ongoing spaces for reflexive praxis. For example, Türkiye, Öztürk and Demir (2025) facilitated monthly *currere* PLCs focused on teacher agency under centralized curriculum mandates, finding that participants increased repertoires of micro-resistance, such as adapting textbooks to local contexts. Policy environments must also shift. Standards boards could recognize reflective portfolios as evidence of professional growth. Funding agencies might support collaborative *currere* projects that link schools with community organizations, advancing what Baszile (2024) terms “curriculum justice.”

Notwithstanding its emancipatory promise, pedagogy as *currere* faces critiques. Accessibility poses a first challenge: the intellectual density of reconceptualist discourse can alienate educators working under resource constraints. Simplified frameworks risk diluting theoretical rigor, yet overly abstract treatises deter adoption. Neoliberal co-optation presents a second concern: reflection is easily commodified into mindfulness packages divorced from structural critique (Riley, 2022). Cultural translation forms a third dilemma: the individualistic subject of Western autobiography may clash with collectivist epistemologies; transnational adaptations require dialogic negotiation. Moreover, questions of assessment persist. How can systems that valorise standardized metrics accommodate idiosyncratic *currere* artifacts? Hybrid models combining dialogic evaluation with portfolio moderation offer one path, but policy inertia remains formidable. Finally, ethical risks arise when autobiographical excavation exposes trauma. Informed consent, trauma-informed facilitation, and optional anonymization are non-negotiable safeguards (Trinh & Nguyen, 2024). Pedagogy as *currere* demands educators capable of holding and balancing such complexity in a healthy tension.

Pedagogy as *currere* invites educators to “run the course” of their own and their students’ lives as the curriculum, weaving past, present, and future into ethical action. Amid planetary crises and epistemic polarization, such a pedagogy offers a route toward reflexive agency and relational justice. Yet realization demands structural support and vigilant critique lest *currere* be reduced to therapeutic individualism.

As we continue to “run the race,” may we do so collectively, in good relationship, attuned to the murmurs of history and the calls of possibility.

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