READING AND WRITING THE SELF

Autobiography in Education and the Curriculum

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6 *Currere* and Reconceptualism: Autobiography as Curriculum Theory

> *. . . the journey inward becomes an ongoing process that leads outward to a more complete understanding of the human condition. Self-understanding is not merely a reflection on what we are but what we are in relation to the world. Self-understanding comes to us via our unique perceptions of the world which are inherent upon our individual abilities as well as on our sociocultural histories.*
>
> *Florence Krall, 1988*

Among the many images or characterizations of curriculum that presently constitute the field of curriculum studies, Schubert (1986) identifies curriculum as *currere* as "one of the most recent positions to emerge on the curriculum horizon" (p. 33). Advocates of this position, rather than interpreting curriculum etymologically and nominally as a course to be run, choose instead to emphasize the root infinitive in order to stress the activity of running, to privilege the individual's own capacity "to reconceptualize his or her autobiography" (Schubert, 1986, p. 33). There is little doubt in this instance, however, that despite the intellectual superstructure of European philosophies invoked by advocates of *currere* to support their position, philosophies that will be examined shortly, John Dewey's idea of curriculum as experience stands closest to encapsulating many of *currere*'s broader educational objectives. Dewey's idea that the curriculum should not be composed of activities that set predetermined ends or learning outcomes leaves the way clear to conceive of it as a continuous process of construction and reconstruction, of active reflection

on one's own experience in the service of self-realization (Blewett, 1960; Dewey, 1938, 1960, 1980; Graham, 1989).

In this manner the curriculum can be seen to evolve, since with its focus on the learner (and here we are reminded that a key reconceptualist belief is that the curriculum "is the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present and our future" [Grumet, 1981, p. 115]), it acknowledges the student's search for meaning as an interactive and reflective process undertaken in a social milieu. It is further argued that autobiography as writing the self, as a method of reflecting on and grounding the self in lived experience, comes closest to hand as the prime candidate to accomplish such a task of reconceptualization.

But if Schubert is confident in one way that *currere* is a position to which some workers in curriculum would subscribe, in another way he is just as certain that many others would object strenuously to such a conception. Indeed, he likens the curriculum field itself to the parable of the blind men and the elephant in which each touches a different part of the animal and infers an image of the whole from that. With this caveat in mind, therefore, I want to review *currere*'s progress by an analysis and critique of its original formulation, by situating its emergence historically within curriculum studies, and by examining the kinds of criticisms and objections that persist in dogging its trail. If Pinar (1988) can confidently state that the curriculum field has indeed been reconceptualized, it has been so only to the extent that we are willing to recognize that "it takes some years for everyone, depending on his or her location, to see this" (p. 3). And further, if Pinar is correct in his observation that elementary and secondary schools must become the sites of a "second wave" (1988, p. 13) whereby reconceptualist thought and practice can be filtered into the consciousness of teachers and hence affect the world of practice, then it is imperative that some broad reevaluation of *currere* be advanced that will refresh our understanding and engage us further in critical dialogue. To this end, I will work on a wide front in order to sketch out briefly those aspects of reconceptualization incorporated in both Pinar's and Grumet's notions of autobiographical method. Then will follow a more detailed consideration of the intellectual sources of the method in continental philosophy, as well as an explanation of some of Pinar and Grumet's stated hopes for *currere* as curriculum theory. Finally, some residual problems that have arisen since the method was first formulated, as well as some recent thinking on the topic, will occupy our attention as *currere*'s present status is challenged and discussed.

RETELLING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE: THE REUSEABLE PAST

If Pinar's edited volume *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists* (1975) can fairly be said to have fired a broadside against more traditional conceptions of curriculum, particularly those associated with the "Tyler rationale" (1949) as well as the work of the so-called conceptual-empiricists (Schubert's social behaviorists), who use empirical methods to predict and control curricular phenomena, then Pinar's own four contributions in that volume (Pinar, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1975d) were individual bullets from the sniper's rifle of a guerrilla band of self-styled "reconceptualists." In one of these essays Pinar (1975c) took direct aim not only at Tyler but also at Huebner (1975), a figure sympathetic to reconceptualism, who in the same volume insisted that the task of the curriculum theorist was "to articulate the uses of language within the curricular domain, and to identify the various modes of language used" (pp. 256–257).

By shifting the focus of attention away from a technical rationale, with its concentration on design and objectives, toward dwelling on the nature of one's inner experience, Pinar (1975c) offered *currere*—"the investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage" (p. 400)—as a knowledge-producing method of inquiry appropriate for the study of educational experience. As we will shortly discover in more detail, by calling upon the traditions of existentialism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, Pinar hoped to be able to analyze educational experience, to reconstruct curriculum materials in terms of the individual's own consciousness. Pinar (1975c) echoed with approval in another essay Maxine Greene's sentiments that reconstructing an artifact (here a narrative of educational experience) in terms of one's own consciousness was "to allow it presence within me, uncritically, to observe it and how it 'fits,' if it is the next 'piece' in the developing intellectual gestalt, to 'test it' against memories of past experience" (p. 408).

And it is in the essay entitled "The Analysis of Educational Experience" that Pinar (1975b) provides the outline of an autobiographical method that is directed at illuminating how our "domain assumptions" (p. 388) form a part of the larger inner world that is equivalent for Pinar to Husserl's *lebenswelt*. Although Pinar wants to argue that this reconstructing of experience has similarities with Dewey's project except that it has a different end, namely, the slow transcendence of

self from circumstances rather than the Deweyan notion of adapting self to circumstances, in practice it wholly supports, under certain provisos, an aesthetic approach to self-realization, one whose consequences are compatible with the kinds of knowledge claims people have traditionally turned to autobiography to supply. In sum, Pinar's (1975b) early characterization of autobiographical method involves three steps:

> . . . first to render one's educational experience . . . into words, using the associative form of minding. The second is to use one's critical faculties to understand what principles and patterns have been operative in one's educational life, hence achieving a more profound understanding of one's educational experience, as well as illuminating parts of the inner world and deepening one's self-understanding generally. The third task is to analyze other's experience to reveal what I call basic educational structures or processes that cross biographical lines. (p. 389)

It is crucial to take note that Pinar's (1975b) conception of the self does not involve the traditional id-ego-superego triad of Freudian psychology, but rather involves Husserl's idea of a transcendental ego, a structure that "remains continuous over time and permits observation of lower-level psychic workings" (p. 390). In effect, the method would work like a Rorschach inkblot test, drawing out by means of association unconscious material regarding the nature of the individual's educational experience. Although Pinar is alive to several immediate objections to the method, objections centered mainly around the ethical constraints that may have to accompany its use as an instrument of research, as well as the inevitable problems of transference (on both of which more later), he maintains that this "translation of private *lebenswelt* into public language" (p. 391) will assist in healing the breach between much educational research and its perceived separation from the actual experiences of teachers and students in educational settings. Likewise, Pinar wastes no time in asserting that in this necessarily slow and long-term effort can be discovered possibilities for transcendence, a process that he would hold involves a potent sense of becoming through excavating and bringing to light that which has been buried by many years of schooling and social conditioning. In his later, more elaborate formulation of *currere* as a regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical method, Pinar (1976c) states that his method "is the self conscious conceptualization of the temporal . . . [undertaken] 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).

For Pinar's colleague Grumet the relationship of autobiography to the reconceptualization of curriculum is also discovered in the reflexive project implied by the very nature of the autobiographical urge toward retelling episodes from our life stories. However, the ultimate significance of the episodes that emerge from this narrative undertaking is not found in their existence "as pieces of literature, as ends in themselves" (Grumet, 1976c, p. 116), but rather "as precipitates of a developmental process in which the telling and reading and revising" (p. 116) are of the utmost importance. Although it is clear that some inchoate principle of selection is involved in foregrounding some experiences and in excluding others, nevertheless Grumet claims that these abstractions themselves can become the subject of inquiry. And as several commentators have noted in discussing the position of autobiography in literary theory (Benstock, 1988; Eakin, 1985; Egan, 1984; Friedman, 1988; Smith, 1987), these texts and the information selected for inspection can work in the service of predicting future behavior and courses of action. Consequently, from this entirely fictional operation Grumet argues that curriculum is reconceptualized in two ways.

First, as with Pinar's free-associative method, experiences are reclaimed through a reflective process that begins by allowing the mind to wander, and continues by providing rich details and descriptions in order to situate the narrative, to place it in the specifics of a thoroughly evoked context. Grumet (1976a, p. 40) appeals in this connection to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "pre-predicative experience" in order to connect the images thus evoked to the subject who underwent the experience. It is only in the "freshness and immediacy" (p. 39) of our narratives of lived experience that the curriculum can be reconceptualized, since the narratives reclaim entire areas of experience from the associations that represent for the individual the feeling-tone of the experience itself.

Second, as these narratives are analyzed, "interests and biases" (p. 41) that are often hidden in the normal course of living stand revealed for inspection. Autobiography as text, as fiction, as an aesthetic artifact that represents the way in which we have chosen to order and interpret our experience, is primed to reveal to us the nature and extent of our freedom. In this manner educational experience is reordered into "a usable past [and] into a usable present" (p. 41) whose purpose is contained in the existential aim of promoting a

sense of personal responsibility for our actions. However, the organicism implied in this construction of narrative, in the reconstruction and patterning of experience to provide an appearance of wholeness, is not undertaken to paper over the cracks in our view of the world but rather to "reach back through our experience to the preconceptual encounter that is the foundation of our judgments" (p. 41), a purpose that transcends the escape afforded by the consolation and comfort of aesthetic representation alone.

Even from this truncated exposition of autobiographical method we not only can move some way toward situating *currere* within the field of curriculum studies in general, but also can examine how the initial criticism leveled at *currere* from adherents to other, more dominant curricular paradigms created various kinds of struggle and tension in the field. This struggle is by no means over, in spite of Pinar's claims to the contrary and the move by Schubert and others (McNeil, 1985; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988) to legitimate the reconceptualist paradigm in their synoptic textbooks of the field itself. It is clear that the kind of hornet's nest *currere* stirred up in the field involved more than an argument over the adequacy of which conceptual lenses one wore to examine curricular phenomena, but in fact addressed a series of sensitive issues that struck at the heart of professional reputations, at political and social ideologies, at aspirations for education, and indeed at permutations of all three.

If we employ for the sake of convenience Schubert's (1986) designation that there exist within the curriculum field three competing paradigms—the *empirical/analytic* represented by Ralph Tyler, the *hermeneutic* represented by Joseph Schwab (although Schubert is rightly unhappy about applying this to Schwab's particular version of "the practical"), and the *critical* represented by William Pinar—then in the terms given currency by the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1971), the "interest" served by each paradigm would be, consecutively, the *technical*, the *practical*, and the *emancipatory*. There is little space here to recapitulate in any detail Habermas's theory of knowledge and its cultural implications; suffice it to say that the empirical/analytic orientation is interested in control and certainty, in social reality as it is, and contains a theory of knowledge as value-free and objective. Hermeneutic inquiry serves the practical interest and understands reality as intersubjectively constituted, emphasizes communicative interaction, and views knowledge as the creation of human beings. Finally, the critical paradigm serves an emancipatory interest that concentrates on the uses and abuses of power, encourages

a sensitivity to false consciousness, and seeks to expose whatever is oppressive and dominating (see Geuss, 1981, pp. 45–54).

Under this particular schema, *currere* and much reconceptualist thinking in general can be clearly subsumed, with differences in emphasis, within both hermeneutic and critical paradigms, since their concentration on the autobiographical act and other discoveries within the humanities largely presupposes an interest in self-discovery, in relations with others, and in the possibilities for personal change, healing, and transformation. Broadly speaking, then, when Pinar, Grumet, and other reconceptualists challenge present ways of thinking and talking about schooling and its effects on individuals, they are saying at the same time that in a curriculum driven by product-oriented methodologies and by technologies of knowledge and evaluation that are firmly in the grasp of textbook publishers and bureaucratic administrators, many of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of education are being willfully ignored or forgotten.

Perhaps more disturbing for an influential critic and curriculum worker like Jackson (1981) than the move away from previous reliance on the empirical methods of mainstream social science was the privileging of European traditions of thought, sources that were not only politically left of center but that were, it was claimed by reconceptualists, more fruitful for thinking about educational events than the native American traditions that had to that point dominated the scene. In addition, and as a corollary to this move, Jackson noted a concomitant change in the relationship between those who study and write about curriculum (academics) and those who work in schools (teachers). In practice this works out to two separate positions, one calling for a closer relationship as in the work of Butt and Raymond (1987), and the other calling for a more distant relationship as in the estimation of some major reconceptualist thinkers. This latter position is justified on the basis that only by maintaining a critical perspective with respect to curricular matters can education and the curriculum be viewed outside of narrow and officially sanctioned conceptions of schooling.

Whatever the merits of this altered relationship, Jackson reserves most of his own critical remarks for the use made by reconceptualists of specifically European intellectual traditions. Although applauding the fact that reconceptualist thinking is "refreshing" and "better written" (1981, p. 379) on the whole than most educational criticism, he is annoyed "by too many signs of in-groupiness and too many lapses into a sophomoric profundity, characterized by half-baked thoughts

and a vulgar display of partially digested knowledge" (p. 379), where words like *lebenswelt* and *weltanschauung* are "plopped like German dumplings into the thin broth of Anglo-Saxon prose in the hope, I suppose, of thickening it" (p. 379). Likewise, the Tanners (1981) argue that not only does reconceptualism fail to conform to criteria that would qualify it in any way as a movement, but that Pinar's work itself illegitimately employs Habermas's categories, rejects research of the conceptual-empirical model of the social sciences, and instead proposes the "mystical alchemy" (p. 389), where the move toward autobiographical reflection and contemplation can somehow be made "through a transcendental-existential levitation" (p. 389) to ensure the emancipatory interest in the way designated by Habermas himself.

As indicated earlier, it is these kinds of criticisms, regardless of their often ad hominem quality, that have been leveled at Pinar and his work with *currere*. Pinar's paper, "A Reply to My Critics" (1981), is of interest in this respect, for two major assertions are made by Pinar that are of direct concern for the curriculum field and for the position of autobiography within it. These assertions are: (1) that reconceptualization is not a movement comprised of leaders and adherents, but a term used to describe "a fundamental shift—a paradigm shift—in the orders of research conducted by diverse curricularists" (p. 394); and (2) that "this method [*currere*] and the view of curriculum embedded in it, are developed to considerable theoretical maturity in *Toward a Poor Curriculum*" (p. 395). It is Pinar's claim that had the Tanners studied more carefully this latter work (coauthored with Grumet), they would not have tried to reduce his work to "warmed-over sixties critique" (p. 395). Both of Pinar's propositions were issued in the form of a challenge, yet to this point neither has been taken up in a systematic way by Pinar's critics. The first assertion, that reconceptualism represents a paradigm shift, has, however, been addressed by Brown (1988) and will occupy us presently. An examination of the second assertion remains to be accomplished, and it is a move toward creating the initial conditions for this task that will be undertaken in the following section.

CHANGING THE FIELD: AN INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR *CURRERE*

In 1981, Pinar enlisted the assistance of T. M. Brown, a historian of science at the University of Rochester, to ascertain whether reconceptualization was indeed a paradigm shift under the terms made popular by Thomas Kuhn (1970). Pinar provided Brown with a range of materials, including the work of Jackson, the Tanners, and himself, to which Brown responded by producing a coolly reasoned assessment of the appropriateness of applying the idea of reconceptualization to the field of curriculum. It is unnecessary to rehearse again as Brown does the familiar features involved in a Kuhnian paradigm shift within a scientific discipline; what is of interest is the kinds of tentative conclusions Brown thought it pertinent to draw with respect to judging the apparent crisis in the quasi-scientific or nonscientific field of curriculum.

Brown's (1988) conclusion, based on his examination of Jackson's critique of Pinar and reconceptualization, is that "a first approximation" (p. 26) to a paradigm shift seems to be under way. However, he cites the Tanners' complaints as evidence that any application of Kuhn's ideas to a field other than science "must be done carefully and cautiously" (p. 27). Therefore, if we should expect that in a field such as curriculum claims for a paradigm shift ought to be advanced with the appropriate degree of caution, what kind of evidence would begin to tip the scales in favor of agreeing that a shift has occurred? True to his Kuhnian training, Brown advocates a sociological study of the curriculum field in order to find out not only who curricularists are, but also to discover "what institutional positions they occupy, [and] what degree of training in what disciplines they have received" (p. 28). This kind of information would provide a more thorough understanding of the academic preparation of workers in curriculum and hence the different "worldviews" brought to its study, as well as monitor the generational aspects of the field since, as Kuhn believes, new paradigms can arise when older members of the field die off to leave the field clear for other views to take over. In this instance it would appear that the field did pass through a crisis (the 1960s) where a new generation was born whose influence is only now being felt as that generation reaches maturity, gains a foothold in institutions, and begins to challenge the received wisdom and traditional points of view.

Interestingly for what is to follow, Brown takes up Jackson's criticism that reconceptualists in general subscribe to the notion that they should sever their ties with practitioners in order to develop a pure theory of curriculum. Brown offers two observations in support of Jackson's position. First, it is too early to develop pure theory in the curriculum field, since even Newton had to rely on his predecessors before he could develop his theory of mechanics as he did. For curricularists, "Mere wishing and straining won't make it so; the time has

to be ripe for a Newton to appear" (p. 29). Second, even if something like the *Principia* already exists in the field, "very few of the older generation are likely to be persuaded until it proves capable of addressing more successfully than its competitors the ongoing problems in the field" (p. 29). However, by concentrating on satisfying the demands imposed by the older generation, reconceptualism may be shouldering an unnecessary burden. Hence the dilemma: If reconceptualism ignores the older problems, it too "risks being ignored" (p. 29); if it takes up these problems it risks cutting itself off from new sources of creativity and thinking. Therefore, if the reconceptualists want to claim that there has indeed been a paradigm shift rather than, as Brown (1988) puts it, "a proliferation of schools" (p. 28), then he also wonders what kind of harm would accrue if the new curricularists really did engage with the so-called anomalies of the older established conceptual-empirical research program.

While Brown's conclusions are properly tempered and cautious, and while there may not yet have appeared a Newton who will irrevocably alter our thinking on curriculum, serious questions remain regarding the capacity of reconceptualism to demonstrate any abiding concern or interest in perennial issues such as curriculum change and implementation. Pinar may be correct in claiming that there is a "significant reduction in the field's resistance to the Reconceptualists" (1988b, p. 1); but they have yet to move in any satisfactory way beyond acting as a ginger group or the self-appointed voice of conscience in a field they claim is ruled by technical rationality and an instrumentalist intention. However, even to succeed in this limited way is to perform a great service to the field. Indeed, Posner (1988) may come closer to the mark when he writes that the function of the critical perspective in the field of curriculum "raises our consciousness regarding the assumptions underlying our work in curriculum. By giving us ground to stand on outside the dominant approach, it has enabled us to examine critically the technical production perspective, to identify its blind spots, and to understand its political and social implications" (p. 94).

In other words, the work of Beauchamp, Tyler, Taba, the Tanners, and Schwab still continues to represent the dominant thinking on how to think about or develop a curriculum, thinking that correctly draws attention to the procedures and concepts involved in attempting to plan a curriculum along rational lines. However, reconceptualist thought seems largely uninterested in, and deeply disagrees with, these procedural models, preferring instead to attack them from ideological and political points of view. Nevertheless, Posner may again

come closest when he argues that both perspectives are required by any model of curriculum that seeks comprehensive status. Not only technique is required, but also what Posner calls "a curriculum conscience" (1988, p. 94), since a curriculum planned without the former "is incompetent," and without the latter "is ungrounded" (p. 94). Reconceptualist thinking is valuable, even necessary, to the extent that it makes us aware of the often hidden implications of a particular technical model, and may in addition help answer Walker and Soltis's (1986) curriculum dilemma: "How to proceed when aims and priorities are unstable and shifting?" (p. 76).

In spite of all this, however, there still exist residual doubts regarding the existence of a paradigm shift in the terms Pinar proposes. It would be irresponsible speculation to guess why Pinar insists on mounting a campaign for reconceptualism as a paradigm shift, but clearly there is a real sense in which he might be said to protest too much. What must be inspected in the meantime, however, is the idea that if reconceptualization more accurately describes the work of a small and heterogeneous collection of individuals from different intellectual backgrounds who share certain loosely defined aims, then a majority of those would subscribe to the governing principle "of finding ways of coming to know oneself as organically embedded in culture and history and needing to rely more on experience" (Schubert, 1986, p. 178). It is here that autobiography enters the picture in the form of *currere*, and it is with revealing the framework for *currere* as curriculum theory that Pinar and Grumet are concerned in *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1976). If not precisely a *Principia*, the book's exploration of the existential, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic bases for *currere* is an intellectual tour de force and must on all accounts be reckoned with. Only then will we be in a position to judge it more fairly and to gauge the possible extent of its continued status as a seminal document in the field of curriculum.

Existential and Phenomenological Foundations

For Grumet (1976a), "the essential and enduring concern" (p. 32) of her kind of curriculum theorist is with metatheory. By continually questioning the presuppositions of the conceptual lenses or metaphors elected to scrutinize educational experience, the aim of curricularists is to contain the experience without reducing it, "to analyze it without atomizing it" (p. 32). To speak of education, then, is to speak not only of one's experience in the world, but to move beyond the merely descriptive toward a definition that "will diminish the discrep-

ancy between public performance and private experience" (p. 34). In other words, for an experience to be educational, as with Dewey, it must be a blend of objectivity and subjectivity, an encounter that changes and extends its immediate significance even as it subtly alters and informs the individual's psyche itself. Grumet wants to view education in these terms as "a person's dialogue with the world of experience" (p. 34), a definition that allows her to argue for finding a theory-base for autobiography in phenomenology, where knowledge of the world requires "knowledge of self-as-knower-of-the-world" (p. 35), and in existentialism, which emphasizes the dialectical nature of the relationship of individuals to their situations. Within the phenomenological tradition, in particular within the work of Husserl, whose central insistence on the *epoché* implied the paradox that only by distancing ourselves from our experience could we begin to come closer to it, Grumet finds a provocative way of conceptualizing the dialectical relationship between humanity and the world.

However, *currere* scales down these somewhat grandiose speculations to the level of the individual in order to make the claim that only by taking into account the situated particularity of the individual can the tendencies within a curriculum designed in discrete and fragmented units be effectively overcome. What *currere* promises, then, as the cornerstone of a reconceptualized curriculum, is nothing less than "the safe return of my own voice" (p. 37). Autobiography, as an intentional act of consciousness, ensures that by bracketing off, remembering, and describing the objects of consciousness, the knowledge so gained would be grounded in the lived experience of the individual. Grumet (1976a) suggests, after Merleau-Ponty, that if the bracketing provided by the *epoché* can "slacken the intentional threads which attach us to the world" (p. 41), then Pinar's *currere*, especially those aspects of it where we take on "the role of the artist and the epistemological posture of the phenomenologist" (p. 53) in order to gain access to the level of our preconceptual encounters, promises to put our "essences back into existence" (p. 41). *Currere* in its employment of the *epoché* is designed to cleanse our cognitive lenses so that through the analysis of educational experience we can make contact with the essential forms of our being.

In addition, Grumet's understanding of the existentialist bases of *currere* causes her to stress the rootedness of all human action in a lived context or situation. If one of the basic tenets of existentialism is that we are condemned to be free, in other words, that we can surpass the facticity of our lives through our free choices, then our self-knowledge develops not primarily by means of introspection, but in

the dialectic interplay involved when an embodied subject acts in the world (Grumet, 1987). In this way *currere* attempts to reconcile the paradox of phenomenology, where to distance oneself is to come closer, with the tensions in existentialism between means and ends, of living always situated in the world and yet assuming responsibility for our actions in it.

Psychoanalytic Foundations

The chapter in *Toward a Poor Curriculum* in which Grumet examines *currere*'s relationship to psychoanalysis also marks the point at which much of the metatheoretical exposition is brought to earth, as it were, by becoming more explicit over what part she would see *currere* play in our schools and colleges. As she states, she is "less interested in autobiography as a record of a student's passage through schooling . . . than as a source of energy and direction for the journey" (Grumet, 1976c, p. 111). By initially drawing on Olney's distinction in *Metaphors of Self* (1972) between the autobiography of the single metaphor that describes a life already completed, and the autobiography of the double metaphor in which "the life story is identical with the life process that created it and is indeed an extension of that process" (Grumet, 1976c, pp. 111–112), Grumet wants to establish the educational application of *currere* as following the path of the double metaphor. As "a dynamic method of self renewal" (p. 112), autobiography as practiced in *currere* employs the double metaphor approach, a method that holds that "to describe one's own developmental process is to generate it as well" (p. 112). Grumet begins in this manner because she wishes to claim that psychoanalysis itself operates on the double metaphor principle as a discipline that combines "the specificity and symbolic ambiguity of literature with the generalities and recurring patterns of the social sciences" (p. 112). The problem involved in bringing *currere* into the classroom is the problem exemplified in the project of psychoanalysis itself: how to account for the polarities of "consciousness and the unconscious, individuality and humanity" (p. 112). *Currere*, then, is conceptualized as a form of ego psychology that examines and interprets experience for its manifest and latent meaning "as well as the political implications of reflection and interpretation" (p. 113). In other words, *currere* is a method for giving voice to private experience within a public setting and speaks to the developing structures of a student's personality as it interacts with social and institutional forms and structures.

In addition, while Grumet (1976c) insists that the essence of *cur-*

rere is to be found in the assertion "that *new structures evolve in the process of naming old ones*" (p. 115, emphasis in original), she also holds fast to the notion that *currere* "is not a form of therapy designed to treat symptoms" (p. 115). It cannot claim in this instance that, like psychoanalysis, self-reflection can liberate the individual from the grip of unconscious impulses, but must settle on the less spectacular, and perhaps no less contentious, claim, "that by bringing the structures of experience to awareness, one enhances his ability to direct the process of his own development" (p. 115). Although we will have more to say below in connection with this and other aspects of *currere* as it relates to Pinar's hopes for a second wave of reconceptualist thought permeating the schools, it is necessary here to follow Grumet's argument to its conclusion.

One of the mainstays of *currere*'s method is that it asks students the question, "what does this mean to you?" (p. 116). In order to focus what significance the students' educational experience has been for them, the writing of autobiography provides a response to that question. These narratives are then translated or interpreted in a dialogue between a student and herself or with the instructor. This hermeneutic project transforms lived experience into language in order to intensify the student's experience, and hence it encourages students to give voice to their own meanings. In addition, Grumet (1976b) wants to use autobiography with teachers in order that they will become "conscious of their fictions so they will not be ruled by their myths" (p. 74), and with students to make them conscious of their constitutive metaphors. By the process of self-objectification, the student can begin to examine the relations between the ego and all those items best described as nonego, from fantasies and wishes to the structure and demands of the academic disciplines undergone in schools.

Similarly, although *currere*'s commitment to the growth of the student means in practice that it is committed to unbuckling what psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich called our "character armor," Grumet is anxious to reassure educators and society at large (who, she claims, fear all expressions of internal experience) that *currere* is not about to "unleash a libidinous behemoth to topple cognitive structure, public schooling and Western civilization with its untamed instinctual energies" (1976c, p. 122), but that, mindful of Freud's injunction "where Id was there shall Ego be," it will proceed more prosaically "to help students recover their own intentionality and find there the energy for their academic work as well as the links that connect that [sic] it to the concerns and events of their daily experience" (p. 123). Grumet is aware that this pursuit of self-knowledge is neither new nor radical; it

is in fact a direct legacy from at least Socratic times, fortified with a healthy dose of Romanticism (Willinsky, 1990a). What is ironic, she claims, is that we have succeeded in producing a culture that "estranges us from ourselves" (p. 126) and that has preserved "the products of its self-consciousness in museums and libraries" (p. 126). Schools have then been content to concentrate on these objects rather than on the "subjective processes" (p. 126) that brought them into being. A genuinely dialectical pedagogy would attempt to restore a deeply felt sense of self, and in this case would fulfill the distinguishing qualities of both literature and psychoanalysis, namely, that they "subvert the official text of the culture" (p. 127).

But if we would want to object that the subversive fruits of self-consciousness and self-knowledge not only might get tempered and normalized by the adjustment mythology that rules over the mentality of many teachers, and also that Grumet seems to be talking here of fairly sophisticated students in the upper grades of high school, she is quick to point out that *currere* has an integral part to play even in elementary school. In this site, *currere* would function "to reinforce the dialectical relationship of the family and the school" (p. 128). By attending to the very young child's experience of the curriculum (presumably in the autobiographical form of journals and other expressive writing, although this is never made clear), *currere* repeats "the maternal and paternal principles" (p. 128). That is, *currere* repeats "the patterns of ego development initiated in the infant's early object relations" (p. 128). The goal here is not adversarial; *currere* would not drive a wedge between the school, the child, and the family, but rather it would "establish sufficient distance so that the child will not be subsumed by the school" (p. 128). Here the maternal principle of trust in the mother (and in mother-surrogates like teachers) is reconciled with the paternal principle that what is seen as alien, as a stranger, can be introjected.

Finally, although by no means exhausting the relation Grumet adduces between *currere* and psychoanalysis, the problem of transference rears its head. While Grumet acknowledges that some measure of transference does take place as an instructor responds to the autobiographical narratives (transference takes place in most teaching situations), realizing this may assist in checking its development. Likewise, the educational use of *currere* differs from the emotional intensity of the psychoanalytic relationship by rejecting "the aura of insight" (1976c, p. 139) of the instructor, and by acknowledging that in working with so many groups of students the instructor has neither "the time nor training" (p. 140) to fully participate in the transfer-

ences that characterize the full-blown therapist-patient relationship. Further, the instructor can diminish the possibility of her own disproportionate influence by engaging other students as co-respondents, and by keeping firmly in mind the idea that *currere* is a developmental process that would see experience "as diffuse and relative but also as intelligible, continuous and self-directed" (p. 140). Autobiography as a provocative blend of fiction, personal metaphor, and myth is undertaken to make students aware that this method of self-representation is less concerned with a wholly accurate rendering of what was the case; rather, it is to be hoped that a student will assume a more relativistic stance in order to facilitate reviewing an educational experience as part of his or her life history "without at the same time repudiating it or affirming it" (Grumet, 1976c, p. 135). *Currere* does not wish to alter basic personality structures but instead holds out to students a method of gaining more direct access to the personal meaning of the experience of schooling.

CONCLUSION

As we saw earlier when Schubert's tripartite characterization of the curriculum field was offered as a convenient way of situating reconceptualism and *currere*, advocates of the paradigm of critical praxis share to varying degrees a concentration on the ideological ramifications of curriculum. Reconceptualists, in concert with social reconstructionists and critical theorists of the Frankfurt school persuasion, are interested in such pertinent issues as how knowledge is reproduced in schools (Whitty, 1985), how students, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, resist the impositions of school knowledge (Giroux, 1988), and how students and teachers alike can be moved in the direction of more emancipatory teaching and learning practices. On the face of it, a clear understanding of Dewey's work, particularly classic statements like *Democracy and Education*, combined with an appreciation for his role in the social reconstructionist movement and its journal *The Social Frontier* (see Bowers, 1969, pp. 48–88), could stand as emblematic of a fully developed program for emancipation that combines a method of inquiry with critique and praxis. Grumet (1981), however, would distance the project of *currere* from Dewey's work, and it is in what she has to say to justify this position that a beginning can be made at summing up and clarifying what is at once attractive in autobiographical method for some curricularists of

her persuasion, and yet what has proved so forbidding for others who are more convinced by the arguments of Jackson or the Tanners.

According to Grumet (1981), Pinar's autobiographical method of *currere* "was a project of restitution, wresting experience from the anonymity and generalisation that had dominated the social sciences . . . and returning it to the particular persons who lived it" (p. 116). Her own first task was in the nature of a rescue operation: to save "autobiography from its association with the self, the alias that has given subjectivity a bad name" (p. 116). The psychoanalytic foundation of *currere* emphasizes a return to an inspection of the manifest and latent content of our inner experience as expressed in narrative, and to all those items like dreams and fantasies that, as we saw previously, formed part of the nonego, and which contain our visions of possibility for ourselves and society. However, Grumet feels that the surplus repressions of advanced capitalism make it impossible to bring our dreams "into the discourse of daily life" (p. 118), and so we disguise them under a "bourgeois notion of selfhood" (p. 119), a designation that Lasch's (1978) term the "culture of narcissism" captures well. The paradox of this state of false consciousness is that even as we are enjoined to celebrate the self, to cultivate all expressions of a rich subjectivity, we are irrevocably tied to the status quo, a relation in which there are few signs of "the tension and struggle of feeling and form that releases subjectivity" (p. 119). Dewey is criticized here not for grounding subjectivity in the social, which he so evidently did, but for his "conciliatory" (p. 120) approach to the Freudian insight that society is maintained at the price of repression. The scenario painted here by Grumet is the familiar one of the conflict between the liberal notion of adjustment to established forms in society, with the possibilities for transcendence implicated in the radical critique. It is Dewey's confidence that his cherished principles of inquiry would be sufficient to deal with the questions and uncertainties encountered in our daily living that Grumet is determined to resist. Curriculum theory must "rigorously root out optimism" (p. 122) if it is to function as anything more than an ideological support for restrictive liberal (read capitalistic) practices; likewise, progressive education "collapses into the most insidious form of cooptation" (p. 122) unless it is also motivated to challenge our most deeply held ideologies. Finally, "it is suspicion that this autobiographical method cultivates. . . . Suspicion is a response to a solution" (p. 122).

When cast in these terms, it is easier to see the threat that making the personal political would represent for a variety of stakeholders

in the curriculum: researchers, professors, superintendents, teachers, and parents whose conceptions of curriculum are more oriented toward improving test scores and in maintaining clear standards of accountability than in shadowy concepts like emancipation. It is small wonder, then, that the charge of warmed-over 1960s critique, a charge that for these educators would bring back memories of commentators like Postman and Weingartner (1969), who conceived of teaching as a subversive activity, has been constantly leveled at the reconceptualist wing of the curriculum field.

And yet if the experience of the 1960s, from Students for a Democratic Society to Kent State, has left its mark on this new generation of curricularists, then this legacy has made them realize that the appeal of autobiography resides less in its Romantic claim to return to us a vision of that which was lost, a vision of the Garden before the Fall (Lifson, 1979), but rather in its psychological and political capacity to mine the sedimented layers of consciousness where repression reigns in order to raise consciousness to a level where the uses and abuses of power in our lives are seen in stark relief. In this sense, then, Pinar's accusations of a generational conflict would seem to ring true: consciousness-raising and political involvement of the sort practiced in the 1960s and early 1970s would appear anathema to previous (and present) generations of scholars weaned on the methods (and often visible successes) of the social sciences. Thus, even if traditionalists could be persuaded to see nothing amiss in insisting that students compose narratives of their educational experience and engage in an undertaking whose outcome may well be feelings of anger and injustice, it is quite another matter to maintain that out of these are likely to emerge concrete proposals for reconstituted curricula that are applicable on a large scale for implementation in every school in the nation. Likewise, it is a far cry from claiming that *currere*, by methodically utilizing the autobiographical impulse, can perform wonders for making increasing numbers of students aware that their lives contain both power and possibility, to claiming that *currere* alone represents the royal road to both the personal and collective search for meaning that is the human side of curriculum.

But even if Pinar (1988b) today can state that ideas like cultural revolution and heightened consciousness are "dated terms that make one wince" (p. 3), there is still little doubt that the consciousness-raising element in autobiography is always and intimately related to its use. Therefore it may be worth pointing out here the distance between, for example, Grumet's (1976c) rhetoric that *currere* will restore to students their "intentionality" and "the energy for academic work" (p. 123), as well as forge connecting links between school and the outside world (all very bourgeois liberal objectives), and the kind of political consciousness-raising that is the not-so-hidden curriculum of the radical hopes for *currere*. If the practice of *currere* does indeed have a place in our elementary and secondary schools as a means of transcendence rather than as another instrument of ideological oppression wielded by teachers as the unwitting dupes of an all-powerful state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), then there is something understandable about those who would downplay the unpredictable vagaries of the transference phenomenon and other items too "hot" for the untrained teacher to handle. To seek to bracket off only the world of educational experience in one breath, and then to encourage students to forge links and connections with the lived world of experience outside the school in the next, could be interpreted as a shrewd strategic move that recognizes the generally low tolerance level of principals and superintendents for any new pedagogy that is politically dubious. But it could also be interpreted as ultimately ambivalent about its own chances of success as a radical instrument of consciousness, and is content to settle for the weaker and more acceptable compromise of giving students motivation and energy to do their homework and to better themselves by something approaching a pride-in-your-roots movement. All of which is to cast doubt on the feasibility of employing the autobiographical method in the public schools with anything approaching the kind of radical potential claimed for it, particularly when it is conceded in advance that teachers have neither the time nor the training (and certainly not the radical consciousness) to implement it thoroughly.

At the same time, however, it is equally clear that part of the continuing attractiveness of *currere* for an increasing number of educators emanates precisely from the courage with which it seeks to make the silences in our educational experience speak. It is indeed the fortunate adult who can reflect on his or her schooling without some residual sense of conflict, of feelings of inadequacy, or of being excluded. Schooling is, after all, as Dewey reminded us, life itself, not a preparation for life. The texts that the autobiographical method makes available for interpretation, then, are interesting to the extent that what they uncover is the manner in which teachers and students alike have been accomplices and victims of the kinds of oppressive relations fostered in educational institutions. This is the kind of payoff that may result when individuals go to work on their own memories. The relationship with the self is transformed, as well as the thematic or metaphoric elements of the remembered material itself. The hope

is that when enough individuals are encouraged and enabled to move in this direction, then changes in the social order will also be precipitated.

Clearly, while both Pinar and Grumet are in accord over the ideal ends of *currere* expressed in both personal and social terms, there do exist some tensions that separate these two thinkers. If Grumet is scathing in her denunciation of Dewey's thinking insofar as it kowtows to the maintenance of the status quo and notions of adjustment, Pinar seems content to rely on a more gradual approach to bringing about the social and educational millennium. On the other hand, it is also clear that of all the figures in education who have concerned themselves in a practical way with autobiography, Pinar and Grumet have by far the most fully developed and sophisticated understanding of its special characteristics and ideal potential. Be that as it may, and irrespective of their own undoubtedly courageous and enlightened practices, autobiography as part of "the politics of personal knowledge" (Grumet, 1987, p. 322), when employed in the service of teachers and researchers, continues to raise serious issues regarding the ethics of the situation. As Grumet knows, every retelling is a form of alienation; it is small wonder, then, that teachers who are requested to reconstruct narratives of experience generally exhibit a wide range of dissimulative behavior. In the same manner that students surveyed by Barnes, Barnes, and Clarke (1984) in Chapter 4 were often unwilling to disclose personal details to a teacher with whom they may not have been on the best of terms, so too Grumet (1987) realizes that telling a story even to a friend is also "a risky business" (p. 321), a fact that makes it doubly uncertain when the recipient is a professor or researcher. In other words, Grumet's open acknowledgment of the political and personal ramifications of narrative work extends our ability to visualize some of the drawbacks, as well as many of the long-term advantages, to autobiographical method.

This analysis has gone some way toward fulfilling the restricted and limited aim of providing points of entry into a key element in an important school of thought within curriculum studies. In general, however, the position of reconceptualism within curriculum studies continues to prove fluid and contested. For now, therefore, Pinar (1988b) may be guilty of overstatement when he claims that reconceptualism, something that "started as an opposition to the mainstream and tradition of the field" (p. 7), has now become the field itself; and further, that in his eagerness to announce the paradigm shift as a fait accompli, he has deliberately sidestepped the important empirical and procedural questions that Brown put forward as the acid test for

judging the claims of reconceptualism as a whole. But perhaps it is in the long run asking too much of reconceptualism that it may ever provide the kind of empirical and replicable proof that would satisfy (and convert) more traditionally minded curricularists. Rather, the appeal of reconceptualism and of autobiographical method in particular may continue to reside, like a penchant for existential philosophy, in the willingness to accede to the cultivation of a particular perspective, a psychological readiness to believe in its persuasive force as critique and conscience regardless of the difficulties in its application or in its local successes with teachers and students.

And yet it is extremely likely that, in typical Kuhnian fashion, a new generation of scholars sympathetic to reconceptualist thinking is slowly in the process of coming into its own. If this is so, it may signify that for a significant number of workers in curriculum, reconceptualism still represents one of the best hopes for keeping the human factor alive in education, especially in a time of widespread political retrenchment, a global movement whose impetus at present shows few signs of exhaustion.

autobiography makes clear. However, as we have seen throughout, the use of autobiography is always fraught with a certain number of drawbacks, particularly when instructors or researchers themselves take a naive realist's view and continue to believe that their students' and teachers' autobiographies are or ought to be considered true in some easily verifiable way.

On the level of school program, however, there is reason to believe that there is a movement afoot to have at least the reading of autobiographies occupy a more significant position within a subject like social studies than it appears to do at present. For example, Krass (1989), in the context of civics education in the United States, seems to be on the right track as she makes an interesting case for the use of autobiography in civics courses "as an instrument for fostering public spiritedness" (p. 104), a recognition of the potent social or collective dimension to its use. Her agenda, though laudable, may at first glance seem to ask a great deal, since she offers the reading of autobiography as a nostrum against the ills of materialism, presentism, individualism, conformity, and mediocrity, all of which she believes are endemic within present-day American society. Although this sounds more like a task for genetic engineering than for the reading and discussion of exemplary autobiographies in the interpretive community of the classroom, we would hope her new generation of social studies teachers will at least be alive to the fact that they are dealing with a very complex and demanding genre, one that does not always wear its intentions on its sleeve and that can yet contain a wealth of riches, some of which will become apparent to both themselves and their students alike only very slowly over time.

Finally, if we are to judge by the productive manner in which autobiography has been taken up in diverse educational settings by women's groups, feminist theorists, and ethnic and racial minorities as one of the most powerful methods for reclaiming their collective voices and for redeeming a lost sense of historical consciousness (Steedman, 1986), then it behooves all of us who are involved in whatever aspects of public education to begin to consider the extent of our own knowledge and attitudes toward autobiography and its potential as well.

Protean, multifaceted, and slippery as the genre surely is, this chapter has suggested some new directions for autobiography in education even as the book itself has demonstrated both the pitfalls and promises that lie in store for us as we take up our pens, processors, and paint and ask our students to take up theirs and begin to construct our autobiographies together.

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