

Currere: The Method (notes on Bill Pinar's method)

- What is (a) curriculum?
 - *Cur•ric' u•lum, n., pl., curriculum*s or *curricula*, [l. a race course, career, from *currere*, to run; figurative use.] a specific course of study or, collectively, all the courses of a study in a university, college, or school. From *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1979).
 - This infinitive, which Bill first explored in the mid 1970s, is extremely important, as it enables us to think of curriculum as method, as process, as journey.
 - Pinar (1975, p. 400): "The study of *currere*, as the Latin infinitive suggests, involves investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage."
- In many ways, *currere* reiterates Dewey's (1916) analysis of experience in *Democracy and Education*.
 - [I]n its contrast with the ideas both of unfolding of latent powers from within, and of formation from without, whether by physical nature or by the cultural products of the past, the ideal of growth results in the conception that education is a constant reorganizing of experience. It has all the time an immediate end, and so far as activity is educative, it reaches that end—the direct transformation of the quality of experience. . . . [education] is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. (Dewey, 1916, pp. 89-90)
- This turn to experience also helped underwrite the reconceptualization of curriculum studies: "questions of design, development, instruction, and evaluation—the perennial foci of the curriculum field—are no longer useful or interesting," Bill wrote forty years ago (Pinar, 1975, p. 397).¹
- In *Curriculum Theorizing*, chapters titled "The Analysis of Educational Experience" and "Search for a Method," Bill describes the method of *currere* (pp. 384-395, 415-424).
 - *Currere* was introduced as "a method that will allow us to 'bracket' the educational aspects of our taken-for-granted world. That is, we must attend to the contents of consciousness as they appear" (p. 406).
 - "the problem initially is to get under one's exteriorized horizontal thinking, to begin to sink toward the transcendental place, where the lower-level psychic workings, those psychic realms determined by conditioning and genetic code, are visible" (p. 407).
 - "When sufficient data has accumulated (and the question of when may well be left to the investigator) the analysis begins" (p. 408)
 - "This process of turning inward to examine one's *currere* will lead to a generalized inner-centeredness and hopefully initiate or further the process of individuation, leading to a gradual formation of the transcendental ego" (p. 410).
 - Pinar (1975, p. 400): I propose yet another meaning of the word, one stemming from its Latin root, *currere*. The distinction is this: current usages of the term appear to me to focus on the observable, the external, the public. The study of *currere*, as the Latin

¹ Pinar, William (Ed.) (1975). *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

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- infinitive suggests, involves investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage.
- (p. 415): As we know, discipline inquiry requires both a subject and a method for inquiry. That this book is subtitled *The Reconceptualists* suggests dissatisfaction with established research methods and, by implication, with that area that is traditionally researched in the field of curriculum.
 - "So finally," he says in 1975, "we can characterize the method. It is (a) regressive, because it involves description and analysis of one's intellectual biography or, if you prefer, educational past; (b) progressive, because it involves a description of one's imagined future; (c) analytic, because it calls for a psychoanalysis of one's phenomenologically described educational present, past, and future; and (d) synthetic, because it totalizes the fragments of educational experience (that is to say the response and context of the subject) and places this integrated understanding of individual experience into the larger political and cultural web, explaining the dialectical relation between the two" (Figure 1) (p. 424).
 - In *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, published with Madeleine Grumet in 1976, Bill simply states that "The Method of Currere" "is regressive— progressive— analytical— synthetic." "It is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that is transtemporal and transconceptual. From another perspective, the method is the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal, and from another, it is the viewing of what is conceptualized through time. So it is that we hope to explore the complex relation between the temporal and the conceptual. In doing so we disclose their relation to the Self in its evolution and education" (p. 51).²
 - A few years later, in "Currere: A Case Study," through an immensely productive encounter with Sartre's *Search for a Method*, Bill elaborates:
 - A definitional note. As you recognize, *currere* is the Latin infinitive from which curriculum is derived, and I use it to suggest a particular focus of curriculum study, a focus on one's lived experience of curricula. Instead of examining only the course of study, or one's intentions in designing the course to be run, in *currere* we focus on the running of the course. The course becomes subsumed in, though not reduced to, the experience of the runner. This runner is the teacher or the student (or whoever comes in contact with curricula). (p. 318)
 - I have worked to create a method through which the interested student (be he professor, elementary-school teacher, high-school student, curriculum specialist) may examine his experience of schools and of particular aspects of schools (a particular teacher, a certain book, a mélange of feelings regarding a particular year). The emphasis is on experience. The aspiration is to cut through the layers of superimposed thought to preconceptual experience, which is the ontological ground of all thought.³ (pp. 322-323)

² Pinar, William F. & Grumet, Madeleine (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

³ Pinar, W. F. (1978). *Currere: A case study*. In G. Willis, (Ed), *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism* (pp. 316-342). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan. See also Pinar, W. F. (1978). Life history and curriculum theorizing. *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science* 3(1), 92-118

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- The method is brilliantly rendered in one of his fairly recent (2004) books, *What is Curriculum Theory?*
 - The method of *currere*—the infinitive form of curriculum—promises no quick fixes. On the contrary, this autobiographical method asks us to slow down, to remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future. Then, slowly and in one's own terms, one analyzes one's experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one's submergence in the present. The method of *currere* is not a matter of psychic survival, but one of subjective risk and social reconstruction, the achievement of selfhood and society in the age to come (Pinar, 2004, p. 4).
- The method of *currere* is an autobiographical means to study the lived experience of individual participants in curricular conversation. There are four steps or moments in the method of *currere*: the (1) regressive, (2) progressive, (3) analytical, and (4) synthetical.... The consequence of *currere* is an intensified subjective engagement with the world.⁴

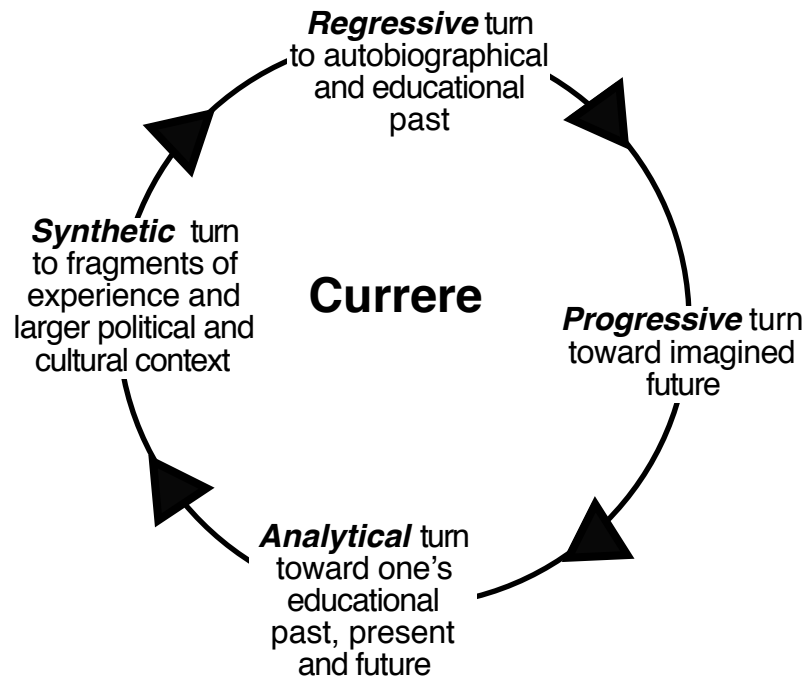


Figure 1. Method of *currere*. Adapted from Pinar, 1975, p. 424.

⁴ Pinar, W. (2010). *Currere*. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 177-178). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.