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ABSTRACT

RESISTING IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS:
ONE REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATOR'S CURRERE JOURNEY

by Mary A. Webb

Teachers are arguably the most important group of professionals for our nation's future growth and development. However, they do not often discuss, define, or identify their professional identities.

Curriculum theory's re-conceptualist movement, exemplified by William Pinar's notion of currere, shifted the field's emphasis from making curriculum to understanding it. Currere as a process is a reflective opportunity to go back to the beginning and project into the future, while intentionally examining the in-between spaces of our educational experiences with the ultimate goal of synthesizing the parts to understand the overall meaning.

Currere allows teachers to develop self-portraits, which include educational experiences, dreams, and the imagination of teaching. It is through the telling of our experiences that we can understand and shape our practices. Understanding curriculum as a strategy that transforms experiences into useable knowledge helps us to develop our practice so that it is responsive to the needs of students and to ourselves as educators. Deconstructing personal histories and stories may allow teachers to gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege.

To understand who I am, I must acknowledge who I have been. This research as an autobiographical study sought to explore the potential and possibilities for engaging currere as defined by Pinar's 1976 work. The purpose of this study was to seek a clearer understanding of the following research questions: (1) Who I am as a teacher? (2) How does my educational experience affect my teaching practices? (3) What inspires me to resist the deintellectualization of my work? (4) What strategies of resistance do I use to support the needs of my students without getting fired?

Through critical reflection and identity construction, teachers can improve instruction and, thereby, improve student learning and achievement in any discipline. This kind of reflection gives us the opportunity to share our truth and to expose the intricacies of what it is really like to be in the classroom with 30 budding personalities, the care we give, and the joy we share when they discover the true meaning of learning. The goal of this research is simply to help as many educators as possible to be able to not only find, but contribute their voices to the narrative of what does happen, what could happen, and what should happen in classrooms today.

RESISTING IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS:

ONE REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATOR'S CURRERE JOURNEY

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my parents for their love and support. Thank you for teaching me the importance of education and being an example of an incredible work ethic necessary to accomplish my goals.

To my 8 brothers and sisters for their unconditional support throughout this academic journey. I appreciate your understanding when I missed events. I love all of you, thank you!

To my nieces and nephews, I hope you will develop a genuine love of learning and realize the value of determination. Dream it, do it, as if your life depends upon it. When your hard work meets God's will for your life, anything is possible.

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This pursuit of a PhD was one of the greatest challenges of my life. This accomplishment would not have been realized without the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and professors. As I reflect on the path to this place in my life, I know that I have been blessed.

As I complete this part of my educational journey, I am compelled by sincere gratitude to note those who supported me in my discovery of understanding my educational experiences both personally and professionally. In the words of Maxine Greene, "I am . . . not yet" (as quoted in Pinar, 1998, p. 1). I am at this resting place; I am not yet finished.

To my best friend, your friendship, love and support has been a gift. I am thankful for your encouragement and your belief that I could accomplish this task. Thank you for being patient with me and keeping me on task.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

"Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story."

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Like many economically disadvantaged students today, my middle and high school teachers wrote me off as someone who would never go to college. Therefore, in their eyes, I did not need to take Algebra. During those school years, I felt disconnected from the mathematics being taught; it had no relevance to my life or what I thought I might be interested in doing in the future. As a result, I quit high school after only one semester and pursued a G.E.D. Many years later, after being given a second chance by the United States Army to develop my math skills on the road to becoming a Frequency Manager, I learned the value of understanding mathematics and grew fond of the subject. That experience led me down a path I had never dreamed of taking. I became part of a program called "Troops to Teachers." That opportunity opened the door for me to utilize what I had learned about mathematics in the Army and later through college courses to become a middle school mathematics teacher.

Over the last 18 years, I have taught elementary, middle and high school mathematics, Pre-Algebra, and Algebra I in grades 4-11. Many of the students I teach and/or have taught come from a background similar to mine. As an African-American educator who grew up in a family of nine with parents having only a middle school education, I understand that education is the key to ending generational poverty and disenfranchisement. A quality education has the power to change lives as well as attitudes about life. In this era of Race to the Top, equal opportunity is equated to sameness of input as if putting the same thing into each student will result in higher test scores.

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Charles Dickens (1859) began one of his famous novels *A Tale of Two Cities* with this contradictory line which describes my feelings about my role as a teacher leader in an urban school these days. It is the worst of times in education. I watch the structure of school kill the spirits of children who are eager learners when they come to school in kindergarten, and I see teachers who are eager to teach, but by the time the children reach third grade (when mandatory testing begins) our school leaders succumb to the edicts of standardized testing and start aligning their curricula and instruction to the test. Teachers are handed scripted lesson plans and etched in stone pacing guides that must be followed to the letter. At each staff meeting, grade level team meeting, and content area meeting, we are inundated with messages about the mandate to focusing instruction on preparing students to pass the test.

It is also the worst of times because policymakers have forgotten that these standardized tests fail to capture the full spectrum of who a child is. In fact, these scores are only a small part of who a child is and what he or she is able to do. Standardized tests have become the centerpiece of the educational experience of all students. The tools of teaching and learning no longer nurture the creative process for students while providing a positive environment where students are encouraged to interact and explore the learning process beyond the rote memorization of facts. As a result, most students don't find school to be relevant, interesting, or fun. Thus, it fails to prepare them for 21st century employment opportunities.

It is the best of times, as I have never before been empowered as a teacher leader to differentiate instruction while making the curriculum meaningful, relevant, interesting, and fun, despite the enormous pressure from administrators to conform to the "one size fits all" model. I believe all students have their own special gifts, and we must use what they're good at to inspire them. I have decided that, as a teacher leader, rather than spending every moment of my student's educational life focusing on the test, I will utilize experiential learning to increase the student's sense of self-worth, long term retention, improve problem solving, and attitudes toward learning.

What I have learned is that most students tend to absorb the content when they can see and feel the subject matter in a way that is related to their lives, is interesting, challenges them, and is fun. Through experiential learning, students are able to express their creativity, collaborate, and communicate in ways that cannot be measured by a multiple choice test. The principles of learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration are all considered experiential learning. They have been studied by researchers (e.g. Clark, Threeton & Ewing, 2010; West & Davis, 2006), as well as having been defined by these well-known adages:

I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.
~ Confucius, 450 BC

Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I will learn.
~ Benjamin Franklin, 1750

"There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education." (Dewey, 1938, p.20). Throughout the 20th century, John Dewey's concept of learning through experiences has been valued as an important foundation in education. He called for education to be grounded in real experiences and rejected the notion that schools should focus on repetitive, rote memorization. Dewey's philosophy of experience is the basis of a curriculum that leads to growth and values. New experiences are usually acquired when past experiences interact with the present and are filled with educational meanings and educational materials. Dewey (1938) said that experience " includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played," and this is the "total social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged" (p. 44). Teachers must be familiar with and understand students' background knowledge in order to design and facilitate a lesson interlinking past experience with new knowledge. While Dewey (1938) theorized that the basic tenet required for learning was experience, he also believed that reflection was a key component in making an experience worthwhile. Thus, Dewey believed that experience and reflection were both required for an experience to lead to true learning for future application. This instructional model teaches students how to apply information to real-world situations and facilitates greater retention of what is learned. Students remember what they learned because they see meaning in what they do, and it provides them with an opportunity to show that they are good at something. This is juxtaposed by Friere's (2005) theory of "banking education," which our current education system subscribes to, in which our students learn by rote memorization and are treated as empty vessels into which the teacher deposits knowledge (like money in a bank).

Ensuring that the learning is tailored to each student is another part of promoting creativity and innovation in the classroom. Providing students with the appropriate challenge balanced with their skills lessens the level of frustration for the students, parents, and the teacher. If work is too easy, it can prevent them from addressing the challenge. Likewise, if it is too difficult they become frustrated, and it affects their belief that they can be successful. It also impacts their attitude toward school and learning. Matching learning with what students care about is critical to the success of those most at risk. When students know they can be successful at the task and care about it, they invest themselves in their learning and will do what it takes to succeed. Meeting students where they are in their academic achievement, interests, and preferred learning styles allows us to assist those students who are historically marginalized by standardized testing and helps them begin to overcome their feelings of failure.

On any given day, you will see students in my 4th grade math classroom working on content that first meets their individual academic needs and then working on various projects that they find interesting and are relevant to their lives. My classroom is not the neat, cute little traditional elementary classroom. In fact, it doesn't look much like an elementary classroom. I marvel at how cute most of the classrooms in my building are compared to mine. Then, I come to my senses and think, "Do I want to spend my time making the classroom look cute, or do I want to use my time to plan exciting lessons and projects that make the students eager to find out what we are going to do next?" Of course, I choose the latter every time. You might see students raising baby chickens as we study measurements, graphing, budgets, ecosystems, and nutrition. You might see students building gliders, rockets, polymers, or electrical circuits. You might find them sewing drawstring bags or cold pillows that are designed to help our service members overseas keep cool on hot days, baking cookies, or making bracelets, to name a few of the opportunities that students have to demonstrate authentic content knowledge while making it interesting and fun. Experiential education as promoted by Dewey (1938) links word to world through a cycle of theory-to-practice and the promotion of students as engaged citizens. As Wink (2000) asserts, "Experiencing is different from knowing about" (p. 101). This is the kind of learning that gets students excited and engaged in the learning process. This is also the kind of learning that results in the school administrators asking me, "Why do you have chicks in your classroom?" or "Why are the students sewing in math class?" or "What do rockets have to do with math?" As educators, we lose some of the dynamism and creativity that makes school effective and enjoyable when there is no value placed on these hands-on learning projects that naturally support meaningful cross curricular learning that allows the most at risk to demonstrate their strengths and talents.

Although the teaching environment in the current testing culture zaps the creativity and motivation of students and teachers, I have made a concerted effort to move in a different direction, one that is not only beneficial to the students, but one that is also beneficial to me as the teacher. I have decided to create an environment that makes "optimal experiences" the norm by creating absorbing and challenging tasks for myself and my students. These worthwhile learning experiences, I hope, will inspire students and help them develop an intrinsic desire to continue the journey of becoming lifelong learners.

Ultimately, I really want my students to love learning, and I am always committed to thinking of ways to keep them engaged in our work. It has only recently occurred to me, however, that their learning is also greatly impacted by how I feel about teaching. What do I love about teaching? When and how am I doing my best teaching? How can I reflect and increase my

optimal experiences of teaching? In an effort to answer these questions, I tried to make sense of them by engaging in the reflective method Pinar (1994) calls "currere." I describe it as an intentional autobiographic reflective process for uncovering and understanding the crafting of my professional identity and practices as an educator.

Background

After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, the United States embarked upon a massive reform of our education system, specifically the curriculum. Globalization has led to changes in the fabric of America's economic, political, and educational sectors. Throughout the 21$^{\text{th}}$ Century our educational system, has been the target of intense political pressure to make changes that will lead to school improvement and increased student learning with the notion of keeping America competitive. In 2001, the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) act was signed into law by President George W. Bush with the goal of enabling all children access to a high-quality education as measured by proficiency in math and reading by 2014. The fears that were created surrounding Soviet dominance in math and science have been used effectively to move educational restructuring toward increased standardization and cost effectiveness. Political leaders blamed educators for the failure of the educational system claiming that our schools were not rigorous enough to compete with other nations. In an attempt to reclaim America's status as number one and to further promote the idea of a democratic future for Americans, the United States also began the so called "closing of the achievement gaps," the first one being the gap amongst the different subgroup populations within the US; the second gap being that between the US and other countries (e.g. results of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS, 1995). In the NCLB proposal released by President Bush on July 3, 2001, the Executive Summary begins with mention of these two gaps:

> As America enters the 21$^{\text{st}}$ Century full of hope and promise, too many of our neediest students are being left behind.
>
> Today, nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests. Our high school seniors trail students in Cyprus and South Africa on international math tests. (NCLB, 2001, p. 1)

A bi-product of this legislation is that in many schools teaching is heavily scripted by a management system that details what teachers do and say, when they do it, and how they do it. Many would argue that teaching has become routinized and lacks any notion of creativity or autonomy to allow teachers to make critical decisions that relate to the realities of what happens daily in a classroom. Few teachers following a scripted program are challenged to work anywhere near their abilities or potential. This restricted range of skill and talent often leads to job dissatisfaction, which often results in loss of motivation.

Significance of the Study

Teachers are arguably the most important group of professionals for our nation's future growth and development. Many of today's teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs and are choosing to leave the profession. This issue, coupled with the fact that many who are graduating from college with teaching degrees are choosing not to enter the profession, has led to shortages in the classroom, which has important consequences for the quality of education received by our children. Researchers have compared the teaching profession to a revolving door (U.S.

Department of Education, 2000). They argue that school staffing problems are caused not so much by an insufficient supply of qualified individuals, but by "too many teachers leaving teaching" (Ingersoll, 1997, p. 2). Teachers cite job dissatisfaction as their reason for leaving the profession. According to Ingersoll (2000, 2001), 42% of all departees report leaving for job dissatisfaction reasons that include the desire to pursue a better job, another career, or better career opportunities.

Many factors have been examined in an attempt to find which ones promote teacher motivation and, therefore, job satisfaction. Contrary to popular belief, pay incentives have been found to be unsuccessful in increasing motivation. In their study of 167 teachers, Sylvia and Hutchinson (1985) concluded: "Teacher motivation is based in the freedom to try new ideas, achievement of appropriate responsibility levels and intrinsic work elements…. Based upon our findings schemes such as merit pay were predicted to be counterproductive" (p. 841). They explain that true job satisfaction is derived from the gratification of higher-order needs, "social relations, esteem, and actualization" (as cited in Bishay, 1996), rather than lower-order needs "pay, job security, environment security and resources" (as cited in Bishay, 1996).

Studies continue to show that improvement in teacher motivation and/or job satisfaction has benefits for students as well as teachers. While the relationship between teacher motivation and student achievement has not yet been established, the correlation between teacher motivation and student self-esteem has been shown by Peck, Fox, and Morston (1977). "Teachers with strong positive attitudes about teaching had students whose self-esteem was high. Students seem to recognize the effectiveness of teachers who are satisfied with their teaching performance" (as cited in Bishay, 1996). Intrinsically satisfying work leads to greater levels of commitment and performance. Studies indicated that teacher's beliefs significantly influence student learning (Butler, 2000; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997). Gregoire (2003) claimed that, "understanding how teacher's beliefs relate to their practice as well as to student outcomes may be the missing link between calls for school reform and teacher implementation of that reform" (p. 149). Positive teacher's beliefs can stimulate positive practices in the classroom and positive student engagement.

Currere, as a theoretical frame, allows teachers to develop self-portraits, which include educational experiences, dreams, and the imagination of teaching. It is through the telling of our experiences that we can understand and shape our practices. Understanding curriculum as a strategy that transforms experiences into useable knowledge helps us to develop our practice so that it is responsive to the needs of students and to ourselves as educators. Deconstructing personal histories and stories, may allow teachers to gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege. Pinar (2004) suggests all educators engage in the process of examining the curriculum of their lives through "currere." He suggests this "autobiographical method of writing provides a strategy for self-study, one phase of which seeks synthetical moments of 'mobilization' when, as individuals and as teachers, we enter 'the arena' to educate the American public" (p. xiii). Although teachers are told that they must leave their values, beliefs and biases outside school doors, the reality is that: "Teachers bring their entire autobiographies with them…It is useless for them to deny this; the most they can do is acknowledge how these may either get in the way of, or enhance, their work with students" (Nieto, 2003, p. 24). The value of having teachers become cognizant of how their personal identities influence their professional identities and the interconnectedness of the two has been heightened.

Currere as an educational autobiographical process has the potential to be a powerful strategy that helps teachers become more reflective and intentional about crafting their professional identities. It encourages and increases the awareness of teachers to their ability to uncover and reveal their true selves so that they can situate themselves for considering how to use memories of their personal histories to reconnect with their educational experience in order to illuminate who they are as professionals. Motivating teachers and students to engage in self-reflections, to work at their peak performance, and continue to study and enjoy learning is one of the critical factors for improving student achievement and attaining the goals outlined in their schools' mission statements. Journeying to create individual meaning from curriculum allows teachers to understand the effect of their actions in relation to the world around them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lemberger, 1997; Pinar 2004). Currere is a useful framework for critical examination and understanding of knowledge, which has the power to guide teachers' practices and empower teachers to make transformative change. A teachers' experiential knowledge, along with research evidence that informs practice, can contribute significantly to improving our current structure of school and to improving how we create an equitable and socially just learning environment. This journey could also help teachers to understand that power within the system rests with them to transform themselves as teachers rather than simply adjusting to the status quo. To gain this power, however, requires an awareness and understanding of how the system has shaped their lives and their consciousness. Currere provides a lens to gain this understanding through an examination of the narratives that are influencing their actions both consciously and subconsciously.

Understanding Teacher Working Conditions

While teacher bashing is all the rage these days, the classroom has become a complex teaching and learning environment. As the expectation for student achievement has risen, so have the responsibilities for teachers. Teachers face the enormous challenge of meeting a variety of needs on a daily basis. Classrooms are made up of students with differing interests, abilities, skills, and knowledge. Teacher pressures include dealing with issues of student accountability in the form of mandatory state testing, limited resources due to decreased school budgets, student poverty, large class sizes, implementing an inflexible curriculum that does not allow for individualized pacing, the constant challenge of behavior management, and time management as teachers always have work that must be done outside of school to prepare for what happens in the classroom. Lesson planning, homework, and assessments must be created and corrected, projects need to be planned, resources need to be found, and phone calls to parents must be made. Another stressor was implemented this year in Ohio. A new evaluation system requires that half of a teacher's evaluation be based on a principal's observation, while the other half holds teachers responsible for student achievement based on how much their students learn over the course of the year (Value Added). Under the old system teachers were mainly evaluated in the form of an observation by the principal.

While limited amounts of stress can have a positive influence on motivation and creativity, excessive pressure has an overwhelming and debilitating effect (Selye as cited in Wilson, 2002). For many classroom teachers, the stress and pressure far outweigh the potential benefits that might lead to increased motivation and creativity. Kyriacou (2001) defines teacher stress as "the experience by teachers of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28). Teachers and students must have the right conditions in place in order for effective teaching and

learning to occur and to promote what researcher Csikszentmihalyi (1975) refers to as an optimal experience or flow in the classroom. Flow was defined first by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) as a "holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (p. 36). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) further described flow as a very positive psychological state that typically occurs when a person perceives a balance between the challenges associated with a situation and his or her capabilities to accomplish or meet these demands, in other words, teaching and learning. Not only must schools attract, develop, and retain effective teachers, but they must consider working conditions as an important factor in facilitating flow and ultimately to the success of the school's mission of increasing teaching and learning for students and teachers. Researchers have begun to demonstrate the role working conditions play in both teacher retention and student achievement.

Teachers who leave schools cite opportunity for a "better teaching assignment, dissatisfaction with support from administrators, and dissatisfaction with workplace conditions" as the main reasons they seek other positions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Teachers indicate that "a positive, collaborative school climate and support from colleagues and administrators" are the most important factors influencing whether they stay in a school (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005, as cited in Berry, Smylie, and Fuller, 2008). In national surveys, teachers identified "excessive workload, lack of time, and frustration with reform efforts" as areas in need of focus and improvement (Loeb, Elfers, Knapp, & Plecki, 2004, as cited in Berry, Smylie, and Fuller, 2008). Additionally, a recent survey of 2,000 educators from California found that 28% of teachers who left before retirement indicated that they would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives were found to be less effective in luring them back (Futernick, 2007). Similarly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) recently concluded that "salary affects teacher mobility patterns less than do working conditions, such as facilities, safety, and quality of leadership" (as cited in Berry, Smylie, and Fuller, 2008). A 2008 study of teacher retention found that teachers left their schools primarily because of management breakdowns, challenging relationships (administrators and colleagues, as well as students and parents), and the loss of creativity and control in their classrooms (Reichardt, Snow, Schlang, & Hupfeld 2008). A three year study by the Center for Teaching Quality (2008), comprised of 250,000 teachers from Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina, revealed the following trends in working conditions:

1. Most teachers want to remain in teaching and are committed to their students.
2. Teachers who intend to leave their schools and teaching are more likely to have grave concerns about their lack of empowerment, poor school leadership, and the low levels of trust and respect inside their buildings.
3. Elementary school teachers were far more sanguine about their working conditions, when compared to their middle and high school counterparts.
4. New teachers who have quality support are more likely to report they will remain in teaching.
5. Teachers who report relatively low levels of satisfaction with their professional development often do not have access to the kinds of training they believe they need.
6. Teachers with different characteristics (e.g., type of credential, years of experience, etc.) tend to respond more or less similarly (except in a few instances, and, not surprisingly, new teachers were less concerned about issues of empowerment).
7. Teachers' perceptions of working conditions may vary more inside of schools than between them.

8. Teachers' response rates vary by type of school (low poverty versus high poverty) in different states and the type of schools appears to influence reports of positive or negative working conditions.
9. Teachers and administrators view teaching and learning conditions differently — and often quite dramatically so. (p. 2)

Many of the working conditions that teachers face limit their ability to not only experience flow, but it greatly limits and often devalues the use of self-reflection as a means for understanding the past and present while pondering the future and, therefore, limits their ability to create optimal experiences for their students in the classroom. As we discover what promotes spaces for self-reflection and flow in schools, we are uncovering the strategies that educators and schools can use to engage students and improve academic outcomes, making classrooms come alive.

Reflecting on Future Possibilities in the Classroom

> Finally, I saw how inconsistent it was to expect this greater amount of creative independent work from the student when the teachers are still not emancipated; when the teachers are still shackled by too many rules and prescriptions and too much of a uniformity of method and subject matter.
>
> -John Dewey, *The Classroom Teacher*

This era of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top has left the learning conditions in classrooms antithetical to the conditions necessary to achieve flow and all the benefits that come with it for teachers and students. Mandatory high-stakes testing and accountability in schools favor regimentation over self-directed learning, making it harder for teachers to teach and engage students deeply with topics that interest them. Paradoxically, these trends seem to be undermining the kind teaching and learning they were designed to promote and could even be causing both students and teachers to burnout. In a 2009 Indiana University survey, "High School Survey of Student Engagement," of the more than 40,000 high school students surveyed nationally, nearly half reported being bored every day in school, with 17% saying they were bored in every class (Yazzie-Mintz,). Eighty-one percent of those who reported being bored said that they weren't interested in the material, 42% thought it wasn't relevant to life, and 35% said they didn't have positive interactions with their teachers. Educational psychologist David Shernoff (2003) of Northern Illinois University notes from research "that most of what passes for learning in schools these days – memorizing facts that may be needed to pass a test but will soon be forgotten – is not really learning because students aren't really grasping the material enough to apply it beyond the context of the test" (as cited by Suttie). He goes on to say, "Real learning, requires student engagement – of which flow is the deepest form possible – and that involves a combination of motivation, concentration, interest, and enjoyment derived from the process of learning itself- qualities that are essential to Csikzenmihalyi's definition of flow" (Shernoff as cited in Suttie, 2002Interest in an activity is a fundamental aspect of flow experiences, setting the foundation for continuing motivation and subsequent learning. Deci and Ryan (1987) argue that interest provides the basis for becoming engaged in a topic for its own sake. School activities that promote flow should include intellectually demanding tasks that are enjoyable and satisfying for students. Relevance to the lives of students will also make these tasks more enjoyable. Individuals who have developed their talent and creativity are those who continue to follow their sense of enjoyment in chosen activities (Csikzenmihalyi, 1996).

In a 2003 study published in *School Psychology Quarterly*, Csikszentmihalyi, and other researchers tracked high school students' engagement during their school day by giving them beepers that went off at various points in the day, signaling the students to rate what they were experiencing and feeling at that moment (Shernoff, D., Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, B., & Shernoff, E., 2003). They found that students were most engaged in school while taking tests, doing individual work, and doing group work, and less so when listening to lectures or watching videos. In addition, the students were most engaged and reported being in a better mood when they felt that their activities were under their own control and relevant to their lives. To encourage more flow in the classroom researchers suggest that teachers offer more activity choices that are aligned to the student's goals and create a balance between challenges and opportunities for success. Shernoff et al. (2003) posited that a student's odds of finding flow are often determined by the person standing at the head of the class, "Students' engagement fluctuates a great deal depending on their teachers" (as cited by Suttie, 20012). He says "the key is for teachers to make learning goals attainable based on the students skill levels and to encourage student autonomy while providing positive feedback" (Shernoff et al., 2003). "Teachers would be better off thinking about how they can affect the learning environment and play more of a coaching role instead of thinking about what information they are going to impart," says Shernoff et al. (2003, cite by Suttie). While subject matter knowledge of the teachers makes a difference in influencing student achievement, Wenglinsky (2000) found that classroom practices make an even greater difference in student achievement. When teachers are skilled at implementing hands-on experiences in the classroom, student achievement increased by 40% of a grade level in science and 72% in mathematics (Wenglinsky, 2000). Teachers encourage flow and intrinsic motivation by creating an environment that fosters enjoyable learning experiences. Ideally, to encourage optimal experiences, teachers must provide optimal challenge and support for competence (or skill). Schweinle, Turner, and Meyer (2006) also found that, in "classrooms where students reported high positive affect, efficacy, and value of the material, teachers balanced levels of challenge and skill, as well as:

> (a) provided immediate, constructive feedback, (b) encouraged students to persist, (c) encouraged cooperation rather than competition, (d) supported student autonomy, ensured that new challenges were tempered with support to match students' skill, (f) emphasized the importance of the material, and (g) pressed students to understand the principles rather than memorize algorithms (para. 15)."

The current conditions in classrooms run counter to what students and teachers need in order to be able to encourage and engage in flow. Grading systems can undermine students' inclination to pursue coursework out of intrinsic interest alone. The mandates of standardized testing and accountability prevent schools from allowing students to have much autonomy or to work at their own pace. It is difficult for students to lose themselves in a class assignment, since the traditional regimented school schedule can easily interrupt their concentration.

An understanding of flow theory and intrinsic motivation could result in greater job satisfaction for teachers, which in turn may reduce the revolving door syndrome. Job satisfaction is less accessible for teachers who work in positions that are highly restricted and controlled externally, which in turn limits opportunities for intrinsic gratification and flow in work settings. The benefits of job satisfaction for both teachers and students, as well as other stakeholders, highlights the importance of studying the working conditions for teachers, how they feel about their work, how they find flow, how they are intrinsically motivated, and how teacher flow impacts students.

The Research Question

        This critical autobiography is intended to disclose and examine my educational experiences as a journey that influences my role as a classroom teacher, my work as a teacher leader, and how I use resistance to challenge the status quo as I utilize strategies that support teaching and learning for my students. This research attempts to present and address the following existential questions:

- Who am I as a teacher?
- How did my educational experiences (past and present) affect how I teach?
- What inspires me to resist the de-intellectualization of my work?
- What are the strategies of resistance I use to push back and to support the needs of my students without getting fired?

I utilize Pinar's (1976) method of currere, which is a means of examining how an individual has evolved over time, both personally and professionally, through their educational experiences. Pinar (2001) writes:

      The method of currere [reconceptualizes] curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation with oneself (as a "private" intellectual), an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action – as a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere. (p. 37)

Currere is a reflexive process constructed of four stages (regression, progression, analysis and synthesis) to scaffold the participant's reflection and imagination, which enables one to better understand and "act upon the past to influence the future" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 105). These stages will be explained fully in chapter three.

        To articulate and examine one's own currere requires a great deal of thoughtful reflection on those experiences, people, and events that have shaped (either positively or unconstructively) one's journey. This study will highlight events and people who were instrumental in my educational experiences and the motivation necessary to continue to experience deep enjoyment of my work despite the politicization of education, the pressures of standardized testing, the monolithic architecture of school and curriculum, unrealistic demanding workloads, lack of worthy professional development opportunities, lack of voice, lack of freedom to be creative, isolation from one's peers, teacher evaluations, lack of resources (to include textbooks, paper, pencils, field trips, staff and technology), and larger classroom sizes. A lifelong endeavor, currere seeks to uncover the personal and academic influences that have acted upon that evolution, through "complicated conversation" with oneself (Pinar, 2004, p. 35).

        If teaching and learning provide some deep enjoyment, then teachers and learners will be motivated to continue with that which gives them enjoyment. As I explore written narratives in search of themes that highlight my educational experiences that shape who I am as a student and educator while understanding my classroom practices, I put into perspective Chase's (2005) claim:

      Narrative whether oral or written is a distinct form of discourse. Narrative is retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience. Narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of action and events over time. (p. 656)

Summary

      This first chapter offers a brief description of the background, the significance of the study, an understanding of teacher working conditions, a reflection on the possibilities through currere in the classroom, and the research question for this study. The goal of this study is to disclose and examine my educational experiences as a journey that influences my role as a classroom teacher and my work as a teacher leader using the method of currere.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

I am who I am not yet.
– Maxine Greene, The Passionate Mind of Maxine Greene: "I am... not yet"

This literature review consists of three sections: the effect of teacher leadership in school reform practices, the characteristics of teacher leaders, and teacher resistance. The three sections represent the theoretical framework from which this research was conceived.

The Effects of Teacher Leadership on the School

> The adventure of life is to learn. The purpose of life is to grow. The nature of life is to change. The challenge of life is to overcome. The essence of life is to care. The opportunity of life is to serve. The secret of life is to dare. The spice of life is to befriend. The beauty of life is to give. ― William Arthur Ward, Fountains of Faith

Effective school leadership isn't just work that principals do. Research is bearing out that principals who share leadership create stronger school cultures and improve teaching and learning, (Copland, 2003; Lord & Miller, 2000). Teacher leaders generally do not aspire to become school principals; they mainly desire a voice in decision making that affects their classrooms and their working conditions. School reformers and their mandates often neglect or fail to consider the role of teacher leadership when implementing school reform practices. A research of the literature around teacher leadership demonstrates that, without question, teachers are the most powerful factor in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders, Saxton, & Horn, 1997). A school's effectiveness is proportional to "the extent to which teachers participate in all aspects of a school's functioning --- including school policy decisions and review" (Silins & Mulford, 2004, p. 613). Teachers typically define career satisfaction in terms of their ability to be of service to others and make a difference in the lives of their students (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988).

Having spent more than 19 years in the classroom and countless hours of professional development designed to improve teaching quality and school leadership, in addition to my master's degree and 107 credits hours toward earning a PhD, I have learned that it is unrealistic to think that teachers can deliver and maintain stimulating learning environments for their students without the same degree of consideration being given to them, their professional development, and their purpose. The need for investigating this phenomenon is based on neglected spirit, neglected motivation, neglected creativity, neglected professional development that meets the needs of individual teachers, and the unacceptable working conditions that limit teacher leadership opportunities in schools. Volumes of research illustrate that teachers neither find their work life rewarding nor do they find it a source of strength, energy, or fulfillment (Johnson, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Steinberg, 1998). The worth and value of the individual's spirit in work is missing (Fox, 1994; Whyte, 1994).

Teacher leadership is a term that has as many definitions as there are variations of leadership itself. But what constitutes leadership in education? The word education comes from the Latin word educare, meaning "to lead out of." Teacher leadership is an umbrella term for the work of effective teachers, not just the traits they possess, but their ability to use their intellectual and social capital to influence changes in schools that promote teaching and learning for both students and colleagues. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities to students. The expertise of the teacher and the needs of the students were paramount in Dewey's vision for a bottom-up approach. He

warned against a system that relied on a lack of connection between the people in charge of planning for education and the people in charge of actually educating (Helig, 2013).

While many authors assert that teachers are an untapped source of leadership within a school, there is still a lack of agreement as to a clear, definitive definition of what teacher leadership is. For example, Troen and Boles (1994) characterize teacher leadership as a collaborative effort, in which teachers develop expertise and promote professional development to improve instruction to all students. Wasley (1991), however, provides that while teacher leaders benefit from collaborative arrangements they also have "the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn't ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader" (p.23). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) defined teacher leadership as, "Teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice" (p.5).

While the definitions for teacher leadership run the gamut, there is general agreement in the literature that teacher leaders take on a variety of roles, but the more recent role is one which is not specialized but more generalized (York-Barr, 2004). A number of studies present a range of understandings about the roles of teacher leaders and indicate that in both a formal and informal sense teachers engage in important leadership functions. Leadership roles have begun to emerge and promise real opportunities for teachers to impact educational change without necessarily leaving the classroom. Teacher leaders take part in school-wide decision making (Hart, 1995; Paulu and Winters, 1998); mentor other teachers (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Hart, 1995); develop curriculum (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Paulu & Winters, 1998); facilitate the professional growth of other teachers (Gabriel, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smylie & Denny, 1990); participate in action research (Ash & Persall, 2000); foster more collaborative working arrangements (Blasé & Anderson, 1995); are learners themselves (Harrison and Killion, 2007); are data coaches (Harrison and Killion, 2007); and influence school change (Day & Harris, 2002).

The term teacher leadership refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning. Teacher leaders are a community of questioners, they engage in divergent thinking, and they voice their opinions, which may challenge the status quo as they seek opportunities to put the needs of their students first. Teacher leaders see school as a place for experimentation, practice, and constant progress towards excellence. Several studies concluded that empowered teachers and distributed leadership impact student performance as well as the teacher leader's own professional learning (Lieberman, Sax, & Miles, 2000; Silins & Mulford, 2004; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Teachers are forging a number of new and unique leadership roles through their own initiative by developing and implementing programs they personally believe will result in positive change (Troen & Boles, 1992).

In a study by Sintz (2005) of the teachers surveyed, 78% identified at least one way in which their role as a teacher leader benefited their own classroom practice, most significantly, by allowing them to design curriculum, assessment, professional development, and school policies that have a direct impact on their classrooms. In *Teacher Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Poetter (2014) cites Dewey as "calling for teachers to study their own work and to report their findings to colleagues as a means for understanding and improving education" (p. 95). He goes on to make a profound statement, "those who know the most about teaching and

learning (teachers!) should produce knowledge about it! (p. 95)." The ultimate goal of teacher leadership is to improve the quality of education to which all children have access, to shape curriculum and practices that directly meet the needs of each student. The benefits of teachers as leaders also have been made clear. Leadership roles for teachers, according to Joseph Murphy (2005):

> • Foster collegiality;
> • Lessen attrition;
> • Increase capacity by attracting bright newcomers;
> • And, most importantly, promote change at the classroom and school levels. (p. 2)

Leadership roles enhance teachers' feelings of professionalism and student academic performance, according to some research. Ladson-Billings (1999) and Dilworth and Imig (1995) find that when teachers design and implement professional development, rather than having learning created for them, teachers feel more valued and are more willing to adopt new pedagogical techniques.

Characteristics of Teacher Leaders

> It is very nearly impossible, after all, to become an educated person in a country so distrustful of the independent mind. ― James Baldwin, "They Can't Turn Back"

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leadership as "those teachers that lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teachers-learners and leaders and influence others toward improved educational practices" (p. 5). Teacher leaders can be generally described as self-directed initiative takers and high performing risk-takers who have an internal locus of control. They have the confidence and work ethic to set and accomplish goals, build trust, and develop rapport, and they are professionally satisfied.

Teacher leaders are willing to try new things, they are risk-takers who find great enjoyment in challenges (high challenge, high skill balance), pursue professional growth for their own satisfaction and to increase student achievement. These risk-takers introduce or create new teaching/learning strategies that have a research base or participate in new systems within the school that support change and the possibility of paradigm shifts for the learning community. They seek innovative solutions to the complex problems of teaching and learning and are willing to challenge the status quo, to participate in decision making, and to get involved in the work to facilitate change in the learning community. Internal locus of control (sense of control) is the perception of control over outcomes and the belief that one has the competency to perform the tasks upon which the outcome depends. Internal locus of control or their sense of control is related to teacher efficacy, an individual's evaluation of her or his performance capabilities. Self-efficacy was introduced by Albert Bandura (1997) and defined as the "belief in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment" (p. 3). Teacher self-efficacy was identified over 30 years ago as one of the few teacher characteristics related to student achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) define a teacher's sense of efficacy as a "judgment of his or her capability to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (p. 783). The perception of challenge and skill critically drives the equation. This means our beliefs or confidence regarding what we are able to do in a situation is more important than what our objective skill levels might be. For example, teachers with a strong internal locus of control are confident of their ability to make accurate, proactive decisions. A teacher's perception of

efficacy involves a judgment about her or his ability to succeed at a task, such as increasing student achievement in mathematics. The important aspect of both internal locus of control and teacher efficacy as each relates to leadership is that they are internal; that is, teacher-leaders believe that outcomes are associated with their actions rather than with luck, fate, or external factors.

These internal aspects of control are significant to leadership development because they result in enhanced self-esteem and confidence, positive motivators of goal, and task attainment. Moreover, Goodard, Wayne, and Hoy (2004) report about teacher efficacy that "teachers' sense of efficacy is a significant predictor of productive teaching practices… The higher the teacher's sense of efficacy, the more likely they are to tenaciously overcome obstacles and persist in the face of failure" (p. 4). Tschannen-Moran, Hoy and Hoy (2001) defined teacher efficacy as a teacher's" judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (p. 783). Researchers have posited multiple dimensions to self-efficacy. Schunk (1989) proposed three kinds of index: personal self-efficacy, general self-efficacy, and professional self-efficacy.

1. Teachers' personal teaching self-efficacy: the teachers' belief in the efficiency of their own teaching, understanding of their students and belief that their methods can overcome the harmful effects of the external world on the students and on their own teaching.
2. Teachers' general teaching self-efficacy: the teachers' belief in their impact on students' individual differences, belief in their impact on all students, and belief to overcome the harmful effects of students' family and society.
3. Teachers' professional teaching self-efficacy: the professional belief and skill that could train students to have professional skill operational ability and the professional knowledge of professional subjects and practice. (pp. 173 - 208)

Bandura (1997) used seven kinds of index to illustrate teacher self-efficacy:

1. influencing the school to make policy;
2. influencing the intersection of schools and resources;
3. the intersection of classes and teaching;
4. regular classroom management;
5. leading parents to participate in the educational process;
6. impelling the community to invest and educate; and
7. build the school interaction atmosphere (p. 474)

I, like many other teacher leaders who love our work purely for the sake of teaching, have learned to cope by honing skills in creative resistance. I have followed my conscience and the moral code to do right by my students even if it meant, in Deborah Meier's (1995) words, "complying differently" (p. 120). Often that has meant pursuing reforms without permission, trying something new on my own, and/or teaching the standards in a very unconventional way. There are many examples of teacher leaders who seize opportunities to improve educational experiences for our students, take responsibility for our own professional growth, and coordinate resources to advance student success.

Teachers are arguably the most important group of professionals for our nation's future. Many of today's teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs. As the number of new teachers graduating from teacher training programs is projected to decline, the teacher labor pool will decrease significantly. Many factors have been examined in an attempt to find which ones promote teacher motivation. Pay incentives have been found to be unsuccessful in increasing

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motivation. In their study of 167 teachers, Sylvia & Hutchinson (1985) (cited in Bishay, 1996) concluded: "Teacher motivation is based in the freedom to try new ideas, achievement of appropriate responsibility levels and intrinsic work elements…. Based upon our findings schemes such as merit pay were predicted to be counterproductive". They explain that true job satisfaction is derived from the gratification of higher-order needs, "social relations, esteem, and actualization" rather than lower-order needs (as cited in Bishay, 1996).

Studies show that improvement in teacher motivation has benefits for students as well as teachers; however, there is no consensus about the precise benefits. For example, researchers have had varying results when examining whether teacher motivation leads to increased levels of academic achievement. Rothman (1981) suggests that this association exists because teachers serve as more than just educators; they are role models. The benefits of teacher satisfaction for both teachers and pupils points to the importance of studying how teachers feel about their jobs and what motivates them.

Moreover, administrators, boards of education, and other stakeholders in education would benefit from the knowledge of how teacher leadership and motivation theory enrich job performance and, therefore, could reduce the mass exodus of teachers leaving the profession. In reference to teacher performance, Herzberg's work indicated that intrinsic rewards are more effective than salary levels in improving teacher performance. (Jacobsen as cited in Tomlinson, 1992). Palmer (1998) wrote,

> In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher, on whom so much depends. (p. 3)

Resist or Keep Quiet (Teacher Resistance)

> To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namer as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in words in work, in action –reflection.
>
> ―Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

The school climate for teachers and students has become antagonistic in the wake of no child left untested. "We will do anything to make sure that the test scores are high, and that means that we cram the students with information for the tests but don't give them a reason or a desire to learn it for the long haul" (Where does quotation begin?) (Keller, 2009, p. 1). Teachers are being blamed for the state of affairs in schools and accused of failing to implement classroom reform practices that are believed to be the cure-all for what ails schools. In his blog, Larry Cuban (2011) a highly regarded educationist begins with,

> In the midst of both teacher praise and teacher bashing nowadays abides a nagging but persistent assumption among state and federal policymakers hellbent on the standards–testing–accountability agenda, charter school operators, and high-tech enthusiasts for online instruction that most teachers resist change.

Cuban (2011) goes on to argue that teachers have changed over time and continue to change but that the changes are incremental. He notes that such changes are unobserved and unnoticed by policy makers. He continues, "Moreover, the past 30 years of high-profile criticism of failing U.S. schools produced a tsunami of topdown reforms showing little trust in teachers' professional judgment."

We are faced with many challenges that are out of our control including: overcrowded classrooms, lack of adequate funding, poverty and family factors that impact teaching and learning, teaching being reduced to drill and kill, a scripted curriculum, the use of standardized testing as a primary means to assess student achievement, and the adoption of test-based teacher evaluations. Policies and decisions about teaching and learning have been taken away from teachers and turned over to bureaucracies and politicians without regards to the complex realities of life in the classroom. Working conditions, culture, and the individual rate at which students learn are rarely considered in reform practices. In addition to the voice of teachers being silenced, those of the students and the community are also left out of the conversation of what happens in the classroom. As a result of these hostilities, some teachers react to change by complying with the reform practices, while others choose to resist these practices. Resistance takes many forms, from openly hostile confrontations with administrators to highly passive, private acts of defiance.

Policy ideals then often do not match classroom realities (Sayed and Jansen, 2001). Experience has taught that such authoritarian mandating of curriculum changes does not provide for the highly complex, uncertain, unpredictable, and rapidly changing conditions which prevail in schools. In fact, policies can only be effective if those responsible for implementing them are involved in shaping them. Cuban (2011) defends teachers in this way: "Policymakers determine the worth of proposed changes in curricular, instructional, and school practices on the criteria of organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. Teachers accept, modify, and reject innovations and mandates on the basis of similar criteria but with the focus on students and classrooms. In doing so, they ask substantially different questions than policymakers who focus on the system, not individual classrooms."

Conflicting ideologies can be the source of teacher resistance to reform practices. Muncey and McQuillian (1996) found that teacher resistance to change resulted when teachers felt that their vested interest or taken-for-granted beliefs and values were threatened by the reform agenda. Bailey (2000) and Sikes (1992) documented how teachers resisted top-down mandates when the rhetoric of the changes did not match with realities of the teacher's experience. Casey (1993) and Foster (1993) found that black and politically progressive women teachers resisted the status quo (e.g. racism and sexism) and the dominate ideologies that support it. Black teachers also resisted school reforms that they believed were grounded in white, middle class perspectives, rather than in the experience and values of the black community (Foster, 1993). The act of finding the space to engage in the intellectual and creative act of redeveloping the curriculum is an act of political resistance and what is described as an act of caring.

Nel Noddings (2003), in her research on the ethics of care, argues that caring should be a foundation for ethical decision-making in education. One of the characteristics of caring that Noddings (2003) posits is motivational displacement. Motivational displacement refers to the willingness to give primacy to the goals and needs of our students. With motivational displacement, the teacher responds to the students in a way that promotes the students' best interest (Noddings, 2003). Williams (2010), in interviews and observations of teachers, found a recurring theme that caring teachers demonstrate flexibility and adaptability. This is carried out by attending to the needs of the students as they deviate from a rigid lesson plan to adjust instruction and create a space for teachable moments and ideas and concepts that interest the students. When classroom experiences are interwoven with daily life experiences, students stand a better chance of seeing schooling as a continued important part of their lives.

Over the past 10 years, I like many teachers across the nation have found myself engaged in tensions with administration over the implementation of rigid pacing guides, scripted curricula, mandated common assessments, and my desire to connect the curriculum to authentic learning experiences related to the lives of my students. This tension continues to threaten my professional identity and impedes my desire and ability to implement a culturally responsive interdisciplinary curriculum. The result leads to my engaging in acts of resistance.

In my praxis of resistance, I have been exiled to the fringes. While it hasn't gotten me fired, it has led to a fight for every opportunity on behalf of my students and for my own professional development. For example, of the elementary staff and mathematics teachers, I have 19 years of teaching experience at all levels K-12, I am probably the most educated in terms of having completed all but my dissertation in curriculum and instruction, I have co-authored two books chapters about curriculum, I am the only mathematics teacher who has served on a Ohio Department of Education Mathematics Assessment Committee for 8 years, and I recently served on the national Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARRC) Rangefinding Committee for Mathematics. Despite all of this I have not been invited by my school or district to serve on any of its committees. So, to counter their refusal to not only recognize my knowledge but their refusal to include me in the conversation, I continue to develop myself professionally through various outlets (university coursework, committee work outside of the district, community partnerships, attending and presenting at scholarly conferences, and membership in professional organizations). Among the most important roles teacher leaders assume is that of learner. Learners model continual improvement, demonstrate lifelong learning, and use what they learn to help students not only want to learn, but enjoy the process of learning and assist the school community in professional growth and development into spaces that support the improvement of student achievement.

On the first day of the 2015-2016 school year for staff, during our opening day ceremony, I was awarded the "You Make A Difference" award. The senior class of 2015 voted for one high school teacher and one middle school teacher that they had in their years in the District who they felt made a difference in their lives. This acknowledgement is by far the most important award I have received as a teacher because the students were 4 years removed and yet they thought that I had made a difference in their lives. I was overcome with joy because the students selected me as one of the teachers that had made a difference in their lives, and to top it off the Superintendent who describes me as "nonconformist, adversarial, and working outside of the system" had to give me the award. To receive this award vindicates me. My hard work and commitment to going above and beyond to create a learning experience that students will remember, despite the battle scars that have been left as a result of my desire to be their advocate, has publically been recognized by the people who have been most impacted.

Recently, while taking the graduate course "Staff Personnel Administration," I was introduced to Dr. Martin Haberman's theory of star teachers. I was excited to read about this theory, which tries to determine who is most likely to succeed in an urban school environment that seems to get tougher every year. His research reveals that not just anyone can or should teach in high-poverty schools. Haberman (1995) argued that "star teachers" focus less on teaching the content standards and objectives and more on turning students onto learning (p. 1). Finally, there was a theory to describe my classroom practices that continues to put me at odds with administration and leads to my resistance. While I would never be called a star teacher by my administrators, Dr. Haberman calls me a "star." This theory serves as great motivation to continue to resist, first on behalf of my students, but also on behalf of our profession. I wondered

if my administrators had ever heard of the characteristics of a star teacher. Haberman (1993) identified star teachers whose effectiveness promotes success with students in failing schools, even under adverse working conditions. He identified star teachers as those who:

- Make school a positive place and make learning as enjoyable and successful as possible.
- Connect learning to students' interests
- Model and teach appreciation of learning for its own sake rather than for rewards
- Convince students they are welcome in the school and in their classroom
- Are gentle while consistently firm; a great manager with much flexibility
- Seek to understand without judging
- Own up to their own mistakes and try to fix them
- Carefully choose homework and assign sparingly
- Base student evaluation at least partly on student effort and progress
- Never "blame the victim"; do whatever is possible in school regardless of the realities of the home, family, and neighborhood.
- Find a way to teach in the style they know is best for their students
- Maintain positive ongoing contact with all parents and guardians
- Use behavior management techniques that teach children to take responsibility for their own behavior; avoid arbitrary discipline or punishment measures (Stafford, n. d.)

In addition to the above characteristics, he also stresses the need for star teachers to be persistent, possess both physical and emotional stamina, a willingness to admit mistakes, and focus on deep learning and organization skills. The star teacher theory strengthens my resolve to resist the status quo and strive to make a difference in the lives of the children and educators I come into contact with. I resist from within by working to create a teaching and learning environment that puts the academic needs of children first, is based upon authentic relationships without the testing agenda, is relevant, is challenging, includes the interests of students, and is fun.

My own list of strategies that I use to resist the status quo in the cause of supporting my students is as follows:

- Humbly operate under the radar
  I try to look like everyone else as much as possible so as not to draw attention to myself for the benefit of my students, but I know that with my divergent thinking that is a difficult challenge. This means meeting the needs of my students regardless of what the reform or policy dictates. My priority is the growth and development of my students.

- Ethic of caring
  Meaningful relationships are critically important to a student's personal and academic success. I spend a lot of time getting to know my students and their families so that I understand their individual needs and can develop instruction around their needs based upon where they are in the learning process. As a result, my students are empowered to develop their own interests and are excited about learning.

- Re-crafting the curriculum
  Resistance requires that I shed the nonsense practices and programs that don't work for my students. Instead, I re-craft the lesson plans as the class proceeds to provide essential scaffolding, responsiveness to student needs, and engagement in effective learning. I opt for daily match-making, creating conditions to promote learning and connecting tasks

with students, giving them what they need to be successful while nurturing the process, their interests, and minimizing known and unknown obstacles as they arise.

- Resist over-assessing
  I resist the pressures to over-assess and, thereby, create assessment winners and losers. I only give formal assessments when I am required to for data collection purposes. I have perfect attendance. I am in the classroom everyday; hence, I am aware of what my students know and can do. Also, if I believe that not everyone learns at the same rate, then why do I test them for the sake of testing? I assess when the student and I agree that they are ready, and if they do not demonstrate mastery, they have the opportunity without penalty to redo the assessment for full credit.

- Experiential learning
  Traditionally, in my school, teachers use learning centers. I prefer experiential learning opportunities. When asked about how I use centers or what centers I use, I respond with the projects that my students are working on to deepen their understanding of the concept in a way that is meaningful and interesting to them. Students get to create, build, research, and present learning that is based on being directly involved in a learning experience, rather than their being recipients of ready-made content. Students work at their pace, and the deadline for each project is when they are finished.

- Resist the rigid pacing
  Pacing of the entire curriculum is based upon the rate at which the students are mastering the material and not the rigid pacing guide mandated by the District. Those who master the concepts continue to the next concept, and those who need more time have the opportunity to learn at a rate that meets their needs. When asked about where I am on the pacing guide, I generally respond with what the administration wants to hear because some students can handle the rigor of the pacing guide, and this response benefits those who need more time to grapple with the curriculum.

- Redo until you get it
  My belief is that students need time to grapple with, ask questions about, make mistakes with, and use concepts in multiple contexts before I can expect them to master the concept. Therefore, I only take grades from material that they have had for at least 2 weeks. I assess for mastery as compared to the standard and not to other students. Students are given the opportunity to redo an assignment as many times as they like including assessments.

- Unschooling grades
  When assignments are taken for a grade, rather than using the average, as most teachers are taught to do, I use the median. The average is affected by outliers, and if I am resisting the notion of assessing students' learning as compared to other students, the average does not support this concept. With that in mind, homework is graded using descriptive feedback instead of a number grade, and students are given the opportunity to redo the assignment if necessary.

- School not jail
  I teach in ways that are not generally supported by my school, as well as allowing student behavior explicitly punishable by school rules. School has become this place where children are expected to do things that are against nature and their pedagogical development. For example, we expect students to spend 8 hours in school and not talk. They can't talk in the classroom, they can't talk when they take a bathroom break, or in the hallways (it's school not jail). Students must ask permission to sharpen a pencil, get water, a tissue, and the teacher must take the entire class to the bathroom during a scheduled bathroom break. Adults don't all have to use the bathroom at the same time, so why do we expect students to. I prefer to teach responsibility and decision making, which allows students to learn to make their own choices and, therefore, promotes independence and confidence. Students are allowed to take a break when they need to. I ensure that the classroom environment is so great that they get to the bathroom and back quickly because they don't want to miss anything.

- Resist the traditional classroom kill and drill
  I believe that school should be this place where you get to see and do lots of really cool interesting things. One of the troubling things that I see too often in many classrooms is that teachers are teaching content in isolation. Therefore, students never really know when or how to apply the mathematics that they are learning to real life situations. While I am responsible for teaching the standard mathematics curriculum, I spend countless hours developing and planning instruction and projects that allow students to authentically use the mathematics that they are learning. I grew up in an era when we had shop class and home economics class, which gave students the opportunity to utilize the mathematics and science they were learning. I try to create this unique experience for students, where they are creating something that they can take home to share with their family. This often requires resources that are not available in my school and/or resources that the school would not fund. My solution has been to develop myself as a grant writer. As a result, I have been able to fund field trips, a 3D printer, rockets, airplanes, drones, a brooder to hatch chicks, materials for art projects, science fair projects, books, and other materials that specifically support student interest. If there is something that the students are interested in, then I go looking for it.

- Teach with the door open
  I want everyone to see not only what I am doing as their learning facilitator, but more importantly what my students are doing, how engaged they are, how they communicate, collaborate, their creativity, and their critical thinking. I want everyone to hear what a classroom where the needs of students come first sounds like and what it looks like as students work on projects that raise eyebrows because the students aren't solely completing worksheets or tied to a computer, but instead creating something of interest to them.

- Be an advocate
  Whenever, I have the opportunity to tell not only my story, but the story of what life is like in classrooms today for students and teachers, I do just that. Teachers see first-hand the effectiveness or inefficiencies of the educational policies. Advocating for myself

requires that I educate myself outside of the schools one-size-fits-all professional development. If I am going to speak out, I must choose my words carefully and know what theories and practices support my concerns. I also try to look for other like-minded teachers and teachers with social capital to support the cause.

We must push back against implementation of drill and kill curricula and resist the priority assigned to standardized testing in favor of a curriculum that meet students where they are academically, is interesting, allows them to be consumers of knowledge, and is relevant to their lives. Teachers realize that students' test scores alone do not accurately represent the quality of an educator, much less the value that he or she brings into the classroom. I end with a caution statement about resisting. Teachers who resist must not have thin skin. You must understand that you may become a target for criticism; you may be ostracized and get emotionally roughed up in the process as you advocate on behalf of your students. Teachers who resist do so on behalf of the voiceless, because we care about what happens to all children, and therefore, we must push for an agenda that puts more emphasis on curricula that create spaces for individualization, critical thinking, and creativity rather than on test scores.

Resistance, for me, is about taking a moral and ethical stance. I resist because I believe all students deserve a high-quality education that meets their needs and is tailored for their success. Those of us who choose to resist do so because we understand that change begins with us doing what is best for our students. I love teaching and learning, care about the future of the profession, and want to improve our schools. When teachers and educational leaders are trusted to make decisions based on their professional judgment, their years of experience, their commitment to students' learning, and their engagement with their communities, school reform policies and practices are more likely to be thoughtful and positive rather than negative and detrimental.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature for the major concepts to the characteristics of teacher leadership. The importance of these characteristics highlight the degree to which school personnel, administrators and teachers, control opportunities and information that could be utilized to improve teaching and learning and, therefore, improve student achievement.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The Research Design

Autobiographical accounts convey how teachers' knowledge is formed, held, and how it can be studied and understood transformatively. Poetter (2011) posits "The autobiography traces the development of self as a result of life experiences and relationships. The teaching platform reveals the beliefs and commitments that constitute your emerging conceptions of the best teaching practices for you and your students". Currere includes self-analysis and self-synthesis, the narrative remains entirely in the hands of the teacher and does not require a researcher's interpretation for validity, thus, empowering the teacher to re-imagine and re-story. I will use the methodology of autobiography in a study that aims to explore more fully the characteristics of the phenomenon of currere, especially when reflecting upon my educational experiences, life histories, my classroom practices, and my performance as a teacher leader. Narrative, personal narratives, or teacher autobiographies have become in recent years an increasingly popular educational research and professional development tool in the United States' educational system (Nieto, 2003). In education, narrative writing is one of the best mechanisms for teachers to explore and recontextualize their life experiences and to discover how they connect and influence their teaching pedagogy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lemberger, 1997; Pinar, 2004). Teacher autobiographies encourage educators to examine and reflect on their lived experiences and tell their stories as only they can tell them (Zinsser, 1998). They allow teachers to create and apply a language in which they can share and critic the experience in a way that is accessible and allows others to view the experience through a different lens.

Over time, narratives help teachers answer the questions of why they entered the teaching profession and what keeps them there (Nieto, 2003). Narratives also afford teachers a mechanism or lens for more critically examining their current practices (hooks, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldua, 2002). When teachers deconstruct their personal histories and stories, they may gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege. Pinar (2004) suggests all educators engage in the process of examining the curriculum of their lives through "currere." He suggests this "autobiographical method of writing provides a strategy for self-study, one phase of which seeks synthetical moments of 'mobilization' when, as individuals and as teachers, we enter 'the arena' to educate the American public" (p. xiii).

Data for this research will be acquired by investigations of past, present, and future dimensions of the self, a written text describing my life's journey and future goals. This chapter presents currere, and data collection procedures which were utilized to measure the frequency of my flow experiences, the rationale for selecting this methodology, the benefits and limitations to autoethnography as a methodology, and the ethical implications of such research.

This autobiographical account of my experiences in education as a student and as a teacher, as well as my work as a teacher leader and makes use of narrative vignettes—short storied texts (Humphreys, 2005). While theory can fall into a number of different categories including descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or propositional (Fawcett & Downs, 1992), research of this nature falls into the notion of what Gregor (2002) has termed "theory for understanding" (p. 7). Gregor (2002) describes this as theory that "explains 'how' and 'why' something occurred" (p. 7).

Currere

Currere as a method of self-reflective autobiographical inquiry arose out of a paradigm shift of the 1970's. In 1969, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Joseph Schwab (Schwab, 1978) delivered his now famous address to Division B, a sub-group of the organization then called "Curriculum and Objectives." The field of curriculum, he said, was "moribund" if not already dead. The concentration of the curriculum field shifted from an emphasis on technical development to one driven by a practical concern for understanding and experience, theorizing through various epistemological lenses.

In 1970, William Pinar formulated the Latin infinitive of "curriculum" (currere) meaning to run the course (Pinar, 1974). The word currere shares the same etymological root as the word curriculum. Thus, one of the most important things that we learn from Pinar's work is currere defines curriculum as a process rather than an object. When asked to describe the meaning of curriculum most educators (including administrators) would say at least one the following: lesson plans, pacing guides, textbooks, standards, objectives, teaching materials, tests, etc. Each of these describe curriculum as nouns and objects. As Pinar (2010) explains, from this viewpoint, "[c]urriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than a process: it becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope" (p. 178).

Patrick Slattery (n.d) in "Annotated Glossary for Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era," describes curriculum as being composed of two parts: "objects like textbooks, lesson plans, and guide books (nouns) and a process of running, ruminating, reevaluating, experimenting, experiencing, creating, and analyzing (verbs). Currere reminds us that curriculum development includes both the process and the product" (para 17). In their 1978 book *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, Pinar and Grumet developed a four-stage process of autobiographical awareness. They called this curriculum theory currere. Currere is a curriculum technique that is used to investigate the relationship between academic knowledge, narrative (life history), self-understanding, practice, and social reconstruction and provides opportunities to dialogue with these moments, and to examine possibilities for change (Pinar, 2004).

The Method of Currere

Currere is a reflexive cycle in which thought bends back upon itself and thus recovers its volition.   —Madeleine Grumet, Psychoanlytic Foundations

Telling stories defines our world and can be the key to learning from experience. Pinar (2012) reminds us, a scholarly story is also a personal story. He proposed a series of "complicated conversation[s] with oneself … an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). In his conception of curriculum as action (our classroom practices) and complicated conversation (how we think about what we did or do) Pinar writes that we must aspire "to understand the overall educational significance of the curriculum, focusing especially on interdisciplinary themes – such as gender or multiculturalism…as well as the relations among the curriculum, the individual, society, and history" (p. 21). Pinar's notion of currere suggests that at the center of education should be one's personal relationship to the world, one's memories, hopes and dreams instead of textbook facts, concepts, and a top-down system that determines the needs of the learner.

Currere is a method that can be utilized to study the evolution of an educator. It is an autobiographical account of the lived experience through the process of bringing the past into the

presentin order to look forward to future, then analyzing and synthesizing emergent themes. The lived moment moves immediately into the past while the future is always arriving. Currere brings elements spread over time together and provides an understanding of the instant moment and its movement (Pinar, 1994). Pinar & Grumet, (1976) describe it as a method to reconnect with past memories, especially those memories having to do with educational settings; in short, to write an educational autobiography. As stated by Pinar (2004), "When we listen to the past we become attuned to the future. Then we can understand the present, which we can reconstruct" (pp. 257-258).

In curriculum studies, currere is generally defined as the running of an educational course or the lived experience that students and teachers have when engaged in learning. Rather than focusing on curriculum as a pre-determined set of content standards, lesson plans, educational objectives, and assessments, currere reconceptualizes curriculum as the teacher's and students' individual encounters with the objects of education. This reconceptualization requires a critical and thoughtful examination of the ideals, purposes, and current practices of education and schooling. It is within these alternative perspectives that teachers and students are better able to investigate their individual personal impressions, feelings, and opinions and the ways in which their social factors affect their beliefs and attitudes about their educational experiences.

Currere as a method involves looking at relationships between academic experiences, life histories, identity, and social reconstruction; in short, to write an educational autobiography (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). The use of a historical lens to address who we are as teachers, offers a possibility of interrogating the socio-cultural, political context, and connoisseurship that informs what we do. This analysis and the work of curriculum studies calls us to trouble our past and problematize our future, at the same time working within and against being inundated in the present. Eisner (1985) claims "... to be a connoisseur is to know how to look, to see, and to appreciate" (p. 219). Connoisseurs are people who come to know, and critics are people who can render what they come to know in a language that is accessible to others and that enables others to "re-see" the work, the performance, or the object at hand. Teachers as connoisseurs and critics are able to discern through observation and appreciating (appreciating being ones awareness and understanding of what one has experienced) the school and/or educational experiences in their natural setting, as well as revealing what is important in a practice, a curriculum, a teaching performance so that others less perceptive or with a different perception in that domain can view things from the lens of the teacher. The trick according to Eisner is for the critic to do what John Dewey (1934) says good critics should do, namely, to reeducate perception. The aim of criticism, he said, is "the reeducation of the perception of the work of art" (Dewey, 1934, cited in Eisner, 1978, p. e-4). Currere creates a space to give teachers the opportunity to become educational connoisseurs and critics to view their teaching practices in a way that they might not otherwise consider. In *Notes on the Curriculum Field*, Pinar (1978) insisted that "curriculum research must emancipate the researcher if it is to authentically offer such a possibility to other" (p.9). Curriculum research or currere, is study and research maintained "through conscious work with oneself and others" (Pinar, 1978, p. 10).

Currere seeks "to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one's understanding of his or her life" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995 p. 520). Currere returns educational experience to the person who lived it, so that the experience can be examined for dormant and manifested meaning and the political implications of such reflection and interpretation. According to Pinar & Grumet, (1976): "Experience is what one senses, one feels, one thinks: it is, in a word, one's living through one's life. So, curriculum reconeptualized is

currere; it is not the course to be run or the artifacts employed in the running of the course; it is the running of the course. The course most broadly is our lives, in schools and out, and the running is the experience of our lives" (p. 18). As a mathematics teacher, I am reminded of the Mobius Strip. The Mobius Strip is a concept with no beginning and no end, where the course and the running turn on themselves and become one. The Mobius Strip represents an ongoing cycle that allows us to reflect as a means to look backward and forward. It is within this reflective process that meaning is created and a plan for growth is developed.

Pinar (2004) outlines a process by which participants write about their educational experiences in four essential stages: (1) the regressive stage: with the focus on past experiences, utilizing one's memories; (2) the progressive stage: with a focus on the future; (3) the analytical stage: with a focus on the present, while reflecting on their previous experiences in light of their current lives, "creating a subjective space of freedom in the present," and (4) the synthetical stage: with the aim of integrating the past, present, and future to achieve the state of self-understanding, self-reflection, and self-transformation (p. 35-37). He demonstrates these four steps, using them as the framework for reflection on curriculum theory and public education in *What Is Curriculum Theory?* (2004). This four stage process includes retelling the story of one's educational experiences, imagining future possibilities for self-understanding and educational practice; analysis of the relationships between past, present and future life history and practice; and new ways of thinking about education (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). The lived experience moves immediately into the past while the future is always arriving.

During the regressive stage one remembers and retells a particular educational experience. Pinar describes this remembering as creation of a "data source" (p. 55) that serves as the foundational material for reflection. He articulates his assumption that one's past affects present educational perceptions and practices. The regressive stage is a "discursive practice of truth telling … to oneself" (Pinar, 2004, p. 55). The teacher describes what happens in her own words, responding to the generative question, "What happened in that particular educational experience?" This question may address personal or professional experiences from the past. Pinar notes that one's past is "shared, each in his or her own way, by us all."(Pinar, 2004, p.125) To generate data, one uses the psychoanalytic technique of free association. Free association helps you to recall the past, enlarge, and thereby, transform one's memory.

The "progressive stage" offers possibilities for the future for self-understanding and educational practices. Pinar offers two modes of exploration in this progressive phase: "stylistic experimentation" and "thematic" imagining. "Stylistic experimentation" or writing offers the opportunity to "become other" as one imagines possibilities for the future. The thematic mode explores a "futural subject … in hopes of dissolving what blocks us from moving forward toward a future not yet present …"(Pinar, 2004, pp. 125-127).

The third or "analytical stage" creates a "subjective space of freedom from the present." This "critical self-examination" of the past and present seeks understanding of the multiple facets of an educational experience (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). Pinar's (2004) discussion of public school anti-intellectualism illustrates this critical approach to the "relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, the processes of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which we live, in which others have lived, and in which our descendants will someday live" (p.187).

The synthetical stage involves re-entering the present in light of the knowledge gained in the previous steps. The question, "What is the meaning of the present?" hopefully offers opportunity for reenergized pedagogical practice. One utilizes insights from past, present, and

future to create transformed educational environments. Mary Aswell Doll (as quoted in Pinar, 2004) illustrates the "moment of synthesis" well: "Curriculum is also… a coursing, as in an electric current. The work of the curriculum theorist should tap this intense current within, that which courses through the inner person, that which electrifies or gives life to a person's energy source" (p. 37).

The Currere Process

Leslie Moore in a 2013 conference paper writes the following of the currere process:

Stage 1 – Regression

Think back as far as you can and record your memories in a stream-of-consciousness manner. Consider teachers, experiences with education, impressions, and media – anything at all that is vivid to you as you grew up with the concepts of education and teaching.

Stage 2 – Progression

Next, project yourself into your future and record "memories" of things that are likely to happen based on this foundation of memories and ideas about teaching. (It is common to find this challenging.)

Stage 3 – Analysis

Look at the connections between your past memories and your ideas about the future. Make an objective identification of the common themes and connections between the first two stages.

Stage 4 – Synthesis

Finally, pull the whole thing together – (where you've been, where you're going, and the common themes) – and write about how you will use this new self-knowledge to make conscious, informed decisions about your practice as an educator. (pp. 3-4)

In a study by Brown (2007), currere was used as a method to encourage participants to create teacher narratives about past and current practice and to examine the themes of their careers closely in ways they find empowering. In *Notes on the Curriculum Field*, Pinar (1978) insisted that "curriculum research must emancipate the researcher if it is to authentically offer such a possibility to other" (p.9). Reconceptualized curriculum theory focuses on the experiences of the teacher, their reflection and articulation of these experiences become the motivation for transformation. Pinar critiques public schools' standardized testing, anti-intellectualism, lack of freedom, and political agenda and suggests school reforms that reconstruct curriculum as a process that connects academic knowledge, student and teacher subjectivity, society, and historical context. Currere offers possibilities for change in public education as it encourages "reflection on educational experience that connects academic content, subjective knowledge of teachers and learners, society and historical context" (Pinar, 2004, p. 21). Pinar's theorizing and practicing of currere created a space in educational research that validates the practice of self-study, primarily through the development of reflections on educational experiences and narrative inquiry.

In this research, reality is constructed via writing about my educational experiences and my professional life as a teacher. This reality is formed over time and is a synthesis of my self-knowledge and recollections, the projections of my future goals, and the analysis of my present

life. It is through currere that this constructed realty reveals itself through the process of narrative writing.

This groundbreaking work allows educators and students of curriculum "to sketch the relations among school knowledge, life-history, and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 515). Understanding and acting upon the past to influence the future affords growth and transformation for the intellectual. Maxine Greene (2001) argues that when teachers are given the opportunity to articulate, or to give some "kind of shape to their lived experience, all kinds of questions may arise. Gaps appear in the narrative; awarenesses of lacks and deficiencies become visible; bright moments and epiphanies highlight the dark times, the fears, the felt failures" (p. 83). Currere has the potential to bring educators to the understanding that they possess personal practical knowledge that guides their everyday work as educators. This personal practical knowledge is conceived of as "that combination of theoretical and practical knowledge born of lived experience" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 557). This new knowledge and understandings have reshaped how I see myself as an educator and my potential to support the teaching and learning for students and teachers.

During the regression process of currere, we are able to visualize where we come from, how experiences affect our development, and how they continue to define aspects of our lives. It allows us freedom from our past as we accept it and view it from a different lens. The next step, Progression, allows us a view of the future, considering our interests, the possibilities for the future, and our dreams of what is to come. Analysis, the third step, allows us to realistically evaluate our present. The past and future are momentarily set aside but remain in consciousness. Acknowledgements of the roles the past and future play in our present are critical during the analysis stage. The final step, Synthesis, allows us to integrate everything together as a puzzle. Who we are is revealed as we perceive our past, present, and future as a whole. We acknowledge ourselves and our personal and professional experiences.

Methods

In this autobiographic study, I am the primary data source. The experiences for this study of currere will be acquired while serving as a 4th grade mathematics and science teacher leader. It will highlight events and people who were instrumental in my reflection on my educational experiences and my practices as a classroom teacher leader as well as the motivation necessary to continue to experience deep enjoyment of my work.

The research questions that drive this study are:
- Who am I as a teacher?
- How did my educational experiences (past and present) affect how I teach?
- What inspires me to resist the de-intellectualization of my work?
- What are the strategies of resistance I use to push back and to support the needs of my students without getting fired?

Autobiography concentrates predominantly on the researcher's self and understanding that self within the context of one's inner or lived experience of curriculum. The "self" comprised of the physical, emotional and intellectual self is who has been educated and who educates others. The process of currere allows the individual to "articulate the relationship of curriculum to this dynamic self-system" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 69). Currere does not attempt to resolve the tensions between conscious and unconscious, individuality and humanity, but rather uses these tensions to fuel continuous development of self and community (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). It is the researcher's personal memory that becomes the primary source of data. However, memory alone

cannot be a single sufficient tool for collecting data as researchers' objectivity can be challenged (Holt, 2003). Therefore, I will support the data from my memory through triangulation with the data from unsolicited artifacts from students, a Teacher Perspective Inventory, and through my personal narrative.

Data collection to support the phenomena of my experiences are the use of the Teaching Perspective Inventory which summarizes my views and perceptions about teaching and through the use of student note cards written in my absence to me during the last week of school. The student note cards list three words that the students used to describe me as a teacher.

Data Collection

My personal narrative stories written from memory, emails, syllabi, and course work, assignment feedback, along with the Teaching Perspective Inventory, and notes from my students validate my observations about my educational experiences and classroom practices as a teacher leader. Although "personal memory is a building block of autoethnography" (Chang, 2008, p.71), and remembering events is a powerful tool indeed, it adds to the validity of the study if there is physical evidence from the researcher's life. Broad–based data, such as artifacts, documents, and interviews add to the objectivity of auto-ethnographic research (Chang, 2008).

Teaching Perspective Inventory

Daniel Pratt's (1992) teaching perspectives model has proven to be a reliable and valid way to understand the beliefs and values held by educators. The development and use of the Teaching Perspective Inventory (TPI) has undergone rigorous testing with a wide range of practitioners, educators, and student teachers (Pratt, Collins, & Jarvis-Selinger, 2001). The TPI is a 45 item inventory divided into three sections (beliefs, actions, and intentions) that assesses a teacher's orientation and commitment to teaching and summarizes one's views and perceptions about teaching. TPI measures teachers' profiles on five contrasting views of what it means "to teach." The inventory is instrumental in aiding self-reflection, developing statements of teaching philosophy, engendering conversations about teaching, and recognizing legitimate variations on excellence in teaching. It is a free, self-report, self-scoring inventory that promotes a pluralistic understanding of teaching and equips teachers with a more explicit vocabulary for reflecting on their own teaching and that of others. Pratt and Associates (1998) articulate each perspective from a normative frame, allowing the reader to appreciate the strengths of good teaching practice that is represented within each perspective. The 5 perspectives on teaching include Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturing, and Social Reform. Teaching perspectives are not synonymous with teaching styles. Teaching perspectives are more innate, Pratt (1998) stated

> Each perspective on teaching is a complex web of actions, intentions and beliefs; each, in turn, creates its own criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, true and false, effective and ineffective. Perspectives determine our roles and idealized self-images as teachers as well as the basis for reflecting on practice. (p. 35)

These commitments in teaching are the foundation for a teaching perspective. The five qualitatively different perspectives (Pratt & Collins, n.d) are:

- Transmission – effective delivery of content
- Apprenticeship – modeling ways of being
- Developmental – cultivating ways of thinking
- Nurturing – facilitating self-efficacy
- Social reform – seeking a better society (p. 3)

A summary of these perspectives may be found in Table 1. It is important not to confuse teaching perspectives with teaching styles or teaching techniques. Teaching perspectives encompass more than a repertoire of behaviors and teaching actions (Pratt & Collins, 2000). Each perspective incorporates fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning, instructional intentions within teaching contexts, and actions in situ (Selinger, 2003).

A quick appreciation of the inventory can be gained by taking it online at www.teachingperspectives.com.

I took the inventory during the summer of 2015 as part of a course on Staff Personnel. As soon as I was introduced to the TPI, I immediately thought that this would be the data set I would use to support my personal narrative, my classroom practices, and my overall feelings about teaching and learning. I have been teaching for 19 years, and this profile is an accurate reflection of me. I have enough experience to know what I am and who I want to be as an educator, as well as what I am not and who I don't want to be. This inventory helped me to validate the kind of teacher I am and want to be. Results of my Inventory may be found in Table 2.

As I began to deconstruct my TPI profile results, one of the first things I noticed was that there was differentiation between the perspectives. Some perspectives spike higher than others. The height of the columns indicates the strengths of my responses (the strength of my opinion about the questions asked). The height tells whether you have a strong, moderate, or minor reaction to the items expressed. My dominant perspective is Apprenticeship, which represents my strongly held views about my role and function as an educator. Good teaching has been defined as having students who adopted a deep approach to learning, and this kind of teaching was found mostly in teachers who conceived of learning and teaching as student centered with a focus on qualitatively changing their understanding or conceptions rather than memorization and recall (Kember & Kwan, 2000; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Trigwell, et al., 1999). Two of the five teaching perspectives are more student-centered: Developmental and Nurturing. Key words found in the work of Pratt and Associates (2005) provide a thematic picture (Table 1) of these two and have components that are aligned with the tenets of adult education and are student-centered, but are less prevalent than the other three perspectives (e.g. transfer of learning).

Nurturing is my backup perspective, which is also high but slightly lower than the dominant perspective of Apprenticeship. The Nurturing perspective is highlighted by the interaction of the teacher and the students where the teacher promotes a student's self-concept as a competent learner. Two of the perspectives (Transmission and Social Reform) fell below the recessive threshold. The dominant and recessive thresholds are keyed to each individual profile (+/- 1 SD around the mean of your own five scores). They are not influenced by how other people score on their profiles.

The score of each of the five perspectives is comprised of three sub-scores: a Belief (B) sub-score, an Intention (I) sub-score, and an Action (A) sub-score. An examination of the sub-scores labeled (B), (I), and (A), (the short bars within each Perspective bar) reveals these sub-scores as indicators of how much agreement exists between what the teacher does (Actions), what he/she wants to accomplish (Intentions), and why he/she feels that is important or justified (Beliefs). High internal consistency (sub-scores within one or two points of each other) means that your Beliefs, Intentions, and Actions are all aligned with each other. With the exception of the Transmission perspective all of the sub-scores for the other perspectives (Apprentice, Nurturing, Development, and Social Reform) had a high internal consistency. My Transmission perspective had a lower level of internal consistency (B - 15), (I - 8), (A – 12). These sub-scores are indicators of how much agreement exists between what I do (Actions), what I want to

accomplish (Intentions), and why I feel that is important or justified (Beliefs). I attribute this inconsistency to job constraints. Overall, the TPI accurately reflects how I feel about teaching and learning.
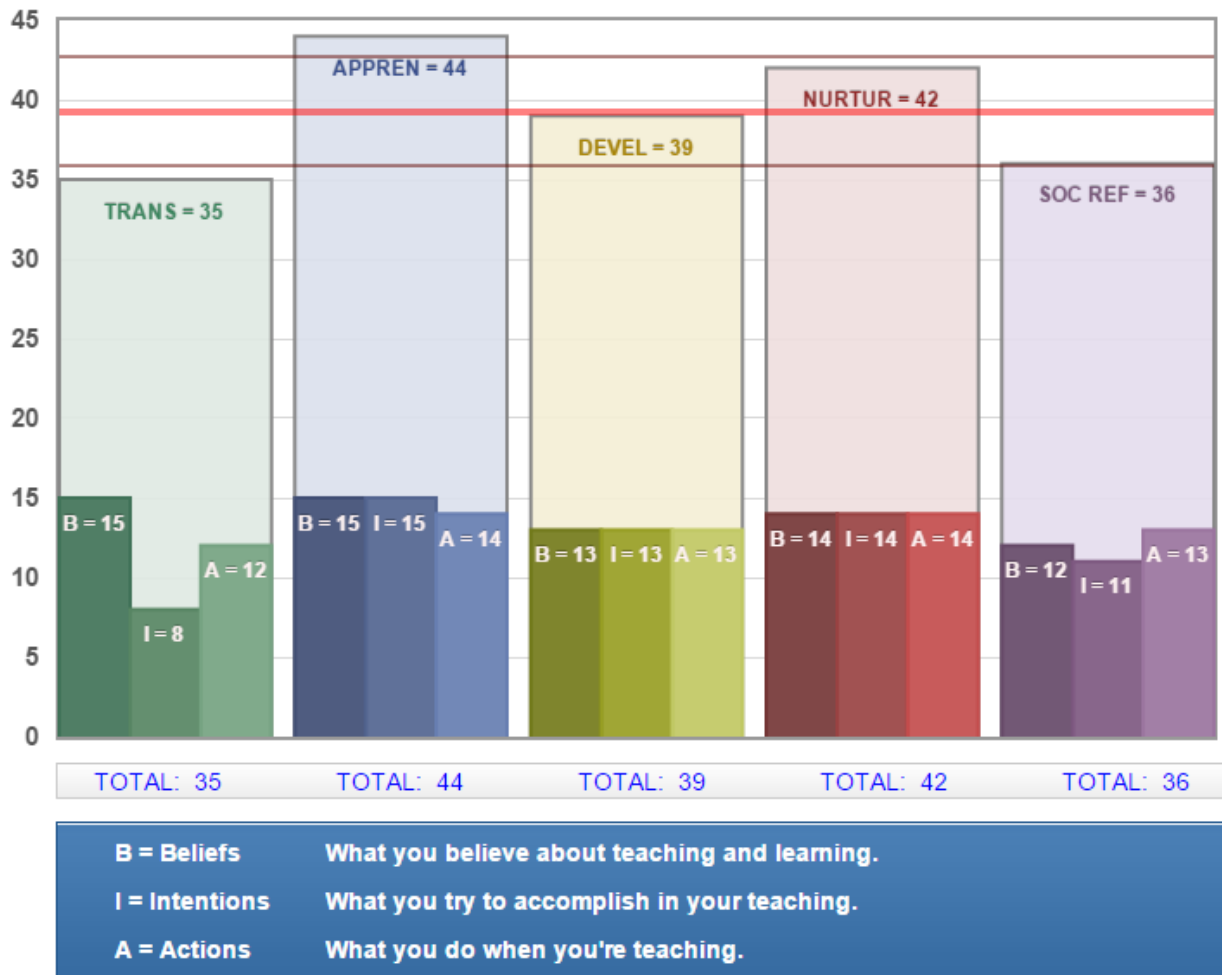
Pratt & Associates (2005) recommends that the next steps are to exchange profile sheets with peers and discuss your results with each other. Do they see you in the same manner as the profile suggests? Compare your profile with norms for other people in your department, or compare with others in your same professional sector or with others who have a similar educational background.

Table 1. The Five Perspectives

Table 1

Themes from Pratt and Associates' (2005) Teaching Perspectives

Transmission	Apprenticeship	Developmental	Nurturing	Social Reform
Stable body of knowledge	Expert knowledge, application and practice	Provide bridges & co-construct: present and desired thinking	Relationship between self-concept and learning	Well-articulated ideal
Shaped and guided by content	Transfer of learning	Content used to develop thinking	Foster climate: respect & trust	Ideals and ideology are central
Commitment to a deep respect for content	Commitment to role and identity as practitioner	Power with the student: prior knowledge and evaluation of that	Mutual collaboration	Move individuals towards ideal
Power in authority of teacher as expert	Power with teacher in craft knowledge		Power between teacher & student: boundaries and competence	Power is in the ideology

Table 2. My TPI Results

TRANS = 35	APPREN = 44	DEVEL = 39	NURTUR = 42	SOC REF = 36
B = 15	B = 15 I = 15 A = 14	B = 13 I = 13 A = 13	B = 14 I = 14 A = 14	B = 12 I = 11 A = 13
A = 12				
I = 8				
TOTAL: 35	TOTAL: 44	TOTAL: 39	TOTAL: 42	TOTAL: 36

B = Beliefs	What you believe about teaching and learning.
I = Intentions	What you try to accomplish in your teaching.
A = Actions	What you do when you're teaching.

Date of survey: 06/01/2015
Name of respondent: Mary Webb
Association group: No, I am not a member of any of these groups
Area of learning: Elementary

Student Notes

During the last week of school after much contention about whether I should have to take personal days to serve on a professional committee, I was granted professional leave to serve on the national PARRC mathematics Rangefinding Committee. During my absence as a parting gift from my students to me, my partner teacher asked our 45 students to write three words to describe me as their teacher. What a nice surprise upon my return. Not only had the students written words to describe me, but some left phone messages, gifts, pictures, and cards to thank me for being their teacher.

The students used 42 words to describe me. The words used most were: intelligent (13), brave (9), fun (9), kind (8), caring (7), determined (7), nice (6), helpful, tough and funny (5),

strong, self-confident and warm-hearted (4), compassionate, lovable, loving, respectful and #1 teacher (3). Each of the other words depicted below were used by students at least once. From the students descriptions I created a word tag to visualize the frequency of the words the students used.

As I read the index cards on which they wrote, I again was reminded of how important this work is. I could see that it wasn't the math that I hoped to have taught them that made the most difference in their lives, but it was the relationships that we built, the time we invested, and the love of learning that seemed to have impacted them most.

Summary

This chapter describes the design and methodology that will be used to answer of the research question. The research occurs within a qualitative autobiographic framework involving the researcher as the object and subject of the research. This chapter includes sections on the research design, currere, and data collection methods.

Breaking the Tradition

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. I grew up in a home with both of my parents and eight other children. Despite the fact that my parents had only an eighth grade education, they always worked hard, maintained jobs to provide for our family, and managed to purchase a home in a nice neighborhood while raising nine decent children. They instilled in us that in life God comes first, followed by family, and then work. I grew up in a close-knit family where the older children were responsible for caring for the younger children when my parents were working. I grew up poor; however, I didn't know it because my parents made up for what they lacked financially in how they loved and raised us. My parents made sure that we had the things we needed and, every once in a long while, something we wanted. My mother worked for the state of Ohio for 20 years before she retired. After she retired, she decided to take classes to learn to be a better reader. I remember being so proud of her. My parents always talked about the importance of education. My siblings and I, all went to the same elementary, middle, and high school. We all had the same teachers. However, I,

to this day, can't remember any of them. As a recipient of Freire's (2008) banking concept of education, I was disenfranchised with school early on. I never really felt a connection to school, the teachers, or any school programs. Although I had friends with whom I walked to school daily and visited regularly, it still didn't help me fit into school. I wasn't involved in any extracurricular activities nor was there a particular adult who I felt comfortable enough with to share my concerns.

During those school years, I felt disconnected from the classes being taught; they had no relevance to my life or what I thought might interest me in the future. Despite having little interest in school as a whole, I was of average intelligence, literate, numerate, and mature enough to know that this traditional structure of school just wasn't working for me. My parents made me go anyway. At that time, the law required youth to attend school until they turned 16 years of age. I longed for the day when I would turn 16 and could quit, or so I thought. I still faced the challenge of convincing my parents to let me do this.

After only one semester in high school, I decided I no longer wanted to be part of a system that I wasn't interested in; it didn't meet my needs, and it seemed to be a waste of my time. The dialectic of my complicated conversation (I began to consider my options) started a shift in the traditional educational path for the first time in my family. I would be the first child to drop out of school. Prior to sharing my desire with my parents, I began to do some research on alternatives to the traditional high school graduation process. They always preached the importance of getting an education, so I knew I had to have a plan to finish high school if they were going to consider my request. I began searching for an alternative to the traditional schooling that I struggled to connect with. I started reading the newspaper in search of a solution. I called our local library, and read community newsletters and bulletin boards at churches and stores wherever I went in search of my solution. Reflecting back to that time, I can see that my situation was "an historical reality susceptible of transformation" (Freire, 2008, p. 253) and that I wanted transformation. I never spoke to anyone at school about unhappiness or my desire for something more meaningful. In fact, I never even met a counselor, and no one in school looked for me when I did drop out.

I have no idea how I found the Cincinnati Job Corp program, which promised that I could finish high school by earning a General Education Diploma (GED), learn a trade, and go to college. Wow… I (a 16 year old girl) found the solution to my feeling disconnected. I had a plan. I was excited and proud of myself. I would even finish high school a year before my graduating class would. This made feel smarter than everyone else who decided to stick with the traditional high school model. Now, I had to convince my parents. With the blessings of my parents who knew me best and understood that I wanted something different, even though I could not articulate it at that time, off to Job Corp I went. As promised, I got my G.E.D., learned to be a wielder, and had the opportunity to take classes at the University of Cincinnati (UC).

Troops to Teachers
Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners.
-John Holt, Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. After a year at UC, one of my older brothers talked about joining the Army. It had only taken me about a year to finish the GED program and begin classes at UC. I was still in a space where I was finding myself, so I went to talk to a U.S. Army recruiter to get information about joining the Army. As

most recruiters are good at what they do, I was sold on the idea that the Army could provide me with opportunities and adventures. In 1982, I joined the Army. As an enlisted member of the U.S. Army the majority of my training consisted of both classrooms and an endless amount of hands-on training. While in traditional school, I never had the opportunity to take Algebra, much less develop my mathematics skills. Well, to be honest, I don't know what I learned in school. But, I guess I did learn something. In those days only the really smart "gifted" students were afforded the opportunity to take Algebra. Everyone else took general math. Many years later as a member of the United States Army, I was given a second chance to develop my math skills. I became a Frequency Manager, where I learned the value of understanding mathematics and grew fond of the subject.

For the first time in my life, academic studies and the range of my own learning became important to me. I enjoyed learning for the sake of learning. One of the reasons I believe this happened is because of the Army's use of hands-on training initially, followed by apprenticeship learning throughout my career. Learning occurs through a combination of firsthand experience and interactions with peers and superiors during training. Through experiential learning, the novice becomes a member of a community of practitioners and a world of practice scenarios. This apprenticeship model is the standard for training and learning associated with the military. Working with a master over a period of time, the apprentice acquires practical skills and learns what works in real life situations. While engaged in various training situations via practice, the apprentice requires less and less guidance from the master, eventually achieving mastery on his or her own.

After a successful military career in which I rose to the rank of First Sergeant, I was planning to leave the military and through the transitional services provided by the Army, I became part of a program call Troops to Teachers. Through this program I was given the opportunity to utilize what I had learned about mathematics in the Army, and later through college courses, to become a middle school mathematics teacher. What a surprise. The Troops to Teachers program for me was like an on the job training program. I was taking classes to work toward certification at Goucher College in Towson, Maryland, while being paid as a regular classroom teacher. I applied and was assigned to one of the roughest schools in Baltimore City, Harlem Park Elementary School, located in a downtrodden and dangerous neighborhood. They paired me with a wonderful teacher (Mrs. Margaret Hayes) who was a veteran teacher with 15 years of experience. She really taught me how to be a teacher. Mrs. Hayes taught me the things that you can't learn in college: how to build caring relationships with children that are meaningful to them, how to be part of the community, how to take a topic and make it relevant and interesting to the students, how to take students from where they are to moving toward growth and ultimately mastery, and to teach children that they are important and are good at something.

Cleaning Up Broken Pieces

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. Over the last 18 years, I have taught elementary, middle, and high school Mathematics, Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, and Geometry to grades 5-11. Many of the students I teach and/or have taught come from backgrounds similar to mine, and I dare to say, have had educational experiences similar to mine. Many don't seem to have a connection to school or really understand the power of education to transform their lives. It is as a result of my experience with the traditional educational system that I try to make a connection with the students I come into contact with on

some level, whether they are in my classroom or not. I am always trying to share information about programs that might interest them and trying to encourage them to get involved in something that interests them in school or outside of school. My goal is to expose them to opportunities for learning that others might think are outside of my duties as a mathematics teacher.

Our high school principal likes to tell the story about a young man who I didn't even teach at the time of this incident. One day after school, I was starting the Math and Science Club. Only 4 students had shown up, so I went out into the hallway to announce that we were meeting and to recruit. I noticed this quiet student coming down the stairs. His name is Ervin. I said to him, "Where are you going?" He replied, "Home." I said, "What are you going home to do?" He said, "Watch T.V." I said "Go into my room, call your mother, and tell her you are staying for Math and Science Club." He did as I asked. He called his mom and said, "Mom, some teacher, who I don't even know, says that I have to stay after school for math and science club." His mom said he should stay. Little did I know that Ervin had been diagnosed and medicated for being depressed, having multiple anxieties (including math), and socializing disorders, all of which had an impact on his academic achievement. This occasion allowed me to build a relationship with him that he did not have with any other adult in our school. He started talking to me about everything, where prior to this, he would not say a word in class or outside of class to any of his teachers, and he barely spoke to his classmates. In fact, most of the students thought of him as odd. Ervin had this particular creative side that no one knew about. He began to design and build things with great detail and precision. Each week he was eager to get to Math and Science Club. Everyone wondered what I had done to him. His mother began calling me to ask what I had done to him. She noticed that he was excited about coming to the Math and Science club and talked about me all the time. About a month after all of this, his mother took him to the doctor to have his meds decreased because she felt that he was overcoming many of his challenges as a result of my influence. Ervin just began to blossom like a flower. He went from being this kid who barely spoke to becoming the spokesperson for the Math and Science Club. He participated and won several competitions such as 1st place in the American Institute of Architects Transportation Project and 1st place in the City Wide Glider competition. This experience allowed Ervin to make a connection, to find something that interested him. He set a goal to pursue Engineering or Architecture as a career.

> Noddings (1984) describes educators working as caring professionals who confirm their students' "best selves" through the practice of a cooperative, sensitive dialogue: Confirmation, the loveliest of human functions, depends upon and interacts with dialogue and practice. I cannot confirm a child unless I talk with him and engage in cooperative practice with him (p. 196).

The Transition Begins

> What is central now is the need for economic access; the political process has been opened-there are no formal barriers to voting, for example – but economic access, taking advantage of new technologies and economic opportunity, demands a much effort as political struggle required in the 1960s.
> –Dr. Robert Moses, (http://www.pbs.org/now/society/moses.html)

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. It was while transitioning from teaching in Baltimore, Maryland, to teaching in Cincinnati, Ohio, that I

discovered a book written by Dr. Robert Moses called *Radical Equations*. I had never considered the idea that there was this linear connection between civil rights and math literacy. The book describes the Algebra Project a transformative math literacy program that has proven effective in improving mathematics education in disadvantaged communities. It was founded on the belief that math literacy is a prerequisite for full citizenship in a global society. The Algebra Project engages the entire community, parents, teachers, and especially students to create a culture of literacy around algebra, which Dr. Moses believes is needed for college entrance no matter what field is pursued. The project teaches students algebra by combining culturally responsive pedagogy with grassroots organizing tactics developed during the civil rights movement.

   As I read the book, it just really seemed to make sense and resonate in my soul. As an African-American educator who grew up in a family of nine to parents with only a middle school education, I understood that education is the key to ending generational poverty and disenfranchisement. I saw how not having reading, writing, and mathematics literacies limited my parent's financial potential, and this lack of literacies could have had the same impact on my life had it not been for the U.S. Army. As a result of the transition from industrial technology to information age technology, in addition to the reading and writing literacy required for industrial technology, information age technology requires mathematics literacy. No one can ignore or deny that computers have dramatically changed our lives. Mathematics, specifically algebra is the foundation from which the symbolic language of computers is written. In algebra, students learn how to manipulate abstract symbolic representations that are the necessary tools that control technology. Simply stated, students who do not have access to high-level mathematics are going to be shut out of college and STEM careers, thereby limiting their financial future. This makes access to algebra a major civil rights issue. Hence, it is exactly what I experienced as part of my educational journey in traditional school. Moses argues that algebra is the "modern day civil right" for minorities because it opens doors to many career-related degrees and vocational programs (Wilgoren, 2001, para 10). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education also states that the odds that a student who enters college will complete a bachelor's degree more than doubles if that student completed a mathematics course beyond Algebra II (e.g., trigonometry or precalculus) while in high school (Adelman, 1999). Therefore, success in algebra is the critical to higher education.

   As it happened, during my interview for Miami University's Educational Leadership (PhD) Program, I was asked if I was familiar with Dr. Moses' work specifically and then why I wanted to pursue getting a PhD. As I considered the future, one of the reasons that I decided to pursue a doctoral degree at Miami University was so that I would be a voice to be heard. The PhD would be my ticket into the conversation. I planned to use this degree to open doors that might otherwise be closed to a classroom teacher and his or her students, facilitate agency amongst teachers who often feel as I do, and to be a practitioner for what works. I worked in a district with a superintendent that did not value the professional opinion of teachers in terms of best practices, instructional strategies, knowledge of the students, their families, and the community, and how best to facilitate learning. The degenerative and restrictive forces of education are evident in the standardization and alignment of curriculum in schools today. This has led to the deterioration of educational quality and the deintellualization of the teaching profession. Standardization and curriculum alignment (also called curriculum narrowing) can be defined as a method of educational quality control (Wraga, 1999) where the "process of teaching and learning is predetermined, pre-paced, and pre-structured. There is little room for originality or creativity on the part of teachers or students [and] specific, correct answers are elicited to

specific, direct questions" (Mahiri, 2005, p. 82). Therefore, in order to pass the required yearly "high stakes" standardized exams required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), the process of teaching is increasingly becoming "teacher proof" (Crocco & Costigan, 2007) in school districts across the country. This educational practice continues to destroy the notion of a critical, engaging, and self-reflective education in this country (Giroux, 2010). There is decreasing potential for individuality and creativity in education today since, "Increasingly, classrooms are places in which teachers and students act out the script given to them by someone else, neither teachers nor students ask the questions that matter, and learning is equated with passing a test" (Hursh, 2008, p. 3).

My experience as a successful, educated mathematics educator was not valued. I was often questioned about why my students were working on projects that had immediate meaning for them, and where they had an opportunity to explore the possibilities for their future through creative hands-on learning instead of the traditional worksheet drill and kill model so often found in predominately underprivileged schools. Not to mention that the traditional model in this information age is just plain boring for the students and me as their teacher. It is no wonder that students hate to come to school and many students are labeled as behavior problems when they don't conform to the traditional model of school.

As I sat in staff meeting after staff meeting, listening to the mandates for instruction with the sole purpose of school being to pass the state mandated standardized test required of all students I realized how the pressures of standardized testing and the school ratings as a result of the testing had put enormous pressure on administrators, that they seemed to have lost sight of the complexities of daily life in the classroom, and school as a place where the possibilities for learning are endless and not solely based upon being able to pass a test.

Stacks (1999) writes:

> Test driven classrooms exacerbate boredom, fear, and lethargy, promoting all manner of mechanical behaviors, on the part of the teachers, students, and schools, and bleed schoolchildren of their natural love of learning. (p. 256-257)

According to Stuart Yeh (2005), critics of high-stakes testing generally report four negative classroom effects produced by testing.

- Narrowing the curriculum by excluding from it subject matter not tested.
- Excluding topics either not tested or not likely to appear on the test even within tested subjects.
- Reducing learning to the memorization of facts easily recalled for multiple-choice testing. (p. 3-4)

Results from a Florida study by Abrams (2004) suggests the following:

- For many teachers, schools are highly stressed environments where a premium is placed on improving student test performance.
- Teachers held especially strong opinions about the pressure to raise test scores; 63 percent indicated the pressure was so great that they had little time to teach anything that would not appear on the test.
- The majority reported that they had found ways to raise test scores without improving learning.

- These findings suggest that pressure to raise test scores has forced educators to fixate on short-term, immediate goals, perhaps at the expense of developing skills that encourage long-term, independent learning.
- Results also suggest that the state testing and accountability program in Florida may have potentially negative implications for the teaching profession. Less than half of the teachers surveyed reported that morale was high at their school; further, a majority indicated that teachers wanted to transfer out of the grades in which the test was given (para 4).

I also struggled with administration's notion of professional development as a one-size fits all model. Again, I sat month after month in professional development meant for the novice teacher with nothing to meet my needs or my desire to grow as a professional. I knew a PhD would be the game changer that would allow me to speak from experience, theoretical research, and as a practitioner.

Finding My Voice

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. On Saturday, December 17, 2009, I received notice of my admission to Miami University's Educational Leadership program. I can remember it like it was yesterday for several reasons. First, I was standing in my kitchen talking with two of my brothers when I opened the letter and began jumping up and down with excitement. Naturally, they wanted to know why I was jumping around like I was crazy or something. I explained that I was admitted to Miami's doctoral program. I would not only be the first in my family to earn a master's degree, but now I would be the first to work toward earning a PhD. I was excited because I never imagined that I would be accepted considering my nontraditional educational background and Miami's reputation for being difficult to get into. In addition, I don't consider myself a writer, and during the application process, I had to write an essay prior to my interview session, so I was worried about that. Second, I have two friends who are also teachers who had applied to Miami when I did. Mind you, none of us knew that the others had applied to Miami until we happened to be attending a meeting and the topic came up. These are two educators (with a traditional educational background) that I admire and I think are much smarter than I. As unbelievable as it was to me, I was the only one admitted. This was the start of the validation of my nontraditional educational route. Up to this point, I was often hesitant to tell people that I did not graduate from high school, even though I had both a bachelor's and master's degree. My journey to becoming a practicing scholar began during the winter semester in January 2010.

As a result of my passion, and I believe my pursuit of this advanced study, immediately, my colleagues who I believed had great respect for me also gained greater confidence in my ability and my knowledge as a scholar. My colleagues began to seek my advice more than ever for solutions to issues and concerns with instruction, student discipline, and administrative support or lack thereof. They saw me as the voice of one who could and would stand up for what's in the best interest of our children first, but also as a voice for teachers. They saw me as a resistor. There were things that they would tell me in private but were afraid or reluctant to tell our principal. One time a colleague told me that I "have a way of explaining things in a nonthreatening way." Being at Miami somehow empowered me to take risks, to go where others would not or could not go, not that I felt like I knew any more than the leadership. My cultural capital seemed to have grown exponentially when people knew that I was pursuing a PhD. Up

until this point, I didn't seem to have any problems with my principal or superintendent. After I began to find my voice and respectfully express my concerns for how we educate the least of our children, the trouble began. My superintendent considered me adversarial.

For the first time in my career as an educator, I had begun to truly understand the complexities of the classroom in ways I had not considered previously. One of the most important theories that I now understand and use to guide my practice as a classroom teacher is that of "critical teacher." According to Kincheloe (2008) critical teachers who are "informed by a critical epistemology refuse to accept standardized, externally developed, scripted curricula that appeal to the lowest common denominator of teacher and student ability" (p. 11). After reading more of Kincheloe, I began to view my role as a critical math teacher through a different lens. Kincheloe (2008) describes the role of the "critical math teacher in this counter hegemonic context as someone who cultivates a love of math, develops student interest in discovering more and more uses for math in their lives, finds applications for math that improve the lives of oppressed peoples, and produces a passion for students to know more about the subject" (p. 11). I not only would share my feelings, but use the theoretical frameworks I was learning at Miami to support my case about best practices, the complexities that issues of poverty, race, class, and historical marginalization have on our ability to educate all children. Now, mind you I was not at every meeting spouting theories. I would always express my concern in the form of a question or a gentle statement like, "Perhaps we should consider…" To this day, my superintendent still feels threatened by my experience and education. I recently was invited to share my feelings and experience on a new curriculum our district adopted. My goal as an educator is to not only improve mathematics education for those students, which may or may not be what we would traditionally see or do in school. I take it personally when we eliminate students from opportunities based upon who they are today, without regard to the possibilities for their future. I want to see teachers, schools, and districts make a commitment to thinking outside the traditional way we have always done things. Do we really believe that all children can learn? If so, why don't we treat them that way? Why aren't we willing to educate them by any means necessary and at any cost? In an attempt to bring scientific rigor to teaching, The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) created What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) in 2002. The DOE's Institute of Education Sciences, evaluates classroom curricula, programs and materials, using standards of evidence that are overly stringent. In fact, WWC does not conduct research at all. It scans the existing literature in search of studies that meet its very stringent methodological criteria, examines those studies, and reports on their findings. What I find alarming is the fact that a government agency is determining what works without teachers playing a role in vetting or the evaluation process. I want to see educators being progressive in our pursuit of what works even if the program does not reach the highest categories of the "What Works Clearinghouse." What works for me may not work for someone else and vice versa, what works for a teacher in a socio-economically advantaged school may not work for me. I want to see the stakeholders demand that we spend funding on the front end of a young person's life, as opposed to spending it building new jails. I want to see programs like the Algebra Project, that are very non-traditional, get the national recognition it deserves for being a program that works to transform the lives of students beyond the mathematics classroom.

The Messiness of Creative Teaching

> For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them. Men become builders by building."

In its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. Experiential education first immerses learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking.

– Lewis and Williams, *Experiential Learning: A New Approach*

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. Like many teachers, I bought into the long established routine of the traditional classroom teacher where students were the empty receptors that I was to fill. My classroom routines (the laws that were not to be broken) were established in the beginning of each school year. Students were to sit in their assigned seats, raise their hand for permission to do anything (sharpen a pencil, get a drink of water, etc.), sit quietly, and complete the endless stream of worksheets. We teach the way we were taught. I came into the teaching profession in a non-traditional way. My bachelor's degree is in Social Psychology, which I earned while serving in the military long before I even thought of a career in education. After having taught for about 10 years, I discovered that my master's degree in education, which I earned while teaching, had not adequately prepared me to be the kind of teacher I wanted to be. I was in need of a teaching style that would fit me as a teacher in the process of learning and would create this indelible experience for students. I wanted a teaching style that would allow them more freedom to think for themselves and be creative, the freedom to move when they need to, and the freedom to engage in discourse with their peers when they need to.

Experiential education was the key to my own learning and teaching especially during my time in Job Corp and then later during my military career. As a teacher, when I discovered education through experience, I found the theoretical framework to describe the style of teaching that I not only preferred, but the theoretical framework that I believe led to my success as a learner. Experiential education allows the learner to build understanding through a process of inquiry and reflection. Dewey (as cited by Kincheloe) advised teachers to build their lessons around the life experiences of students. Students engage in experiential learning when they are able to apply their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations where the teacher directs and facilitates learning. The classroom, laboratory, or studio can serve as a setting for experiential learning through embedded activities, such as case and problem-based studies, guided inquiry, simulations, experiments, or art projects (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010). When students are engaged in learning experiences that they feel are relevant to their lives, they have increased motivation to learn. Students are also motivated when they are provided opportunities for practice and feedback. Experiential learning meets these criteria (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010).

To an educational traditionalist, my classroom may be seen as chaotic or disorganized. In fact, a colleague of mine once said, "You have a lot of junk in your room," and my principal, who seemed to feel the same way, was a little less direct and more polite by describing it as, "having many resources." They both were referring to the many projects of my students in various phases, which appeared to them as junk, but to my students and me, they were masterpieces. In an attempt to create an environment where teaching is a creative practice and one that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems and projects where I direct and facilitate learning, I have created a space for

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hands-on investigations, projects, creativity, collaboration, and fun. It is my attempt to take advantage of the unique interest of my students while they figure out what they are good at and how things work. It is a space that stands out from the dull classrooms that are around us where students are expected to sit for 90 minutes quietly, where the primary goal is preparing for standardized tests, completing worksheet after worksheet, and now, the overuse of computers to replace instruction. As a result, the enacted curriculum is interesting, engaging, relevant and I have experienced few classroom disruptions and rarely have to call a parent and/or write a referral due to disruptive behavior.

Passage to Freedom
        Experience plus reflection equals learning.
                             – John Dewey, (as cited by the Centre for Teaching Excellence)

        To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. One of the first courses I took at Miami was Education Leadership (EDL) 790A (Advance Curriculum Seminar). My professor, Dr. Thomas Poetter, sent us an email with brief instructions about getting the required text. Well, he opens the email with "Friends, What a terrific group of 9 scholars signed up for our course! I'm very excited to work on it with you." So, not only is it my first course in the PhD program where I felt inadequate, I was being called a scholar. I was terrified that they would find out that they had somehow made a mistake in accepting me. This was enormous pressure and overwhelming. The high school dropout was being called a scholar. There was a whole new language that I had to learn, and now in my first course they were asking me to be part of writing a book. It was a course that took me through several emotions. I was excited about the possibility of getting published, but at the same time overwhelmed with the new language of the PhD program and intimidated by the process of writing for publication. As I said earlier, I did not consider myself a writer. First, I, along with 8 other classmates and the professor, would embark upon a project where each of us would write a chapter in a book titled *10 Great Curriculum:* Lived Conversations of Progressive, Democratic Curricula in School and Society. The book, based on selected "great" curriculum, would convey what Dr. Poetter describes as "curricula which had some extra special oomph!" They not only worked well and stood the test of time, but they transformed lives in meaningful, powerful ways. They also shape our perceptions of educational approaches from yesterday and today, and they define who we are as citizens of a democracy (Poetter, 2013).
        I chose the Algebra Project (AP) to illuminate in the book because, like many of the students who are AP participants, I was written off by middle and high school teachers as being someone who would never go to college; therefore, I did not need to take Algebra. The AP has implications for changing the lives of underrepresented minorities through mathematics achievement, and it has the ability to prepare disadvantaged youth to be active participants in a society that values democracy as a way of life. The seed for the AP was planted over two decades ago when its founder, Bob Moses, decided to redirect his struggle for change from civil rights movement to the right of every child to a quality public education. He argues that Algebra is as important today, in this global technological economy, as the civil rights movement was in the 1960's (Wilgoren, 2001).
        Algebra is the gatekeeper to upper level mathematics. And yet, the traditional way we teach Algebra doesn't work for everyone—it serves to open doors from some and close doors for others. Thus, the lack of math literacy prevents some from realizing their potential and/or their

dream of a productive career. I traveled to Jackson, Mississippi, with Dr. Iris Johnson who worked with Dr. Moses in 1995 when he began the project in Lanier High School, the lowest performing high school in Jackson. Lanier was the first high school to implement the project in order to provide students graduating from the AP middle school cohort with continuity to their instructional approach. In addition to learning about the AP first hand, I conducted research on the implications for more widespread use of the AP along with how it promotes both political and social democracy as the end products of why we educate. The AP is about being progressive in education, where learning is rooted in questions generated from the students that arise through their experience of the world. It is not meant to be part of the social reconstruction of education. The AP does not explicitly have students use mathematics to investigate injustice, study racism, or examine institutional discrimination. The students learn mathematics based upon their lived experiences through sports, games, other real-world settings familiar to them, or abstract mathematical structures, but they tend not to be critical analyses of social relations and institutional arrangements. Within the classroom, social reconstructionism involves a combination of traditional lessons and students actively working towards a goal. The AP works to change common attitudes of our society that routinely promote the exclusion and regression of minorities. The goal of the AP is to take the students who score the lowest on state math tests and prepare them for college level math by the end of high school.

At the heart of the AP is the notion that students learn by doing. They are expected to pursue answers to their questions through problem solving and critical thinking, and are rarely expected to find their answers in a book. Rather than asking students to understand symbols from a textbook and apply them to their world. The AP begins with the world that the students live in. They take an experience from the lives of students and mathematize it through a protocol of drawing, writing, and discussion. For example, instead of asking students to memorize equations and formulas, the students might take a subway ride (a physical event), which provides the context to show them, step by step, how to transform their trip into a mathematical equation. Upon their return, students write about their trip, draw a mural, or construct a three-dimensional model, make graphs for trips that they create, and collect statistical data about them. The purpose is to fuse in their minds the two questions "How many?" and "Which way?" and to anchor these questions to physical events. The subway rides help demystify the symbols and help students understand how symbols, formulas, and rules are developed. Through these experiences they gain a sense of self and are able to define the world.

Given my own history with the lack of opportunity to study Algebra in school, this work became critically important to me as I sought ways to increase access to Algebra for our middle and high school students. This work led me on a quest to reconstruct, not only the way Algebra is taught, but the way we think about Algebra as fundamental to the democratic way of life that theorists such as Moses, Counts, and Dewey advocate. So, as a result of my research during the following school year, I embarked on a new journey to teach Algebra in a way that is very different from the traditional way. I began using what Moses and Dewey refer to as experiential learning where content relevance for students was emphasized while focusing on outcomes that promote the democratic sentiments of Counts (1969). In addition, I utilized the curriculum and my relationship with students to develop and foster interest in the world around them. What happens after school is just as important as what we teach in school. Are my students prepared for life beyond school? Are my students good community members? Do they care about the environment? Do they recognize social injustice, and are they willing to speak out against it?

A quality education has the power to change lives as well as attitudes about life. I

wondered why this powerful, life changing curriculum is not being utilized in all schools serving disadvantaged youth, particularly when the achievement gap is widening and many young people leave high school with an eighth grade education unable to find employment.

As I reflected on this book project and its impact on my educational experiences, I realized that after being accepted to the program, this was the second significant event toward freedom from my label as a high school dropout. As an educator, I am always looking for ways to renew and to grow professionally for the benefit of my students. Henderson and Kesson (2004) wrote,

> During curriculum enactment we must stick our necks out in a high-minded, determined, and consistent way. (p.37)

A few years ago, I had been asking the District to consider teaching Algebra in two years to our below-grade-level, slow learners, and our special needs students who clearly we continue to fail in terms of closing the achievement gap, as well as preparing them to be productive members of our democratic society. Finally, on the last day of the year I got the Superintendent to agree to allow us to pilot the idea next year (09/10). Ultimately, the goal is to prepare disadvantaged students for being able to take upper level math courses in high school prior to going to college. Too often, students are leaving high school unprepared. We want students to leave high school prepared for college mathematics without having to spend time and money taking remedial courses that don't count toward graduation. In the book *Education for Everyone*, John Goodlad (2004) writes the following,

> The idea of a good and meaningful life for all has been around; it seems in various guises since time immemorial. Yet it remains in many respects a radical idea. The U.S.
> Constitution speaks specifically of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (p.)

These are the ideas at the heart of American democracy. But simply "having democracy" does not necessarily provide everyone with access to the "good life," however we choose to define it. This is where education comes into play. For those who are not, by virtue of wealth and status, born into the good life, education is our best hope for providing opportunities to them that otherwise might not exist (Goodlad, Goodlad, & Mantle-Bromley, 2004, pp. 45-46).

As a result of my past, present and future, I know what it means to dream big. I know what hard work, perseverance, and endurance can bring. I also know how people, places and things can ignite a passion for learning beyond traditional means. I know all too well the power of education to transform one's life. It is this knowledge that I hope to continue to pass along as I continue to seek ways to give back.

Breakthrough

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.

—Mark Twain

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. When the second semester arrived, I was relieved that I had completed my first semester of the PhD program, but I still had feelings that they would soon find out I didn't belong here. While my professional persona of being a classroom teacher at all levels (elementary, middle and high school) was one of confidence, I was struggling with my confidence in being a PhD student. However, one of the things I discovered early on in the program is that pursuing a PhD gave me the intellectual stimulation that I had not gotten ever during professional development provided

at any school I had served in. It also in many ways led me to feeling a little bit alone in that the people that you think would understand you most are the people who didn't understand at all. I spent at least three evenings a week with fellow PhD students who understood not only the challenges associated with pursuing a PhD, but the challenges of balancing work and family as well. By day I resumed my role as a classroom teacher and teacher leader; it is in this space I felt isolated because while I was excited about what I was learning, the challenge was to share this knowledge in a way that did not threaten the administrators and alienate my colleagues.

You see, I was cautious about not giving the perception that I knew everything and/or could solve the complex issues of school alone. What I most understood was that teaching, learning, the structure of school and our families are all complex issues that can only be resolved by stakeholders working together. With this understanding, how do we best use our resources and work to create a more socially, just learning environment where our children's and their family's needs are being met by a school that has accepted the responsibility to educate all? I realized how my growth as a professional in a PhD program at a prestigious institution as Miami University was threatening to some. However, since I started this journey, my goal has been to empower myself and to create teacher agency not only for me, but my colleagues as well. I am grounded in a spiritual belief that "What God has for you is just for you and what God has for me is just for me." So, I live in the reality that when my assignment in a particular position is completed that God will elevate me to my next position. I don't operate in a space that would lead me to look at taking over someone else's position.

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. In the summer of 2009, I meet Dr. Sheri Leafgren while taking EDL 780, Curriculum Planning. Little did I know at the time that this course would be what I needed to finally come to terms with my negative perception of being a high school drop-out. In fact, as I reflect on this transformative experience I think of it as taking a bandage off of a wound that had finally healed. The scar and the memory of the injury are still there, but it is healed and serves as a reminder of what makes me unique in my thinking about life and the journey of education having endless possibilities.

In the course syllabus she outlined the following expectations:

It is expected that each participant will attend, be prepared for, and participate in each class meeting. Preparation includes engaging in the significant amount of readings assigned for each session—each reading serving as prompt to an assigned reflection/representation (for the first three weeks), and as an influential source for a self-selected curriculum problem to solve. (If one must miss a session, the group can work together to determine a compensatory activity).

It is expected that participants engage in scholarly and collegial curriculum inquiry—to prepare thoroughly, to listen carefully and critically, and to share openly and thoughtfully.

It is also expected that the participants engage in the course in ways that the readings, dialogues, and activities support one's professional and scholarly needs related to curriculum problem solving.

It is further expected that as curriculum problems emerge, that each participant will engage in their problem with full commitment, intellectual rigor, and personal responsibility to derive the greatest benefit from the project.

It is expected that each participant will complete assignments in the timeframe indicated and with deep attention to the meaning to be made from their engagement in the activity.

And finally, it is expected that each participant will bring their own narratives, expertise and interests to the course and will be willing to lay these personal texts over the many texts of CURRICULUM.

Keep in mind that this was only my second semester in the PhD program, and I was still feeling like they were going to find out any minute that they had made a mistake. In each of the other 2 courses that I had finished during the last semester, everyone had a traditional educational background, which was revealed during the natural course of our conversations during class. After reading the syllabus and later Dr. Leafgren's explanation of the expectations, I knew that two of the expectations would be a struggle for me: "(1) It is expected that participants engage in scholarly and collegial curriculum inquiry—to prepare thoroughly, to listen carefully and critically, and to share openly and thoughtfully," (2) "And finally, it is expected that each participant will bring their own narratives, expertise and interests to the course and will be willing to lay these personal texts over the many texts of CURRICULUM." I was being asked to go deeper and share more of myself and my educational experiences. In my previous courses I don't remember openly telling anyone that I did not go to high school.

In the first half we spent creating a muse. A muse is something or someone that has the ability to excite our creative passion and calls forth our creative spirit and, thus, becomes the focus and inspiration for creative work. I knew from the research I had just conducted on Dr. Bob Moses and the Algebra Project that he and his work to improve mathematics literacy in disadvantaged communities was my muse. It was during the second half of the course in which we were expected to engage in currere that the self-examination process tested me in ways that I didn't anticipate and challenged me to stretch myself in ways I hadn't previously known. The assignment was to write and share a curriculum problem paper. The following are excerpts from Dr. Leafgren's updates to the group:

- The Problem
- How it derived from your currere—your commitment to it (ethical fidelity, see below)
- How what you've read and brought into the problem has both complicated the Problem even while helping you understand it, make disciplined and reasoned judgments, raise more questions, etc.
- How a particular person or idea (muse, or "hero") has given you focus, hope, direction related to your Curriculum Problem.
- What is that direction?

In your currere, you have engaged in self-examination/self-storying—toward cultivating a sense of "ethical fidelity"—being committed and true. Here is where we have--as Sue so eloquently put it—come to the table naked and committed. She asks how does one stay committed enough to do all the uncomfortable work because as she worries, "…if we don't get naked or be our stupidest selves, we won't ever grow." (Remember in that link I sent you re: Kevin's question: "we need to remember Kegan's warning that not growing is costlier still.")

THIS (how do we stay committed?) is where two things come into play: first is the quality of "ethical fidelity." Your currere narrative expressed ways you are moved, haunted, stirred, angered, troubled… From such "soul-stirring events"—examined and articulated—one is changed:

Badiou provides precise definitions for his key ontological concepts of "situation" and "event." He writes that all human situations are complex, open-ended phenomena that recede into infinity. Hence no one can claim to have acquired an

overview of a particular situation. However, individuals can experience a moving, soul-stirring event that inspires them to speak a truth "for all." Such a truth can be interpreted as democratic in the sense that it considers or includes all humanity, even all species on the planet (Badiou, 2005). This truth inspiration, which endures after the specific event has occurred, "compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation" (Badiou, 2001, pp. 41–42). (this is all from Henderson & Kesson's recent Edu. Researcher response to Pinar's book, Intellectual Advancement Through Disciplinarity: Verticality and Horizontality in Curriculum Studies at http://edr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/full/38/2/132)

Dr. Leafgren uses a quote from Sue Barlow a member of our class that rings true to my experience. "It is in this space of nakediness that I ultimately found the healing for my wound." My breakthrough occurred during one of our last sessions held at Dr. Leafgren's home. It was a bonfire, and we were sharing our currere narratives. I had pondered over and over again in my mind how much of my story I felt comfortable with sharing. After hearing several heartwarming stories, I felt that I had nothing to lose. In fact, hearing some of the other stories encouraged me that my story wasn't that bad. So what, I quit school. Look at me now. I have had two successful careers. First, in the military where I rose to the rank of first sergeant, and I am a teacher, and now I am working toward earning the highest degree awarded despite my less than humble beginnings. I began telling my story and after about 10 minutes of giving family background and my early school years, I said it. "I dropped out of school." This was an emotional night for most of us as we shared and listened intently to one another's stories. The mood was one of empathy and shedding tears. It was one of those events that draws you closer as a PhD cohort and was an excellent demonstration of transformative teaching. This was an evening I will never forget. The return to the past in currere allows for working through intellectual and emotional, blocks to reconstruct one's relationship with oneself and the world (Pinar, 1994). By looking into my past and recovering a part of me that I tried to bury because it made me feel like I didn't fit in and inadequate, I was able to finally release the negative feeling I associated with being a drop-out and move forward. This assignment pushed me to discover, think, and grow. I can now celebrate that part of my life's journey with confidence.

Bamboozled

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. It was during my third semester in the program that I actually got to take a course with the professor who was my advisor (Dr. Denise Baszile Taliaferro), and up until this point I had not had a lot of contact with her as it was still early in my program. Being a part-time student creates another host of challenges for navigating the PhD process. Just the nature of being a part-time student limits your communications and interactions with the professors and other scholars alike. So, up to this point in the program, my focus was primarily on theories about curriculum and instruction. Then, during EDL 780D, Dr. D., as I call her, gave us this assignment:

Write a 3-5 page essay recollecting a critical moment in your intellectual development. A critical moment is a moment after which your thinking is distinctly different than it was before that moment It could be within the context of a formal or informal educational experience. It could be, for instance, the moment you read a particular book, had an intriguing conversation, realized you did not know something you thought you should have, or the first time you struggled with the meaning of truth. In your essay, describe the experience, describe what you thought before and after that moment.

Here is what I wrote for this assignment:

   Wow, this assignment generates a wave of emotion for me. It comes on the heels of my spending a considerable amount of time thinking about my positionality as a researcher, my current employment as a classroom teacher, and what the future holds. During winter break, I had surgery, which left me with a lot of time to read and reflect on my future. Recently, I read a series of books about Critical Race Theory (CRT) in an attempt to do an in-depth exploration of this social theory. From these readings I discovered Derrick Bell's theory of "interest convergence" and the notion of school curriculum as a property right. Bell argued that racial advancement of people of color was inextricably linked to serving white interest. White people will tolerate advancements of people of color only when white interests are ultimately served. Following this extensive reading, I began reading Pinar's, *What is Curriculum Theory*, in which I discovered more about the history and policies of No Child Left Behind. Both left me excited about the possibilities as well as feeling like I had been bamboozled.

   The excitement came from learning that there is a real body of work (CRT) out there that inspires those of us committed to doing the work of eliminating the status quo and addressing how we educate those historically undereducated. There is a focus in CRT on praxis, a commitment not only to scholarship, but also to social action toward liberation and the end of oppression. It also was encouraging to know that I was on the right track with my work in the classroom. I believe in culturally relevant teaching, using projects as a way to connect what students are learning to real life, making learning interesting and fun, and meeting students where they are as vehicles for empowering and encouraging students to achieve their full potential. I spend more time planning how I can use the interests of my students and cool projects to teach the standards and less time worrying about teaching to a test where the odds are stacked against my students. Regardless of how hard or how long my colleagues and I work, it goes unrecognized if the students don't pass the test and/or the school doesn't make Adequate Yearly Progress.

   Each year, I set a goal to go above and beyond the standardized curriculum to introduce my students to the world at large. This creates a dichotomy between my requirements to teach the standardized curriculum in the traditional manner and my desire as a professional to decide what knowledge is of most worth and how I deliver it. Projects take time and administrators want to see worksheets and textbooks. This year, our projects included financial management, fair trade chocolate, the hatching of chickens in our classroom, the sewing of drawstring bags which the students used for gym, cold pillows that we sent to service members in Afghanistan, making lip balm, the rap music industry, and the construction of glider airplanes, rockets, and mousetrap cars. Each of these projects allowed the students to utilize mathematics in a real life context, to position themselves as consumers, critical thinkers, and members of a democracy. Not to mention the fact that the students enjoyed these projects immensely. In fact, while we were sewing, a student from another classroom came by to see what we were doing. He said to me, "Why are they having fun? Isn't this a math class? Why doesn't my class get to do things like this?" Of course, this was no surprise to me. I always get comments about whether I teach math or science and my former students always scold me about the fact that they didn't get to do some of these projects. Therein lies my joy of teaching. It is exciting and rewarding to watch students make connections between what they learn in

school and its applicability to their world. They talk about the projects before we start, as well as for weeks afterwards.

I thought that pursuing a Ph.D at Miami would give me a voice in a system that devalues the knowledge of teachers. However, the administrators and my superintendent see my knowledge and praxis of critical pedagogy as arrogance and my confidence as anger. The administrative "guardians" in this system see teachers with intellect and initiative as threats. They are told time and again that "they just aren't team players"- "Mr. Brewer you just don't fit well here at Cedar Grove Elementary School"(Kincheloe, 2008, p. 101). Never mind the fact that students are learning and growing as individuals, are in most cases excited about math, come to school regularly, and have few referrals for behavior issues. Children learn by connecting what they already know with what they are trying to learn. If they cannot actively make meaning out of what they are learning by doing, they will not learn or remember. We must keep in mind that when it comes to knowledge, there are different kinds of knowledge and different ways of acquiring knowledge.

Furthermore, my recent reading also caused a paradigm shift for me. I thought I understood race as a factor in determining inequalities in our society as well as our schools. I thought I understood the intent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT). What I learned makes me feel bamboozled, disappointed, and like I want to get out of what sometimes appears like a hopeless situation. I discovered that according to Diane Ravitch (2010), the Obama administration "dangled $4.3 billion before financially struggling states, threatening to exclude any that limited the number of charter schools" (p.218). Additionally, they also provided funds for states to create a database that links student test scores to individual teachers. Teachers have become solely responsible for the plight of the American education system. I am struggling with how our federal and state governments are expecting teachers to perform the miracle that parents, businessmen, and politicians can't do. They seem to have overlooked the social inequalities that systematically plague students of color and underfunded school districts. I, perhaps like many others, thought that NCLB/RTT would benefit our educational system. It has done nothing of the sort.

In American society, education has always been considered the "great equalizer." The purposes of standardized testing have gone from an equalizer of opportunity to a tool of segregation used to separate, not only by intelligence, but by socio-economic status, wealth, and privilege. A study by Lee and Burkam (2002) reveals the following:

There are many factors preventing education from serving this role as "the great equalizer." Schools serving low-income students receive fewer resources, face greater difficulties attracting qualified teachers, face many more challenges in addressing student's needs, and receive less support from parents. This inequality of school quality is widely recognized. But the inequalities facing children before they enter school are less publicized. We should expect schools to increase achievement for all students, regardless of race, income, class, and prior achievement. But it is unreasonable to expect schools to completely eliminate any large pre-existing inequalities soon after children first enter the education system, especially if those schools are under-funded and over-challenged (Lee and Burkam, 2002, para 3).

In a recent conversation with a friend about her research interest in charter versus public school reading achievement, I began thinking about whether public versus charter schools was an

example of the theory of interest convergence. Republicans, at least in Ohio, have historically favored implementing the voucher system. African- American parents whose children have been historically held prisoners to failing public school systems who have been unable to meet the needs of minority students have been advocates for quality alternative options, while white policymakers support a voucher based public education system that would benefit upper/middle class white parents by allowing them to not only choose charter or private schools, but to push for magnet schools. The theory of interest convergence was unknown to me until recently. This mirage represents interest convergence. The theory of "interest convergence," means that white people will support racial justice only when they understand and see that there is something in it for them, when there is a "convergence" between the interests of white people and racial justice. African-American parents believe they are getting an alternative to failing public schools, while the dominate class of parents gets their choice of specialized courses and/or curricula through charter and magnet schools. The voucher system challenges the traditional public education system, which must change the way in which they educate students or risk further loss of students. Either way the majority of our communities are left with racially isolated, segregated schools, hence, a rollback of the civil rights legislation and maintenance of the status quo. Here I thought that charter schools were created to offer an alternate to families looking to find a better opportunity for educating children, only to find that what was meant for good has gone so wrong from legislation, to the lack of adequate funding to support NCLB/RTT, to disadvantaged students being victimized by standardized testing, to the for-profit management that has created spaces in many cases no better than our traditional public schools, all with no regard for the systematic social inequalities that plague marginalized students.

I always thought the purpose of government was to protect the individual rights of its citizens. Our society is based upon property, and the role of government is to protect that property, thus, maintaining the hegemony and social structures of inequality. While reading, I discovered a theory that links "Whiteness" to property. One of the core tenets of CRT addresses the inequalities of our educational system as property rights. Harris (1993) explains how Whiteness is property to: 1) use and to enjoy certain privileges and 2) exclude other people. A school's curriculum is considered a form of intellectual property. Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that control over the curriculum empowers Whites to determine which students have access not only to top quality curricula, but also honors programs, advanced placement courses, gifted and talented programs, as well as those courses that prepare students for college admission and academic success. Those with better property are entitled to better schools. The quality and quantity varies with the property values of the school. This notion of property also manifests itself in other ways. It is demonstrated in the maintenance of separate schools and, recently, the creation of the vouchers that provide public funding for private schools and charter schools.

CRT provides a conceptual framework for understanding the inequalities in education that result primarily from race and racism. It focuses on the ongoing adverse impact of racism and how institutional racism privileges Whites in education while systematically disenfranchising racially oppressed people. CRT has helped me to situate my work in such a way that I am able to explore the moral and ethical implications and consequences of not only the structure of school, but schooling practices as they impact my practice as a classroom teacher and leader. CRT is a powerful analytical tool to illuminate and to tease apart the intersections of power, race, class, and other modes of domination that not only shape my life choices, but also shape the larger society's struggle over valued cultural and material resources such as schools.

When it comes to knowledge there are different kinds of knowledge and different ways of

acquiring such knowledge. On one side is theory, and on the other side is the practical application of theory. Both types of knowledge are important, and both serve to make me better at what I do. Theoretical knowledge can often lead to a deeper understanding of a concept through seeing it in context of a greater whole and understanding the "why" behind it. Practical knowledge can often lead to a deeper understanding of a concept through the act of doing and personal experience. Practice can only take you so far. Theory helps you apply what you learned from solving one problem to different problems.

Learning for youth takes place in multiple contexts, not solely in schools. These multiple contexts include family settings, community settings, neighborhood and neighborhood-based organizational settings, church and other religious settings, work settings, sports and other recreational settings. Students need multiple sources of support from a variety of institutions to promote their personal and intellectual development. Community resources such as local government services (i.e. police and fire), other non-profit agencies (4H, Junior Achievement, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League Baseball), social services, and other community based organizations can serve as tools for promoting social justice and providing an outlet for historically disadvantaged youth to develop personally, socially, and academically.

While most, if not all, of these programs possess a document that serves as their operational curriculum, it is the experience that they are able to provide that constitutes curriculum that makes them invaluable resources to the growth and development of students. Banks (1991) asserts that if education is to empower marginalized groups, it must be transformative. Being transformative involves helping "students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action" (Banks, 1991, p. 131). Unbound by the constraints of an emphasis on standardized testing and a deficit model in education these student centered programs share an emphasis on helping students create knowledge while providing an opportunity for students to explore interests that lie beyond the scope of the normal school curriculum. They differ from regular classroom instructional units in that they deal with topics not ordinarily covered in the regular school curriculum, and they often use teaching strategies that are different from traditional recitation, drill, and testing practices.

Extra curricula provided through community resources in this counter hegemonic context have the potential to cultivate a love for learning, develop student interests in discovering more uses for what they learn in their lives, find applications for what they learn that will improve the lives of the oppressed, and produce a passion for students to know more about any number of things. Students involved in these kinds of extra-curricular activities find opportunities to shine and are less likely to become disengaged from school. Their success is not measured quantitatively through test scores or through grades, but rather through qualitative measures. Studies have indicated an association between extra-curricular activities in general and positive academic outcomes. These experiences should be viewed as vehicles through which students can apply their interests, knowledge, thinking skills, creative ideas, and task commitment to self-selected problems or areas of study. Extra-curricular activities emphasize authenticity in learning. Students have the opportunity to ask questions and study topics they think are important, and generally, they are allowed to determine the pace and direction of their own learning. Activities are often framed to have some connection to the real world beyond the classroom involving hands-on, project based learning, making them more than just academic exercises. Through these programs students are able to find their inner voices and power; therefore, they feel empowered to affect social change, bring about justice, curiosity, and the

search for gratification. Empowerment in this context is the process of increasing one's sense of personal, interpersonal, or political power so that they can take action to improve their lives. Empowerment can be also described as academic competence, self-efficacy, and initiative. Students must believe they can succeed in learning tasks and have motivation to persevere. For example, stating that dropout rates and urban crime are real problems does not make them real for an individual unless they decide to do something to address the problem. Students benefit from group discussions about the differential status of power among groups in society (e.g., comparison of income or education levels by race) and how to change the cycle of inequities across groups, which don't take place in the classroom for any number of reasons. These discussions among students build critical consciousness, whereby students feel a sense of personal power to make positive changes in their lives, families and communities.

A survey of the goals and mission statements of various organizations that provide extra-curricular programs reveal some common themes. All state a desire to create positive opportunities for youth development. They also all have a component of community service, which implies "doing" something for the benefit of others. Each of the programs emphasizes life skills in the context of meaningful hands-on learning. While not explicitly stated in their goals, all of the programs seem to be engaged in experiential learning. Building upon earlier work by John Dewey and Kurt Levin, educational theorist David Kolb (1984) believes "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). The experiences provided through these community programs engage students in decision making, investigating, experimenting, curiosity, problem solving, creativity, and constructing meaning. The students are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. This interaction between the student and the learning process produces a perception that the learning experience is authentic and, therefore, meaningful to the student.

Learning is all too frequently equated with schooling. Schools alone are not sufficient to enable the optimal academic and personal development of youth (Comer, 1997). Additional educative resources must be made available to children if their optimal development is to occur. Schools are only one of the nation's education institutions (Cremin, 1988). Allocation and coordination of programs, resources, and incentives between and across communities and schools are essential to overcome inequities in economic, political, and social capital. Political and educational leadership will be necessary to overcome these and other challenges.

Students can increase their potential by learning from their experiences. Every experience (whether good or bad, planned or unplanned) should be a step toward achieving goals in life. Dewey (1934) puts it well when he writes, "every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives" (pp. 43-44). William and Ann Schubert (1981) urged educators to "develop ways to form curricula with students so that learning activities come from within them as well as from without" (p. 250). When classroom experiences are interwoven with daily life experiences, students stand a better chance of seeing schooling as a continued important part of their lives. This would probably lessen the number of disengaged and alienated students who eventually dropout of our schools.

The idea of experience as a curriculum is an invitation to extend the notion of curriculum to include outside school curriculum and to emphasize experience as the organizing center of curriculum. Just as the Schuberts (1981) advocated for the evaluation of outside school experiences with Tyler's rationale, the same rationale can be used in analyzing the curricular implications of life experiences in general. The traditional model of school could be improved and, therefore, greatly impact the lives of students through providing the kind of experiences

often associated with community based programs. Each of these community programs has a significant role to play in improving access and opportunity for children historically marginalized by mainstream public schools. The use of community resources serves as a strategy for overcoming the barriers to educational development for urban youth. The existence of such programs, working in urban communities to provide complimentary learning systems to inadequate public education, is a form of social justice in and of itself, although not necessarily a criterion of the organization's missions.

Present Challenges in My Role as Teacher Leader Shaping My Space

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. Every teacher has funny, interesting, and crazy stories that are a source of laughter, frustration, and a renewed passionate commitment to the children and communities in which we serve. Recently, August 9, 2014 our nation experienced another tragic killing of an unarmed African-American teenager (Michael Brown) by a white police officer. As a result, one of the daunting facts that has come out of this incident is the racial disparities that exist in Ferguson, Missouri's police department. According to a recent USA Today article, "In 1970, Ferguson was 99% white; now, the city has a 29% white population and 67% black. The police department, however, does not reflect the demographics of the town's residents — only three of the 53-officer department are black" http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2014/08/14/ferguson-police-department-details/14064451/.

Reading this article and a recent conversation with my best friend reminded me why I continue to teach in the midst of school chaos. You see the teaching staff in my school and district also bears little demographic resemblance to the students who attend. Seventy five percent of the 600 children that attend my elementary school are African-American and 16% are white. Of the 35 classroom teachers and intervention specialists only 2 are African-American. Last year in November, a new African-American female student arrived in my classroom. After a few days, she had become comfortable in class, and she began to get involved and participate in our classroom discourse about math, science, family, and the world at large. I could immediately tell that she was an accelerated student who was eager to learn. I also had a hunch that she was gifted, and I wanted to have her screened for the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. When I went to our school psychologist who does the testing I was told that, "We only screen in the fall and the spring." She would have to wait until spring. Naturally, that did not sit well with me, and as I pursued the policy, I began to ruffle some feathers with the suggestion that we needed to do what is in the best interest of our children regardless of the policy, especially in light of the fact our GATE program is also a reflection of the disproportionality of our school. Of the 20 students in the GATE program, only 2 were African-American. Shortly after my conversation with the school psychologist, I got an email from the principal explaining that if the school gives the test to one student outside of the scheduled screening windows, it opens the door for other parents to request to have their children tested. This response of course didn't sit well with me either.

Later in May (2014) this student participated in a City Wide Mathematics and Science competition sponsored by the University of Cincinnati. She overwhelmingly competed against students from across our city in science fair, toothpick bridge building, egg drop, glider, and essay composition and won first place in each event. The Dean of the College of Applied Engineering wrote her a letter to acknowledge her exceptional performance, particularly her science fair project research knowledge. I made sure that our school officials got a copy of the

letter and placed a copy in her cumulative student file. Imagine that, the Dean of the College taking the time to write to a 4th grade student. It was exciting, and I was very proud to be her teacher. This is why I stay in the classroom as a teacher leader and remind colleagues and perspective teachers when I speak to undergrads in Miami Universities (EDL 318) Teacher Leadership and School Organization course (designed to challenge and shape students' conceptions of educational organizations and cultures; their professional development as teachers and/or educational staff members; as well as the acts of teaching, curriculum development, teaming and leadership) that we must teach every child as if we are teaching the next Einstein (he did not speak until he was four and did not read until he was seven, as a result his teachers and parents thought he was mentally disabled and anti-social) or Dr. Ben Carson (he overcame childhood poverty, bad grades, and anger issues to become a neurosurgeon). Our job is to defy the odds at every opportunity and unleash potential that might go unleashed if we don't inspire, encourage, model, challenge, reach, and have faith in our students. As one of the two African-American teachers, in the school, if I don't advocate for those who don't currently have a voice in our school system and those who have been historically marginalized by challenging the status quo, who will? By the way, I forgot to mention that the North College Hill Police Department like the Ferguson Police Department and the North College Hill City School District all lack diversity and does not reflect the demographics of the town's residents or in the case of the school student population. In fact, the North College Hill Police Department does not have any minority officers.

Schools are involved in framing ideas about race and in struggles around racial equity. They serve as a sorting mechanism, providing different students with access to different kinds of experiences, opportunities, and knowledge, which then shapes future opportunities. We must acknowledge the way in which schools are structured and have policies and practices that are implemented to reproduce the very inequalities that they should break down. Another recent challenge in my role as a teacher leader is one of helping my district leadership along with my white colleagues understand the importance of not creating an opportunity gap as we try to close the achievement gap on so many levels. Remember, I mentioned that I am one of only two African-American teachers in a school that serves predominately African-American children. Closing the achievement gap, while not creating an opportunity gap, is the civil rights issue of our time. The Glossary of Education Reform states, "the term opportunity gap refers to the ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, and familial situations contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students" (edglossary.org).

Despite the promises of equal educational opportunity, school systems like mine continue largely to fail to provide low-income and minority children access to the high-quality education they need to compete in a global society. Many experts have since asserted that achievement gaps are the result of more subtle environmental factors and "opportunity gaps" in the resources available to poor versus wealthy children. Being raised in a low-income family, for example, often means having fewer educational resources at home, in addition to poor health care and nutrition. At the same time, studies have also found that children in poverty whose parents provide engaging learning environments at home do not start school with the same academic readiness gaps seen among poor children generally (Sparks, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Viadero, 2000). Education, school funding policies and lack of cultural competency by school staff can exacerbate these opportunity gaps.

I was recently asked to speak at a school board meeting about the new curriculum that the District adopted. One of the false ideas that our administrators have is that anyone should be able to come in, pick up your lesson plan, and teach. Unfortunately, this is not possible for several reasons:

(1) Schools send or conduct professional development for the new common core standards so that teachers are adequately trained to deliver instruction, so if the standards require so much professional development how can someone without this extensive training be expected to deliver the content?

(2) Often times substitute teachers lack the mathematics background necessary to adequately teach the common core standards.

(3) The new common core standards require that students be taught to solve math problems using multiple strategies. This kind of expectation would require that the substitute have prior knowledge of what the teacher will expect them to teach and that the substitute would have adequate time to learn the strategies. It also assumes that the substitute teacher has the time and is interested in preparing to teach the content in advance of the assignment.

At the conclusion of the middle school staff presentation on ways in which Chromebooks were being utilized as a result of the District's 1 to 1 implementation policy, we were asked if anyone had any questions. Being mindful, of my superintendent's perception of me being adversarial I was careful to preface my question with these statements first: "After having worked in each of our buildings over my nine year tenure, I have had the opportunity to build relationships with children and their families across grades levels. We have families with multiple children in different buildings with no access to a Chromebook because they can't afford the $50 insurance fee. Does the district have a plan for ensuring that there is at least one Chromebook made available to those families?" Well, the Superintendent took my concern as a personal attack. He began by telling us, me specifically, as he said "Ms. Webb our district has come a long way from where we were one year ago, and we didn't have many families that were interested in taking a Chromebook home." I replied that that's great but that this fact should create a space for us to look at creating a policy for next year to assist those families that need assistance. I then made them aware that I had personal knowledge of a few families that had expressed an interest to me and that I had also personally sponsored a family. He followed up with the notion that many of our families don't have access to the internet at home. I reminded everyone that many of our families now have Smart T.V.'s and if they have cable then they have access to the internet in most cases. Additionally, free WiFi is available at our corner McDonald's, as well as other local establishments. Finally, I simply reminded them that we cannot punish the children for the decisions of their parents. Children don't make the financial decisions for their household. I ended my comments.

As I looked around the room to see what the reaction to my concern was, I noticed my colleagues a kindergarten teacher and two first grade teachers were in complete shock. One looked at me with her mouth wide open. I think they were simply surprised that I would voice my concern and then reply to the superintendent's comments. You see, we have this atmosphere of just going along to get along, and no one dares to present a different perspective for fear that they might end up like me on his adversarial list. One school board member, an African-American man, was taking notes and asking questions about the percentage of students who do actually take the Chromebooks home by building. Often policy decisions and life circumstances conspire to create an opportunity gap that leads to an inescapable achievement gap.

The following day I got this email from the Superintendent:

GG   Mar 10

to me

Mary,

      We share a zeal for technology and the impact that it can have on learning. As a result of our conversation last evening I would like to share some thoughts. Also, I talked to NM, dean at Diamond Oaks, to gather more information on their implementation. Let me say that I share your interest in increasing access to technology for our students.

      The District Technology Team (DTT) has done a **great job** of managing the 1:1 implementation.

      Members of the team are: Ann Brinkley, Michelle Garton, Sheri Renneker, Lori Hardaway, Tricia McMillan, Zack Lewis, Joe Vlachos, Rob Kovacs, Kay Faris and myself.

      The team deployed 1200 chrome books successfully. I am proud to say the computers are having a positive impact and we have received so much positive feedback from students, staff, and parents.

      The DTT looked at a variety of models and made the decision to self-insure. The $50 care fee is self-insurance for anything that might happen to the computer. In the high school we have 207 students who paid the fee representing 51.6% of the student body. 106 middle school students paid the fee representing 20%.

      When we researched 1:1 initiatives we looked at Reading. They charged a $50 fee and 100% of the families paid it. A few did installments, but in the end I was told that they all paid.

      We looked at the Great Oaks model. Ann B. obtained the paperwork from Diamond Oaks. To clarify, all students at Great Oaks do not receive one for free. Oaks students must pay a $40 care fee unless they are on free lunch. The Oaks is also self-insured. The difference between our implementation is that the Oaks could not have done 1:1 if they charged a care fee to all students because students on free lunch who did not pay the fee would not have had equal access.

      Our students who are unable to pay the care fee have access to technology every day in the media center until 4:30 p.m. On average 10 students take advantage of this. From where we were 1 year ago we have come a long way and I look forward to the program evolving next year. We navigated many obstacles to provide our students with 1:1 throughout the day. I would love to increase access outside the school day. Any suggestions you have on how to manage this better can be provided to any member of the District Technology Team.

      After I received that email, I sent an email to members of the technology committee in my building to request their assistance in crafting a policy for next school year. Ironically, one of the members I sent the email to had a response that I found equally unsatisfactory and judgmental. He said, "I don't understand how parents can buy T.V.'s and shoes, but they won't make sure that their child has $50 for a computer. If it were your child wouldn't you?" I replied that we have to respect the values of our families, which might be different from ours and not penalize the children for the decisions of their parents. I also reminded him that we should not be creating an opportunity gap for children who are already at an educational disadvantage by the

nature of the family they were born into. School leaders and their communities must engage in transformative leadership through partnerships where they re-conceptualize their practice based on a social justice agenda and their responsibilities to the students they serve. They must challenge political, economic, and social structures that privilege some and disadvantage others in the name of democracy, equity, ethics, and care. They must dismantle unequal power relationships based on gender, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, language, and other systems of oppression. Districts, schools, parents, educators, and policymakers must engage in uncomfortable conversations about how we inadvertently create opportunity gaps while trying to close the achievement gap. This is an issue that we have not yet resolved.

As a scholar, practitioner, and a leader for social justice, it is my belief, which is also held widely by critical theorists, that my work should "benefit those who are marginalized in the society" and that "the current way society is organized is unjust" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21). I am impelled by a moral purpose to work toward improving conditions for learning for students, both within the confines of the school building and in those spaces outside of school. On a daily basis, my vision of what could or should be drives my actions. It propels me to search for solutions that not only empower students, but will optimize their learning while giving them hope for the future. As a critical mathematics teacher, my goals are to cultivate an understanding and hopefully a love for mathematics, develop an interest in discovering more uses for math in the lives of students, and devise "generative themes" (Shor, 1992) taking from the students' lived experiences that are compelling and controversial enough to elicit their excitement and commitment to the possibilities. The goal of my leadership in this research effort is to move community members and school members from rhetoric to action, to move from our common knowledge about the achievement gap and social inequities to what we can do with our knowledge, resources, and understanding of racial and cultural inequities to improve the mathematics and science experiences of urban African-American youth while facilitating real change and progress toward re-visioning a strong equitable agenda for all students.

In 1932, George Counts, in his speech before the Progressive Education Association and later in his book, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?,* challenged educators to become leaders for social justice. Counts (1932) identified with the more radical notion that all "resources must be dedicated to the promotion of the welfare of the great masses of the people" (p. 43). The essence of Counts' dare, which was to create an educational system in which all students could benefit and be successful, has reemerged as a leadership challenge as not only part of our educational agenda, but for our political and social agendas as well. The work of leadership is moral and transformative because it is committed to a pedagogy of freedom that labors to see democratic practice and equitable treatment of all members of the learning community regardless of race, gender, class, ability, age, or sexual orientation (Freire, 1998). Central to our work in critical pedagogy is the effort to end the dissonant reality of oppression. Transformative leadership creates a space to encourage stakeholders to include students to dream and empower everyone to act. I close with my commitment to the position suggested by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

> Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expedience asks the question, is it politic? But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he and she must make it because their conscience tells them it is right.

A Proper Sense of Priorities, Address delivered to Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam

Adjusting the Prescription: A Vision and A Vehicle For Change

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. To learn is to develop an identity through modes of participating with others in communities of practice. Identity is the who-we-are that develops in our own minds and in the minds of others as we interact. It includes our knowledge and experiences, and also our perceptions of ourselves (e.g. beliefs, values, desires and motivations), others' perceptions of us, and our perceptions of others (Wenger, 1998).

Time, space, and materials are critical components of an effective learning environment. I have always worked in financially disadvantaged school districts by choice. As a result, as a teacher, I often face a lack of adequate materials and supplies to provide my students with the kinds of educational opportunities that I believe they deserve and the ones that have to power to be transformative. One of the things that I have discovered based upon my experience in the classroom is that the traditional structure of school turns off the amazing desire, capacity, and motivation to learn. Classrooms as we know them today are a product of history, not of research into how children learn best, with little to no focus on the individual student and their growth, but instead the standard education is a one size fits all model.

I strive to create a positive environment for teaching and learning and believe it is a shared responsibility. Preparing our youth to participate in a democratic society is a task that belongs to all of us. In addition to creating a culturally competent classroom that values cultural and individual differences, one of the skills that I have developed as a classroom teacher and leader is my ability to bring community resources together to support hands-on exploration learning and summer camp opportunities that my district has failed to provide. The district leadership in my opinion has failed more by soliciting the support of the business community at large to include corporate sponsors. Creating a successful community school partnership is a complex, challenging, and time-consuming task. However, it is one that benefits children and their families, and ultimately the community is better off as a result.

Rather than waiting for those resources to show up at my classroom door, I decided to go in search of opportunities that provide financial support, technical support, and mentoring. Through the use of community resources I have been able to change the educational experiences of not only the students in the school in which I teach, but children in other communities through my work facilitating summer camps.

By moving beyond the classroom practice of teaching with the sole purpose of passing the test, I am able to differentiate instruction to create an array of learning opportunities and connect school lessons with daily life and the interests of my students. Through self-development I have learned how to write grants to fund our classroom projects. Each year for the last 4 years, I have been able to secure about $2,000 - $4,000 in grants, which I have used to purchase materials, supplies, and fund field trips. In addition, I have created a partnership with several organizations to support student opportunities to learn things that cannot be measured by standardized testing. While there are a number of organizations that support my classroom with materials and technical support, some of our partners that support us financially include a local church, a branch of the University of Cincinnati, Hamilton County 4H, and an architectural firm.

The resources I am able to secure allow me to be the change I want to see in the classroom. We don't all learn at the same rate, and we are not all interested in the same things.

These resources have allowed me to tailor instruction to meet the needs of each student while providing them with the opportunity to use their hands, engage in problem solving, creativity, collaborations, and best of all they create something that they are proud of and can take home. For example, while teaching area and perimeter, students were given the option of creating a shadow box or creating their dream room. One girl in the class decided she would create her dream bedroom. This girl was often tinkering with things during instruction and was more interested in making little things out of paper. So, during class we used cardboard to build a three dimensional model of a room. This occurred on a Thursday toward the end of class. So, we only got the structure built. The next day she was ready to get started. She asked if she could go ask the art teacher for pink paint which I didn't have. She also had begun to make furniture (a bed and dresser) for her bedroom. I had finally figured out what she was interested in. Because she wanted to get to her project she paid attention to instruction, participated, and finished her practice work with her partner. At the end of the day, she asked if she could take her project home over the weekend.

All projects are designed with the notion that they will be completed in class, using the materials and supplies that I have acquired. However, I am happy when they want to take something home to work on. While it is great if parents and/or another adult can assist my students at home, it is not a requirement. I don't want parents or students feeling guilty if they can't help their child for any reason. What I expect is that they would be their child's encourager. I know my families and those parents that can help will, and those who can't will communicate their needs to me. This is one of those experiences that has occurred over and over again, where I feel like teaching is similar to practicing medicine. Just as a patient's illness is often an experiential learning ground where doctors try out various forms of treatment in an effort to find the one that works, I believe the same applies to teaching as we are trying to craft practices that meet the individual needs of each student. Finding and using this student's talent for design to motivate her to consistently complete assignments was a huge deal for both of us. For me, it's that A-Ha moment that I got it right. Her grades improved, her self-esteem improved, and she gots to use her creativity to do something she was good at in school. One day she proudly brought me her progress report that I had given her earlier to show me that her grade had improved. Additionally, her classmates recognized her talent and asked her for advice with their projects.

In this technological age, working with your hands can bring a sense of satisfaction that is lacking in zeal when we solely use computers as a tool for learning. When I was in school, there used to be electives such as shop and home economics, classes where math and science were used to engage in project based learning. Students made tables, lamps, and learned how to sew and cook. It is when we are engaging students in this kind of learning that we bring academics to life. While computers are an awesome tool to have in the classroom specifically for differentiation, research, writing, data collection and presentations, amongst other things, they can only replace traditional textbooks, teacher time, and educational props; they cannot replace opportunities for authentic hands-on learning. Thus, our goal should be to use computers and software tools to improve collaboration and knowledge construction.

After being assigned to the elementary school as a mathematics and science teacher, I decided that a great place to use these resources would be to host an annual science fair for our 4th Grades. After some hesitation, I was able to convince the other two teachers on the team to agree to participate. I did all of the work in putting together a science fair packet that would go home to parents with a detailed outline of topics, a timeline, and the format four months prior to

the actual science fair. I even committed my resources to any student who needed them to complete their science fair projects. I made arrangements with Minorities in Mathematics, Science and Engineering (community partner) to provide a science fair tri-fold board to each student. I elicited the help of my high school students after school to serve as mentors and technical advisors to the students who needed additional support. One day while in the teacher workroom, after about a month and a half, I asked one of the teachers how things were going with the science fair. She replied that she decided "not to participate because it was too much." While disappointed that she would not continue, I understood how such an undertaking like this could be overwhelming. I suggested that if she had anyone who wanted to continue that they come see me for support. Like me, she teaches about 50 students. Of those, only one actually completed a project.

Some of the teachers feel like these kinds of experiences, along with homework, are pointless because as they say, "The students don't do them anyway." I challenge them by asking if they cared whether their own child's teacher gave homework or denied them the opportunity to complete homework because some of their students didn't complete the assignment. Further, I challenged their traditional practice of giving a packet on Monday that is then due on Friday or the following Monday. Are these assignments relevant to the day's instruction? How can you make adjustments to instruction or clear up misconceptions if you don't see the homework packet until the end of the week? The more I thought about it, the more I thought about the lost opportunity to provide the students with this valuable experience due to low expectations for African-American children. As it stands, when they go to middle and high school they are required to complete a science fair project, not to mention that every first Saturday in May is our annual City Wide Competition sponsored by the University of Cincinnati. Along with their science fair projects, students compete in the egg-drop, mousetrap car, glider, toothpick bridge, and essay competitions against students from across our city. I haven't missed an opportunity to take my students to this event in 15 years. In fact, not only have I not missed the opportunity to engage students in this rewarding opportunity, but upon our return from winter break, I spend every day after-school with 20 students in grades 4-12 as they prepare to compete.

Despite the lack of support from my school and my district, I continue this important work for several reasons. First, it is an awesome experience to see a student surprised that they actually built something that works and wait until they get to competitions. The excitement of the experience is unparalleled to anything we could provide in school. Second, if not me, then who would do it? Who cares if they have these opportunities? How do I expose them to the possibilities if I don't expect them to take risks? That's part of the process of learning. Finally, one of my students, who is amongst the brightest in the class, but whose parents, while they support her, are unaware of her potential to be and do whatever she desires, was searching for a project. I encouraged her to challenge herself to select something that a 4th grader would not select. She accepted my challenge and decided to research penicillin. From that day, she conducted research and wrote daily about penicillin. She began her experiment to grow mold on oranges. After a couple of days, she came back to school and reported that her brother didn't know it was her science fair project and ate them. I told her not to worry and gave her three more oranges to start over. She continued her research and began asking questions about doctors and medicine. So, I told her that she was going to be my doctor. A few days later while I was at my desk working with another student, I overheard this girl telling another student who was not wearing a stethoscope that "Ms. Webb thinks I can be a doctor, she said I am her doctor. She told my parents that I have to do all of these projects because I am going to be a doctor."

The next week I brought in stethoscopes and had her along with nine others wear them around school. In mathematics they were learning about collecting data and graphing it on a line plot, so I decided to have the doctors check the student's heart rate at rest and then after running in place for one minute. By this time the doctors had been wearing the stethoscopes around school, and some of them asked if they could take them home to show their parents. I had not imagined how something as simple as a stethoscope would create so much buzz around the school. So, not only were students in other classes asking my doctors why they were wearing stethoscopes, the little kids in 1st and 2nd grade where asking them if they were doctors. You can imagine how just the question about their being doctors boosted their self-esteem and, I would dare to say, their idea of this possibility. In fact, the girl who calls herself my doctor decided to go check in with the nurse to see if she needed help in the clinic. The nurse allowed her to give peppermints, the standard protocol in elementary school for most ailments, and showed her how to check a student's temperature. Her next question was how fast should your heart beat? My response was, "I don't know. Why don't you research it and let us know?"

The idea that schools might be places for nurturing critical thought, creativity, self-initiative, or the ability to learn on one's own the kinds of skills most needed for success in today's economy is the furthest thing from the minds of many administrators' in this no-child-left-untested climate. We should not be surprised that learning is unpleasant. Through questioning and exploring, students acquire an enormous amount of knowledge about the physical and social world around them, and in their play, they practice skills that promote their physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development. Changing the educational experiences of children by moving beyond the classroom walls can diversify the array of learning opportunities and connect school lessons with daily life and real problems.

Linking the Past to the Future

To understand who I am, I must examine and acknowledge who I have been. I am not sure what the future holds, but see my dissertation experience as not the culmination of who I am or what I know, but as my ticket into the conversation. I hope that being awarded this PhD will open doors to opportunities not only to continue my work with children, but to continue to work with teachers. This dissertation has served as a vehicle for my heightened sense of awareness and a vigilance for discovering connections and making meaning. Eudora Welty (date) so artfully describes this experience:

> Connections slow emerge. Like distance landmarks you are approaching, cause and effect begin to align themselves, draw closer together. Experiences too indefinite of outline to themselves are connect and are identified as a larger shape. And sudden a light is thrown back as when your train makes a curve showing that there has been a mountain of meaning raising behind you on the way you've come is raising there still, proven know through retrospect. (p.98)

Concluding Thoughts

I invite educators to share my personal story in an attempt to explain my passion for teaching, learning, and resisting the status quo and to give you hope that we can and do make a difference in the lives of our students. While I am a mathematics teacher, my study reaches out to teachers in all disciplines. The ramifications extend to any teacher wanting to improve their classroom practices through reflection. Through critical reflection and identity construction teachers can improve instruction and, thereby, improve student learning and achievement in any discipline. This kind of reflection gives us the opportunity to share our truth and to expose the

intricacies of what it is really like to be in the classroom with 30 budding personalities, the care we give, and the joy we share when they discover the true meaning of learning. As others read this account, the goal is simply to help as many educators as possible to be able to not only find but contribute their voices to the narrative of what does happen, what could happen, and what should happen in classrooms today. Qualitative research invites personal interpretations of research. It is my hope that readers can construct meaning for themselves through my experiences. Further, I hope that my story might influence practice and efficacy for current and future educators. Let's take back the joy of teaching and learning that really makes a difference in the lives of our children. Let's create this space where school is interesting and learning is cool because there are no limits on what we can do both inside and outside of our classrooms.

"When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well." —Parker J. Palmer, *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* (1998, p. 2)

This is an illustration of my currere that I used during my defense to tell my story.

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