CURRICULUM FRAGMENTS IN THE BOUNDARIES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DISABILITY STUDIES: AN EDUCATOR'S JOURNEY FOR A NARRATIVE

Ashley Cartell Johnson

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Thomas Poetter, Director
Brian Schultz, Reader
Joe Malin, Reader
Amity Noltemeyer, Graduate School Representative

ABSTRACT

In this self-study, I propose a curriculum fragment methodology to work toward a greater understanding of the boundaries (Herdandez-Saca et al., 2023) between special education and disability studies that strengthens both teacher education and disability studies in education (DSE). Specifically, I engage in critical reflection on my teaching practices (Freire, 1998) to explore the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies. In this study, I use curriculum fragments (Poetter & Googins, 2015) to frame a methodology as supported by the curriculum studies traditions of currere (Pinar, 1975), Teacher Lore (Schubert, 1989), and narrative points-of-entry (Schultz et al., 2010). My aim is to excavate my experiences as an educator and professional working with disabled students and adults labeled with multiple and intellectual disabilities and my current experiences as a teacher educator by leveraging curriculum fragments that flow freely through Pinar's (1975) four stages of currere and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (2008) to facilitate my journey for a narrative. The culmination of this curriculum fragment methodology leads to reimagined possibilities in the boundaries that ultimately culminate with Pinar's (1975) synthetical stage presented in curriculum fragments that interlace the past, present, and future to enhance my teaching practices.

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To my two biggest loves, Izzy and Lucy.
Beautiful girls, you can do hard things.

And to the women upon whose shoulders I stand, Helen McCauley, Molly Kelly, Kathy McMahon-Klosterman, and Nickie Coomer.

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Curriculum Fragments in the Boundaries of Special Education and Disability Studies: An Educator's Journey for a Narrative

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the words of Maya Angelou (n.d.), "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

The aim of my dissertation is to embark on a self-work journey to "do better" as an educator, a scholar, and as a person.

This is my reckoning – where my failures, my journey, and my dreams as a special education teacher, a teacher educator, and a disability studies in education (DSE) academic meet curriculum studies scholar Tom Poetter (2017).

In "Curriculum Fragments: Bullied (Bullying)" Poetter (2018) reflects on the aim of telling our stories, our "curriculum fragments" (Poetter & Googins, 2015):

> Perhaps when we surface difficult things and tell the truth about the best we can, we own the implosion and can, on at least a psychic, personal, and relational level, heal, maybe even forgive ourselves, and see the universe as it is exploding all around us more clearly, as both horrifying and awesomely beautiful. (Poetter, 2018, p. 7)

My northstar in this project is to surface my experiences in teaching, the hard and the beautiful, through stories to imagine a future of "doing better."

To introduce my problem and my research question, I present three curriculum fragments, (Poetter & Googins, 2015) or "bits," described by Poetter (2021) as "short narrative take(s)" (p. 2). First, memories from my early years as a middle school teacher, second, a recent conversation with my teacher candidate students, and last, an interaction with a colleague that highlight my challenges and warrants my reckoning.

You Raise Me Up

In five years of teaching middle school-aged students labeled with multiple and intellectual disabilities, it's impossible to remember how many times my students were denied access to the general education curriculum and their same-age peers. Even on rare occasions when colleagues would agree to partner with me and include any of my students in their class, my students were never given full access. During my first year of teaching, after significant resistance, our choir teacher agreed to let four of my students participate in her choir class. They loved to sing, the louder the better, and they loved being a part of the choir. I remember the excitement that I could barely contain on the night of their first fall choir concert – the parents and I kept sharing glances of excitement and anticipation from the front rows of the auditorium. I don't remember what song they sang, but I remember their palpable love of performing and the pride they were carrying in their voices and posture.

As they finished the first song, the choir teacher motioned to my four students to leave the stage. They did, clearly upset and disappointed. They were the only ones – my four girls with visibly identifiable disabilities – asked to leave. The plan for them to only sing one song was not communicated to me or my students' families. My pride and excitement immediately turned to embarrassment and fury as they were removed from the risers. After the concert, I held back tears as I approached the choir teacher and shared my feelings about the blatant display of segregation in the most professional way 22-year-old-me could express myself. It wasn't well received and she told me she was going to go to our principal in the morning. I was about 10 minutes into teaching the first lesson of the day when the loudspeaker came on in my room with the secretary requesting that I go to my principal's office. My arguments to my principal were quickly shut down in the accolades our choir teacher, who was also the teachers' union president, received for including "those kids'' and giving them a "chance." The principal agreed that they "brought down the collective voice of the choir" and that she did what was best for all of the students.

Later that school year Cora, one of my four students in choir, auditioned for a spot to perform in a student showcase at a school assembly. Cora loved to sing. She increased her reading fluency with karaoke performances at the end of every school day. For her audition she sang a Hannah Montana song. She rocked it. She was confident, loud, and determined. Everything you wish a middle school kid could be. More confident than Miley Cyrus herself.

A week later the list was posted outside of the choir room of students who made the cut for the showcase. I remember so vividly watching her read the list, several times, then asking me why she wasn't on the list. The tears. She was truly heartbroken. When I asked the choir teacher why she didn't make the cut she responded with a complete absence of feeling that her performance would be embarrassing and she "didn't want other kids to laugh at her." I was on fire. Instead of trusting that our school community would be supportive of a classmate with Down Syndrome on stage, she excluded her completely.

My students were not going to be shut out by this gatekeeper again. Exhausted by the fight to give my students any sliver of access as a first-year teacher, I started a sign language club that was open to the entire school. We called ourselves the "Happy Hands Club," a nod to the movie *Napoleon Dynamite*. Almost 30 students signed up! I taught basic American Sign Language and eventually taught my students how to interpret and perform songs in ASL. Determined to prove my students' worth to the school, we signed up to try out for the talent show to perform on the last day of school.

I chose a song I knew would make an impact on our school community, and would make the choir teacher look terrible if we didn't make the cut – "You Raise Me Up" by Josh Groban. They learned all the signs, practiced, and crushed their audition. Finally, we had a spot to perform and, in my 22-year-old mind, a chance to win over a school community that segregated them at every opportunity. My clearest memory from the talent show performance was watching my students' faces – they were all shining. My student Josh had been unable to walk into the gym all school year – the

acoustics were too painful to his sensitive sensory system. He walked right into the gym for the first time ever for the performance, visibly negotiating with himself to manage the pain for what I know he perceived as a chance to finally earn the worthiness of existing in the school. They performed the song beautifully. Every person in the auditorium jumped to their feet and cheered for my students. I vividly remember the glowing smiles on each of my students' faces as they watched 300 members of their school community scream and cheer for them when the music stopped. This, I thought, would change everything.

That August, when I knocked on doors asking our guidance counselors and teachers to sign my students up for their classes – I was given the same answer as before, though the "I'm sorry, but I can't" responses were now sugar coated with accolades of how inspirational, amazing, and beautiful my students were. The only thing that changed was that I further exceptionalized my students. I made them an inspiration to our school community. I failed my students in my early teaching career. I objectified them to try to create opportunities for them.

My school community failed them – we failed to recognize their humanity and basic right to be given access to an equitable school experience.

The "Happy Hands Club" wasn't the answer. I didn't even teach about Deaf culture. We had a Deaf substitute teacher in our school. I never asked him if he wanted to participate in any way. He was the sub who almost always covered my classes. I didn't ask if he had feedback or suggestions. I only further exceptionalized my students and was so shortsighted in thinking that making them an inspiration would change their opportunities in the school.

The performance of "You Raise Me Up" is what I am most remembered for in my time as a middle school teacher. We performed at a fundraising event for the school district at the request of one of my administrators. We performed again with several students at the funerals for two of my students at the request of their families. There is a plaque in Gahanna, Ohio, with my name on it that reads "You Raised Us Up" donated to the city by my former students' families. What they

remember as a source of pride is now one of my most shameful memories as a teacher.

What do I do When I Make Mistakes?

I finally am teaching my dream class. Truly. I've been dreaming of this class and this group of students since I began my teaching career at Miami in 2009. I have 13 students who are the first cohort at Miami to receive two teaching licenses – primary (PK-5) general education and primary special education. For the first time, I am teaching as an affiliate faculty member in the department that houses teacher education. During my introduction for the first class of the semester I shared with my new students the history of how their cohort came to be. A wave of emotion washed over me as I shared the current collaborative work with colleagues to reach the goal of an inclusive licensure program. And an even bigger wave hit me as I told them stories about my retired mentors and colleagues, Kathy McMahon-Klosterman and Molly Kelly, who spent their careers as Miami faculty members working toward inclusive blended licensure. Tears filled my eyes as I shared with them how much they meant to me even as we were meeting each other for the first time.

My aim for the course is to teach students how to create accessible and just classroom communities. The real work for the course is to help students situate themselves in the tension of anti-oppressive education working in the liminal space of the current state of special education and a reimagined accessible and just state in education.

In the first weeks I introduced students to the field of disability studies in education. As we discussed the field and its call for leadership from, not for, the disability community we spent a lot of time discussing the paradigm shift of learning about disability from a non-disabled perspective to learning about disability *from* the disability community.

It's our seventh class together. I assigned two readings prior to class: "A Duoethnographic Journey of Inclusion to Access" (Johnson & Hineman, 2019) and

"Critical Coalition with/in the Boundaries: A Radical Love Response to Neoliberal Debilitation in Special Education" (Coomer et al., 2023). In both pieces I share curriculum fragments (Poetter & Googins, 2015) of my experiences as a teacher, including my previously described middle school talent show debacle. I wanted to share my mistakes with my students. More, I wanted my students to see the ways continual reflection can be deeply impactful for educators. We engaged in some sensitive identity work together – and I think it's important for them to see how I engage and work in these hard spaces, too.

I gave my students the discussion prompt: "What are the possibilities of continual reflection on our teaching practices?" A student responded with a question: "What do I do when I make mistakes? I feel scared about making mistakes but maybe I shouldn't be."

I shared with the class that they will, and should, make mistakes. If you are not making mistakes, then you are not taking risks. We discussed how we truly cannot grow as educators if we cannot take risks. To work in that liminal space of what is and what could be, you have to take risks. And you must be willing to get it wrong sometimes. Being comfortable with risks and mistakes exudes the confidence I deeply wish for them to work toward the space of what could be. I teach a lot about the importance of being a just and 6accessible teacher. It wasn't until this class, and truly this conversation, that I realized the importance of how giving them opportunities to further develop their strategies to be self-reflective can support them in having the courage, and ultimately confidence, to reach the northstar of truly becoming a just and accessible educator.

As we wrapped up class, I encouraged students to ask their host teachers for their new field experience questions about making mistakes and the impact they have had on their teaching. The next day, students had their first day in a new classroom with a new host teacher. When I asked my students the following day to share about their experiences, we jumped right back into the conversation from our previous class. Two of my students observed their host teacher make a big mistake

with a student's parent at the end of the school day. Our teacher candidates observed their host teacher problem-solving quickly in the moment, and then were with her when she fell apart and burst into tears in her classroom after. My students capitalized on the moment to immediately support their host teacher by talking about how important they feel it is to make mistakes which led to an honest and vulnerable conversation about the mistakes she has made and the ways she has grown as a teacher.

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I didn't have these conversations with my professors or host teachers as a Miami student in 2005. I felt a huge pressure going into my teaching career to have it together, to know everything, and, honestly, to go change the world. Conversely, I do want my students to go change the world – but not to feel the weight of the world in doing so. I want them to have the agency and the tools to create a classroom culture and community that models the world that they wish to see, that they dream of. And more, the courage to make mistakes and to teach unconventionally to get there.

It's taken me nearly 20 years in the field of education to come to this reckoning. I want my students to be able to develop these reflective skills now. To identify as an educator who is constantly a work in progress seeking to "know better" and "do better," not an educator who realizes many years down the road that it is time for a reckoning.

Enemy

The scene: Morning meeting, early fall semester in 2021, new colleagues sitting around several tables shaped into a square. There's palpable excitement in this new faculty learning community group – 11 colleagues who don't know each other very well, but are excited to come to the table around a shared interest: disability studies. I am helping to support the group with a colleague and am leading with an ice breaker activity and introductions. This isn't a typical introduction; I'm

sweating this one. Like others in the room, I am in an applied profession, and am not just introducing myself, but trying to make a case for why I have the credibility to be in this space, to be supporting this faculty learning community. My profession, special education, is not just objectionable, it's reprehensible to many disability studies scholars. I'm intentional, calculated, trying to open the door for other colleagues sitting around the square to feel comfortable in this new space, as I start my script about being a former teacher who now recognizes the harm in special education practices and teaches for change toward just and accessible teaching practices.

I remember my words clearly; I didn't wing it – I rehearsed.

"Good morning and welcome. My name is Ashley Cartell Johnson and I am a program coordinator and teach courses in both our disability studies program and inclusive special education program. Disability studies gives me a critical lens that informs my work as a special education teacher educator… "

Then, BAM, a disability studies colleague interrupts my introduction.

"So we're enemies," she says to the group.

The jab lands like an actual punch to my face. Even covered with a mask, I'm sure the room could see how her blow landed, could see my reaction – I was so caught off guard, shocked really, and hurt. Everyone turned their wide eyes to me. Fully aware of the awkwardness in the room, I responded in nervous laughter, "We're working on being frienemies."

Nothing. No response.

My Problem

This is my challenge. I am a former special education teacher and current faculty member and program coordinator in both inclusive special education teacher preparation and disability studies programs. I identify as a critical special educator with a disability studies in education (DSE) disposition. I have two fields and roles in my professional career that are historically and conceptually at odds –

in truth, they are enemies. Being called out as an enemy in a public meeting with colleagues is rough though. Navigating through my professional career in adversarial fields is challenging. I do not feel like I am always succeeding.

It is my job to support meaningful instruction and effective and innovative programming and opportunities in both special education and in disability studies.

My problem – my professional fields co-existing at odds with each other – runs deep and impacts both my work, my teaching, and my collegial relationships. My field of special education is an enemy to disability studies and so, it feels like I am perceived to be an enemy to disability studies – that I am the antithesis to the field as a White, non-disabled, special education teacher.

Honestly, when I reflect on my career, I can see how I have been an enemy.

My undergraduate and graduate degrees are in special education, focusing on students labeled with moderate to intensive disabilities. I took many Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) classes in my graduate program at The Ohio State University. I learned how to do research on my students – and I did. My first study was an examination of the effects of sensory rich environments on my students labeled with profound disabilities. Further, my thesis was "An Examination of the Effects of the Nintendo Wii on Performance of Community-Based Job-Skills for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities" (Cartell, 2008). I did research *on* my students. I was the lead teacher in my school for behavior supports and, feeling overwhelmed by the task, became a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. I learned about strategies to help students fit better into school, into society. I coached Special Olympics. I raised a lot of money every year to do the Polar Plunge for Special Olympics. I was featured in an article in the *Columbus Dispatch* newspaper one year for being the top fundraiser for the Special Olympics. I was known as being a strong advocate *for* my students with disabilities. It was a big part of my identity. One of my first dates with my husband was going to a Special Olympics basketball tournament that I led and coached for my students. I clearly remember him telling me that I am such a good person as we were leaving the tournament.

In the world of disability studies, the ways in which I portrayed and objectified my students were harmful and dehumanizing.

For the many ways that I have perpetuated inspiration and other harmful disability stereotypes, I have been an enemy to the disability community. My colleague who called me an enemy doesn't know about my specific teaching experiences; however, they know that I am part of a system that has historically and continually excluded, segregated, and harmed the disability community.

I am outing myself and owning the harm. I don't want to be an enemy to a field that I deeply care about.

In 2009 I was given an opportunity to teach a disability studies course at Miami University. Thrilled by the opportunity, I read as much disability studies scholarship as possible. I immediately realized so many of my teaching practices were antithetical to this entire field of study, largely led by disabled people. I had been so wrong about so many things. About everything. So I've wandered through my career since this defining moment with more questions than answers. And more questions than self-reflection.

> If our work doesn't start with questions and a personal, reflective gauging of who we are in relation to our complex histories and others around us, we are all mere lemmings, and, in a sense, particles bouncing around in the universe with the potential for movement, and embodiment. I have held to the long view, that education is valuable, and that students, that all of us, should make our stories and experiences the centers of it. (Poetter, 2024, p. 14)

In my quest for self-reflection, my research question is: What are the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies?

My quest is my reckoning – to make sense of my failures, my journey, and my dreams as a special education teacher and a teacher educator with a DSE disposition through stories, through curriculum fragments. This is deeply personal, but after teaching for almost 20 years, it's critical to me to engage in this self-study to inform my teaching practices in ways that I can "do better."

My hope is to engage in self-study to revisit my past through curriculum fragments, to sit with and acknowledge my challenges as a teacher, to identify the ways I have contributed to the perpetuation of deficit-based education for disabled students. My aim is to reckon my past with my current positionality as a teacher educator to move into a space where I can contribute in meaningful ways that do not make others feel like I am an enemy. Further, I try to navigate my hard truths through a pathway to a self-understanding that not only influences and enhances my own teaching and curriculum development, but can also present a methodology that can be a model in self-reflection for both teacher educators and teacher candidates, particularly those wading through the boundaries (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023) between special education and disability studies.

Curriculum studies scholar William Pinar (1974) encourages us to explore what is and has been the nature of our educational experience. To me, a reckoning is an accounting for my time as a middle school teacher – accounting for my educational experience as a teacher, who, through a disability studies lens, engaged in pedagogy and practices that were harmful to my students. An accounting for how I have prepared my teacher candidates. An accounting for the assumptions I've made in growing a disability studies minor and a special education program as a non-disabled faculty member.

In Poetter's (2024) *Curriculum Fragments: A Currere Journey through Life Processes* his aim for engaging our educational journeys helps me align my northstar in this project:

> When we take our educational journeys in an effort to understand them and the world and our places in it more completely, to explore them deeply, we become who we are supposed to be, or see truly who we are and what we might become. That finding can be a critical step for thinking about the next

> steps we might take in the world, both internally and externally, as people, as educators, as those who engage in academic study in an attempt to enrich life. To me, this is the curriculum, the curriculum journey, our currere destiny, if we will engage it. (p. 28)

My northstar in this curriculum journey is to see more clearly who I am and what I may become as an educator. In this self-study, I will engage in curriculum fragment methodology as told through a series of stand-alone curriculum fragments, situated across both time and place throughout my teaching career, and work toward a greater understanding of my place in the boundaries (Herdandez-Saca et al., 2023) of special education and disability studies and to reimagine the possibilities as a boundary worker (Bosch, 2023) that strengthens both teacher education preparation and DSE.

More specifically, I want to explore the ways that writing curriculum fragments can help me engage in boundary work (Herdandez-Saca et al., 2023) to gain meaning and bridge my teaching journey from advocating *for* disabled students toward inclusion in public schooling to advocating *with* the disability community toward access and justice.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

There is disconnect and tension between special education, disability studies, and DSE. The northstar of special education is inclusion. Conversely, the northstar of disability studies is access. It's not just semantics. DSE is a space to work both in the boundaries – both in and between the practices of special education and disability studies.

To understand the tension between special education and disability studies and the boundary space of DSE, this literature review explores the history of special education; an overview of the field of disability studies and critical disability studies; the ways that special education further oppresses disabled students; the resistance of disability studies from the field of special education; how to practice critical disability studies in work toward disability justice; and how to engage in boundary work in the tension between special education and disability studies.

Section 1: Special Education: Past and Present

The history of disability and schooling is critical to understanding the tensions between special education, disability studies, and DSE.

History of Special Education

The history of special education is vast. For the purpose of this review, a brief exploration of disability and schooling in its earliest stages shows the pathway of both critical and unfortunate turns in special education that led to the passage of federal special education law and our current system of special education.

Practices in disability and schooling have been widely shaped by the medical model of disability, a construction of disability that defines disability as located *within* an individual and lends to treatments and medical interventions aimed to fix or cure an individual of the disability (Linton, 1998). The intention of most

medicalized interventions are to minimize the effects of a disability and so the child can be more "normal" (Goodley, 2017).

Known as the "Father of Special Education," Dr. Edouard Seguin created and taught a physiological method to cure "imbecility" through the development of motor and sensory skills in the mid-1800s. Following suit, similar approaches were developed in the U.S. in the 1800s and 1900s to advance medical research of disability – all influenced by societal and cultural discriminatory values. State institutionalization of disabled individuals was common practice until the 1970s and 1980s (Nielson, 2013). The Eugenics movement in the U.S. advanced a goal of fitter, healthier, and smarter Americans that led to the institutionalization, sterilization, and systemic murder of disabled individuals who were deemed to be the result of genetic inferiority (Nielson, 2013). The inhumane medical practices throughout our history have deeply influenced our continued emphasis of medical treatment and intervention in response to disability.

The formal existence of special education in U. S. public schools was not mandated until 1975 with the passage of the hard-fought civil rights law, The Education for All Handicapped Act, Public Law 94-142, that ensured a free and appropriate public-school education for all children. Prior to 1975, public schools were legally and regularly excluding disabled children from attendance and services. This significant achievement, while giving disabled students the civil rights to attend public school, reinforced continued medical-based intervention. (Nielson, 2013)

Along this journey, there were two significant and unfortunate turns that have led to ever-present obstacles to socially just and democratic education. Danforth and Gabel (2016) identify the two turns in the history of special education as: 1.) "Building the individual deficit disability construct as the cornerstone of special education ideology, research, legislation, and practice," (p.93) and 2.) "Limiting professional language, thought, and practice to a discourse of positivistic social science" (p. 93) replacing human social issues to technical problems to be

measured and treated. By taking on a professional role of diagnosing and treating students with disabilities with medicalized language and clinical methods, special education has "generally avoided a substantial critique of the broader social conditions and political arrangements that create and maintain the kinds of economic and social marginalization that ensnare and oppress 'disabled' students and their families" (Danforth & Gabel, 2016, p. 99). These unfortunate turns have coalesced in practices that center the medical model of disability that remain the current dominant lens that heavily influences today's special education philosophy and practices.

Many special education scholars have taken strong positions against a socially just framing in which disability is viewed as a marker of diversity. This position is prevalent across special education literature. In the *Handbook of Special Education*, Kauffman et al. (2011) assert, "a particularly important challenge of special education of the 21st century is reaffirming its scientific and logical foundations and rejecting alternative views of disability…" (p. 16). A continued consequence of prominent special education scholars holding their ground in the deficit-focused medical model is the exclusion and segregation of students with disabilities from general education classes with their non-disabled peers. Kauffman et al. (2011) describe the field's increasing emphasis on inclusion as "…a misinterpretation of civil rights law and magical thinking about disability and effective instruction" (p. 22). Additionally, the scholars assert that they "…recommend more concern for what the students learn than for where they learn it" (p.22).

Current federal special education law continues to frame disability as existing within individual students in need of intervention, with a complete lack of examination of the context in which the disability exists (Connor & Gabel, 2013; Cosier & Ashby, 2016; Ferri, 2008). As a result of the field widely continuing as a system based on the medical model, the special education process is reified in a cycle that assesses and categorizes students with specific disability labels, identifies what services students need to be successful in school, and determines where and

when the services should be provided. This process of special education and the culminating interventions rarely include environmental, cultural, and/or schooling practices to create a more holistic picture of students. The perpetuation of this systemic process results in segregation, labeling, and often social isolation for disabled students. Connor and Gabel (2013) argue that this cycle produces a harmful "Hegemony of Normalcy." Critical special education scholars often describe the process and practices of special education as a set of tools to keep disabled students segregated to maintain "classroom efficiency" and to preserve the existing "bureaucracy of education" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 7).

The celebrated history of the passage of special education federal law that was initially emancipatory for disabled students has continually operated as an oppressive system that maintains segregation, stigma, and disproportionate negative outcomes for disabled students today. Furthermore, our unfortunate turns in special education and historically deficit-centered processes and practices grounded in the medical model in teaching practices permeate as well through the field of teacher preparation (Connor & Gabel, 2013; Cosier & Ashby, 2016).

Section 2: Disability Studies

Critical Disability Studies

As a critical theoretical field of study, disability studies offers an academic social movement to disarm the oppressive and unjust social systems, practices, and policies that seek to enforce segregation, prejudice, and discrimination for the disability community (Linton, 1998). Through scholarship and activism, those engaged in disability studies have advocated for more socially just and accessible policies and practices.

Critical disability studies is grounded in the assertion that disability is a social phenomenon – a social construction in opposition to medical and clinical perspectives on disability (Taylor, 2016). Disability – through a critical disability studies lens – is something one *does*, not something one *has*. More specifically, "disability is not a characteristic that exists in the person so defined, but a construct that finds its meaning in social and cultural context" (Taylor, 2016, p. xiv).

Critical disability studies scholars like Simi Linton (1998) renounce individual models of disability and support social models of disability. Society's constructions of disability help us understand how ableism can shape the experiences of the disability community. Critical disability studies aims to disprove the assumptions and misunderstanding of disability and to reimagine disability as a "civil and human rights issue, a minority identity, a sociological formation, a historic community, a diversity group, and a category of critical analysis in culture and the arts" (Garland-Thompson, 2019, p. 12).

As the grass-roots scholarly side to the disability rights movement, critical disability studies offers critical theory for understanding human diversity (Ellis et al., 2019; Garland-Thompson, 2019). Critical disability studies rejects the dominant understanding of disability as an individual problem needing an educational or therapy-based intervention or a medical solution (Ellis et al., 2019). Institutions of education largely adhere to such individual models, namely the medical model (Connor & Valle, 2019). Through this lens, the onus is placed on individuals and the need for treatment (Linton, 1998). Impairments, therefore, become the focal point with little consideration for how ableism shapes the experiences of disabled students who face barriers accessing and participating in schooling (Connor & Valle, 2019). Using critical disability studies as a theoretical framework allows us to examine how "disability becomes a representational system more than a medical problem, a social construction more than a personal misfortune or a bodily flaw, and a subject appropriate for wide-ranging intellectual inquiry" (Garland-Thompson, 2019, p. 12).

Shifting the onus from a lens focused on individuals to a lens exploring social constructions of disability supports a more critical space to examine the interaction between the individual and larger societal values and practices (Connor & Valle 2019). More specifically, critical disability studies calls for a shift to focus on "issues such as equal access for all, integration of institutions, and the historical exclusion of people with disabilities from the public sphere" (Garland-Thompson, 2019, p. 12).

Social Models of Disability

Reflective of multidisciplinary scholarship in disability studies, social models typically encourage people to consider the meaning of disability in the context of social and cultural interactions (Linton, 1998). In contrast to individual and medical models of disability, social models of disability recognize that people may have impairments; however, disability is defined by the physical and social environments that often seek to segregate and oppress (Linton, 1998). Through a theoretical framework, disability studies aims to make clear that the challenges disabled people experience are a case of society's response to their impairments. The idea of social models of disability was first coined by scholar Michael Oliver. Oliver (1996) originally conceptualized models of disability as the binary distinction between what he frames as the individual and social models of disability.

The social models dispute disability as an individual problem and reject the long-standing dominant model of disability focusing on individual impairments needing to be treated, fixed, or cured. The social models of disability, therefore, define impairment as distinct from disability. The social models view disability as a case of an imbalance of power of people with and without impairments and oppressive social practices imposed upon people that invoke unemployment, isolation, segregation, and poverty (Linton, 1998). There are many social models of disability in addition to Oliver's (1996) initial consideration of social models disability, including Marian Corker and Tom Shakespeare's (2002) Postmodern Theory and Alison Kafer's (2013) Relational Model.

In response to the continually emerging additional social models, Oliver (2013) published the article "The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On" to restate his view of the social model and its potential for improving the lives in the disability community. He acknowledges the ways the social model has served as a "vehicle for developing a collective disability consciousness and helped to develop and strengthen the disabled peoples' movement that had begun to emerge a decade earlier" (Oliver, 2013, p. 1024). Oliver (2013) identifies the many ways in which the social model has made progress toward breaking down barriers in media representation, transportation accessibility, and accessibility in public spaces;

however, “there were some barriers that proved, and continue to prove, much more intractable. The hegemony of special education has barely been challenged in schools” (p. 1025).

Critical Disability Praxis

As a non-disabled faculty member in academia engaging in work toward access in education, I rely upon critical disability studies work and theories to guide me as I navigate academia following and supporting the work of disabled scholar activists. Furthermore, I also rely upon critical disability praxis as a methodology toward disability justice (Nishida, 2019) to add further depth and meaning to the work towards accessible and just education. Akemi Nishida (2019) describes critical disability studies as an always-evolving field that “is not only about theory or research, but it is also about lives, how we live, and how we relate to one another” (Nishida, 2019, p. 246). Nishida (2019) bridges critical disability studies with the work of grass-roots disability justice workers through critical disability praxis.

Critical disability praxis calls for practicing disability studies *with* disabled communities, not *for* disabled communities (Nishida, 2019). Critical disability praxis is guided by 10 principles of disability justice as named by Patty Berne et al. (2018), including the principles of interdependence across communities of all identities, intersectionality where each person has multiple identities which shape the experience of disability, and collective access that holistically balances the needs and autonomy of disabled communities. Through critical disability praxis, disability justice work privileges cross-disability solidarity and seeks participation and leadership *from all members* in the disability community (Berne et al., 2018; Nishida, 2019).

Section 3: Disability Studies in Education

Reframing disability as a social phenomenon creates a space for critical implications for educational policy and practice. Critical special educators who challenge special education practices and assumptions often turn to critical disability studies to support a practical concern with educational policy and

schooling practices. This led critical special education scholars to develop a related corollary academic field, disability studies in education, DSE, to generate a base of scholarship and practice to support a counter narrative to the historically deficit-based oppressive practices and philosophies in special education (Connor, 2012).

DSE is an interdisciplinary field that extends the rejection of practices and policies grounded in a medical model of disability to public schooling and special education (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). DSE scholars apply and extend the tenets of critical disability studies to educational contexts in important ways that have called additional attention to the consequences of special education that marginalize disabled students, perpetuate deficit-based narratives, and create real-world negative outcomes for students (Rice, 2006). The medical model of disability, understood in DSE as the guiding framework of special education, is widely critiqued by DSE scholars as exclusionary and harmful to students (Connor, 2015; Danforth, 2008).

DSE aims to reimagine education that, "promotes… social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities…" (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. 32). Teacher preparation can and should take up the mantle of this change now and for the foreseeable future. To support this reimagining, Valle and Connor (2011) identify the following as basic tenets of DSE:

1. contextualizes disability within the political and social sphere;
2. privileges the interests, agendas, and voices of people with disability/disabled people;
3. promotes social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with disability/disabled people; and
4. assumes competence and rejects deficit models of disability (p. 32).

Further, these tenets of DSE provide teacher educators a critical framing for teacher educators that challenges laws, practices, and systems in special education

to move toward more accessible and just schooling (Cosier & Ashby, 2016; Valle & Connor, 2011).

As the field of DSE has widened its base of scholarship and engagement with critical special educators, DSE scholars continually seek engagement with special education to collaborate along the divide between the fields. Many DSE scholars are "representative of educators who navigate the space within and between *both* worlds, working in the structure and apparatus of special education, yet having a DS disposition that views considering disability through a plurality of perspectives as a strength" (Connor, 2019, p. 18). Given the clearly different viewpoints in how disability is conceptualized there are strong tensions between DSE and special education.

Section 4: The Tension Between Disability Studies in Education and Special Education

The tension and the differing views of disability are profound:

> Special education has spurred the discursive, material, and ethical construction of "what counts" as an educational disability on the one hand–high-incidence special education categories such as Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Behavioral Disorder, Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Speech and Language Impairment, for example–while DSE has advanced an agenda of critical theory, pedagogy, and heuristic to understand and critique special education. (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, pp. 4-5)

The roots and current practices of traditional special education clearly and strongly differ from the tenets of DSE. Prominent leaders in special education have diligently maintained an academic monopoly that is rigid and myopic with a deep commitment to keep science as the only basis for the field. Traditional special education scholars Kauffman and Badar (2018) exemplify the ongoing tension in their article "Extremism and Disability Chic." They claim social constructions of disability are "extremist" and lead to "undesirable, distorted positive perceptions and denial of disability, as well as inappropriate responses to it" (p. 46). DSE scholar

David Connor (2019) speaks to this disconnect in the special education literature through a review of six prominent special education articles in his piece "Why is Special Education So Afraid of Disability Studies? Analyzing Attacks of Disdain and Distortion from Leaders in the Field." Through Connor's (2019) systematic review of the traditional special education cannon, he argues that the field of special education continues to hold power and influence and continues to zealously argue that the field must remain defined as scientific. In Connor's (2019) review, he analyzes six recent articles by prominent special education scholars and identifies that all of the articles contained three elements: "1. a harsh critique of the social model of disability, frequently distorting and rejecting its contributions; 2, a defense of scientific knowledge as the 'true' basis of special education; and 3. a generalized tone of fear, anxiety, and anger" (p. 12). In response, Connor (2019) asserts that while "the field of special education still wields power and influence, it also reveals the vulnerability of its own limitations and justifies the imperative of DS/DSE to continue providing other renditions of how we understand, and respond to differences among humans" (p. 20).

Reimagining disability in diverse ways through lived experiences is neither "extreme" nor "chic." It is necessary. DSE will continue to grow and claim that the field of special education is no longer the only voice in disability and education.

Disability studies, an interdisciplinary field charged with a responsibility to critically challenge the portrayals, perceptions, and practices of oppressive discourses regarding ability/disability (Linton, 1998), offers a potential for creating spaces for "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2004) to take place between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. As a critical theoretical framework, disability studies offers an academic side to the ongoing disability rights movement to disarm the oppressive and unjust social systems, practices, and policies that seek to enforce segregation, prejudice, and discrimination for people with disabilities (Linton, 1998). Through scholarship and activism, those engaged in critical disability studies have advocated for policies and practices aimed toward more inclusive and accessible communities and educational spaces.

Disability – through a critical disability studies lens – is something one *does*, not something one *is*. Disability studies scholars like Simi Linton (1998) renounce individual and medical models of disability and support social models of disability. Individual models locate the source of disability in the individuals themselves and frame disability as a deficit. Medical models view disability as a disorder which must be treated, fixed, or cured through medical, psychological, or educational intervention. The social model of disability recognizes that people may have impairments; however, disability is defined by the physical and social environments that often seeks to segregate and oppress (Linton, 1998). Working through a methodology of surfacing curriculum fragments could hold potential in the claiming of disability as an identity for people with disabilities through revisiting experiences in deficit-based practices in special education programming (individual and medical models) then analyzing and synthesizing a future that resituates disability outside of the body (social model).

Section 5: The Boundary Work between Disability Studies in Education and Traditional Special Education

Given that many DSE scholars "navigate the space within and between *both* worlds" (Connor, 2019, p. 18) and consequently navigate in the inherent tension that accompanies this space, it is important to consider the ways critical special educators and DSE scholars, particularly teacher educators with a DSE disposition, negotiate these boundaries between both worlds as a means of engaging in boundary work. Bosch (2023) describes boundary work as "all human efforts toward dignity for self/others that occur in the gaps between special education and DSE" (p. 195). Further, she describes boundary workers as educators who "channel their labor toward goals that subvert problematic special education traditions: honoring the lived experiences and knowledge in DSE critiques; reducing, or eliminating, the harms of a functionalist special education approach" while also "imagining or creating ethical, just, loving ways of learning and teaching" (Bosch, 2023, p. 195).

The consequences of the tension between traditional special education and DSE that create a wall, or a boundary, are numerous and ever present for DSE scholars (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023). These tensions, however, offer "opportunities for individual, institutional and societal transformations, if we reframe the tensions at the boundaries between DSE and special education by centering *a disability justice radical love meta-critical emotionality consiliencatory boundary work praxis that anchors self-study in teacher education*" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 6).

Given the boundary work between DSE and traditional special education and its consequences across both worlds of education scholars, Hernández-Saca, Pearson, and Voulgarides (2023) call for boundary work that "requires vulnerability and transparency that can lead to a consiliencatory framework at this nexus and boundary work of DSE and SPED" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 6).

Consilience Self-Study in Teacher Education Work

Self-reflection is critical in working toward consiliencatory praxis in the boundaries between DSE and special education (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023). Engaging in self-study provides an opportunity for educators, including teacher educators, to gain greater understanding of their different teaching roles, positions, or relationships. Exploring the social construction of the self as a form of meta-analysis is a powerful method of consiliencatory boundary work (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023). More specifically, utilizing "self-study-ing as a conceptual springboard, we move toward our individual and collective boundary-crossing and objects of DSE, (SP)ED, and/or beyond for historical, spatial, cultural, emotional, affective, and discursive development at the axiological, epistemological, ontological, and etiological lines for ALL" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 6).

To further consiliencatory praxis, DSE scholars and educators can extend this method of self-study to curriculum deliberation, specifically through surfacing lived experiences in the boundaries through a currere informed curriculum fragment methodology.

Section 6: Consilience Through Self-Work in Curriculum: Currere

What is Currere?

William Pinar's (1975) creation of currere sparked curriculum scholars to shift from deliberations around the creation of curriculum toward a paradigm around understanding it. As developed by Pinar, (1974, 1975) currere is a reflective process that provides a methodology to engage in past regressions as a means to speculate into the future, while engaging in a meaningful examination in the nooks and crannies of our lived educational experiences with a northstar of synthesizing the pieces to understand the comprehensive meaning.

Currere as a Verb

Pinar (2011) prefers the verb form – currere – because it speaks to the "lived rather than the planned curriculum, although the two are intertwined" (p.1). The verb "emphasizes action, process, and experience in contrast to the noun, which can convey stipulation and completion" (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). Pinar, (1975) from his earliest work, is clear to define currere curriculum as a *process*. Pinar (2011) rejects the notion of curriculum as things (nouns) – syllabi, assessments, text books – and argues that curriculum is "a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope" (p. 178).

Pinar (2011) further describes curriculum in verb form as the "running of the course" (p. 1). The concept of currere advocates for the facilitation of an experience that occurs "socially and subjectively" through academic study (p. 2). "The running of the course–*currere*–occurs through conversation, not only in classroom discourse, but also dialogue among specific students and teachers and within oneself in solitude" (Pinar, 2011, pp. 1-2). This collaboration is achieved by surfacing memories and lived experiences through a method that can help us reconstruct our own "subjective and social lives" (Pinar, 2011, p. 2). In other words, when education is *experienced*, it "enables subjective and social reconstruction" (Pinar, 2011, p. 2).

Curriculum conceived as a verb – currere – can develop the identity/identities of the individual. The verb form of currere becomes enacted as a

curriculum technique that is used to engage in self-work rooted in academic and lived experiences and self-understanding and provides opportunities to converse with these moments, and to create potentialities for change (Pinar, 2004).

Currere in Curriculum Studies

The field of curriculum studies has been deeply impacted by the scholarship of Pinar (1975, 2004, 2011) and his transformative methodology in which we can study the curriculum – both formally and informally – not mearly as an atheoretical and technical entity that is delivered in educational spaces, but one which is enacted *through* us and as an "experience encoded in the school curriculum" (Pinar, 2004, p. 20) and schooling experience. Curriculum studies is maintained through conscious work (Pinar, 2004) that is "highly symbolic, the theorization of curriculum requires situating itself historically, socially, and autobiographically" (Pinar, 2004, p.20). Study in currere – re-conceptualizing curriculum – requires a critical and mindful examination of the ethics, purposes, and practices of education via "complicated conversations," (Pinar, 2004) the point of which is autobiographical movement (Pinar, 2001). This re-conceptualization can transform current practices of education and schooling. It is within these alternative perspectives that teachers and students are better equipped to interrogate their individual values and opinions and the ways in which their history and social privileges affect their beliefs about their educational experiences. In her piece "On the Virtues of Currere," Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2017) asserts that "the teacher who is committed to practicing an engaged pedagogy must be invested in her own process of intellectual and spiritual growth through self-reflection and contemplation" (p. vi).

Identifying the tensions between special education and disability studies highlights the necessity to pursue the boundary spaces of DSE more clearly. Storying lived experiences from the boundaries can bring boundary work to a greater consciousness in teacher education. Notably, engaging a currere-informed curriculum fragment methodology holds promise for extending these boundaries.

> Doing currere work is one way to nurture that journey toward or from a place or sense of purpose, and toward living as completely in the moment as possible without losing ourselves in the meantime. Do we have the power educationally to learn from our experience to change the course of our lives, to live and learn and make our way productively, ethically, in ways that bring life to ourselves and others? (Poetter, 2024, p. 20)

Pinar (2004) argues that one's past affects present educational perceptions and practices. When disabled students are continuously segregated in PK-12 schools and not given equal access to education, Pinar's argument speaks to the continued segregation of disabled students. If the disability community does not become part of our lived experiences, many can and will continue to exclude them in a synthesis of a reimagined future.

Chapter 3
Methodology

"[T]he practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of teaching, involves a dynamic and dialectical moment between "doing" and "reflecting on doing" (Freire, 1998, p. 42).

My methodology in this self-study is more of an evolving journey that leans on several narrative traditions than a prescriptive methodological approach. Specifically, I am using a *curriculum fragment methodology*.

In this chapter I provide an overview of several narrative traditions that support my framing of centering curriculum fragments as my methodology. I propose that with thoughtful analysis that is leveraged by curricular narrative traditions, the use of stand-alone curriculum fragments can ground its own methodology – a curriculum fragment methodology.

> I use relatively short bits of experience, happenings in the world, and narrate them as stories, typically autobiographically, and call them "curriculum fragments." They are fragments because they are part of the whole story of my life and experience, though not in its entirety, not the whole, entire picture. But if the fragments hold up, they can be perceived as allegorical and carry meaning that could help the reader understand the whole more completely (Pinar, 2012). The stories of our educational lives can only be told in fragments anyway, but perhaps those pieces can give us a good look at the whole picture. And they are curriculum fragments, not merely fragments, because our lives are curricular in nature (Poetter, 2024, p. 4).

I am approaching this study with an aim to further develop a curriculum fragment methodology as informed by Poetter's (2015, 2021, 2024) scholarship that centers storied fragments of educational experiences to inform the circular, reflective process of currere. My aim is to more explicitly define curriculum fragment methodology by:

1. exploring other means to tell educational narratives that are informed by traditions in the curriculum studies literature in narrative inquiry, including Teacher Lore (Schubert, 1989) and narrative points-of-entry (Schultz et al., 2010);
2. examining methodologies leveraged by narrative inquiry, including currere (Pinar, 1975), phenomenology, and hermeneutics; and
3. identifying means of analyzing curriculum fragments to make meaningful narratives for the purposes of personal and social transformation (Pinar, 1975; Taliaferro Baszile, 2017; Poetter, 2015, 2021, 2024).

The intention of this study is to answer my question: "What are the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies?"

In this self-study I engage in critical reflection on my teaching practices (Freire, 1998) using a curriculum fragment methodology as supported by the curriculum studies traditions of currere, (Pinar, 1975) Teacher Lore, (Schubert, 1989) and narrative points-of-entry (Schultz et al., 2010). My purpose is to excavate my experiences as an educator and professional working with disabled students and adults labeled with multiple and intellectual disabilities and my current experiences as a teacher educator by leveraging curriculum fragments that flow freely through Pinar's (1975) four stages of currere and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (2008). These frameworks guide me to my end goal of realizing and creating my own narrative that ultimately culminates with Pinar's (1975) synthetical stage presented in curriculum fragments that interlace the past, present, and future to enhance my teaching practices to both "know better" and "do better."

To better inform a curriculum fragment methodology, I explore an interpretivist framework of phenomenology to seek a deeper understanding of my educational career as guided by curriculum fragments of my personal lived experiences. Further, I engage a critical theory paradigm, largely exploring the ways that engaging in critical disability studies and DSE as critical theories have impacted my educational and curricular experiences.

In this methodology chapter, I outline several traditions that I lean on to more clearly define curriculum fragment methodology. Specifically, I provide an overview of curriculum fragments, narrative inquiry, interpretivism, phenomenology, phenomenology in education, critical theory, the currere method (Pinar, 1975), Teacher Lore (Schubert, 1989), and narrative points-of-entry (Schultz et al., 2010) to frame my self-study in creating my meaningful narrative further guided by Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis.

Curriculum Fragments

Poetter (2015, 2017) developed curriculum fragments, initially coined as "bits" and "treatments," to support his doctoral students in writing "reflections, autobiographical responses to life experiences, readings, images, trends, facts, etc." (Poetter & Googins, 2015, p. 5). Poetter (2017) describes curriculum fragments as "story-bits of learning" (p. 2) that help us think about "how stories come together, with bits of information, bits of experience, bits of meaning, bits of insight. That is, small pieces" (Poetter & Googins, 2015, p. 5).

Poetter (2017) further describes curriculum fragments as "small bits of memories that continue to stick to me (Poetter & Googins, 2015) – that persistently influence my thinking and actions in my personal and professional lives" (Poetter, 2020, pp 1-2). Poetter (2017) has begun using the term "curriculum fragment" (p. 1) to describe "[regressive] story-bits of learning" (p. 2). "Curriculum fragments" can be thought of as stories from one's autobiographical and educational past that constituent significant learning in Pinar's (1975) "regressive" turn.

My own memories, my dreams, sometimes my nightmares, are often filled with vignettes of experiences with my students and individuals I have worked with, past and present. My memories of the disabled students and adults I have worked with have just stuck with me, they are deeply ingrained in a way that impacts how I teach, what I teach, and remind me of the reasons why I teach. They are very much a part of my life – they truly influence my thinking and actions in ways that would be impossible to quantify without telling our stories.

My aim is to enact curriculum fragments as a curriculum technique that I employ to engage in self-work rooted in academic and lived experiences to provide opportunities to converse with these moments, and to create potentialities for change (Pinar, 2004).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research has a breadth of forms and practices. "As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67). Narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016) is a qualitative research method that centers personal, lived stories as the key component of inquiry. Therefore, this method uses narratives as research seeking to understand and interpret the significance and meaning of personal stories that are central to individuals. Focusing on the collection and analysis of narratives, the researcher seeks to understand the meaning behind personal stories, as well as common themes that can emerge across multiple narratives.

Narrative inquiry is grounded in the assumption that stories are an integral part of the human experience and support a greater understanding of the ways in which people make sense of their lives. More simply stated, the aim of narrative inquiry is to understand the ways in which people construct and interpret their experiences through storytelling. Kim (2016) states "using narrative as a phenomenon to understand multidimensional meanings of society, culture, human actions, and life, it attempts to access participants life experiences and engage in a process of storytelling" (p. 6).

Curriculum studies scholar Brian Schultz (2006) asserts that "the use of narrative in educational research allows the stories of classrooms – particularly PK-12 – to be told, allowing a great opportunity for reflection to take place, voices to be heard, and learning to occur" (p. 22). In educational research, narrative inquiry explores personal stories of students and educators and contributes to a wide range of educational contexts, including curriculum studies, teacher education, teaching and learning, pedagogy, multiculturalism, and educational policy (Kim, 2016). More specifically, "narrative educational researchers purport to bring the lived

experiences of teachers and students to the forefront as a way to reshape the views on education" (Kim, 2016, p. 19). By representing personal stories of schooling and education, narrative inquiry has endless possibilities in advancing educational research, particularly in teacher education. Kim (2016) asserts that "as teacher education programs put more emphasis on what it means to be a reflective practitioner, teachers' stories of their personal and professional experiences along with stories of young children have become key devices in understanding the complex nature of the classroom" (p. 18). Narrative inquiry is not only an increasingly popular research method, but also a pedagogical and curricular practice for many education scholars.

Narrative inquiry is grounded in the assumption that storytelling is a cultural and social practice that is deeply influenced by the practices and values of society. Therefore, narratives are not only individual stories of lived experiences, but are also cultural and social artifacts that represent broader values and norms in our society. In this way, narrative inquiry can expand the theoretical traditions of interpretivism and phenomenology (Kim, 2016).

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a qualitative research method that centers an understanding of the human experience and social phenomena through the lens of individual experiences and meanings. More concisely, interpretivism as a paradigm seeks to understand and interpret the world (Glesne, 2016). The intent of interpretivism is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and the social, cultural, and situational contexts that shape those experiences. Further, the aim of this research method is grounded in the belief that multiple perspectives, multiple truths, are created with others through reflections of and engagement with lived stories (Denzen & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000). Glesne (2016) positions the role of interpretivist researchers to consider others' assessments and interpretations of social experiences. Interpretivists reject universal laws and look to social constructions, or constructed realities, of how we make sense of our world and experiences (Glesne, 2016).

Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) describe several philosophical assumptions of this paradigm that guide the research process. Interpretivism assumes that social phenomena have subjective meanings and are complex and multifaceted. It also assumes that individuals construct their own interpretations and realities of the world around them as they are individually, socially, historically, and culturally constructed. To understand human behavior and social phenomena, it is the role of the researcher to ground the interpretation of individual lived experiences and multiple realities as central to the process. Additionally, interpretivism assumes that the researcher is an active participant in the research process, or a "passionate participant" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) as a facilitator. As such, it is critical for researchers to position themselves in the research in a way that acknowledges their own experiences, values, and positionalities.

Interpretivism holds a high standard for researchers to practice accountability that recognizes how researchers are subjective and are influenced by their ontologies and epistemologies (Glesne, 2016). In this paradigm, rather than starting with a theory, researchers start with questions and develop meaning from lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000). Interpretivism assumes that social reality is subjective and complex with multiple interpretations of any particular phenomenon. Based on this assumption, interpretivism aims to explore multiple interpretations, rather than seeking objective truths (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000).

There are several ways to analyze data in interpretive research to identify meaningful themes that reflect the subjective experiences of the participants and the complex nature of social phenomena. The most common data analysis procedures used in interpretivism research are thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and phenomenological analysis. Phenomenological analysis is a method of data analysis that focuses on the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals based on the philosophy of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical method that aims to find meaning by exploring lived experiences grounded in the assumption that there is a core difference between the world as it objectively exists and the world as it is experienced subjectively. According to phenomenology,

exploring the world as it is subjectively experienced is the foundation of all meaning and knowledge.

A more recent approach in narrative inquiry, interpretive phenomenology, fits within the framework of phenomenology and acknowledges the potential for meaningful and transformative impact, learning, and mindfulness for the researcher. Interpretive phenomenological analysis as a framework is influenced by phenomenology, and specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology

van Manen (1990, 2016) describes phenomenological inquiry as a creative endeavor to holistically capture a phenomenon of life. The aim of phenomenology is to understand phenomena in-depth to gain a deeper understanding of one's lived experience of the phenomenon, a "grasp of the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). From a phenomenological lens, to engage in research is to "question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (van Manen, 2016, p. 5). van Manen (2016) further asserts "to *know* the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching–questioning–theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world" (p. 5). This self-study will provide a structure for me to revisit and question my teaching, to attach myself to my experiences to "become more fully part of it" as a means to deepen my understanding of my world as a teacher. The ultimate aim of phenomenological research, and my hope in this study, is to "become more fully who we are" (van Manen, 2016, p. 12).

Knowledge is subjective. Subjectivity is the "epistemological starting point" (Kim, 2016, p. 55) of phenomenology. Subjectivity then occurs when personal meaning is assigned to a phenomenon, or to a lived experience. In phenomenology, researchers believe the subject, the individual, is at the center of the object, the lived experience, because the subject is the "one who knows the world while giving meaning to it" (Kim, 2016, p. 55). Phenomenology is a philosophical method to

understand the essence of human experiences. It is grounded in exploring the subjectivity of lived experiences and the meaning individuals attribute to specific experiences. Phenomenology rejects the idea that knowledge can be gained by experimentation and argues that, without subjectivity, such methods can provide only a limited understanding of the human experience.

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl founded the phenomenological movement in the early twentieth century. Simply stated, the theoretical framework for phenomenological research is phenomenology. Further, there are two key philosophies in phenomenological research methods: Edmond Husserl's descriptive or transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology (Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1990, 2016).

Descriptive/Transcendental Phenomenology

The aim of Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach, also referred to as transcendental phenomenology, is to describe the experience of research participants. Descriptive phenomenology seeks to provide a systematic account of phenomena as experienced and described by participants that would be free from the assumptions and biases of traditional experimental design (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl asserted that in the analysis of consciousness directed towards objects, we can gain insight into the structures of experience. In descriptive phenomenology, bracketing, or epoché, is a methodology of withholding judgment about the existence of the external world. This allows the phenomenologist to focus on the structures of experience, rather than on his or her relationship to experienced reality (Moustakas, 1994).

Hermeneutic/Interpretive Phenomenology

Sprung from Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, or interpretive phenomenology, originates from the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962). Where descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing specific phenomena, Heidegger (2008) expands phenomenological practice as not just descriptive, but interpretive, focusing on the

deeper aspects of phenomena. Further, he believed it is not possible to "bracket our experiences because we are always in a world with others in the circumstances of existence" (Peoples, 2020, p. 32). Hermeneutic phenomenology is grounded in "consciousness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 8) and strives to reveal the complex relationship between interpretation and lived experience to better understand how individuals make sense of their world.

Hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that our understanding of the world is shaped by the way we interpret experiences. The human experience then, in hermeneutic phenomenology, is embedded in a world of meanings. In this method it is the aim of the researcher to provide deep and nuanced descriptions of and to gain insights into the complexities of lived experiences (Heidegger, 2008).

An essential aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology is the process of the hermeneutic circle. "The hermeneutic circle is a description of the process of understanding" (Peoples, 2020, p. 32). It is an iterative process of breaking down parts of an experience for synthesis prior to examining the entirety of an experience or phenomena. The underpinning is that understanding the parts is crucial for grasping the whole, and vice versa. The hermeneutic circle continues until new meanings and understandings of lived experiences are uncovered (Peoples, 2020).

van Manen (2016) acknowledges that "hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity" (p. 7). This circular process of examining, writing, reexamining, and rewriting creates depth – van Manen (2016) describes it as, "reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, no here and then there, going back and forth between the parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece that often reflects the personal 'signature' of the author" (pp. 131-132). Kim (2016) further asserts that when we embrace this flow and fluidity of examining lived experiences we can create something meaningful in "a circular or even rhizomatic way" (p. 71). This circular process will provide a flowing structure as I create curriculum fragment reflections that are also leveraged by the four cyclical stages of currere (Pinar, 1975).

Phenomenology in Education

van Manen (1990, 2016) concisely characterizes phenomenology in a word as "thoughtfulness." Heidegger (1962) describes thoughtfulness as mindful acts that reflect on what it means to live a life. As applied to education, phenomenology is the "attentive practice of thoughtfulness" (van Manen, 2016, p. 12) in our interactions with students and our engagement with pedagogy. For educators, the practice of phenomenology lives in the practice of thoughtfulness and pedagogy. van Manen (2016) clarifies that "phenomenological pedagogical research edifies the same attentive thoughtfulness that serves the practical tactfulness of pedagogy itself" (p. 12). From this perspective, this self-study seeks to transform my pedagogical understanding and practice through reflective attentive thoughtfulness.

Critical Theory

Critical theorists critique the ways our social world has systemically and historically oppressed populations of people (Glesne, 2016). Glesne (2016) describes the aim of critical theory to pursue "transformation" (p. 10) of oppressive systems, norms, and practices. Critical theorists use "standpoint epistemologies" (Glesne, 2016, p. 11) to privilege the lived experiences of oppressed individuals and communities to challenge positions and systems of power. Critical Theorist researchers aim to emancipate research from social constructions and systemic oppressions, such as class, gender and race (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Examples of critical theory include Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, critical disability studies, Feminist Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and mad studies, et al.

In education research, critical theory challenges oppression and power inequities within educational systems. More specifically, it explores how power operates in education spaces, policies, and curricula as a means to foster social change (Giroux, 2003, 2011). Furthermore, critical theory in education research encourages educators to advocate for transforming education practices and policies to achieve greater equity, inclusion, and access (Giroux, 2003). In this self-study, I will draw upon the key tenets of critical disability studies and DSE to guide my reflections, analysis, and synthesis.

What is Currere?

Pinar (1975) coined the Latin infinitive of "curriculum" as *currere* – meaning "to run the course." The word *currere* shares the same lexical root as the word "curriculum." Pinar's development of currere as a method of self-work in autobiographical inquiry challenged education fields driven by technicist delivery methods. According to Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2017):

> Currere is an attempt to reclaim education as a journey toward self-understanding or an understanding of self as it is always in relation to other selves and always positioned in the world at a particular historical moment. On this journey, then, we learn not only about ourselves as situated knowers, but also about others and the world around us. (p. vii-viii).

The Currere Method

Currere asserts that each of us is a creation of our past and that in order to realize any pretense of true progress for the future, each of us must first delve into our previous lived experiences. Currere offers us a method by which to begin this journey – as individuals, as a collective society. Taliaferro Baszille (2017) describes it as "a method of autobiographical/biographical inquiry that moves the 'currerian' through and among four moments of critical self-reflection and contemplation, giving shape to an internal dialogue" (p. vi).

The method of currere cannot commit to quick fixes. On the contrary, the currere method asks us to slow down to re-enter the past and to mindfully reimagine the future. Pinar's (1975) conceptualization of currere supports a shift in education that centers teacher and student world views as shaped by lived experiences. Pinar (2004) proposed a series of "complicated conversation[s] with oneself" (p. 35) as a continuing form of self-work in which we become "mobilized for engaged pedagogical action" (p. 35).

Pinar and Grumet (1976) interpret currere as a method to reopen past experiences, specifically memories in schooling. The outcome is intended to be an autobiographical storying of the lived experience. Pinar (1975, 1994) describes the

method of currere as a cyclical process of calling the past to the present to look toward the future by analyzing and synthesizing the surfaced themes. The lived present moves fluidly into the past while the future is constantly entering.

Pinar (1975) identifies a cyclical process by which individuals write about their educational experiences in four stages:

- the regressive stage: with the focus on past lived experiences, revisiting memories;
- the progressive stage: with a focus toward the imagined future;
- the analytical stage: with a focus on the present, with reflection on previous lived experiences with connections to the current life; and
- the synthetical stage: with the aim of interlacing the past, present, and future to achieve the state of self-understanding and, ultimately, self-transformation (p. 424).

The currere method develops a cyclical relationship between academic and other lived experiences and identities. Pinar (2004) specifies this four-stage process for teachers and for curricular work. He dials in the four stages to focus on a regression to one's educational experiences, a conceptualization of future educational practices, an analysis of the relationships between a personal past in schooling and future educational practice, and a synthesis of newly imagined ways of thinking about education.

During the regressive stage one recalls specific educational experiences. Pinar (2004) recommends writing during this stage to collect data as foundational material for the process. The progressive stage begins to develop possibilities for the future for educational practices. Pinar (2004) has developed two means of exploration in this progressive phase – a "stylistic experimentation," or writing as a process to spark ideations of the future, and "thematic" visioning, or exploring a "futural subject" (Pinar, 2004) to problem solve through potential road blocks to the future as imagined. The analytical stage provides an opportunity to generate a space that bridges the past and the present. This is an intense level of self-work that helps us connect with the many layers of our educational experiences (Pinar, 2004). Last,

the synthetical stage calls for circling back mindfully into the present with the knowledge gained by the other three steps of the method.

Poetter (2017) states, "In the end, the steps are fluid, and the jumping-in point depends on the problem, the context, the inquirer, and the experience. Every currere project is different, in a sense, tailor-made" (p. 4). Through the currere process, we can operationalize the visions from our past, present, and future to transform our work as educators. Who we are at our core is exposed through this deep, holistic self-work into our past, present, and future. We can recognize and accept ourselves and validate our lived experiences.

Teacher Lore

Curriculum studies scholars William Schubert and William Ayers (1994) assert that we "must listen to the voices of teachers" (p. 105) to understand "the practical art and wisdom" (p. 105) of teaching. Teachers learn best from other teachers. In curriculum studies, the tradition of teacher lore provides an "attempt to learn what teachers learn from their experiences" (Schubert, 1993, p. 207).

Lore pertains to belief or knowledge. Schubert (1993) characterizes teacher lore as "the study of the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and understandings of teachers" that is an inquiry into the "beliefs, values, and images that guide teacher's work" (p. 207). Teacher Lore was developed in the hopes of contributing to teacher education through a means that values the "experiences, interests, and concerns of those most involved and democratically engaging them in the process of understanding themselves" (Schubert, 2012, p. XIII). With an understanding that teachers are often good at telling stories, Schubert (1992) developed teacher lore as a means for teachers to "relate the essence of their experiences, their best teacher lore, through anecdote rather than trying to explain the essence directly" (p. 142). Teacher lore provides educators a space to capture their experiential knowledge in a way that "hones in on meaning, and in this regard unlocking the hopes and dreams and passions of teachers is not a digression–it is essential science" (Ayers & Schubert, 1994, p. 115).

Teacher lore is not wed to a specific methodology. Teacher lore intentionally resists a prescribed framework that prevents teachers from telling their stories about the knowledge they have gained in their teaching experiences in ways that work best for them (Schubert, 1992). Instead, Schubert (1992) calls for a writing process in teacher storytelling that is more fluid in nature. At its core teacher lore is storytelling. Schubert and Ayers (1994) describe it as a "living thing–a work-in-progress–which is by its nature unfinished, provisional, and partial" (p. 114). Further, it is an "unfinished business–inexhaustible, open, fluid" (p. 115). The aim of this self-study is not to progress sequentially through the four stages of currere but to move in a free-flowing and circular progression that captures the fluid nature and tradition of teacher lore.

Narrative Points-of-Entry

Schultz describes "narrative points-of-entry" (Schultz et al., 2010, p. 372) as storytelling of educational experiences through "emergent narratives" (Madda, Skinner, & Schultz, 2012, p. 368). Narrative points-of-entry are "neither predetermined nor prescribed" (Madda, Skinner, & Schultz, 2012, p. 368) and provide a methodology for entry points for teachers to share their lived experiences. Further, narrative points-of-entry are vignettes for teachers to write "glimpses" (Schultz & Pearson, 2021, p. 13) that detail starting points to their "pursuits and thoughts" (Schultz & Pearson, 2021, p. 13) and reflections in their own teaching experiences. Schultz (2017) asserts that using teachers' own knowledge and lived experiences as narrative points-of-entry "provide[s] opportunities to seek meaning and to generate thick descriptions" (p. 35) of teaching and pedagogy as a form of reflective narrative inquiry.

Research Design

Participants and Data Collection

I am the primary data source in this self-study as I engage in critical reflection on my teaching practices using curriculum fragment methodology. My stories – my curriculum fragments – are my data. The names of the students and

individuals in my curriculum fragments have been changed to protect their identities. Specifically, the data will be my lived experiences as a middle school teacher educating students labeled with intellectual and multiple disabilities and as an administrator and educator for a residential agricultural program supporting individuals with intensive disabilities and my current experiences as a teacher educator. I will generate data from my lived experiences as an educator by creating curriculum fragments to guide me to my end goal of a narrative that culminates in Pinar's (1975) synthetical stage of interlacing the past, present, and future. My aim aligns with Taliaferro Baszile's (2017) description to "synthesize my thinking across these moments as a way to purposefully engage a process of learning and re-learning toward more just futures" (p. vi).

The data will highlight events that have been instrumental in my education journey and people who have been impactful to me along the way. I will support my data collection of my lived experiences through multiple means of engagement with the data through journaling, generating curriculum fragments, building fragments through the hermeneutic circle, and analyzing them through Donald Polkinghorn's (1995) narrative mode of analysis.

Data Analysis

Kim (2016) asserts that "analysis and interpretation should be done holistically, heuristically, whole-heartedly, and most of all, narratively" (p. 195). Narrative analysis of my lived experiences, my curriculum fragments, is critical to derive meaningful insights, to identify patterns, and to uncover underlying themes within my education journey to create my own narrative. In this study, I use Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis as a framework for analyzing and making meaning of my lived experiences. Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis is grounded in the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology. The narrative mode of analysis is a "method of emplotting the data, in which we would analyze narrative data that consist of actions, events, and happenings, in order to produce coherent stories as an outcome of the analysis" (Kim, 2016, p. 197).

The process of Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis includes immersion, structural analysis, and interpretation – this is a circular process that encapsulates the hermeneutic circle and the four reflective stages of currere where meaning and understanding can occur by progressing through pieces of the narrative to come to a "configuration of the data into a coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). The "coherent whole" of this process will coalesce with Pinar's (1975) synthetical stage.

In Chapter Four of this study I will use curriculum fragments to continue to engage in the regressive stage of currere (Pinar, 1975) to share teacher lore and that dives into self-work and storying through my lived experiences throughout my career to my current work as a teacher educator.

In Chapter Five of this study I will use Polkinghorn's (1995) narrative mode of analysis to extrapolate meaning of the stories that coalesce through Pinar's (1975) regressive and progressive stages to further immerse myself in a structural analysis of recurring themes, patterns, and narrative elements that become evident to develop my narrative that is further imagined through the synthetical stage of the currere process in Chapter Six. Analyzing the meaning of the themes that emerge through the currere process though a narrative mode of analysis will provide a structure that "is not merely a transcription of the data, but is a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in the final story" (Kim, 2016, p. 197).

The aim of Polkinghorn's (1995) narrative mode of analysis is to make the "final story congruent with the data while bringing narrative meanings that are not explicit in the data themselves" (Kim, 2016, p. 198). The goal of this process is the creation of a "metaphoric richness of a story" (Kim, 2016, p. 198). This mode of analysis will be strengthened by a hermeneutic circular curation of meaning analyzed in the stories and reflections generated by the first three reflective stages of currere. The desired outcome of analyzing the data generated by Pinar's (1975) currere process is a powerful culmination of a synthetical stage that provides a "coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15) narrative with a clear interlacing of my past, present, and future to achieve the state of self-understanding and, optimistically, a reckoning that will support me in reconciling with my past as a

special educator and will guide clarity to my possibilities in boundary work as a teacher educator to leverage the tensions of special education and disability studies in reimagined ways.

Curriculum Fragment Methodology

Each of these traditions and methodologies in curriculum studies inform a path to a curriculum fragment methodology that embraces critical theory in a process of interpretive phenomenological self-study as told through practices employed by the field of curriculum studies for storytelling to be both generated and analyzed through a hermeneutic circular process of currere.

To summarize my proposed curriculum fragment methodology, a self-study is initiated by:

1. engaging in the regressive stage to identify and develop several curriculum fragments that help identify the problem and lend to the proposal of a research question;
2. navigating in the progressive stage to further explore and frame the problem and research question;
3. returning to the regressive stage to journal and map a series of curriculum fragments that are connected to the problem;
4. capturing the stories through curriculum fragments that build and, ideally, circle back to other fragments;
5. engaging in the analytical stage through a narrative mode of analysis to shape and create a culminating narrative construct that coalesces into a story, the narrative, as framed by the researcher; and
6. reimagining a future by writing a series of curriculum fragments that addresses the problem and gives hopeful answers to the research question in thoughtful imaginings of what can be as a result of self-reflection and a more developed, useful, and personal narrative generated through the meanings of the educational experiences.

In Figure 1 I provide an image of curriculum fragment methodology that highlights the hermeneutic circular nature of currere and the circular steps in progressing through this methodology.

In Chapter Four I share a series of stand-alone curriculum fragments that encapsulate important people and moments in my journey across special education and disability studies. In addition, in Chapter Five and in the synthesis is Chapter Six, I utilize all the fragments from the entire work in my analysis.

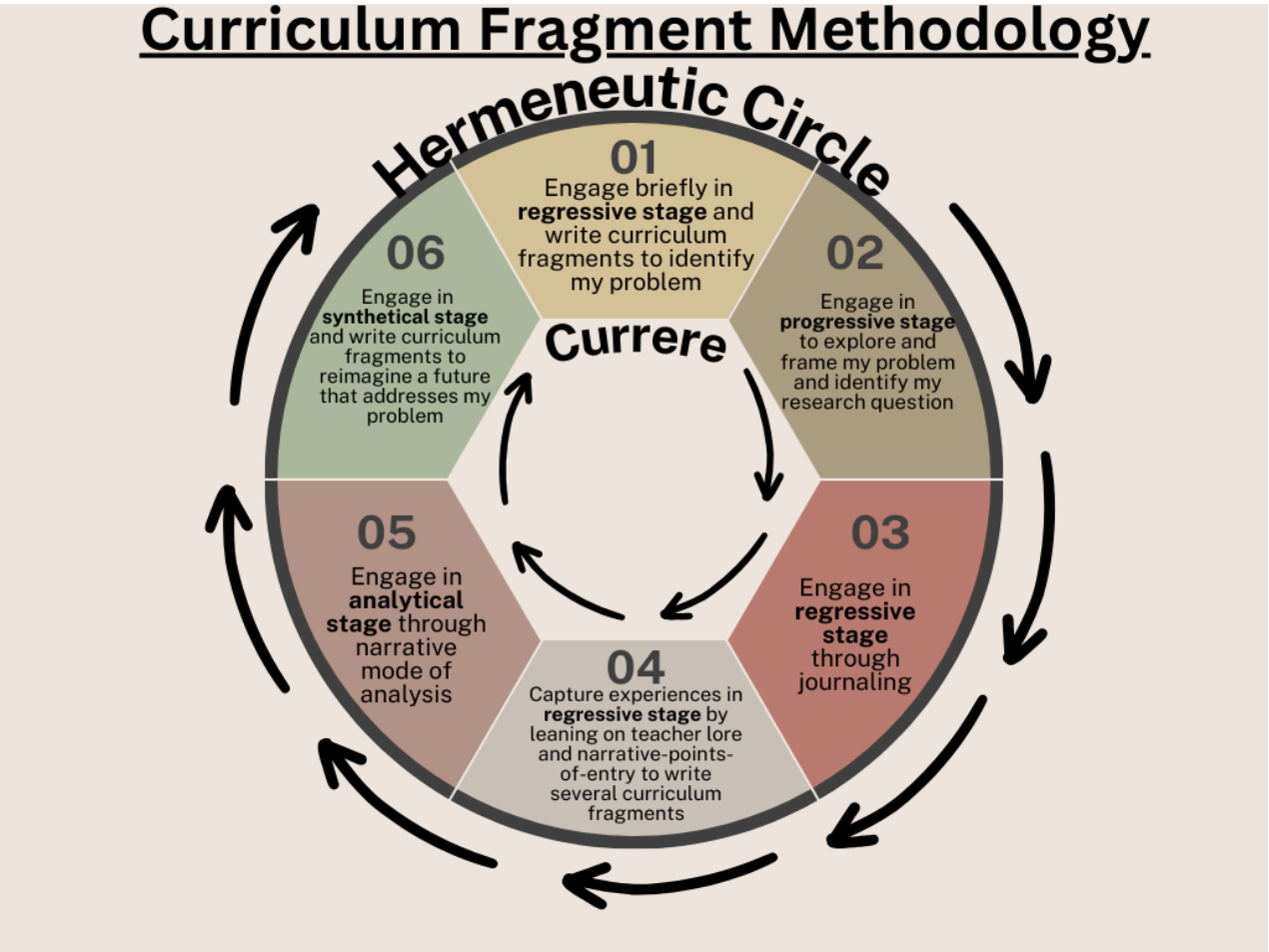


Figure 1: Overview of Curriculum Fragment Methodology as Informed by Currere and Hermeneutic Circles

Chapter 4
Curriculum Fragments

In this chapter, I present 22 curriculum fragments of my lived experiences throughout my professional career as an educator. My intention is for these stories to coalesce in meaningful ways that lead to a narrative in Chapter Five and to hopeful imagined curriculum fragments in Chapter Six.

Pedro

Pedro moved to Ohio from Ecuador when he was in fourth grade. Pedro is particularly gifted in connecting with people. He wanted to connect with every student and teacher in our middle school and learned to speak English very quickly to be able to do so. People with Williams Syndrome are often very social and very musically inclined. Pedro and I connected immediately with music. Pedro has brought me so much joy in my life. He truly is very dear to me.

Pedro asks, "Hey Friend, How you doin?" to every person who makes eye contact with him and makes a genuine effort to connect with everyone he encounters. He is gifted at these connections – his warmth, curiosity, and energy draw people to him. Pedro brings joy everywhere. During his high school graduation, every single one of his 600 classmates stood up and cheered for him when he walked across the stage. It was beautiful. It wasn't in any way patronizing. They didn't see him as an inspiration or another disability-related trope. His peers were celebrating the kindness and humanity he had shared with each of them. Pedro recently went out to dinner with me and my daughters – he scanned the room as soon as we were seated trying to lock in our waiter. He found him and greeted him as soon as he was within five feet of our table.

"Hey, How you doin' Man? I'm Pedro, what's your name?"

"Pedro! I totally remember you from high school. How are you Man? It's been a long time."

Pedro graduated high school in 2015. He is so magnetic and positive that memories of him are not easily forgotten.

Vote for Pedro

Desperate to find social opportunities for my students, I volunteered to lead our middle school's student council. I wanted my students to participate, but even more I wanted them to have opportunities for leadership positions. They deserved to have a voice in a space where they had been historically and systemically powerless. Pedro was the perfect student to run for an office – He was the most friendly and outgoing student in the entire school and deeply cared about others. At the time the movie *Napoleon Dynamite* was wildly popular, especially with middle school-aged students. Pedro had the best idea for his campaign. Following his lead, we launched a "Vote for Pedro" campaign for him to run for student council vice president. I set up a silk screen press in our cafeteria for a week during lunch for students to bring shirts and create their own "Vote for Pedro" shirts that looked just like the "Vote for Pedro" shirts in the movie. At least 150 kids made and wore the shirts. There was an all-school assembly later that week for all of the candidates to give a speech to share their platforms.

Pedro walked up to the microphone and said "If you vote for me, all of your wildest dreams will come true."

He won in a landslide.

Stand by Me

Toward the end of that school year my students wanted to coordinate another "Happy Hands Club" sign language performance at the talent show. I was still on a charge to prove my students' worth to our choir teacher so I was all in.

Pedro has a beautiful singing voice. He has a crooner-type sound and would have fit in seamlessly as a member of the Rat Pack. We were on the bus one day that spring on a community outing and the 1960s song "Stand by Me" came on the radio. Pedro knew the bridge and belted it out as beautifully as Ben E. King himself. When we got back to school, I asked Pedro if he wanted me to give him the lyrics and to play the song again. I remember feeling like I was in a trance listening to him sing this song. It was like it was written just for him.

This time the talent show performance was solely about the students, no ulterior motives. No selfish message of inspiration that I wanted to impart to our school community. We decided to sign "Stand by Me" as a group as Pedro sang. We choreographed, practiced, auditioned, and were on track for another talent show performance. All of my students worked very hard to memorize the signs to perform the lyrics. This performance is one of my sweetest school moments.

There we were on that stage again. Pedro and I were shoulder to shoulder – he was facing the crowd as he sang and I was facing our students to model the signs for them as they performed. Before this moment, I heard Pedro sing "Stand by Me" no fewer than 100 times. It's hard to put into words the level of emotion and love that Pedro put into every word, every syllable, every note of this song. This was his moment. And he rocked it. All of my students did. I kept scanning across all of their faces trying to capture this instant – each of their expressions read that they were all so proud of themselves – knowing I would want to always keep it in my memory.

Every student got up and screamed and cheered. Many of them were wearing their "Vote for Pedro" shirts. This round of applause felt different than the last time we were on this stage. I will remember this moment for all of my life – I watched him as he smiled and teared up.

He rested his head on my shoulder and said "They love me, Cartell."

They truly do, Friend.

Josh

My student Josh is very special to me. When he was seven, his second-grade teacher placed him on home instruction because of his "aggressive behaviors." His parents, both lawyers, fought every school year to get him back into the classroom. The teacher who retired right before I began my first year of teaching agreed for Josh to come to school for an hour a day three days a week during his sixth-grade year. Four years, and three feet and at least 100 pounds later, he finally had access to an education in a classroom in a public school. The district special education director asked me to meet with him that summer – he shared Josh's school history with me and encouraged me to continue an hour a day for his schedule. But I was

the teacher who was going to change the world. We bumped his schedule to four hours a day five days a week to start.

I spent a lot of time with Josh and his family that summer before school started – we had a lot of work to do. Josh first had to learn school again. I planned to take it easy with him the first week of school – let him observe and feel comfortable with the students and our routines. I created his own partitioned space in the corner of the classroom with gym mats, comfy pillows, and a video game chair.

Josh looked like an adult man next to other middle school students. He has autism and uses augmentative and alternative communication devices to communicate. In middle school he had a communication device that would speak a series of pre-recorded requests like "I need a break." If Josh becomes upset, he lets out a high-pitched squeal and snaps his fingers in front of his face, alternating each hand back and forth in an extremely fast rhythm. If he is really upset he will hit himself with the thumb side of his hand implausibly hard on the middle of his forehead. Almost like he is resetting or rebooting himself.

I put together a visual schedule of the school day for Josh and started academic instruction during the second week of his seventh-grade year. That Monday morning, bright-eyed and ready to tackle the world, I brought Josh over to my desk to review his picture schedule and to start a math assessment. I turned my head to grab a pencil and when I turned back Josh punched me right between my eyes. Hard. It was the first time I had ever blacked out. I remember hearing his squeal and his snapping fingers before my eyes were clear enough to focus on him running back to his corner of the room.

I was so determined with Josh and am so proud of our first school year together. There were many bumps, literally and figuratively, along the way but Josh eventually settled into a school day routine, would join the class for certain activities, and, what I am most proud of with all the things I taught my students during my teaching career, learned how to communicate by using a computer to type requests and responses to questions. He is very intelligent and has had very limited means to show it.

As an eighth-grade student we increased his hours in the school day. My school journey with Josh was a rollercoaster but our peaks kept getting higher each week.

Blue Christmas

In December of Josh's eighth grade year, I partnered with the high school "Multiple Disabilities Unit" to throw a Holiday dance. This was one of my favorite days of the school year – I made it an annual event during my middle school teaching career. I hired a DJ each year and went all in with dancing, games, decorations, and food. Our students *lived* for dancing. I always loved dancing with my students – we would often have dance parties at some point throughout our school day.

The students were having a blast. Cora proudly sang on the stage with her hand as a microphone during every song. Jason requested the DJ to play every Michael Jackson song – he has accurately mastered every MJ move. Chelsea would yell, "Go Cartell, you're doing it!" when we would dance together. These parties were always just the best. I brought Josh's videogame chair and set him up in a spot for him to take everything in. He rocked and happily observed his classmates – every few minutes he would jump up from his chair, run and grab some pretzels from the snack table, then run back even faster like he thought he was stealing them.

After every couple of songs I would go over and invite Josh to dance with me. The first time I put my hand out he pushed it away. The second time he got up and made it halfway to the dance floor before squealing and running back. The third time he made it to the dance floor, stood and rocked there for a few seconds, then ran back. A few songs later I tried again. He took my hand and we stopped on the outskirts of the dance floor. Josh's body is always moving. He constantly rocks back and forth and jumps in a way that seems like he is always trying to make sense of where his body is in space. I held his hand and started to sway back and forth, following his lead to be perfectly synchronized with him. Josh didn't smile or laugh very much at school. I clearly remember that this was the biggest smile I had ever seen on his face. I figured out how he wanted to dance – holding hands and pushing

and pulling each other back and forth in rhythm. I have a beautiful memory of dancing with him at my wedding just like this. We danced together during the last few Holiday songs. He was all smiles and happy squealing vocalizations. We truly had a great time together. He took a break in his rocking chair as we were wrapping up the party.

When it was time to get on the bus I walked over to Josh and held out my hand. He started his angry snapping and hit himself forcefully in the forehead. Sure that he was overstimulated from the music and dancing I encouraged him to sit down and take a break. A few minutes later I walked back over to him and held out my hand and said, "let's go get on the bus." He sprang out of his rocking chair and lunged at me – he jumped so high he started to fall down on top of me. I reacted by turning myself to the side and put up my arm to block his body and then his hands as he started hitting me. He was clearly trying to hit my forehead. As I blocked him with my forearm he grabbed my arm and pulled me towards him. Before I could react and make sense of what was happening, he bit a large area on the upper part of my arm just below my shoulder.

I have had several injuries in my life, given birth to two children, went through some surgery recoveries – but this was the most intense pain I have ever experienced in my body. He is so strong. He put every single ounce of his energy into biting me. The pressure that he put into my arm is still indescribable for me. I was wearing a thick knitted cardigan that day. As soon as he bit me I could feel the saliva in his mouth and knew that his teeth ripped instantly through my clothes. His front teeth and canine teeth punctured into my skin. The sensation when his teeth started to cut into my arm was like a sharp searing burn. Then, the most intense pain, he started to pull his mouth away. My skin was starting to tear. From the inside out.

I knew what to do in these moments, It wasn't the first time I had been bit by a student. But just never like this – I was in shock and sensory overload. I shifted all of my weight towards Josh and pushed my arm into his mouth to counteract his pulling away. I yelled for my teaching partners and watched them run over in my periphery. The strength that he had in his jaw felt like the force came from a machine. I put my free pointer finger under Josh's nose and lightly pushed pressure

upwards. My educational assistant reached her hands to his shoulders to pull him off of me – I yelled "Don't! Stop!" really loudly and startled both her and Josh. I was still pushing my arm into his mouth and I knew he would seriously injure and tear my arm if he pulled back while biting. I started to lightly wiggle my finger back and forth on the cartilage between his nostrils and he finally let go. He took a huge breath. We locked eyes – the look on his face was glazed. In his eyes it appeared that he wasn't really present in that moment.

I remember the clear feeling of my heartbeat pounding in my head and in my arm. I could only hear the sound of my own quick shallow breathing. Josh crashed into his chair and started to rock again. He was trying to catch his breath – he hadn't been able to take a breath until he let go. He was having a hard time coordinating catching his breath and rocking in his chair. He had *very* clearly communicated that he wasn't going to ride the bus.

My school crew was always loud. In all the best ways – they have always been talkers and just make a lot of different sounds. Chelsea narrates everything in real-time. At that moment the room was completely silent.

When we got back to school it was close to the end of the school day. I didn't want to make a big deal of things – we finished the day as usual. Once the kids were all on the bus heading home I went to the office to have the nurse help me get cleaned up and to talk to my principal. My principal instantly decided she was going to suspend Josh from school for a week. We got into an argument. She wasn't well-versed in the special education laws that protected him.

I had deep puncture wounds from many of his teeth. My arm had instantly bruised – the bruising had reached my elbow by the end of the school day. It left a blood blister shaped like a "t" inside of my arm in between his bite marks. My teaching partner had asked me to go to church with her every weekend since we started teaching together. Now it wasn't negotiable – it was a cross and a sign from above. I remember the intensity in her face when she told me we needed to have a talk about being "saved." I just wanted to go home. I followed the school nurse's advice and went to the emergency department to get my arm looked at. It turned

out that deep bite wounds from humans can be dangerous and require a tetanus shot. At the ED the nurses and doctor were calling others into our exam room to look at my arm. "Yes, really, it's a human bite" they kept saying. I was asked what happened an obnoxious number of times.

"Just a rough afternoon at work."

Josh stayed home the next day while I talked in circles with my principal and special ed director about the law and what to do. I went to his house – he lived only a few blocks away from our middle school – during lunch to start some home instruction. I didn't want him to learn that if he bit me at school then he didn't have to do school work. When I sat down with him at his kitchen table, I took off my cardigan to show him my arm.

He poked it and said, "Ouch!" This is one of the few spontaneous words I recall him speaking to me.

Fire and Pain

Fire drills were a lot for my class. They were harder for some kids than others. The anxiety of not knowing the exact moment when the alarm would go off, the sensory meltdowns because of the alarm sound, wheelchairs and mobility devices without the elevators, fire drills were just rough. I tried everything. Practicing the drill without the alarm, putting it on our visual schedule for students well in advance, inviting the firefighters to come into our class to meet my students, having a really fun activity after the drill, having other students come into my classroom to model what to do during the drill, taking candy outside with us during the drill – all the things. My student Jack had a very sensitive sensory system and would get so stressed about fire drills they would completely ruin his entire school day. He would talk nervously every single second until it happened. The fire marshal agreed to let Jack become the honorary "Middle School South Fire Marshal" and would let him pull the alarm with him and help supervise the drill.

I tried all of these things with my student Maria, too, but could not figure out how to support her in preparing for the fire alarm. Maria had very intensive and debilitating seizures as a baby and toddler. When she was young, she had brain

surgery to cut her intersecting point, her corpus callosum, to help manage her seizures. In middle school, Maria had a hard time with processing and managing big feelings and surprises and loud noises and transitions would almost always overwhelm her. In these moments it felt like she was exploding – she would ball up her fists, tuck her body into itself, and start to turn red. Then at any moment would jump and scream very loudly and would often throw things around her, hit me or other adults, and run around screaming.

One particular fire drill went very poorly during the fall of my last year of teaching middle school. I remember that it was in the fall because we were in an especially brilliant leaf season. After lunch on this day, I had a plan for transitioning and preparing for a fire drill scheduled at the end of the school day. I tried something different with Maria. I pulled her aside and told her that I had an important job for her and that I wanted her to be my guest teacher that afternoon. She was really excited – she was comforted when she could feel a sense of control. I told her about the fun activities I had planned that afternoon that I was hoping she could help me teach and lead, all things I knew she would enjoy. I remember this conversation so clearly. We were standing by my desk and I had our plans laid out for her to look at with me. She was pumped. And we had a great couple of hours teaching together that afternoon. Her classmates humored her and happily let her take the lead. After a class game, I pulled Maria aside again and told her I had a really important job for her – to continue to be the teacher and be in charge of the class for the fire drill at the beginning of our last period. I knew this was the last thing in the world she wanted to do, but the afternoon was going so well I was optimistic about my plan. She immediately tensed up and started turning bright red. I took a few steps back.

She screamed, "No, never! No! No! I hate you!" again and again.

She tried to hit me. I asked her to go into the hallway with me so we could take a walk together to calm down. She stormed out of the classroom screaming and reminding me that she hated me. She went out first. As I heard her kick a locker and scream, I stopped in the doorway and turned and gave my educational assistant some quick directions for the class while I helped Maria cool down. My door was

about halfway open. The second I stepped out of my doorway Maria surprised me from behind the door and kicked me in my ankle as hard as she possibly could. I fell into the wall as a pain shot through my toes and up my leg. She ran down the hallway screaming:

"No!"

"You're the worst, Cartell!"

"I hate you!"

My ankle was swelling up by the time I hobbled back into the classroom.

"I'm done with fire drills!" I proclaimed in the most dramatic way possible.

We eventually helped Maria calm down. I asked my principal to cancel the fire drill that day. The answer was a clear no. I took some Advil and powered through the afternoon – hopping on one foot when I couldn't sit. I wasn't going to leave my class until after the fire drill. Maria and my educational assistant went for a walk around the track before the drill so she didn't have to be in the building when it happened. I went to the ED after school to get it checked out. I had a fractured ankle.

When Maria walked into our class the next morning and saw me in a boot, she stopped, and said, "What happened to you, Cartell?"

Next

I left my middle school teaching position when I was 27. I poured my heart and soul into my teaching every day. Some of the most meaningful and unforgettable experiences in my life happened in those five years. Each school year I started to feel a bit more discouraged, burned out. Not by my students in any way. I had some hard days with some of my students – even days that ended with trips to an emergency department for stitches, wound care, and in my last year, a fractured ankle. I was never upset with any of my students. These hard moments are an expected part of the job. The frustration came from knowing these moments were exacerbated by their lack of access to peer models and general education spaces. My students always filled my bucket, even on days with some spills. I became burned out from

the fight for my students. The disappointment in my peer teachers at my middle school continued to grow. I always tried. They always said no when it mattered.

Over five years they continued to turn away each of my students. Even Pedro. In eighth grade, he was the student body vice president and truly the kindest kid in the school. After he sang "Stand By Me" in the talent show every teacher, staff member, and student knew Pedro. He has always loved machines. The last time I asked a fellow teacher for my students' to access their class was for Pedro to join an eighth-grade science class for a unit I knew they were doing on simple machines. He couldn't give me a valid reason and I decided that I was finished pleading with my colleagues as I walked out of his science lab.

I went searching for more.

But I instead plunged myself deeper in the boundaries. This time into what felt like a canyon.

Field of Dreams

For three years I was the Director of a residential farm community for adults labeled with autism in southwest Ohio. My experiences go beyond the boundaries between special education and disability studies. In this role, I was in a canyon between these two worlds.

My dear friend and former professor Kathy and I were chatting in the car on our way to dinner recently about a visit we had together while I was teaching middle school. We share a memory of a conversation together in her living room in 2008 where Kathy asked me about my dreams for the future. I was ready for something bigger than teaching. I grew up connected to my grandparent's small farm in southeast Ohio and for the past several years I had spent a lot of time with my husband on his family farm. I had a vision for how these worlds could come together.

"I want to build and run a farm community to create transition supports for the disability community. Of the options for students labeled with intellectual disabilities to live, learn, and work as they transition from high school to the adult world, very few of them are in the county." Kathy was the President of the local

County Board for Developmental Disabilities at that time and shared with me that there was a group of local parents of adult children labeled with autism who wanted to create a farm community for their sons and daughters to live and work.

A few days later I received a phone call from the parent who was spearheading the plans to create this farm community. And a few weeks later we met to discuss their goals and vision.

I'm not sure that I always believed that we can receive signs to help guide us, or warn us, in opportunities or situations. I certainly wasn't looking for or reading into signs when I was 26. I met this parent, David, in the fall of 2008 at a Panera. It was a cold and windy day. There had been a wind advisory across most of Ohio for the past few days – a hurricane had hit the Carolinas and was moving north. I remember the wind intensifying a bit on the drive to Panera but didn't have a sense that the weather was going to change drastically during my lunch meeting.

We sat in a booth by a window, exchanged small talk, and David shared a presentation in a binder of his dreams for a farm community, named Frosty Acres Farm, for his daughter and other adults with autism. His vision mirrored several of my own dreams that I had just shared with Kathy – a therapeutic equestrian program, a greenhouse to grow and sell produce to the community, and farm animals to care for. He was loquacious and long-winded. By the time he asked me to share more about myself and my future goals the sky had become very dark and I could feel the wind shake the windows next to our booth.

I had been talking about my teaching career for a few minutes when I saw a shopping cart out of the corner of my eye. It caught both of our attention. It was flying through the parking lot at an unbelievable speed – at least 40 miles per hour. My eyes widened and I held my breath – it went barreling into the car parked right next to my own. It shot backwards and then hit the car again. In a shared unspoken understanding we both jumped out of our seats, exchanged quick goodbyes and a promise to reconnect soon.

I drove back to our family farm in a hurricane. Hurricane Ike was a category two hurricane that carried winds so strong into Ohio that it retained its hurricane status. My knuckles were white gripping my steering wheel as I struggled to keep

my Hyundai Elantra on the road. I vividly remember sparks flying out of power lines, fallen trees with sprawling roots, and trash cans, lawn decorations, and tree branches scattered through the roads. About a mile from the farm, on a very curvy country road, an enormous tree had fallen through power lines and was lying on the road in front of me. I turned my car around and made it about a half a mile back on the road I had just traveled to another large tree that had just fallen after I had driven by. As I was trying my best not to panic, I turned around again and drove back up the curvy road – completely lined with trees. I drove through a farmer's field – his soybeans had broken off and were lying flat – to get around the fallen tree and whipping power lines. The rest of the mile-long drive to the farm from that field was unbearably long as I watched massive trees shake and sway. I pulled into our long farm driveway shaken and full of adrenaline. All of our field corn had already dried out that week in the windy conditions – we were waiting for the weather to break to start harvesting. Every corn stalk had broken in the wind, covering the 100 acres we were getting ready to harvest like a blanket.

My naive 26-year-old self spent the next few days during a power outage talking around candle light about all the possibilities for me to build and be a part of Frosty Acres Farm. No inkling that the universe had been screaming at me.

I was hired as the Director. I partnered with this group of parents, raised over a million dollars, purchased a 100-acre horse farm, worked with contractors to build four homes, created a Medicaid funded care provider agency, hired 50 staff members, and began a residential farm program for 16 adults labeled with autism and intensive needs.

Just as this journey had started, I spent the next three years in what felt like a hurricane – in a storm of stress managing the dreams of what we had hoped for at Frosty Acres Farm and the reality of caring for 16 adults with very significant needs around the clock.

Diana

I was in my office at the farm when one of my staff members called – she was yelling and said she needed immediate help. The farm had been open for about six

months. I knew all of my residents well by this point and, as the Director, was the go-to person in emergencies. I ran down to the house. One of the adults who we supported, Diana, was extremely upset and was chasing this staff member around the kitchen island. Diana has a hard time communicating verbally, especially when she is upset, and often communicated with physical aggression. Her staff had been telling me recently that she had been biting herself, biting hard things around the house, and trying to bite them. I quickly walked into the kitchen, started running laps with the staff around the kitchen island, and created a plan with the staff member to run outside together to encourage Diana to follow us where she could have some space and fresh air.

"Diana, come outside with us. Let's take a break."

We both made our break and ran towards the front door. We were in the doorway when we saw Diana stop, scream, and then squat down to bite the lip on the countertop.

"Diana, let's walk outside."

She was biting the countertop with so much strength you could see her head and her body start to shake. She began to lift up and, with the countertop of the island in her mouth, she lifted the entire corner of the island. Six inches or more. When she opened her mouth the weight of the kitchen island pulled her forward by her bottom teeth as it crashed back to the floor. She sat down right there on the floor – not slowly, she just let herself fall – and started to cry. Her face was bright red. She was struggling to cry and breathe at the same time.

"Diana, come outside with me."

She walked outside and sat down in the driveway. After a minute or so of calming her breathing, we locked eyes, and she reached her hand out to me. I was also trying to slow my breathing. As she was sitting on the blacktop I connected with her hand and she instantly squeezed all four of my fingers together and pulled me toward her. I was grabbing my wrist with my free hand to give myself leverage to pull my hand away when she popped up on her knees and fell into me with her mouth open. She still had an extremely tight grip on my fingers but I managed to arch my back and jump back just far enough. I remember making eye contact with

the staff member and exchanging an unspoken "that was close" until I felt my body being pulled closer to her by my shirt. Diana missed my skin but managed to bite my shirt.

I'm not sure what I was exactly thinking when I reacted in that moment. I know I really don't like being bit. My immediate decision was to bend over and use my free hand to pull my shirt over my head. I startled Diana enough that when she found my shirt dangling from her mouth she let go as I pulled back my other hand.

I could write 100 more curriculum fragments about my experiences at this farm; however, standing outside in just a pair of jeans and a bra with several of my staff and residents circled around me is my most vivid Frosty Acres Farm memory.

When I was lying in bed that night, I tried to really give some thought to what was going on. I called her dentist's office the next morning. Her staff took her to the dentist later that week. Once they had sedated her they found that most of her molar teeth had cavities and one of her molars had a significant crack. She was communicating with us that her mouth hurt and she didn't have the words or means to directly tell us.

Fire and Rain

Another one of the adults we cared for, James, was so sad and unhappy when his family moved him to the farm. He had lived with his parents for 30 years and was just uprooted and moved to a house with three other adults with autism and intensive needs. He paced around the farm all day – from one side of the property to the other. He tried to hurt anything that came into his path. He pulled the legs off of frogs, grabbed people by their hair, choked the farm dog, and would hit people and animals very hard. He had an old Walkman and listened to a tape of James Taylor on repeat all day as he paced the property. He would wear the headphones around his neck – he didn't like the way they felt on his ears – so you could hear "Sweet Baby James" from around his neck anytime he was close enough to you. Whenever I was outside at the farm I would keep my eyes scanning and ears open for all of the residents, but I especially listened for James Taylor music. One afternoon during the first summer that the farm was open I was walking across the property to find one

of my co-workers – no James Taylor music in earshot. I always wore my hair in a bun when I was there – we had several adults who we supported who could pull your hair if they were upset – but for some reason that day I had my hair in a ponytail.

Without audible warning someone grabbed my ponytail and yanked me down to my knees. It was James. He pushed me forward in the grass and put his knee into the middle of my back. I used my free hand to push the base of my ponytail against my head – I could feel the hair at the base of my ponytail start ripping out. I protected my face with my shoulder and arm and screamed as loudly as I could for my co-workers. I was completely pinned and restrained to the ground.

James leaned down next to my ear and whispered in a breathy voice, now permanently etched into my brain, "Go ahead and scream. No one can hear you."

He stopped rewinding his tape and then, click, "Fire and Rain" started to play from around his neck. Several of my co-workers came sprinting over and startled James enough for him to stand up and quickly walk away. I vividly remember rolling over and lying in the grass, my coworkers standing over me. It was so sunny and bright I could only squint when I opened my eyes – I laid there and caught my breath for a while, cursing myself for my dream of this farm.

Over my Head

One of the adults whom we supported only lived at the farm for a couple of weeks. Trevor moved to the farm from a county in the northern part of Ohio. His family was one of the "founding families," but of all the adults moving to the farm I knew the least about Trevor and his needs. His support coordinator from his county board of developmental disabilities was frustratingly brief and vague with me about his support needs as he was transitioning to live on the farm. I knew that Trevor had meningitis as a baby that resulted in some significant brain injury with cognitive disabilities and impulsivity challenges. We quickly learned that he could unpredictably become upset and engage in unsafe and physically aggressive behaviors towards others.

The second weekend that he lived there I got a panicked phone call from one of my staff members. I remember this moment so vividly – I was helping my husband and father-in-law spray our herd of 100 cattle for flies. My job was to spray each cow between their shoulder blades as they ran them through the cattle chute. It was hot and it's not a favorite, or always safe, job to run 1,200-pound cows through a narrow chute. We were almost finished. I answered my phone. I couldn't hear many words clearly – just a lot of screaming.

"Trevor is hurting everyone. It's an emergency!"

I was on speaker phone and could hear Trevor screaming in the background "I'm going to kill you!"

I told my staff I was calling 911 and that I would call them right back. I remember calling emergency dispatch while I sprayed the last two cows. I jumped down from the chute and ran to my car. I was winded trying to tell the dispatcher what was going on – and I didn't clearly know. I just knew it was a dangerous situation. I gave them the address and explained that he has autism and developmental disabilities and to ask the police officers to please turn off the sirens before reaching the farm. I was on the phone with the staff member while I drove to the farm, doing my best to support them and help keep everyone as safe as possible.

When I arrived the police had been there for several minutes. The other three housemates went to other houses. The two staff were outside. One of them was in one of my special education classes that I was teaching as a part-time instructor at Miami – her knees were skinned up and bleeding. The other was holding his head – Trevor hit him with a hot frying pan from the stove. Trevor was inside the house yelling and throwing furniture. Two police officers were standing outside, unsure of what to do. They told me they had called for backup. No one was completely sure what to do. I called the emergency phone number for our county board for developmental disabilities and asked them to send someone to the farm. I called his parents and asked for permission to have him transported to a behavioral health unit at the hospital. They lived several hours away and could not help at that moment.

I didn't know what to do but I knew that he wasn't safe at the farm until we could get better supports in place. I asked the police to call an ambulance to transport him. By this point we had several police officers in front of the house. He would open the front door and yell threats to everyone standing in the front yard while throwing whatever he could find at us. Then he would slam the door and throw furniture, items in the kitchen, anything at the walls and the windows. He was exhausted by the time the EMTs arrived. He had hurt himself and his clothes were stained with blood. We were able to convince him that he was really hurt and needed to go see a doctor. He eventually was so exhausted that he didn't want to fight anymore and willingly got into the ambulance.

As the ambulance drove away I walked to my staff member, who was also one of my special ed majors, and gave her a big hug. She fell apart. She was crying and kept saying that she had no idea what had made him so upset. My other staff member had a bruise forming above his eye and red burn marks on his face from being hit with a hot pan and food.

Shortly after I received a call from a social worker at the hospital. Her voice was timid as she empathetically told me that they could not admit him to their behavioral unit.

My immediate, and unprofessional, answer was "Are you serious?"

She apologetically explained that they were concerned that he could be dangerous to their other patients. I was in way over my head at this point. When the administrator from the county board of developmental disabilities showed up we came up with a plan to have him admitted to a developmental center outside of Cincinnati. The ambulance left the hospital and transported him there. I called his mom and shared an update. She was so distraught on the phone that she just cried and couldn't answer my questions or really speak with me.

My heart had been beating so hard in that past hour that I was feeling really light headed. That feeling intensified as reality washed over me as I made sense of the magnitude of being the one to make the decisions in dangerous situations. And then came the looming big thoughts about what I had helped create. It must have been the hottest day of that summer. I was walking up to my office, sweaty,

exhausted, and feeling a wave of emotions, when a huge storm rolled in. I was too dizzy to drive. And more timid after driving in Hurricane Ike to drive in a storm. My office was in the original farm house on the property. It sat on top of a hill that overlooked the four homes – we had just moved the four residents into our third home and construction was almost complete on the fourth. I had this really comfortable chair that I pulled up to the window. I sat and watched this storm crash on the houses below me. I can still clearly see what my reflection looked like in that window. It startled me when I caught it – I had forgotten that I was wearing my farm clothes – dirty boots, cut-off jean shorts, and a Case IH tank top. I looked, and felt like, I had *zero* business running this operation.

In this storm, and this moment, I realized that the universe had been trying to get my attention.

Institutions

That next week I went to visit Trevor at the developmental center. There are several developmental centers across Ohio that are run by the state department of developmental disabilities. This was the first time I set foot in one. Ohio has these centers as a temporary housing option for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities who are in crisis and cannot live in supported environments in the community. The intention is to provide individuals in crisis intensive supports and then transition them back into the community. For individuals with the most intensive and significant needs, these developmental centers are often their last and only option.

At this same time, my former professor and friend Kathy was coordinating Miami's disability studies minor. She asked me to teach an introductory disability studies class as a part-time instructor.

"Kathy, I don't know that I'm qualified and ready to teach this class." She convinced me otherwise and I trusted her to take the leap. (I have since taught at least 75 sections of "Introduction to Disability Studies" since 2009. It is and will always be my favorite class to teach.) Planning and teaching this class for the first time while I was simultaneously getting the farm up and running sent me on a

serious soul search every week. I was learning about and teaching the tenets of disability justice while creating and running a space that was not, and never can be, capable of my utopian dream of a safe and therapeutic farm for adults with autism. Just days before visiting the developmental center, I was teaching about different facets of history in the disability community and showed my class a documentary about a family deeply impacted by institutionalization. The documentary is narrated by a man who had a younger sister who was born in the 1960s with a mild intellectual disability. His parents made the decision, at the urging of doctors, and the societal norms of that time, for her to live and be raised in a state-run institution when she was a toddler. It became a dark family secret – the brother didn't know what happened to his sister until he found her much later as an adult. The documentary shows heartbreaking footage of young children in rows and rows of cribs, of terrible, overcrowded living conditions, warehoused in a place our society created to forget that they existed. The beginning of the footage shows an aerial shot panning over large white cottage-like homes and one large facility hidden by woods on all sides of the property.

So many thoughts and curse words ran through my head as I watched this footage. I built and created a smaller version of this institution.

A few days later I drove to the developmental center for a meeting for next steps for Trevor. It was past the city limits of a small town outside of Cincinnati. The driveway was long and lined with woods on both sides and winded up a hill to a locked gate. As I drove through, I saw several large white cottage-like homes and a large central facility. The entire compound was completely surrounded by woods. This was the exact image of the footage of the institution from the 1960s. And, deeply troubling, it was a larger but very similar image of Frosty Acres Farm. I needed security clearance and an escort to go through every gate and door. The facility was clearly on a tight lock down. The main building was bright from fluorescent lights, was bustling with medical professionals and staff, and felt cold and very sterile.

I had a meeting scheduled with a social worker from the developmental center and with Trevor's support coordinator from the county board of

developmental disabilities. We sat down in a bare room and the social worker started to share updates with how everything had been going with Trevor at the developmental center that past week. It seemed like his days had been filled with evaluations and arguments and aggression. She shared that he was on a chemical sedative after becoming aggressive with a staff member and seriously injuring him and breaking his knee. (This staff member died shortly after in the hospital from a bacterial infection, MRSA, from one of the wounds from the knee injury).

Before Trevor moved to the farm I had a meeting with his previous support coordinator. She had completely downplayed his support needs. She didn't send me his behavior support plan. Instead, she sent me a list of "behavior support recommendations" to help him transition to his new home. It was a list of very typical supports for individuals labeled with more intensive needs like, "Prepare Trevor in advance for transitions to new activities" and "Give Trevor a visual schedule of his day every morning." The social worker also had recently met with his previous support coordinator. This time, feeling the need, and likely guilt, to be more ethical, she sent his behavior support plan and other supporting documentation.

"Did you know that Trevor's staff up north had to wear cut-resistant Kevlar sleeves to keep themselves safe from him biting them?"

"Did you know that he had documentation of severely injuring his staff?"

She asked me many questions like this.

Many of my answers were "No" and "I had no idea; his family and the county board didn't tell us any of this information."

She wanted to create a plan to transition him back to the farm.

"Can we go visit him before we start to talk about plans?" I asked. "Sure," she responded hesitantly. She stepped out of the room for a few minutes. She returned with two large men wearing scrubs-like uniforms. My bodyguards, I presumed.

When we walked into the residential cottage the smell of ammonia immediately started to burn my nose, from clearing supplies, or urine, or both, and it was overwhelming. We got to his room – it was small and sterile. Just enough size for a twin bed and a dresser that were both mounted to the walls. His family had

come to visit but didn't bring any of his personal belongings. He had a dog named Jasper that he really loved and had moved with him to the farm. I had grabbed a picture of Trevor and Jasper that he had on his nightstand at the farm. He was sitting on his bed with his head down, he had a magazine next to him.

I stayed close to the doorway, said "Hey Trevor," and handed it to him slowly.

He said "Hi" in a gruff voice. He wasn't happy to see me.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"What have you been up to? Have you been reading?"

"No." His responses were truculent and completely warranted.

What do you say? What can you say?

"Trevor, do you want to move back to the farm?"

"No. Hell no. I want to go home."

On the drive home I called David to talk through what to do. He was now the board president of Frosty Acres Farm. I had a nuanced relationship with the board – they were the landlords and oversaw the property and I was the Director of the Medicaid funded residential support agency that I developed to provide 24-hour staffing and supports to the residents who lived at the farm.

Some of the families were visiting their adult children during the incident with Trevor. Everyone who was at the farm that afternoon could hear and see what had happened. He made it clear that the other residents and their families did not feel safe with Trevor returning. I didn't know how I could support the safety of my staff if he returned. While we physically looked like an upgraded developmental center, we had significantly less access to staffing and supports through Medicaid funding. David told me that the board had an emergency meeting and they decided that he could no longer be a tenant at the farm – they were evicting him.

This decision put me in an even more complicated position. If I didn't give his family notice that I was no longer able to provide residential Medicaid services, then I was legally responsible to continue his support care elsewhere. I was not equipped for that. Really for any of this.

David called his mom first. She called me immediately after. She was so sad and angry and just cried so hard. It was heartbreaking. She told me I had ruined her dreams and her life. The entire situation was just heartbreakingly sad.

Shortly after his family worked with Ohio Legal Rights and sued the Frosty Acres Farm Board of Directors. This sparked an investigation by the state board of developmental disabilities. They had a legitimate concern that we were not upholding the intention of Medicaid to provide supported living in the community. It was a valid argument. Our residents' needs were so intense that many days I felt like I was running a small developmental institution from the 1980s. Not my dream of a therapeutic farm community.

My only argument to the continued probing from the state was that we were the only alternative for supported living outside of the city and suburbs. I quickly became hardened to my own arguments.

Corroboration

I could write a book of fragments just from my experiences at the farm. If you haven't spent time with people with very significant disabilities some of the stories could be hard to imagine. We had a resident become aggressive with staff then run away and disappear into the nearly 100 acres of woods behind the property. It took a police-led manhunt to find him. Helicopters, infrared equipment, dogs, the whole thing. He was missing for an entire night. I watched one of our residents punch through a glass window and then eat a piece of the glass. Another resident punched me in my side so hard he cracked one of my ribs. I had my jaw dislocated by another resident. There were many hospital stays in the behavioral health crisis unit. And more stays for our residents in the developmental center.

It was almost three years from when I was hired and began building plans to the day when I just knew I couldn't do it anymore. David's son Levi was one of my staff members – an unspoken nonnegotiable staff member. We had a very complicated relationship. There are a lot of challenges with what Medicaid funding can realistically provide in supports. My staff earned an average of $10 an hour. I was one of the highest paying residential providers in our area and one of very few

that provided health insurance. Even so, employment at the farm perpetuated a cycle of poverty for my staff. Burnout, injuries, and turnover were unending. I didn't have the funding to pay staff an equitable living wage. This reality made it impossible to meet the parents' expectations. One mom, a former leader of a county board for developmental disabilities, stormed into my office one afternoon and threw her son's towel on my desk.

"I didn't pay $100,000 for my son to live here and not have his towels bleached."

Levi was a direct pipeline from the hard realities of the farm to the parents and board members.

One gray summer afternoon, around the three-year marker of starting this journey, this hurricane, there was a very sheepish knock on my door frame. One of my staff members asked quietly if he could come in and talk. He was one of my kindest and most trustworthy staff. Usually these knocks meant they were giving me a resignation. He sat down. He didn't make eye contact.

"Levi has been abusing Calvin. It's been happening for a long time but I haven't said anything because I don't want to lose my job. But today he jerked him around and pushed him so many times that I cannot take it anymore."

I thanked him sincerely. I was surprised but not shocked. I asked him to write down everything he had witnessed. About an hour later he gave me pages of incidents. I gave him a big hug and assured him that I was going to do everything in my power to make it okay.

When I reflect broadly on my life, there are several defining moments. This was one of them. I sat at my desk and read through his terrible accounts of Levi hurting and coercing our residents with the physical power he had over them. With complete clarity and without a second of hesitation I knew what I had to do. I also knew this would be the end of my role as the Director at Frosty Acres Farm.

I was on fire as I walked across the farm to find Levi. As we walked back to my office I told him that I had received reports of abusive behavior and that legally I had to call the police to file a report. He was arrogant and truculent.

"Wait till my dad hears about this."

The police came and created a report. I sent Levi home on administrative leave. I notified the county board for developmental disabilities and called the families. The police followed up with the families about pressing charges. Unsurprisingly, they all declined. I didn't tell them which staff member was accused of abusing their adult child. But they all knew. Pressing charges against the president's son in that fragile ecosystem would have absolutely resulted in an eviction notice.

David was not a fast man but he charged into my office like a linebacker that afternoon. He was red. As red as his daughter had been when she lifted up a kitchen island with her mouth. I don't recall every threat that he made to me and don't remember really listening.

Without formal charges, the police deferred to the county board to take the lead in the investigation. Over the course of several weeks, many more staff had come forward and reported abuse.

The general sentiment was, "Yeah it happens, but we can't say anything because of who he is."

The investigators substantiated several claims of abuse. I terminated Levi's position. The conversation with him didn't go well. Several days later a board member, not David, walked into my office and handed me a paper with a notice that the board and all legal guardians of the residents were providing notice to my residential service agency. Meaning, in 30 days another Medicaid support provider would begin services at the farm. The way she said "I'm sorry" as she handed me the paper was actually very genuine. But also cowardly.

"This has nothing to do with you. I'm thankful for everything you have done here. I'm just really sorry."

I didn't want a hug but I let her hug me anyway. I walked out of my office and told my administrative staff. I remember three of them cried. I encouraged them to apply for similar jobs with the new residential service provider. Then I did the same with all 50 of my staff members.

So that was it. Many of the families were too ashamed to talk to me. Many apologized and said they were bullied and didn't have a choice. Levi was hired in a

leadership role with the new agency. There is an abuse and neglect registry at the state level that needs to be cleared of every staff member you hire to do this type of work. Strings must have been pulled at the state level to keep him off the list.

I wanted to leave so many times since the first summer when we opened Frosty Acres Farm. But I hadn't been ready – I equated quitting to admitting that I had failed. I kept holding on to the good moments, to the glimmers, and to the possibilities if we just tried something else a little differently. The enormous weight of the farm that I had been carrying on my shoulders just dissipated, just lifted away, as I drove home that day. I had a drink on my back porch with my husband when I got home. I distinctly remember the rush I had as the sense of becoming a functioning person with agency and freedom again hit me after three years of being tethered to a whirlwind of a flailing dream.

What if we Make Mistakes? Part Two

Pedro, three of my Miami students, and I recently traveled to Syracuse to present at a conference on inclusive college programs for students labeled with intellectual disabilities. He came into town a day before the trip to spend time with my family on our farm and to go to class with me. He came to my Teacher Education class on Classroom Culture, Communities, and Climate – the class with my dream students that I previously described. This was my dream scenario – my teacher candidates whom I truly adore and Pedro, my greatest gift as a teacher. Towards the end of class we spent some time chatting as a group. One of my students made a comment to Pedro about being my student in this class.

She asked him, "What was it like having Ashley as a teacher in middle school?"

"If you growl, you cannot go to community. Right, Cartell?"

"What do you mean, Pedro?"

"If Jack makes you mad and you growl, then you don't go to community. Right?"

I had no memory of this until that moment. I stopped breathing. The way you stop breathing when you get the wind knocked out of you. Pedro is the most

naturally empathetic person I know. His brain must be filled with the highest density of mirror neurons possible for a human – his warm expression shifted and I think he stopped breathing, too. He could sense the way I was disarmed by his response.

He smiled and laughed his signature laugh.

"Remember we would dance?"

He started singing the bridge of "Come on Eileen." I helped Pedro learn to read and speak English by reading and singing karaoke together at school. He loves 80s music.

"Come on, Eileen, too-loo-rye-ay. Come on, Eileen, too-loo-rye-ay."

I laughed. Another nervous giggle. He has the most distinct big laugh that fills and lights up a room. His rendition of Dexy's Midnight Runners was lost on the 19-year-old students in the room – but they found his singing and laugh infectious.

"Remember, I'm your soul man."

"I know, Friend. Pedro, I am sorry about community that day. That wasn't fair to you. Thank you for helping me remember. That was a mistake and I apologize."

Pedro, my three students, and I traveled to Syracuse the next day and presented together at a conference for inclusive college programs for students labeled with intellectual disabilities on incorporating into the curriculum the tenets of disability studies into Miami's inclusive college program, the Access Miami Program. The presentation was really special. It was moving to be in an academic space that valued his experiences and perspectives.

When I met with the students next week in class, we picked right back up to our question and conversation about mistakes at the beginning of the semester.

"I have been thinking so much about the question you asked me earlier this semester: What if I make mistakes?"

I shared with them that many of the most joyful and special memories of my teaching career include Pedro. Someone asked me what he meant when he called himself my soul man. I was happy to share the memory. Close to the end of his second school year in our class, Pedro and I were working on something together at

his desk – math, reading, I'm not sure anymore – and he stopped me and said, "Thank you, Cartell. You are my soul."

"Awe," all of my students were synchronized in a sappy voice.

"I know. It is the sweetest, kindest, and most genuine thing anyone has ever said to me. When he wants to make me smile, he will ask me if I remember the time that he told me I was his soul."

"These are the memories that I hold onto from our time together. It broke my heart to hear that the first memory that came to his mind to share was the time I had him stay at the school while we went on our community outing as a punishment."

I explained to the class the way my class was structured as a resource room for students labeled with multiple disabilities – most people called my class the "MD Unit." When students are placed in "units" they inherently move through a series of resource rooms with the same group of students, often sharing a teacher for several years at a time. Full days, no changing classes. And they often stayed together for Extended School Year services, the formal name for special education summer school. This was the case with many of my students. Cora and Chelsea had been classmates since pre-school. By the time they came to my middle school classroom they had spent every day, all day, for 10 years in school together. They were like sisters. They loved each other dearly and could not remember a life without each other. But they also fought like sisters. They knew every single possible way to annoy each other. My students were more than classmates – they were family. Some days this fostered really special shared connections. And some days were filled with bickering and sibling-like banter. I'm not sure I could quantify the amount of time I spent addressing the sibling rivalry dynamic often present in my classroom. The conversations during those days were not wildly different than the things I now say repeatedly as a mom.

This was the case with Jack and Pedro. They have been best friends for 17 years and have spent as much time together as many brothers do. I don't have a clear memory of what happened during the morning before our community outing, but I do recall refereeing banter and jabs between Jack and Pedro. Shortly before leaving the classroom for the bus, Pedro hit a breaking point and turned to Jack and

growled really loudly. In a moment of exhaustion and exasperation I broke down, yelled, and told them both they were going to stay back during our community outing. They were crushed.

Determined to make this a learning experience for my teacher candidates I was completely honest.

"So what if we make mistakes? Clearly I have made more than I could remember. I've been reflecting on how as a young teacher I didn't have the foresight to know how to begin to comprehend the magnitude of my students' lives and memories. Think about something unfair that happened to you at school when you were young. Do you think your teacher remembers?"

"Probably not," they chimed in.

"We're going to make mistakes. After hearing Pedro choose to share his memory about getting in trouble, I've realized my biggest mistake was not being reflective enough."

Jason

I was lucky to have Jason in class for each of his three years of middle school. Jason loves music and knows every word to every Michael Jackson song. He gives the best hugs. He only eats chicken nuggets, chicken fingers on rare occasions. He loves game shows. Mirroring his affinity for game shows, everything in middle school was a negotiation with Jason. I would ask him to do something, anything, and he would counter with something more agreeable to him and say, "Deal or no deal?" I do feel confident that I taught Jason some important skills in three years, but I spent significantly more time in negotiations than in direct instruction. I was the most effective teacher for him when he didn't know he was learning something new. We loved dancing together. He learned his left and right by dancing the "Cha Cha Slide'' together at the end of every Friday.

When Jason knew he was learning something new, he usually wasn't having it. Sometimes the answer was just, "No deal."

"Oh no, Miss Cartell."

"I really can't Miss Cartell."

"Please, no way, Miss Cartell."

"Please, Jason. I know you can do it. Math first, then break. Deal?"

This was the flow of our day.

I teach my teacher candidates about the importance of positively stated classroom rules that are collaboratively created with students. As a middle school teacher I always worked with my students to create agreed upon classroom rules during the first week of school. Each year that Jason was in my class, after we collaboratively finished writing our shared expectations, I added, "No whining" to the bottom of our class rules.

"Oh no, Miss Cartell," knowing it was a rule just for him.

I didn't follow my own advice.

Access Miami Program

Around 10 years after Jason moved on from middle school, I had an opportunity to have him in class again. In 2015 a group of Miami students and I developed a summer program for students labeled with intellectual disabilities. My special education majors had the dream and I had the perfect group of students.

During my first-year teaching at Miami, three of my inclusive special education majors, Sydney, Emily, and Rachel, became really engaged in my class on transition supports for disabled students. They asked important critical questions about why students labeled with intellectual disabilities have very few opportunities after high school. They kept asking bigger questions and eventually came to the question, "Why can't students labeled with intellectual disabilities attend Miami?" I, too, shared this question and encouraged them to create an independent study with me where we could research perspectives from the disability community on accessing college.

While guided by perspectives and preferences from the disability community, we together created a weeklong summer program for students with and without intellectual disabilities to live on campus together and take a disability studies class – our students named it the Access Miami Program.

Partnering with my current and former students to collaborate in ways that honor their deep desire for access to a college education at Miami has been powerful. The Access Miami Program is what I am most proud of as an educator of almost 20 years.

These summers are a dream. My former middle school students and my Miami students learning together and becoming friends will always be the most meaningful experiences of my professional life.

Over the course of five summers, our Miami students have taught many aspects of the courses, have co-taught several classes with our students labeled with intellectual disabilities, and have partnered in meaningful action projects together to advocate for real change. One summer our students with disabilities led an action project by researching areas in our local uptown area that they found inaccessible. With the support of our Miami students following their lead, they created a list of recommendations to increase accessibility through elements of universal design and presented them to our community leaders at our local "Town and Gown" conference that was taking place the same week. Pedro, Chelsea, Jack, Jess, and Josh presented. Josh presented recommendations using his communication device – asserting his voice in this space was powerful. And a deeply meaningful shift from where we started in our educational journey together. Our students were working together in solidarity with members of our disability community who identified problems that were important to them and worked in partnership to follow their lead to support their advocacy work.

During the second summer of our Access Miami Program, I taught an introductory disability studies course and focused on exploring the differences between the medical model of disability and social models of disability. Towards the end of the week the students worked with partners to create a visual presentation to share with the class what they learned about the models of disability. These summers have been full of many defining moments in my career. One of my most impactful moments came from Jason.

He put together a simple slide show to present to the class. Jason brought a pair of classic aviator sunglasses to campus that week. He looked just like Hunter S.

Thompson wearing them. He received so many compliments about them when he arrived that he wore them all week. Including during class and for this presentation.

He started with a slide that provided an overview of the medical model. When he advanced to his next slide, he cleared his throat and continued in a solemn and stately voice.

"I don't need to change. Columbus needs to change."

Yes! His city, Columbus, and his world, need to change. I clearly remember the juxtaposition of my wave of feelings in that moment.

Jason got it. He had the lightbulb moment I was deeply hoping for in teaching my students social models of disability. How freeing, I was thinking, to lift a weight off of his shoulders and share it with society.

That moment also hit me like a ton of bricks. Every year in middle school I asked Jason to change. I asked *him* to change. Not me. Not our classroom community. I stifled his voice. All of my students communicated in different ways – communication devices, sign language, switches, sounds, and words. Jason felt uncomfortable at school. Many things in our environment were triggering to him and he was communicating that to me in his own way.

Jess

My student Jess is the sweetest person you could ever meet. As a middle school student, she was like a mother hen to all of her classmates. She has always been soft spoken, comforting, and caring. She is innately a natural caregiver. She came to stay with me for a bit after my oldest daughter was born – she loves babies and would hold her for hours and watch her sleep. We met Jess for ice cream recently and she thought it was so funny that my daughter is now taller than her. I loved watching Jess wrap her up in the biggest hug.

"I remember when you were just a baby, Missy!"

Jess has been the mother hen of our Access Miami Program, too. Our Miami students gravitate to her. Her peers depend on her – especially Josh. Jess is caring and nurturing and is truly a really good friend. My favorite thing in the world is

getting texts from my current and former Miami students with selfies with Jess, out and about in fun places.

Jess has always taken her Miami classes very seriously. Recently she texted me, “Homework Miami” 1. Disability studies is change the world. 2. Disability studies for model saying social society needs to change.” Jess deeply wants to become a Miami student. Several times over the past few years, I have received an email as a faculty advisor to verify a “non-Miami” email address for a student named Jessica requesting to add either a disability studies minor or a special education minor. Jess has very strong skills in navigating the internet and has a lot of determination.

Northstar

The summer after the pandemic we still were not able to come back to campus to live in the dorms. We improvised and partnered with our university’s outdoor pursuit center and coordinated a camping trip at a state park. This camping trip filled my bucket – our time together was hilarious, fun, and exhausting.

We had 20 people with us and most of them had never camped outside overnight before. Racoons loudly and aggressively ransacked our campsite throughout the night. Owls made calls all night. One of them was a screech owl with a haunting banshee call. There was a lot of rustling in the woods. Every single time through the night that there was a noise this was how the scene would play:

Jack: “What was that?!”

Pedro, from the same tent: “Please Buddy, go to sleep.”

Jess, from across the campsite: “Boys, be quiet please.”

Jack: “Whoops, Sorry Jess. Wait! What was that?”

Jess: “Go to bed please.”

Jack: “What was that? Seriously Guys, was that an owl?”

Pedro: “Jack!”

On repeat, for eight hours. The pictures of everyone the next morning are so great – 20 people have never looked so tired.

That day we did all the expected camping activities including building a fire and roasting marshmallows. We spent a couple of hours sharing memories and stories from both middle school and our AMP summers before everyone attempted sleep. Jess is a night owl. After my daughters fell asleep, I came out to check on everything. Jess was with Samantha, one of our favorite Miami students, and they were still sitting by the dwindling fire. When I walked over, they surprised me with their conversation.

"We were looking at the stars together and we found the northstar," Samantha started as she was making eye contact with Jess and making an encouraging head nod in my direction. They were planning something.

"We talked about how you've taught us about access and that access is the northstar of our advocacy."

"Let's get star tattoos!" It seemed like Jess startled herself with her own volume.

I'm not quite sure about the face that I made. I paused only for a moment as I was considering my unlucky history with tattoos.

"Absolutely!" A chance to permanently mark our collective relationship and journey toward access? Absolutely.

A couple of months later we found ourselves in a booth at a Mexican restaurant before our appointment as we hyped each other up to see who was going to sit in the chair first. They were both resolved that I was going first before the conversation even began. Jess squeezed my hand as I was getting my northstar as hard as she squeezed my hand as she was getting hers.

InclusiveU

Pedro had never been on an airplane before. He is a nervous talker and made friends with every person who he could make eye contact with from his seat on our trip to Syracuse on our 6:00am. flight. It's hard to imagine that anyone else has ever been so happy to go to Syracuse, New York, as Pedro was for this trip.

Pedro, my three students who helped me start our Access Miami Program, Sydney, Emily, and Rachel, and I traveled to Syracuse University to attend and

present at a national conference for inclusive college programs for students with intellectual disabilities at their Center for Inclusive Higher Education, InclusiveU. Every second of this trip was special.

Pedro and my Miami students led a presentation titled "Opportunities for Disability Studies Curriculum and Culture in Inclusive College Programming." The session was very well attended and they made several salient points about the value of a disability studies-centered focus in inclusive higher education programming. There are currently 332 inclusive college programs in the U.S. for students labeled with intellectual disabilities (Think College, 2024). I have reviewed most of these programs and have found few that intentionally ground disability studies in their curriculum. It was meaningful to work with Pedro and my students to contribute something meaningful for those committed to access in higher education. And it was incredibly meaningful to share a space with Pedro as a valued and respected contributor in a world dedicated to access that he so desperately wants to be a part of.

This was Pedro's space. The hallways and rooms were filled with college students who identified with intellectual disabilities. Pedro, very easily, made a new friend Micha. Over lunch he shared highlights of his job with Pedro – he is a graduate of Syracuse University's InclusiveU and is a part-time instructor in their inclusive blended licensure teacher preparation program. Pedro now has a life goal to teach classes at Miami for teacher candidates.

Pedro felt so proud of himself all day. I saw the same look when he was elected class vice president and when he received standing ovations at the talent show and at his high school graduation.

Chelsea

Chelsea has a gift of bringing so much life into every space she graces. She loves singing, dancing, good food, sushi, making art, and getting tattoos. Her brain is wired for the best word associations. My favorite word association came from an Access Miami Program class on self-advocacy. I remember asking the class what they wanted to do as self-advocates.

"Let's go to the advocasino!" Chelsea is the best at making people laugh.

She encourages everyone.

"Cartell, look at you!"

"Oh wow, Cartell!"

"Let's hear it for Cartell!"

Chelsea loves to give gifts. And she loves to have fun. When she was an eighth grader, she walked up to my desk as she came into our classroom on my birthday and pulled a bottle of champagne out of her backpack and held it out to me with the biggest proud smile.

"You're champagning, Cartell!"

On her first day of classes at Miami for our first Access Miami Program week, she kept telling me on our walk to class that her backpack was so heavy. As soon as she sat down at her desk for her first ever college class she opened her bag and pulled out a bottle of margarita mix.

"Who wants a margarita? Cartell?"

She doesn't drink but thinks everyone else should.

She's always bursting with affirmations. Chelsea's voice can easily fill a room. She always has a strong compulsion to give compliments to people as they speak and to repeat parts of what people say in affirming ways, often with a word association, often referencing food.

"Absolutely, Chelsea."

"Applesolutely, Cartell!"

Over the years Chelsea has become one of my closest friends. We've been there for each other's big life moments. We've been to Disneyland together. I took her on her first roller coaster on a visit to Knott's Berry Farm. She took me to see *The Lion King* on Broadway. She sang the entire time. We've traveled around the country together with the Williams Syndrome national organization. My favorite picture of us is on a beach in the Pacific Ocean, walking by the water and holding hands, somewhere along Highway 101. Chelsea called out throughout my entire wedding ceremony, "You look beautiful, Cartell!" I really adore her and our friendship.

Chelsea loves getting tattoos and has become quite an illustrated woman. Her best tattoo is of her cat positioned like a "lucky cat" holding up a piece of sashimi sushi in its paw. She has asked me to get a tattoo with her since she was in middle school. The summer after our second Access Miami Program week wrapped up we went for it. We decided on simple and small matching little red hearts on our wrists. Noticing that Chelsea was really sensitive to the sounds of the tattoo machine, our artist offered to use a new type of machine that was quieter. We happily agreed. It must have been his first attempt at his new machinery. Several days later Chelsea and I both ended up with reactions from the needle being too deep. They looked terrible. After a year of monthly steroid injections to decrease scar tissue we were ready to try again.

Chelsea and I decided to get bigger black hearts to cover up our red debacle hearts. I had the great idea to add a comma below the heart to symbolize a semi-colon and the unending continuation of our shared stories and friendship. I don't prefer the feeling of needles and foolishly chose not to watch the artist as she etched a very simple heart and comma into my wrist. I didn't watch or look once.

"You're doing great, Cartell! I'm so proud of you."

She covered my wrist with some Aquaphor and a black bandage. I held Chelsea's free hand and laughed with her as the artist worked on her heart and comma.

She laughed "That tickles!" at least a dozen times.

After a post-tattoo sushi date with Chelsea, I drove two hours back home. I was excited to show my daughters and took my bandage off as soon as they ran up to me. Here was yet another moment where my heart stopped. I looked down at a fairly large black heart tattoo with a comma, completely backwards, stained on my wrist.

Coffee?

Recently the Society for Disability Studies (SDS) has been partnering with The Ohio State University's disability studies program to host the SDS annual conference. SDS conferences are a model for meeting access needs and are scholarly

in unique and exciting ways. The highlight of every SDS conference is a dance on the second evening. I had attended a few SDS dances at previous conferences – the field of disability studies is very connected to artistic expression. These dances embody the spirit of the field in really beautiful ways.

The middle school where I used to teach was close to OSU's campus. I invited Chelsea to come to the dance with me. I have yet to meet a person who loves to sing and dance more than Chelsea. I picked her up after my conference presentation that day, stopped for a quick sushi date, and brought her to the dance. There was a social hour and a keynote speaker before the dance. I remember feeling really excited as I introduced Chelsea to a new Miami colleague and our current and previous disability studies visiting scholars. I'm confident it was because including her in that space felt like my two separate worlds – my teaching in special education and my scholarship in disability studies – were coming together for the first time.

An OSU disability studies faculty member corralled the crowd's attention and began to introduce the keynote speaker.

"Everyone, there are many types of fidgets on the table here. Be your free self in this space. Roll around on the floor if you would like." The crowd responded in approval with the applause sign in American Sign Language.

I remember vividly thinking to myself, "Okay, this is our space." I was looking forward to the keynote speaker and was particularly interested in her work on mental health arts-based programming. The room fell quiet as she approached the podium. She introduced herself. From the middle of the room Chelsea's voice carried.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Chelsea."

"Hi Chelsea." The speaker responded with a smile and a surprised laugh.

She began to read from an academic paper she had just published. I could see Chelsea's brain searching for word associations. She knew not to speak too loudly but could not fight the impulse to share her connections aloud.

"While students nearly…"

"Nigiri? Sounds good."

I remember this so clearly. Some of our neighbors initially seemed impressed with this association and giggled and smiled at Chelsea. This was her cue for social acceptance. So she kept listening for more associations to share.

"You're doing great!" Chelsea shared in a natural pause between sentences as she was reading from her paper.

"Um, thank you."

This time without the warm smile. It was one of those smiles when you are annoyed so you press your lips tightly together. I started to get nervous.

"All that remains…"

"All the lo mein?"

She couldn't help it. It wasn't loud enough in the room for everyone to hear but it caught the speaker's attention. She made eye contact with me and raised her eyebrows. Our neighbors around the table made the same face – eyebrows slightly raised and lips pressed together. Our cues had changed. Chelsea's vocalizations were not embraced. It was time to go. It was very clear that she wasn't the right type of disabled for that space.

"Chelsea," I whispered, "Do you want to go get Starbucks?"

"Yes, Cartell," she gave it her best attempt at a whisper and gave me one of her classic winks.

Chelsea doesn't sneak out of places well.

"S'cuse me. Pardon me. Ooops. Pardon me. S'cuse me."

We made it to the elevator and I told her I was bored and really appreciated her leaving with me.

"Oh, it's okay, Cartell."

As the elevator lowered I felt my blood pressure rise as I started to visualize the very similar scene in my mind when our middle school choir teacher told Chelsea to leave the risers during her first choir concert.

We eventually found the Starbucks in the student center. I texted my friend and colleague still in the room and asked her to let us know when the dance was starting. Chelsea ordered a complicated fancy drink and we sat alone in the coffee shop and talked about sushi and future plans.

At the dance, Chelsea was met with warm smiles again. She always finds acceptance on a dance floor – it's her place to shine. She went to the DJ and requested ABBA songs during every slow song. Before the end of the night he complied and she found a way to be at the center of an ABBA dance circle that she inspired.

Later that night when I pulled my car into her driveway Chelsea held up her wrist.

"Hey Cartell, let's see your heart."

I brought my wrist to hers and connected our hearts. Chelsea laughed.

"Boop. Love you, Cartell."

"Love you, too, Chels."

Fairytales

I recently went out for ice cream with several of my former middle school students. Cora charged at me when I walked in with the best hug. Jason asked me what TV shows I had been watching. Jack brought my daughters each a Build-a-Bear he made for them. Josh loves ice cream and was taking a bite each time he rocked closer to the table. Pedro belted a very accurate Santa impression for all of the Graeter's Ice Cream patrons. Jess took a selfie of us while holding up our matching tattoos. These students have become my family. *They are the family I choose.*

Once we all had our ice cream and were sitting down together Chelsea held up her ice cream and proposed a toast.

"Drum roll everyone."

Everyone complied.

"Let's hear it for Cartell! Hey Cartell, let's go make fairytales!"

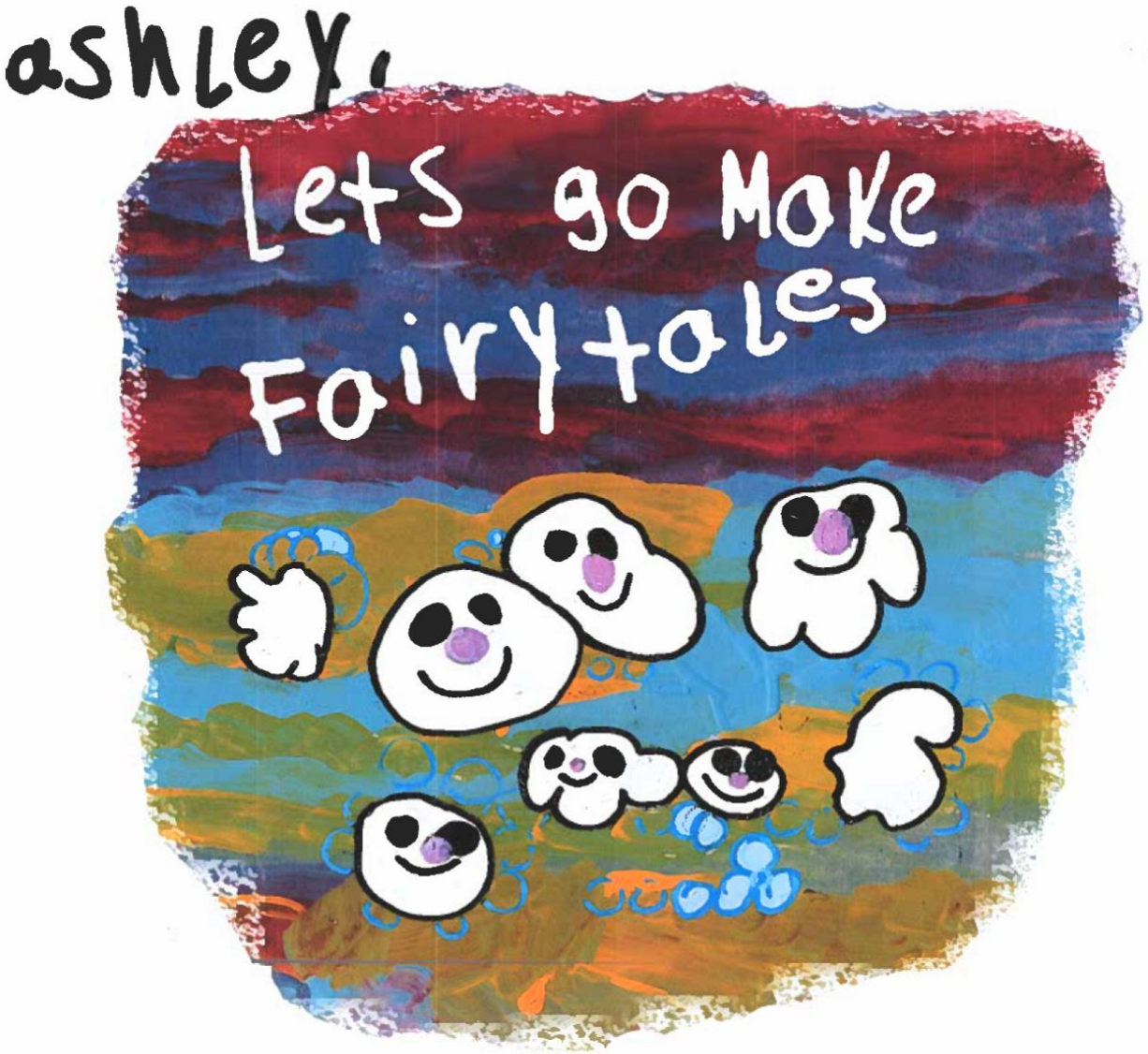
She put down her ice cream and pulled a laminated piece of artwork that she made out of the cinch bag on her back. In her handwriting, the exact same handwriting she has had since middle school, it reads, "Ashley, Let's Go Make Fairytales." Under the words are several fluffy figures with big smiling faces with a brightly blended backdrop.

"Chelsea, I love this so much. What are these?" I pointed to the wide-eyed figures.

"They're your cows."

"Thank you, Chelsea. I really love it. What kind of fairytales should we make?"

"Good ones, Cartell."



Alt Text: Image of painting by Chelsea that reads "Ashley, Let's go make fairytales" with eight images of fluffy white cows with big eyes, smiles, and pink noses in a green and yellow pasture underneath a purple and red sky.

Chapter Five
Analysis of Curriculum Fragments for a Narrative

As educators, our stories "point to critical moments or touchstone experiences" that, through reflection, we understand as "helping to shape who we have become as teachers" even as we "look back at these earlier selves with surprise and affection, and sometimes even shame and regret. We may wish that we knew then what we know now, but also must recognize that we likely wouldn't be who we are, or know what we know now, had it not been for that earlier self" (Connor & Ferri, 2021, p. 314). My stories have deeply shaped who I have become as a teacher, and as a person. As I began creating my curriculum fragments, I intentionally built stories to represent the range of the work in educating and supporting disabled students and adults – surprise, affection, shame, and regret – that could weave together the complexities, nuances, and depth to my lived experiences to better situate myself to create a narrative that is truly reflective of depth and growth. As Maya Angelou (n.d.) asserts, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." In an effort to position myself to "know better," I surfaced my hardest moments as a teacher, my biggest mistakes, hoping that taking an uncomfortable stance could open the window that changes the view. In this chapter, I analyze my new view to create my new narrative.

More specifically, in this chapter I engage in Pinar's (2004) analytical stage of currere informed by Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis using a hermeneutic circle to curate meaning of my curriculum fragments generated by reflection through the regressive stage of currere. The intention of the analytical stage is to reach a clearer view that bridges the past and the present.

Journaling and crafting my curriculum fragments sent me on an emotional journey that helped me relive my joy and regrets and was widely very cathartic. These fragments represent my greatest joys and my deepest regrets – the memories I often replay in my head, the scars I wear, and the symbolism of the illustrations etched on my body. Connor and Ferri (2021) claim that the value in our stories as educators is to "help us navigate and make sense of the ongoing, contradictory

impulses of schooling. They help us to bring meaning to current practice and understand our place in the larger context of education" (p. 314). The aim of this chapter is to create my narrative to "bring meaning" to my current practice as an educator and to explore the possibilities as I navigate in the boundaries.

Looping Circles, Finding Meaning

Though the timeline of my curriculum fragments is linear, creating each fragment flowed from one to the next in a way that ultimately became circular in nature. Considering the hermeneutic circle as I wrote my curriculum fragments helped me build each story in ways that also helped build a greater meaning, a bigger picture.

Specifically, the thread of my fragments about making mistakes became tied together through circles of reflection that span almost 20 years of my career.

I truly was well-intentioned when I coordinated a performance of "You Raise Me Up" for my school community. And was truly horrified several years later when I learned about harmful disability tropes and the damage caused by framing the disability community as inspirational. I have held onto the guilt and remorse for how I exceptionalized my students to their peers and teachers for nearly 20 years.

Ten years after I left my teaching position I had the opportunity to discuss portrayals and tropes of the disability community during one of our Access Miami Program classes. As I taught them about representations of disability, we discussed our shared experiences at the middle school talent show performance. I apologized to my students and explained the reasons I was genuinely sorry for the position I put them in. Through a lot of conversation, our framings of that shared experience clearly differed wildly. Jason made a connection back to "I don't need to change. Columbus needs to change." He felt it was a "Columbus problem" if the people in his city thought of him differently from the performance. Pedro made the connection that it opened a door for him to sing "Stand by Me," a very positive memory for him. Jess felt upset with the teachers at our middle school. I am confident I caught my students off guard with my vulnerability in that moment and they were as worried about and protective of my feelings as I was about theirs.

When I was a young teacher, I made an impulsive and brash decision to punish Pedro in a moment where we were both frustrated and emotionally drained. We both reached a tipping point of our tolerance for stressful noise levels and both reacted in a moment of exhaustion. Pedro was punished for reaching this threshold. I was not. The conversation with my teacher candidates almost 20 years later about making mistakes happened organically as I shared the importance of constant reflection that was sparked by my own self-reflection of "You Raise Me Up" and what I now interpret to be my own mistake. Pedro's first memory, his own unintended curriculum fragment, that he shared during his visit with my teacher candidates two months after our initial conversation seemed like a confession of what he perceived as his own mistake that he felt compelled to share. For nearly 20 years he held onto this fragment where he inherently believed he did something very wrong. It was likely the first, or only, time he had been punished at school and it clearly wasn't a small thing for Pedro. He rushed to respond to my student's question, "What was it like to be in Ashley's class?" with an immediacy that signaled he had finally found his moment to get this bottled-up, self-identified mistake off his shoulders. Sharing a genuine apology with Pedro after class gave us an opportunity to loop back to that day almost 20 years ago and make sense of our actions in ways that helped us create a new shared story.

In Figure 2, I demonstrate the ways in which I used a hermeneutic circle as a narrative mode of analysis to inform my pathway of creating curriculum fragments in the regressive stage of currere that were built upon, connected to, and ultimately reconnected with each other.

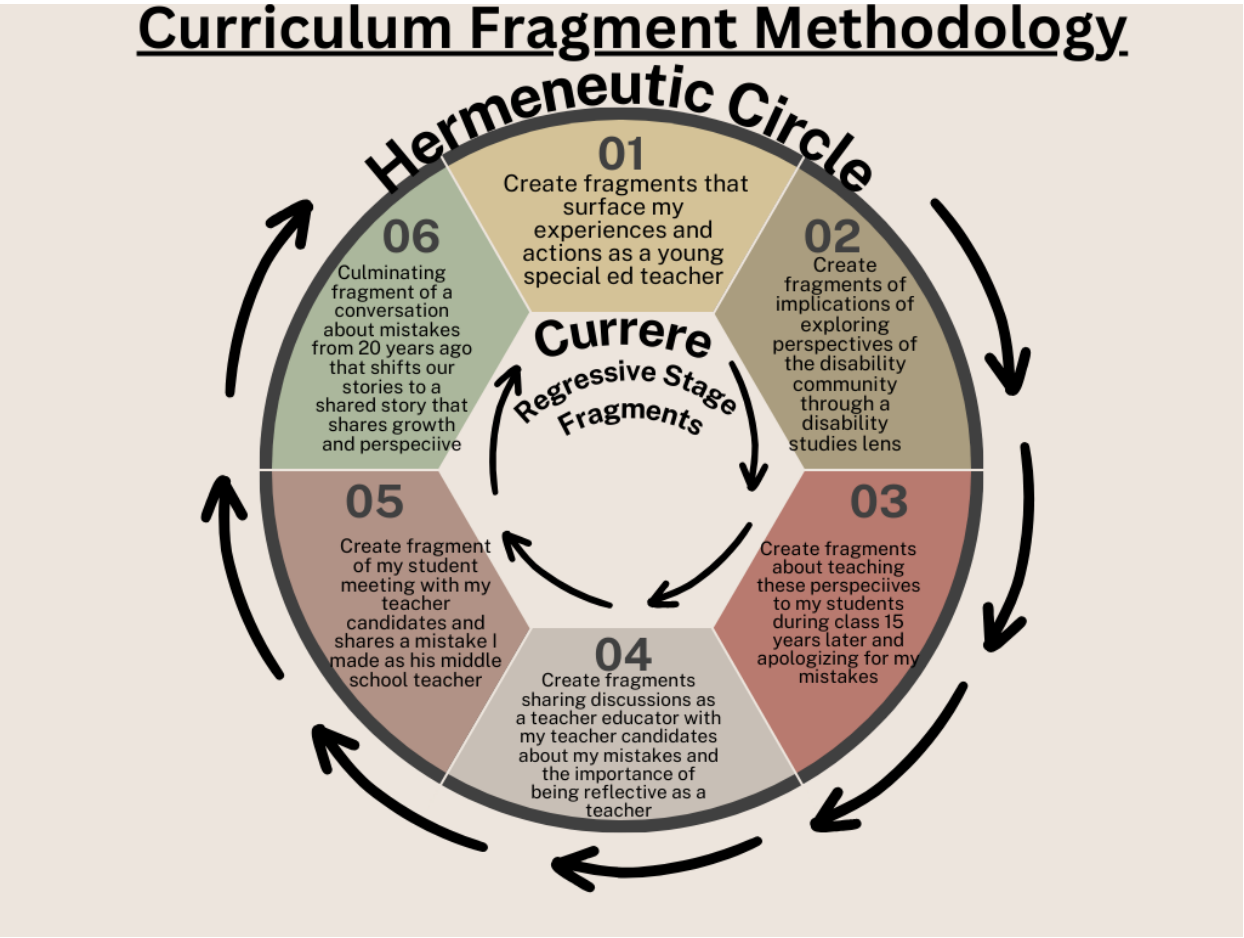


Figure 2: Currere and Hermeneutic Circles as a Narrative Mode of Analysis in Curriculum Fragment Methodology

Making meaning of themes that emerge in my curriculum fragments through a narrative mode of analysis in this circular way helps me weave these stories to create what Polkinghorne (1995) calls a "coherent whole" (p. 15). In this process, I dialed in and focused on very specific memories of my teaching career to then create a thread that weaves and expands into a bigger picture of themes in the story of my career. Through this process, my theme of making and reflecting on mistakes became a salient essence to this learning journey. It's a difficult theme, but I found truth in that the uncomfortable stance is the window that changes the view.

The benefit of creating and weaving curriculum fragments through a hermeneutic circle in the regressive stage of currere is that the fragments naturally coalesce into themes to lead to a cohesive "whole" and into a flowing story. This is

the beauty of engaging in curriculum fragment methodology – creating fragments in a circular process lead to fragments and themes that build upon each other naturally, and that can ultimately build a narrative. The goal in curriculum fragment methodology is analyzing the stories to create a narrative.

Framing my Narrative

As I progress through the analytical stage of currere, I task myself with creating meaning in these stories – my career "life story," the story of my educational experiences (Pinar, 1994).

Narrative psychologist Dan McAdams (2001) asserts that our identity itself "takes the form of a story" (p. 101). McAdams (2001) coined the phrase "life story" to describe a narrative framework in which individuals make sense of their lives in a dynamic and evolving process of self-reflection.

Narrative psychology claims that individuals create their identities through the stories that we tell about ourselves (McAdams, 1985). The life story is central to this process as we create a narrative by weaving together stories to make sense of our past experiences and envision possibilities for the future (McAdams, 2001).

Looking at the broadness and complexity of my professional life story, I feel the weight of and a deep responsibility in directing the narrative of my story. These fragments are written through my recollections – it's how I narrate and interpret the fragments that matters. Creating a life story from a special education lens or a disability studies lens creates two versions of my narrative that differ wildly. The curriculum fragments are a series of stories from my career. The way I frame these stories from either a special education lens or a disability studies lens changes the way you think about my narrative, and me, profoundly.

Life stories can be interpreted through several lenses, or life story constructs (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In exploring narrative psychology, there are several constructs that can shape and direct a thematic arc to frame a narrative. There are three of the life story constructs, redemption, contamination, and communion, that particularly provide useful lenses for me to approach the direction of my narrative. The curriculum fragments of my story don't have to change for it to be a very

different type of narrative. The lens in which you view my stories and where I create breaks in my stories makes a big difference in the outcome of my narrative – and can make the difference between creating a redemption or a contamination narrative.

McAdams and McLean (2013) identify a redemption construct as stories in which a "demonstrably 'bad' or emotionally negative event or circumstance leads to a demonstrably 'good' or emotionally positive outcome" where the negative experience "is 'redeemed' or salvaged by the good that follows it" (p. 234). Redemption constructs involve growth and reconciliation where the narrator overcomes adversity and reframes their story in a positive light (McAdams, 2001). Conversely, contamination constructs begin with a "good or positive event" that turns "bad or negative, such that the negative affect overwhelms, destroys, or erases the effects of the preceding positivity" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 234).

Thinking about my narrative through constructions identified by narrative psychology, I can see more clearly the ways I have been bound to a cycle between these two narrative constructs. I now have the heuristics to better construct the framing of this cycle – I am caught in a cycle of either a contamination construct or a redemption construct. Much like a chapter break in a story, I need a break in the cycle, a cycle break.

Writing these curriculum fragments helped me see more clearly that my narrative is already being told for me as I navigate through the boundaries between both worlds of special education and disability studies. When a colleague called me an enemy in front of my other colleagues, that very much felt like a public telling of my narrative as a villain, clearly telling a contamination construct. When my students' parents held a small ceremony for me to unveil a plaque as a means to share their appreciation for my work as their childrens' teacher, that felt very much like a permanently etched narrative of an inspirational educator's redemption construct.

Reflecting on my curriculum fragments in Chapter One, I can easily frame my narrative from a disability studies lens as a contamination construct. I am on a self-propelled journey beginning as a special education teacher who worked as a tireless

advocate for my students going to great lengths to provide inclusive opportunities for them. Wanting to better advocate, I found the field of disability studies, only to find that my "good" teaching practices and my efforts toward equity are not just "bad," but harmful, even reprehensible, through a disability studies lens. And more, as a special education teacher, particularly an educator supporting disabled students in a resource room setting, I am the antithesis of an educator engaged in disability justice (Berne et al., 2018), as confirmed by my public labeling as an enemy by a disability studies colleague.

Conversely, with the fragments in Chapter One, if I weave a story from my fragments as an early career special education teacher directly to my fragment as a teacher educator engaging with my students about the importance of being reflective of your mistakes, then a chapter break in that narrative is easily framed as a redemption construct of a special education teacher who found a way to learn from her mistakes and find redemption in impacting future generations of teacher candidates. From the perspective of special education, I can easily create a redemptive narrative as a teacher educator who embodied the mission of Maya Angelou's (n.d.) words: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

To the people I work with on both sides of the boundaries, these narratives about me are clear to them. When I ask the question, "What are the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies?" the intention is not to create curriculum fragments only to retell the narratives others have written for me. Curriculum fragment methodology is a framework for reflecting and writing curriculum fragments to help see the possibilities and to define *my* narrative through the construct that I choose to tell.

I am not just a character in my curriculum fragments. *I am the author.* How I weave my fragments together and where I draw the chapter breaks, truly, my cycle breaks, creates the narrative that I choose to tell.

From my position in the boundaries I don't feel that I have the positionality or agency alone to reject the narratives that have been written for me. I acknowledge, and want to better understand, the histories and lived experiences that bring them to frame these stories as redemptive or contaminating; however, the aim here is to write my own narrative.

Much like an author using a chapter break to shift the direction of a narrative, I need a break to shift out of the cycles that I am perpetually bound to. In exploring the possibilities for me as an educator in the boundaries, I choose to move forward to explore ideas and heuristics to give me opportunities to break out of my circles and to shift to a narrative construct of *communion*.

Narrative of Communion

McAdams and McLean (2013) describe a communion construct as the ability to "demonstrate or experience interpersonal connection through love, friendship, dialogue, or connection to a broad collective" (p. 234) through a story that captures the quality of people's connections to others. Narratives constructed through communion reflect essential motivations for care, union, and relatedness (McAdams, 2001). Communion isn't just about connections with others, it's about the strength of connections with others.

The narrative I choose to tell speaks from the boundaries between special education and disability studies and, ultimately, in the boundaries between enemy and dedicated educator.

This is my narrative: As a special education teacher I have dedicated my career to supporting disabled individuals with more intensive needs across the life span – from my role as a middle school teacher supporting students labeled with multiple disabilities to my role as a Director supporting adults labeled with autism and intensive needs – I have sought ways to better myself and my understanding of multiple perspectives, specifically perspectives from the disability community and the field of disability studies. Wanting to expand the reach of my work, I transitioned into higher education to both teach the tenets of disability studies to

undergraduate students of all majors and to teach philosophies and methodologies of supporting disabled students to teacher candidates. As I navigate both worlds of special education and disability studies, I have to navigate a boundary. This boundary is complicated. From one side of the boundary I am an enemy. A villain. From the other side, I am an educator doing my best to work towards "what's best" for students. But my boundary is further complicated by the nature of my work – not just teaching both disability studies and special education. My career has been dedicated to disabled students and individuals labeled with intensive needs, specifically multiple, intellectual, and/or developmental disabilities. The students and adults whom I have taught and worked with have had to fight for access to equitable education. They have to fight for access to exist in our community. They have been systemically left out of schools, left out of the community, and largely left out of conversations in disability studies. In this work I feel that my career life story is deeper than a boundary. *It feels more like a canyon*.

The narrative I choose is the story of an educator navigating the boundaries, and more specifically, navigating the canyon between special education and disability studies. There is an increasing number of scholars who identify as navigating in the boundaries between special education and disability studies. I feel confident that there are also others in the boundaries who work in fields with disabled students and individuals labeled with intensive needs who feel that the boundary is deeper, that inclusive education and access to disability studies feel further out-of-reach. I know I am not alone as a professional in this canyon. *But most importantly there are students and individuals who live their lives in the canyon who deserve a more productive and equitable approach to this work.*

The point, though, is not in any way for me to tell a story that makes me feel better about myself. It's for me to tell a narrative to explore possibilities and to spark change. To speak to those in the boundaries and canyon and to bring people together who are also navigating in this liminal space to feel connected and to resonate with the desire for communion. Communion to share stories and to find ramps out of this canyon in the boundaries – ramps to break the cycles of redemption or contamination and, through both constructs, segregation and

exclusion. Communion to pave a shared road to extend the space in the boundaries to the canyon, and further, out of the canyon, to a space of community where I, and others, can tell a narrative to lift up those who live, and not just work, in the canyon.

My curriculum fragments from the canyon are not in any way unique to me. I am not in any way a martyr or a victim in these fragments. But the work is hard. And complicated. And so nuanced. It's not easy to be framed as an enemy in doing the work that many do not want to do and most do not know about. Across history we have set a standard of segregation and exclusion of disabled individuals with the most intensive needs. These are the students in a separate wing of a school in a segregated class for students labeled with similar disabilities and needs. Middle school students who, even after being turned into sources of inspiration, cannot access the general education curriculum. These are the adults living in a segregated farm community because they were pushed out of living in their communities, disabled adults who will spend the rest of their lives in state-run developmental facilities.

Through my curriculum fragments, narratives emerge of circles, and cycles, of segregation and exclusion. Students labeled with multiple and intellectual disabilities are segregated in public schools, do not have access to curriculum, spaces, and peer models in general education settings, and consequently have fewer opportunities for post-secondary education, employment, and social networks. Diana, James, and Trevor started their cycle of segregation and exclusion through school careers in segregated resource rooms that led them to a one-way route to a specialized community, and even an institution, for disabled people. They began their lives hidden from their school peers and from their community and have been trapped in a cycle of segregation and exclusion since. They've lived their lives in a canyon. A developmental center may as well be in an actual canyon.

To highlight this cycle further, let's consider a student who navigates her school career without access to peers labeled with multiple and intellectual disabilities. Her only context is seeing these students exit a separate bus in the mornings and walk through a separate door to a wing of her school where she doesn't have classes. And when she sees the students she cannot help but think

about how inspirational they are after a talent show performance that nearly brought her to tears. She graduates and decides she wants to be a teacher. She earns her license in middle childhood general education and takes one required introductory special education class. As a middle school teacher, she is too uncomfortable to say yes to a young special education teacher, begging her to include her student labeled with an intellectual disability who loves machines in her science class. So they stay in a resource room in a separate wing of their school, in their canyon.

A canyon is not an easy place to thrive.

How can a teacher educator in the boundaries move forward in ways that acknowledge the most marginalized of the marginalized? In ways that lift us from the canyon and into communal spaces?

> And so, I am always thinking about the quantum entanglement of relating to students and others who have been dealt difficulties through no fault of their own, or maybe because of their choices: those lines aren't always clear but never really important to me in any way. To me, educationally, putting those experiences and differences front and center, not in the rearview mirror, are essential relationally and educationally. If we can't do these things, acknowledge the existence of disparity and privilege, how can we ever learn to love, even to see eye to eye? (Poetter, 2024, p. 11)

The answer, to me, is to put these "experiences and differences front and center" as a community. To get there, however, we need ramps to rise out of the boundaries, out of the canyon.

Onramps to a Communal Narrative

In envisioning my narrative of navigating the boundaries in a canyon, I see three hopeful ramps to create a cycle break in the unending circle of segregation and exclusion:

1. an onramp to a deeper commitment for community between the fields of special education, disability studies, and DSE to disrupt the boundaries;

2. an onramp for spaces to tell curriculum fragments from the boundaries, and from the canyon, to create community and ultimately shared direction in moving toward a circle of inclusion and access; and
3. an onramp for accessible practices in higher education, including teacher preparation programs that support teacher candidates to earn inclusive blended licensure to teach *all* students and access for students labeled with intellectual disabilities to attend inclusive college programming.

I truly believe the nexus of these three aims is a cycle break, as visualized in Figure 3, that leads to access and disability justice.

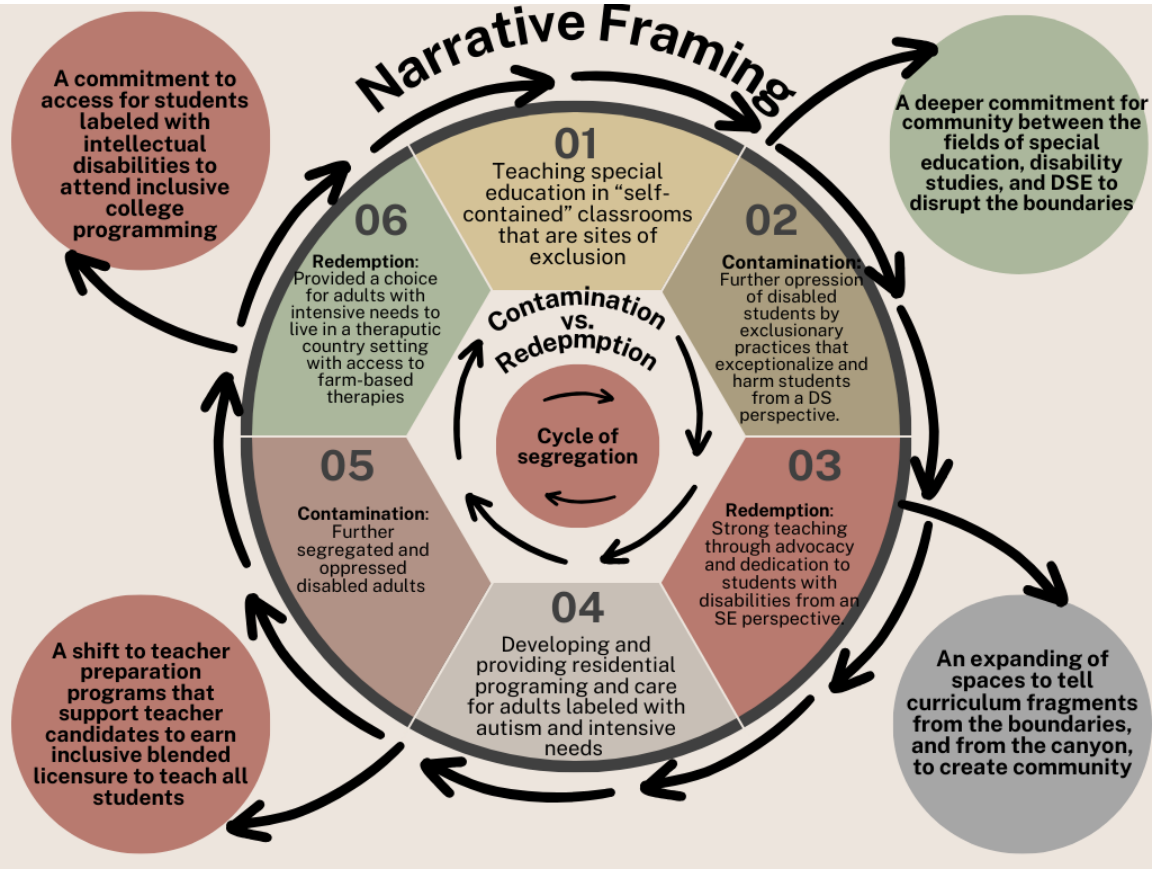


Figure 3: Narrative Framing to Break a Cycle of Segregation Through Three Identified Onramps. The green circle is the first onramp, the gray, the second, and the two red circles are a manifestation of the third.

Onramp One: Increased Commitment for Community Between SE, DS, and DSE

"To disrupt boundaries involves leaning on each other. To create spaces of vulnerability while unlearning years of toxic programming. Without building in community care, we will not survive, and instead, our hearts and spirits become weakened, damaged, and fatigued" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 3). Between our three fields, we cannot commit to communion, to community, without the space, heuristics, and courage to understand and act.

A call to increase our commitment to community is not intended in any way to bypass or diminish the history and the hurt between special education, disability studies and DSE – many, on all sides, have engaged in career-long attempts at consilience as well as career-long obstacles of attacks and disdain. Connor (2023) proposes that "there is much to be learned from respectful debates in which contrasting positions should always be examined. Tensions and disagreements, I have almost always found, are productive sites of thinking" (p. 25). Acknowledging the tensions from both sides, and the space in the boundary, and in the canyon, can offer "opportunities for individual, institutional and societal transformations, if we reframe the tensions at the boundaries between DSE and special education by centering *a disability justice radical love meta-critical emotionality consiliencatory boundary work praxis that anchors self-study in teacher education*" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 6).

Connor (2023) identifies that the most universal, and potentially useful, question toward consilience that speaks to the guiding concern for teachers is: "What is best for my student(s)?" (p. 11). Extending this question further to the field of disability studies is: "What is best for the disability community?" Connor's (2023) response is, "without wishing to oversimplify a highly complex issue, I have always thought the answer to be 'It depends,' because so many considerations have to be weighed" (p. 11).

Special education has the power to choose to lighten the historic "objectivity and positivist knowing" to seek perspectives through "the power of story and the kinds of generative knowing derived from practice" (Connor & Ferri, 2021, p. 307) of both educators with a DSE disposition and disability studies scholars and

activists. Specifically, we can seek perspectives through the power of stories of those navigating the boundaries, and more, navigating in the canyon. All three fields have the power to choose to lighten the critique, just enough, to enter a shared space and work co-constitutively to answer the question: "What's best?"

Connor (2023) asserts that '"What's best?' cannot be divorced from how educators understand the primary concept of disability" (p. 17). For those engaged in the field of special education, choosing to learn about disability *from* the disability community, rather than *about* the disability community can be an impactful catalyst, as it was for me 15 years ago, to rethink disability, and ultimately rethink the field of special education. For those engaged in the field of disability studies, working with special education toward a greater understanding of access to focus on systemic change of the oppressive special education system, can shift the onus of responsibility from individuals, teachers, and practitioners, both in the tower of special education and in the boundaries (and the canyon) to sites of systemic change. A shift in identifying teachers as the enemy, the villains, to a greater understanding of the confines of our oppressive schooling system that not only traps students in a cycle of segregation and exclusion, but also educators, could shift the onus to oppressive systems in productive ways toward consilience. As educators, we need to tell our stories. Our stories have the power to change perceptions of educators as the enemy when you can see our plight and our confines.

Movement toward disability studies, special education, and DSE working in community to create a more useful, just, and universal answer to "What's best?" for both disabled students and the disability community is a step toward consilience, and further, a hopeful onramp from the boundaries.

Onramp Two: Curriculum Fragment Methodology from the Boundaries

In a chapter on coalition building from the boundaries I co-authored with DSE scholar Nickie Coomer (2023), she shares a curriculum fragment of her experiences with a student as a primary intervention specialist – her words are powerful: "[I am] convinced that no document, no law, can truly govern the

immeasurable relational ecologies of the spaces we inhabit when we cross the boundaries to be together" (p. 159). As educators our words are powerful. Not only did I find power in telling my stories, my curriculum fragments, and in reframing my narrative, my most powerful learning experiences in disability studies and in education have come from listening to others' stories, their lived experiences. Connor and Ferri (2021) advocate that "we are all indelibly changed by our experiences of teaching, and believe others can learn from our stories, as we can learn from theirs" (p. 314).

Further, Iqtadar and Hernandez-Saca (2023) call for educators and practitioners in both DSE and traditional special education to employ "emotive pedagogies" to "come forward to create such third and brave spaces within the structures by sharing our personal and political narratives" to "not only help us as humans who are wounded by the systems" but would also be a "model of reflective practice for our future educators' critical consciousness" (pp. 229-230).

A clear onramp from the boundaries is increasing the visibility of the voices of students, individuals, and professionals navigating this complex liminal space to surface the lived experiences in the boundaries, especially the often-unseen experiences in the canyon. Creating and sharing stories and reimagining narratives though curriculum fragment methodology holds promise as a powerful approach to consilience in the boundaries. Creating "such third and brave spaces" (Iqtadar & Hernandez-Saca, 2023, p. 229) through storytelling can be strengthened with curriculum fragment methodology and the traditions of the currere method, (Pinar, 1975) Teacher Lore, (Schubert, 1989) and narrative points-of-entry (Schultz et al., 2010).

> I can't agree more that centering life experience from multiple perspectives should be a critical element of higher education pedagogy in education and integrally a part of education of all kinds. Certainly, the more we practice forms of inquiry and research that front the interrogation of personal experience as legitimate knowledge from as many cultural contexts as possible, the more students and scholars can feel and understand that knowledge comes in many, many critically vibrant forms that can lead us to

improve our understanding of the matters at hand as well as of each other. (Poetter, 2024, p. 25)

Centering "life experiences from multiple perspectives" through curriculum fragments and shared stories, namely from perspectives in the boundaries and in the canyon, as a "critical element of higher education pedagogy" (p. 25) can lead to increased deliberation of "What's best?" for both disabled students and the disability community through scholarship and teacher education as hopeful onramps from the boundaries.

Onramp Three: Commitment to Inclusive Education and Access in Higher Ed

Circling back to the first identified onramp of an increased commitment to community, Connor's (2023) question, "What is best for my student(s)?" (p. 11) can also lead to an onramp from the canyon by institutions of higher education through a commitment to inclusive blended licensure in teacher education and increased access to higher education for disabled students. "[W]hat's best" cannot be divorced from how educators understand the primary concept of disability" (Connor, 2023, p. 17).

In teacher preparation programs, our understanding of the concept of disability drives the philosophy and nature of our licensure programs. When teacher educators define disability through a deficit-oriented medical lens, the nature of the programs they develop, teach, and coordinate are more likely to create silos between general education and special education. Conversely, when teacher educators see disability as a marker of diversity defined through an asset-oriented socially-constructed lens, the nature of the teacher preparation programs are more likely to lead to inclusive blended licensure with majors seeking both general education and special education licensure grounded in anti-ableist, accessible, universally designed methods with a DSE disposition. "In our roles as professionals, we *choose* what we think disability is and how it should be responded to. This choice of how we view other human beings influences everything we do in our teaching and research" (Connor, 2023, p. 25).

Gaining an understanding of disability grounded in the tenets of disability justice (Berne et al., 2018) and educating teacher candidates with a DSE disposition – that asserts that all students have a civil right to access to the general education curriculum and their same-age peers not only leads to a new generation of teachers prepared and willing to teach *all* learners and to create access in general education for students with disabilities – will break the cycle of segregation and exclusion. Further, "in this space of possibility, preservice teachers can reconfigure conceptualization of general and special education away from sorting mechanisms, and instead as places of shared power" (Coomer et al., 2023, p. 165).

In higher education, we not only respond to disability by choosing how we teach disability perspectives and prepare teachers, we respond by who we teach, and do not teach, in the disability community. Creating access to higher education for students labeled with intellectual disabilities extends an onramp to lift those in the boundaries, and in the canyon, to a pipeline of increased possibilities for employment, independence, social networks, and community access that breaks the cycle of segregation and exclusion.

Our words are powerful – but there is more power in our actions. "Arriving at 'What's best' for students in specific contexts is through the practice of thoughtful, deliberative process, culling from multiple perspectives, that should always include students with disabilities" (Connor, 2023, p. 27). Collaboratively identifying "what's best" is a powerful place to start; however, doing "what's best" by creating an onramp from the boundaries to accessible practices and pedagogy in and access to higher education has the power to break the cycle of segregation and exclusion.

These Three Ramps Lead to Community

Onramps that lead us to a deeper commitment toward community from disability studies, special education, and DSE; visibility of our stories from the boundaries; increased inclusive blended teacher preparation programs; and more equitable access to higher education can ultimately merge into a path toward the northstar of access. These three ramps can break the perpetual cycle of segregation and exclusion that has led to a long and dark history of disabled individuals labeled

with multiple, intellectual, and/or developmental disabilities living in the canyon and lead to a collective journey for those living and working in these boundaries toward a narrative of community. These ramps can lead to a new cycle where teacher preparation programs prepare teachers to educate *all* students; a new force of teachers create schools that are desegregated and accessible; and equitable educational opportunities create increased opportunities for disabled students as they transition from school, including access to higher education. This leads to a future where *all* students can be educated together from preschool through college, closing the canyon and creating bridges across the boundaries.

Poetter (2024) affirms that "teaching and learning and educating and thereby becoming more richly human – among several other purposes and processes of human life… give us life, animate our humanity, our hopes and connections across boundaries, and ultimately, that inform our deeper understandings of each of our unique, valuable places in the world with each other" (p 2). Rethinking disability in ways that enriches our "teaching and learning and educating" can reshape our narratives through "connections across boundaries" that tell a story of community, equity, and meaning.

Curriculum Fragments to Know Better

When I began my dissertation journey using curriculum fragment methodology through a currere informed process, I aimed to answer the question:

What are the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies?

Using Poetter's (2015) curriculum fragments as a methodology gave me the opportunity and freedom to not just explore the possibilities for educators working in the boundaries, but to challenge the narratives that disability studies and special education have pigeonholed for me as a constructive means to create *my own narrative*. Engaging in the analytical stage of currere has helped me envision my own narrative as an educator in the boundaries, and further, it helped me see the opportunities for onramps to three specific pathways to break the cycles of

contamination and redemption and to support the agency to redirect the trajectory of my narrative to a construct of communion. More importantly, this process that coalesced from this curriculum fragment methodology helped me see three tangible pathways not only for me, but also for others living and working in the boundaries, that can create onramps out of the boundaries and canyon between special education and disability studies.

Bosch (2023) coins "boundary work" as a "shifting, messy, vulnerable, and risky venture" (p. 193). The curriculum fragment methodology gave me the structure, freedom, and courage to engage in boundary work in ways that let me take risks and create space for vulnerability. Reliving and telling my many mistakes has been uncomfortable. Exposing myself for being named as an enemy to the field of disability studies, a field I care about deeply, has been intensely personal and sensitive. As I reflect on my initial engagement in the regressive stage in Chapter One to identify my problem and research question, I was hard on myself. By pushing through and centering my mistakes and weaving them through stories of my highest, lowest, and hardest moments in my career, I can see now how leaning into and surfacing this range of experiences – without suppressing the hard times or the mistakes – was the catalyst for the reckoning I went searching for. Connor and Ferri's (2021) sentiments of being a reflective teacher resonate deeply with me in this moment of this journey:

> Without the benefit of hindsight, we summoned resources and made choices that revealed who we were in that instant. We were doing the best we could in any given moment, learning from our choices, and especially our mistakes, which is the core of self-knowledge and the very heart of teaching. (p. 314)

I accept being named an enemy. "This does not mean that the human inclination to care, love, and serve does not appear in such a system; it is often the core driving critical special educators, and should be treasured, especially before the context deforms it into codependent, controlling, and patronizing care" (Bosch, 2023, p. 193). I also accept my identity as a boundary worker, especially as I can more clearly see ramps and bridges I've been searching for.

Maya Angelou's (n.d.) words remain my guiding northstar: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Curriculum fragment methodology has been the catalyst to a transformative cycle break in my life story that has shifted my narrative in ways that have deeply enhanced my practices as a teacher. Doing the "best I can" through nearly 20 years as an educator sent me on two clear trajectories: 1. on a contamination narrative as an enemy to the disability community and 2. on a redemptive narrative as a teacher educator teaching aspiring teachers to be reflective practitioners who aim to "do better." The curriculum fragment methodology sent me through circles that helped me examine and make meaning of my mistakes and expand my view to see broader themes and bigger pictures in my career that empowered me with new lenses and heuristics to arrive at a more holistic and practical framing and direction of my own self-directed narrative. This curriculum fragment methodology sent me on a journey where I buried myself deeper in my own stories from the boundaries between special education and disability studies to the point that I found myself in a canyon. Seeing my place more clearly and comfortably in my work and the tensions that surround me gave me the clarity to see the onramps to create the cycle breaks to lead to the future narrative I hope to one day write. This process gave me the vision I needed to "know better" and the clarity from a higher level of understanding to see direct ramps and pathways to "do better" to create community.

Curriculum fragment methodology sent me on a journey where, for the first time in my career, I have truly engaged in such a deep level of reflection and clarity. "Knowing better" will always be fluid and a process just as my own evolving narrative will find new circles and chapter breaks.

Boundary work "fundamentally comes down to embracing ourselves as who we are–as complex messy imperfect beings and listening/feeling/trusting our instincts as this provides us clarity and the ability to engage in boundary work that aligns with our values and beliefs" (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023, p. 344). This self-study led through curriculum fragment methodology gave me the clarity to see myself more fully as an "imperfect being" who is coming out on the other side of this

journey able to embrace myself as who I am, an educator in the boundaries with a vision for a reimagined future.

This curriculum fragment methodology has helped me engage the hermeneutic circle of my regressive fragments through the analytical stage of currere in a way that helps me clearly envision futures of community-led by paths on each onramp out of the canyon, toward my reimagined future. Chapter Six coalesces as a "coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15) as a progressive synthesis with fictional, and hopeful, curriculum fragments as imagined through Pinar's (1975) synthetical stage. I truly hope that my "doing better" leads to a future where these imagined fictional curriculum fragments become a shared reality.

These imagined curriculum fragments are not intended to be woven together into a redemption construction, a contamination construction, or into a fairytale. They simply represent a hopeful envisioning of a communion narrative. These curriculum fragments are my best response to my question, "What are the possibilities for an educator working in the field of special education with a DSE disposition to engage boundary work as a teacher educator in the tensions between special education and disability studies?"

These are my hopeful possibilities.

Chapter 6

Synthesis Through Hopeful Curriculum Fragments

Old Miami, New Miami

Miami's Millett Hall is bursting with people and with energy. It is a beautiful sunny spring day, the trees lining the arena are flowering and hopeful. Students in red and white robes are packed into rows and exchange smiles with faculty as they walk down the aisle to the music of Miami's alma mater. I hear a voice from one of the rows as I walk through the sea of students.

"Cartell!"

It's commencement day. I've attended many spring graduation ceremonies as a faculty member. Today is different. I am beaming with joy and with gratitude in a way that is hard to describe and contain. I am celebrating Pedro's graduation as the first Access Miami Program student to complete the program and become a Miami graduate.

We go through the motions. Our Dean movingly acknowledges the hopes and dreams of the graduates. The convocation speaker talks about determination. It's time for the students to walk across the stage. Our Dean follows a formality as she politely asks families to save their applause and cheers for the end. Pedro's row is finally called to come forward. From the faculty row in the front I can see him shaking with excitement as he walks to the aisleway.

"Cartell!" he yells and waves again as soon as we make eye contact.

As he walks up, he is surrounded by students in the inclusive blended licensure cohort. It makes me smile as I think about these future teachers and the implications for their future students by their experiences at Miami with inclusive practices from preschool through college courses. These are the teachers who will move the needle from inclusion to access in schools. And they will undoubtedly be the teachers who will say "yes" and will change the world of students like Pedro, Cora, Josh, Jason, Jack, Maria, and Jess and especially for students like Diana, James, and Trevor.

I feel an internal lightning storm as my body processes through all of the emotions from the gravity in finally arriving at this moment. I try to remember the last time I felt this much joy then consciously bring myself back to be in this moment. Pedro is wringing his hands and visibly shuffling his knees back and forth under his red robe as he waits patiently at the bottom of the stairs to the stage. It's his turn. He hands the strip of paper with his name to the reader. I can hear him say, "It's me Pedro." The reader smiles as she reads his name. As Pedro turns to stride to our Dean to shake her hand – the applause starts. The students on the floor begin to stand up and cheer for Pedro. He undoubtedly has asked, "How you doin' my friend?" to every person he has seen in McGuffey Hall for the previous two years. And these students undoubtedly remember him and his genuine care for them in those moments as he passed them by.

There is nothing patronizing about this moment. It is truly genuine and supportive. As Pedro walks down the ramp off of the stage he swiftly bypasses the photographer and gives me a bear hug.

"They love me, Cartell."

"Yes they do, Friend."

Teaching Partner

After his graduation Pedro has accepted a job supporting Access Miami Program students with Miami's Student Life office. It's the beginning of a new fall semester and Pedro and I get to collaborate in his new part-time position as an adjunct and my new co-teacher in my Culture, Community, and Climate class for my inclusive blended licensure students. So much has changed since the first time I taught this class, crying my way through an explanation of finally reaching that moment to teach candidates licensed to teach *all* students. I finally built a ramp with my colleagues and broke the seemingly endless circle of exclusion and segregation through a collaborative, accessible, and just blended licensure program for our teacher candidates.

It's the second class of the semester and we are discussing the difference between inclusion and access. Pedro and I take turns telling our shared story about

fighting for inclusion in our middle school. I tell them the abridged version of our "You Raise Me Up" story and the impact of my mistake.

"What do we do when we make mistakes?" asks a student, looking pretty overwhelmed by the thought.

Pedro jumps in, "I make mistakes. Cartell makes mistakes. It's okay because we all make mistakes. You'll make mistakes. It's how we grow. Right?"

As Pedro assuages the students that they will make mistakes, he feels the need to share about a time that he made a mistake as well. He transitions right into a story about forgetting to bring his homework with him to one of his Miami mechanical engineering classes. He loves learning about machinery and was so upset with himself. I catch my breath, relieved that the worry of his perceived mistake of growling at a classmate as a middle school student that resulted in losing a community outing didn't seem to cross his mind.

It seems that he's moved on from dwelling in mistakes from 20 years prior. I smile to myself as I realize I need to follow his lead.

Wrecking Ball

The gymnasium is hot. It's a balmy May afternoon and 400 elementary-aged students are visibly wiggling as they sit cross-legged on the floor of their school gym. There are about 20 students lined up along the wall opposite to where I find a seat, waiting very anxiously to go up on their school's stage. Some of the performers are dressed like it's another school day and some are in full costumes, many of them adorned with sequins and glitter. I catch myself getting caught in a drifting memory of my youngest daughter singing her favorite Taylor Swift song in her grade talent show when she was their age. She wore all the sparkles.

It's the end of another spring semester. I have several student teachers who I am supporting and supervising and my Miami student Lucia has asked me to come to her school at this exact time. Lucia is earning inclusive blended licensure in both primary general education and special education and has spent the past 14 weeks in an inclusive classroom co-teaching with both a general education teacher and an intervention specialist. My visits throughout the semester have been surreal – this is

the classroom that I could have only dreamed about as a teacher and the classroom I have spent the past 15 years trying to inspire my teacher candidates to create. Both teachers, both recent Miami graduates with inclusive blended licensure, have complete parity and a shared lead role that flows seamlessly across curriculum design, lessons, and individual supports for *all* of their students.

During my visits, I am especially drawn to Caroline. Her big bright brown eyes and wide toothy smile are magnetic. She reminds me so much of my student Cora. Her speech and articulation are typical for kids with Down Syndrome but she shares an uncanny similar cadence to Cora's. I love listening to her hum as she works and sing as she walks around the classroom. Caroline's educational experiences are beautiful – an interlacing of both universal and individual supports and socially just philosophies grounded in access. I cannot say that I exactly dreamed of this classroom for Cora when she was my student. I couldn't have even imagined something this collaborative and student-focused in my narrow haze of being trapped in a cycle of segregation and exclusion. My middle school students and farm residents have motivated me every time I set foot into my classroom for the last 15 years to focus on rethinking disability, universally designed and accessible teaching practices, and social models of disability while working toward inclusive blended licensure to prepare teacher candidates to teach all students. Each time I walk into this classroom to check-in with Lucia I feel energized and more resolved.

Lucia wants me to come and watch some of her students perform in the end-of-the-year talent show. I see Caroline in the line waiting to go on stage – she surprisingly is wearing all black, a stark contrast to her typical loud and bright ensembles. This is suspenseful now. After several kids performed adorable rehearsed numbers, I see Caroline walk onto the stage.

She's dramatic as she emerges from behind the curtain. Her confidence clearly indicates that this is not her first public performance. The all-black outfit matches the intensity of her facial expression as she approaches the microphone. As the music starts it sounds familiar. She hits her first verse with perfect timing and delivery.

I've got it – it's *Wrecking Ball* by Miley Cyrus. I am completely swept up in her confidence and her delivery – like she's singing this song to save the world.

The realization hits me. In the heat of the gym I feel a chill trickle down the back of my neck as I flashback to Cora 25 years ago in our middle school. I can still vividly see her playing a Hannah Montana song by Miley Cyrus on repeat on my CD player as she practiced her performance for the talent show auditions. I never thought I would have an emotional connection to Miley Cyrus but this is hitting me hard.

She crushes a high note and I pull myself out of my head – but I cannot help but picture Cora on that stage.

"I came in like a wrecking ball."

"All I wanted was to break your walls."

This is everything to me.

What to do with a Second Grader?

Aniyah is feeling a little anxious as she looks around the table, not completely sure of her role in this meeting. She was "asked" to attend this team meeting for a student who receives special education services as the general education teacher representative. Aniyah is a couple of months into her fourth year in a general education classroom as a teacher with inclusive blended licensure in both general and special education.

She leans in toward the intervention specialist as he recounts a story of his student Travis in his self-contained resource classroom. He explains Travis's history of aggressive incidents – hitting, pulling hair, kicking, hurting animals, biting objects – and leads into a recent incident where Travis had bit him on his arm. His teacher was clearly very unhappy about it. The principal gruffly asks the team for their thoughts on moving Travis out of the resource room and to a private school for disabled students. General agreement is seeming to quickly fill the room from the professionals. Travis's parents are visibly becoming upset and emotional.

The shared words are turning to sounds as Aniyah is transported to a memory from a class in her inclusive licensure teacher preparation classes. She

remembers a story her professor told the class, she always told stories, about a student who came to her in seventh grade who had been removed from school in second grade and placed on home instruction. She was trying to remember the challenges her professor shared that the student experienced as a spiraling of challenges from exclusion. She remembers that he had very limited options after graduating high school and moved into a segregated setting. She's drifting away from the meeting, thinking maybe she recalls he moved to a farm for disabled adults, but that doesn't seem like a real thing to her. Her principal's loud voice snaps her back to the scene in the conference room.

"He can come to my class."

The words rush abruptly out of her mouth mirroring the rush of impulsivity through her brain. Aniyah had never met Travis. She was only invited to this meeting because legally she or one of her general education colleagues needed to attend.

"Before moving him to a different school can we see how he does in my classroom with your support and with an educational assistant?" She is nodding to his intervention specialist and speaking with increasing confidence.

The meter in the room is visibly scaling from serious hesitation to joyful relief. Everyone agrees to give it a try, some more hesitantly than others.

Travis thrives in Aniyah's class. He excels with access to higher expectations, peer models, and new friendships. Aniyah organizes a new desk for him next to his new classmate named Hana. She has a good feeling about Hana – she is the most helpful student in her class this year.

Hana has never met a kid who jumps and squeals and flicks his fingers. She is a very curious kid and genuinely thinks that Travis is interesting. She is gifted at creating intricate origami and is fascinated by the way Travis can quickly, repetitively, and evenly fold pages in magazines. She tries not to stare but can't help but study his fingers and movements as he quickly folds page after page with perfect symmetry.

Hana becomes anxious often at school and Aniyah often encourages her to take walks in the second-grade hallway with a fidget toy when she needs a break.

After a couple weeks of observing Travis, she realizes it's likely that when he jumps and flicks his fingers he is trying to communicate that he is feeling anxious.

"Miss A, can Travis go on a walk with me? He can use my fidget."

Hana is Travis's first friend.

Count on Me

Courtney truly has her hands full with her fifth-grade students this year. This is her seventh year as a general education teacher and, while she feels so much joy from her students, she also feels tired at the end of many of her school days.

Her student Travis embodies this dichotomy: He brings her so much joy but balancing his needs with the needs of 25 other students can be a lot some days. Courtney co-teaches with a really wonderful intervention specialist. Courtney feels like not only do they have each other's back – they also complement each other so well in content knowledge and universally designed methods and in creating a positive classroom culture.

Travis has had some rough experiences this year but she keeps perspective on how far he has come. Her friend from her blended licensure program at Miami, Aniyah, teaches in her building and had him in her second-grade class. Aniyah has been so helpful with Travis's transition to her class this year.

Today has been a day – Courtney has a headache and has spent the morning navigating louder-than-normal energy from her students. They just had a fire drill this morning and her student Molly was very anxious from the anticipation of the loud noise. Earlier in the school year Molly would try to hurt her in these moments but she has come a long way with help from her peers in her general education class. Courtney worked with Molly on her calming strategies and they got through it. But fire drills make for stressful days.

Travis has also had an off-day and his vocalizations are louder and more frequent than typical for him. Travis has a very distinct squeal – it's a loud song on a sliding scale from a low to a very high pitch.

She is frustrated. Several students ask her questions at the same time as she is texting her co-teacher and asks her to come back from music while she is also

trying to redirect Travis to an activity. Courtney can feel her heart beating in her temples and comes to a breaking point. She is fighting an impulse to yell and threaten the class with their field trip scheduled for the next day.

She catches herself as she opens her mouth to yell and takes a big breath. She tries to heed the same advice she gives to her students and starts counting backwards in her head.

"10, nine, eight, seven…"

She feels a warm hand on her arm. Courtney snaps out of her angry counting as she hears Hana's tiny voice.

"Can Travis and I go for a walk in the hallway? I think we both need a break."

Sold

Hana has just hit the six-month mark at her new job at P&G. This is the dream job she was hoping for as she was working toward her degree in paper engineering. Hana is ready to take the next leap in adulting and is resolved to buy her first home.

Hana has spent the day with her realtor looking at condos in neighborhoods close to her new office and hadn't fallen in love with anything yet. After a considerable amount of time in this last condo of the day, she is checking and re-checking each room and starting to use her imagination to place her things in these spaces. She walks to the front door of this fifth condo and takes a big breath. Hana is feeling a building comfort and connection in this place and can envision herself feeling at home here.

As she walks through the front door she is a bit startled and quickly exchanges smiles with two men looking at her as they are standing on the front porch of the condo next door. The man closest to her catches her eye; he has visible developmental disabilities. He is saying good-bye to the man next to him as another man starts to approach the house. They exchange a few comments about the day – it looks and sounds to Hana like this is their job. The realtor looks visibly nervous as he wonders if this will impact her decision.

Hana looks more closely at the man on his front porch until they lock eyes. She squints a bit as she starts to connect that he has a familiar face. The man starts

to jump up and down and happily flicks his fingers. His movements spark an instant connection.

"Travis?"

He looks more closely at Hana as his body moves up and down. "Hana?"

He squeals so loudly it instantly takes her back to childhood memories.

"No way! I haven't seen you since high school."

They exchange hugs and small talk. She notices that he doesn't jump as high as he used to. As she notices that his hair has gotten thinner, she wonders if he is analyzing the ways that she has changed over the years, too.

Travis turns to his support staff. "This is Hana. We met in the 2nd grade. Do you remember when we used to go on walks together at school? And when you taught me origami?"

"Of course!"

"Are you going to live here?"

Without any hesitation or second thought she says, "I was just getting ready to tell my realtor as we were walking outside that I would like to make an offer."

A Seat at the Table

I'm more nervous than I thought I would be to return to a Society for Disability Studies conference at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. After several years of bottled frustration over Chelsea's experience at the SDS keynote, it feels important to enter into the space again.

Chelsea and I have an accepted presentation for a roundtable discussion at the SDS evening event. In the proposal details, it seems that the event has been completely restructured. I am not sure what to expect with this new platform, but I walk in with Chelsea feeling hopeful. I keep thinking of Pedro's conference presentation and the normalcy of his engagement with that space and just truly want an experience as meaningful for Chelsea.

As soon as we walk in, there is an announcement by an SDS board member.

"This year we are trying something a little different. I'm sure you noticed we do not have one keynote speaker but rather several honored guests. This is a social

event. Our honored guests have name plaques spread throughout these round tables. If you want to engage with an honored guest and ask questions you can, and if you prefer not to, you absolutely do not have to. Each table has a list of possible questions shared by the honored guest of that table meant for conversation starters. Eat, relax, chat, roll on the floor, ask big life questions – this is your hour. Make it the experience you are hoping for and that meets your access needs. Let's just all be in this space together. And then we'll dance!"

Instantly more optimistic, I turn to Chelsea. She winks at me and nods her head. We grab drinks and walk through the roundtables until we find our names. I am beyond thrilled to see six people sitting at our table. We sit down and I realize I've just sat down next to a prominent DS scholar. And I recognize two familiar faces from our table at the SDS keynote several years ago. My heart starts to beat a little faster. Here we go!

Chelsea turns to her right, "Hello, Dear."

Then to her left, "Hello, Dear."

I start with introductions and the aim for our roundtable discussion.

"We are hoping to have an open conversation about the boundaries in disability studies and opportunities and possibilities for points-of-entry for those in the disability community labeled with intellectual disabilities to engage in the DS community."

Nobody is sure what question to ask first. Happy to break the silence, I get right to it.

"Chelsea, what do you think are the possibilities for you in narrowing the boundaries in disability studies?"

She clears her throat. Now I know she is nervous. I can see her glance at her tattoo on her wrist. She smiles slightly out of the corner of her mouth. I can't help but smile, too, quickly thinking of the symbolism of our backwards comma. Our story does continue together, but it feels like at times we have to go backwards to be able to move forward. I wonder if she is thinking the same thing. I'm not sure why it hadn't struck me before, but I realize that the tail of my backwards comma on my wrist points directly to the northstar on my other arm. I smile again as I make the

connection with how well the artist's grammatical error actually aligns with my narrative of the past 20 years. Even as we go backwards, we still aim in the direction toward access, and keep pushing to our northstar. I nod encouragingly to Chelsea. She nods back and begins to speak.

"I want to have a space at your table. I've learned the difference between inclusion and access. Inclusion is an invitation to the table. Access is building the table together. When I came to your table last time, I felt like I needed to leave. I understand competing access needs, but I cannot help my impulse to talk. It didn't feel good to feel excluded in a room of disabled people and allies.

My friend Jason taught me that I don't need to change, Columbus needs to change.

I am really good at bringing people together if you give me a chance. I do not know how to build a table by myself. But I would really love to learn how to build one with you."

She locks eyes with me. I smile through that uncomfortable feeling you get in the back of your throat that comes with big feelings. My eyes start to well up. She winks as dramatically as possible at me and curls her smile to make an exaggerated click through her mouth. Even in the gravity of her big moment she is thinking of others and wants to make me smile. She continues.

"My rights are not a fairytale. I do not want access and disability justice to be my fairytale."

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Author's Notes:

I use the phrasing "disabled students" deliberately when referring to students in a disability studies context to emphasize the ways students are disabled by society and schooling practices. I use the phrasing "students with disabilities" when appropriate to reference a special education orientation and/or student preference for person-first language. I use the phrasing "students labeled with intellectual disabilities" deliberately when describing my former students in reference to a label in a schooling context that was placed on them with biased assessments and assumptions.