FOLLOWING THE TRACE:

EXPLORING TEACHERS' STUDY OF THE CURRERE WRITING PROCESS,

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF STUDENTS, AND

TEACHER COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE DATA MEETING PROCESS

by

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gives me the strength and courage to use each of life's challenges as stepping stones to blaze new, historic trails. To my grandchild: may you be encouraged as you witness the vicissitudes of life and conquer each day with tenacity, grit, and your delightful smile. Ha-T loves you!

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I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my mother, Lou Reddic Roy, who worked as Senior Secretary to the Chairman of the Psychology Department at Texas Christian University from 1972-1984. She was a champion for education, a woman of excellence, and the motivation for me completing my doctoral program and dissertation at Texas Christian University.

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The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the effect of teachers' study of the Currere Writing Process on teachers' views of students and teachers' collective memory of the data meeting process. The conceptual framework of this research study is grounded in Jacques Derrida's *Theory of Deconstruction* and his theory of the trace. This dissertation addresses the two following research questions: (1) will the study of the Currere Writing Process allow teachers to view students in a way contrary to audit culture? and (2) what will teachers' study of the Currere Writing Process open up and produce? In order to answer these questions, this study uses a deconstructive analysis of the traces of audit culture in the current state-level accountability system. Through meticulous readings of teacher responses to Jessica Sierk's (2014) article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" during the Currere Writing Study, a rich, new dialogue is discovered that contrasts the views of standardization, allowing teachers to see students as more than just numbers.

Keywords: education, teacher, audit culture, currere, deconstruction

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Historical Perspective

The standardized testing process in today's schools is a contemporary representation of historic structural racism. The education system of our country has enculturated the learning process with numbers, hierarchies, and an unhealthy academic competitiveness that has led us to our current melancholic state (Taubman, 2009). The classroom, a place where innocent children should be able to learn and grow, has become a battleground for corporate interests and a breeding ground for a continuation of the status quo. The teacher, one who pours their heart into their planning and teaching on a daily basis, is reduced to simply a number or a percentage of students who make a passing or acceptable score on the state test. The stressors, increasing expectations, and the constant regulation and monitoring of numbers have produced an obsessive-compulsive field of professionals who go to school day in and day out without gratification. Social media continues to paint teachers as an overpaid profession; in actuality, teaching is one of the lowest-paid professions. Katherine McKittrick (2006) offers her analysis of black geographic thought, the historic events of the transatlantic slave trade, and the complexities of slave auction blocks as anticolonial sentiments that represent the struggle against bondage. I offer a similar interpretation of the local- and state-level accountability systems, as audit culture has transformed the school system into an auction block of scaled numbers, instead of a safe space of true learning (McKittrick, 2006). These scaled numbers become the essence of who a student really is in audit culture (Taubman, 2009). Instead of education policymakers seeing students for who they are as unique individuals, the education system is labeling students' and teachers' success with numbers. Reminiscent of the auction block used in slavery to indicate the

marketability of Black women, men, and children, audit culture has turned learning spaces into commodities of open sale (McKittrick, 2006).

Audit culture, with its moment of sale of the school with the so-called highest achievement, has suppressed the spirit of schools that have increased populations of African American and Hispanic students (Taubman, 2009). Knowingly setting a high standard of achievement for students and with the constant monitoring of teachers, policymakers continue to push the rhetoric of high-stakes testing to make ready the stage of the auction block and walk of shame (McKittrick, 2006). At the center of audit culture is the dehumanization of teachers and students as teachers and students are not viewed as individuals who have their own minds and creativity. Audit culture places the teacher and the student at the center with outside influences infiltrating their understandings as merely numbers (Taubman, 2009). Audit culture cancels the idiosyncrasies that make us the individual educators we are; therefore, making us succumb to the pressures of self-regulation and self-monitoring to ensure that we are marching in synchrony with the standards. Our children deserve to be seen for who they truly are and not seen as a test score through the eyes of a system that devalues the essence of learning. The psychological aspects of a system that embraces high-stakes testing affect teachers at a deeper level that, in turn, governs their everyday lives in the teaching environment. Teachers live, eat, and breathe numbers in an audit culture. The nightmares of shameful data meetings that place blame on the teacher contain traces of guilt, worthlessness, and fear; placing blame on the teacher is inevitable in a system where displaced concern for the individual is re-coded as financial investment in exchange for services (Taubman, 2009).

Theory of the Trace

Jacques Derrida's (1970) theory of the trace purports that every experience has a trace: for experience is the present consciousness of a past and future; every present understands itself as not being its own origin (it has a past, which is elsewhere, and 'elsewhen'), and also understands itself as incomplete (it has a future, which is not here, not yet) (Rasiński, 2011). Derrida offers a deconstructive approach to data, which "adheres to sneaking suspicions that something may be wrong with what we currently believe, while keeping a watchful eye…that something else, something other, still to come, is being missed" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 23). Derrida refers to this as a trace. This study will search for the destabilizing moments, snags in the data, and traces of audit culture (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Are we reducing students to test scores? Does a learner only amount to the score they make on a standardized test? Derrida suggests that there are "traces" of the "something else" and "differences, with traces of traces" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 23). Deconstruction is the "tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2021, p. 24).

Sigmund Freud explored the unchartered depths of the human psyche and came to a riveting conclusion that not only shocked the world but also foreshadowed the current educational paradigm shift. Freud candidly described education and psychoanalysis as "impossible professions," stating that "education and psychoanalytic treatment will probably before long be the subject for a detailed investigation" (Taubman, 2012, p. 1). The writings of Peter Taubman (2012) substantiate a need for further examination of the relationship between the inner human spirit and the outer influences imposed upon the teacher and learner through the current education system. The very presence of Sigmund Freud at Clark University in 1909

signaled the beginnings of a new frontier of embracing psychoanalysis and education which many progressive educators anticipated (Taubman, 2012). Instead, what has unfolded throughout the history of education is a juxtaposed neurosis fueled by neoliberal agendas, corporate ideals, and business-centered models that serve as guides to education policy (Taubman, 2012). The exploration of the corporate powers that influence educational decisions has influenced the field of curriculum theory. Curricular scholars seek to understand discourse and regard "pedagogical work as the cultivation of the independence of mind, self-reflexivity, and an interdisciplinary erudition" (Taubman, 2012, p. 34). Curriculum theorists are oftentimes "suspicious of rhetorical bandwagons such as 'standards' and 'accountability'" (Taubman, 2012, p. 34). Therefore, curriculum theory is a historical analysis of curriculum and a way of viewing the current societal events that heavily influence the current education system (Taubman, 2012). Taubman (2012) describes curriculum theory as "a form of autobiographically informed truth-telling that articulates the educational experience of teachers and students as lived" (p. 35). Presenting perspectives from individuals' subjective accounts of history and society, curriculum theorists embrace the subjectivity of and, as Taubman (2012) calls them, "inextricable interrelationships" that embody one's educational experience (p. 35).

The History of Curriculum Studies

The history of curriculum studies and the understanding of how current events affect the current education system play a major role in understanding the emerging field of curriculum theory. Educators who worked in the field of curriculum in the 1970s were called traditionalists (Pinar, 1977). Traditionalists were field-based writers who worked or taught in the school systems. Traditionalists' curricular work was centered upon the Tyler Rationale of curriculum and instruction that emphasized the purposes, experiences, organization, and evaluation of the

educational program (Tyler, 1949). Building connections with school practitioners, traditional

curriculum personnel were committed to the improvement of schools with curricular change

being measured by reviewing the resulting behaviors in comparison to the objectives (Pinar,

1977). Traditional curriculum work includes curriculum development, implementation,

evaluation, and supervision (Pinar, 1977). Traditional articles are editorials and are significant as

readily accessible resources to educators who need quick solutions to problems of practice

(Pinar, 1977).

The late 1970s brought to the forefront a group that Pinar (1977) called Conceptual

Empiricists who received their name due to their development of hypotheses and tests in

methods of social science (Pinar, 1977). Conceptual empiricists relied upon making hypotheses,

collecting data, and interpreting the data. The word concept came from the focus on alternatives

in content sequencing and the word empiricist emerged from the research that supposedly yields

hard data (Pinar, 1977). Psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists became more interested in

researching in schools as the traditionalist view began to wane in the late 1970s, creating the

opportunity for those in the social sciences at the university to seek solutions for practical and

generalizable classroom practices (Pinar, 1977).

Reconceptualists emerged from the work of these conceptual empiricists and were known

for exploring their perspectives and acknowledging the political and intellectual aspects of their

research (Pinar, 1977). Reconceptualists see their work as inevitably political and academic and

there are no prescriptive methods or traditional curricular rationales (Pinar, 1977). The

reconceptualist is concerned with how the curriculum functions as emancipatory—

reconceptualized with processes of inquiry and intellectual phenomenon (Pinar, 1977). Pinar

(1977) posits that the field of curriculum studies seeks to synthesize all three perspectives—the

traditionalist, the conceptual empiricist, and the reconceptualist—to create various perspectives that can be experiential, explicative, analytical, and liberated while compassionately and intellectually analyzing work that is characterized by the other genres of work. A synthesis of perspectives could create a new academic ambiance that reinvigorates the field of education, increasing the likelihood that there are significant impacts made toward American education (Pinar, 1977). Oftentimes, local current events have a major influence in the reconceptualization of societal perspectives that call for new global entities to serve as a voice for the voiceless.

Connecting Current Events to Collective Memory and Activism

Communities across America and countries globally had to witness the recent history-making verdict in the case of George Floyd, convicting former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter (Holcombe et al., 2021). Officer Derek Chauvin's action of placing his knee on George Floyd's neck for over 9 minutes, while a 17-year-old onlooker archived what would become known as a record of George Floyd's last words, "I can't breathe," ignited a revolution of weeks of protests and refueled international dialogue about racism (Holcombe et al., 2021). George Floyd's death was a spark in the journey of uncovering the racism that plagues our country, which leaks into the crevices of our supposed pledges of allegiance to democracy that began with the vision of our forefathers—From the Pilgrims capturing the land of the Wampanoag Natives to the 17th-century slave trades of kidnapped African tribes who were forced into indentured servitude. From 1848, when the United States won the Mexican American War, to the aftermath of the Union winning the Civil War that freed millions of slaves and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that gave 55% of Mexican territory to the United States, this

historical timeline of events would lead people of color on the centuries-long scavenger hunt for true equality (Blakemore, 2018; Zinn, 1980).

The manhunt for equality and equity continues with the recent sentencing of former officer Derek Chauvin who was sentenced to 22 and-a-half years in prison on June 25, 2021 (Arango, 2021). Society's response to the George Floyd sentencing was a split perspective of those who were satisfied with the sentence and many who had hoped for a more stringent consequence for Chauvin's inhumane actions. The ordeal has become a contemporary construct and symbol of Americans' collective memory of race, potential, and human capability. Collective memory, according to Winfield (2007) is a distinctive memory of significant events of the past that are excavated by our thoughts about present-day occurrences. For example, racist ideology sailed the seas with the Puritans and became finely etched into the interwoven cloth of the American Spirit. Historically known as colonization, advances in science and positivism solidified a system of dividing human beings into an ethnic ranking order of skill and value that is the backbone of the systemic racism that we see prevalent today. This hierarchy encompasses cultural entities of religious, political, economic, and even domestic and foreign policies. Scientific approaches to understanding human difference are immersed in social discourse and are a part of the collective memory. *Eugenics*, a term coined by English mathematician Sir Francis Galton in 1883, was a description of the process of enhancing human genealogy (Winfield, 2007). Eugenic ideology is a system based on race and class with an emphasis on "human worth" (Winfield, 2007, p. 5). Central to eugenic ideology is the "fear of the other" as history witnesses an influx of two million Eastern European immigrants making America their home. Northern European Americans claimed that the Easterners were diluting their stock and "corrupting their political life" (Winfield, 2007, p. 5). The turn of the century brought about a

change from Social Darwinism to eugenics, as people began to question the demographic landscape of the country. With the Industrial Revolution came larger impoverished classes of Americans that were often called the "underclass" (Winfield, 2007, p. 5). The Progressive Movement sought to level the mindset in eugenic ideology and to legitimize Puritan theology in the idea that "America represented an exalted position as a city on a hill and was God's chosen place" (Winfield, 2007, p. 6). Black and Hispanic populations sought solace from such Puritan rhetoric by creating organizations to serve as a refuge and platform against racism.

The Black Lives Matter Global Network, incepted in 2016, is one organization that seeks to strengthen the local power within the African American community and to rail against racism as a singular mission (Black Lives Matter, 2020). The Black Lives Matter Movement began in response to the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of the vigilante who was responsible (Black Lives Matter, 2020). The birth of such a movement is impactful and gives a voice to the black community in order to combat anti-Black racism that is rampant within our society. Groups representing millennials, like the Black Youth Project, also strive to empower and uplift the young African American experience by learning more about millennials' opinions on current political topics and the societal challenges that pervade their peer groups (Black Youth Project, 2020). The mantra of the Black Youth Project is to consistently be informed of the culture and to mobilize African American youth and their peers to take positive action to shape the world they envision through internet-based forums (Black Youth Project, 2020). Established in February of 1909 with the goal of eliminating racial prejudice, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is another organization that seeks to provide support for African American communities and is the most notable civil rights organization. Today, the

organization includes more than half-million members who advocate for anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies (NAACP, 2020).

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation was founded in 1987 by the United States government, which empowers Hispanic students to become leaders in the classroom, workplace, and the community (Hispanic Heritage Foundation, 2020). Organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) seek to advance the civil rights of Hispanic Americans through community-based programs (LULAC, 2020). Established in 1929, LULAC is the oldest and most respected Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. Today, there are more than 1,000 LULAC Councils nationwide (LULAC, 2020). United We Dream is another organization that advocates for Latino communities. UWD is the largest immigrant- and youth-led group in the United States that, like the Black Youth Project, create a safe space for young people to make their voices heard regardless of their immigration status (United We Dream, 2018).

Organizations like the NAACP, LULAC, the Black Youth Project, and United We Dream are mostly comprised of online forums that students can readily access. However, an online presence only gives Black and Latino students a temporary answer to the daily challenges they are faced with at home, at school, and within the community. This simple fact makes the school leader and the teacher the most influential people in the lives of our students. School administrators and teachers see students for about 1,408 hours each year (176 school days multiplied by 8 hours). This is about the same amount of time that parents are able to spend with their own children, which amounts to only about 528 hours (176 school days multiplied by 3 daytime hours), after school during the school year and 976 hours of daytime during the summer months for parent-children family time (61 days of June and July multiplied by 16 daytime

hours). These numbers mean that the school serves a vital role in shaping who our students are and who they will become.

Emancipatory Thinking and the Battle for Curriculum

Educators inherently possess a love for humankind, want what is best for the student, and demonstrate their passion for teaching students from a place of what is good for the soul (Taubman, 2012). Likened to medical science, teachers provided counsel to students and were historically viewed during the Mental Hygiene Movement of the 1940s as the single most important factor in shaping a child's "self-esteem and self-knowledge" (Taubman, 2012, p. 110). Teachers of the 1940s were trained by psychiatrists to be able to recognize what a "mentally healthy person looked like" and were charged with shaping the whole child, including their social-emotional needs (Taubman, 2012, p. 112). When Congress passed the National Mental Health Act of 1946 to create the National Institute for Mental Health, they provided access to all forms of public services, including education, to implement steps toward achieving their goal of "prevent[ing] mental illness and promoting positive mental health" (Taubman, 2012, p. 112). As the Mental Hygiene Movement gained momentum, the teacher became the central focal point as the number one influencer, which came with the hefty price of being blamed for society's failures (Taubman, 2012).

As a result, teachers and educators are held to a higher standard by local and state policymakers. Reminiscent of the therapeutic and emancipatory aspects of schooling that come with the territory of the educational system, lawmakers and stakeholders are looking to education to shape the whole child and to prepare students for a career in the workforce (Taubman, 2009, 2012). Aligned with this affective component is the requirement and heavy mantle for educators to understand and provide students with opportunities to be individuals in their thinking, to

recognize their own psyche and emancipatory thought processes (Taubman, 2012, p. 146).

Emancipatory means freedom and emancipatory thinking places the student and the analyst at the center of learning (Taubman, 2012, p. 150). Emancipatory ideology includes an understanding of how what we see at a young age affects us and shapes who we are. For example, family and language are important sources for molding our thinking (Taubman, 2012). The emancipatory component of education requires teachers to re-frame their thinking toward ensuring students are able to use their creativity by interacting with the objectives in a meaningful way (Taubman, 2012). Teachers and administrators have a heart for children and want to mold students so that they can apply their learning to become productive citizens. The accountability system requires teachers to not only implement activities that prepare students to be citizens in the community, but to also implement activities at a higher level of rigor, which introduces another quandary.

Rigor is "a quality of instruction that requires students to construct meaning and impose structure on situations rather than expect to find them already apparent" (Jackson, 2011, p. 15). Rigorous instruction asks

> *what students will understand* and how *students will be able to think*…[giving students the opportunity to] integrate skills into processes, and use what they have learned to solve real-world problems, even when the 'correct' answer is unclear and they are faced with perplexing unknowns. (Jackson, 2011, p. 15, emphasis in original).

Rigor is one of many requirements of the American school curriculum that can become an issue; each educator has her or his own definition of what rigor looks like in the classroom. Teachers can implement more rigorous activities during instruction that require students to productively

struggle to find the answers to subject-area problems or rigor could be a child working on more difficult problems that she or he has an increased likelihood of success to solve.

Just as lawmakers, policymakers, stakeholders, and educators have their own ideas as to the instructional requirements for students, the Humanist, Social Meliorist, Developmentalist, and Social Efficiency educators were in a competitive struggle as each group had its own theoretical stance about the rigor of American education from 1893 to 1958. Accordingly, each group had its own idea of what was best for schooling and society. Humanists believed that learners should embrace their own creative agency and self-actualization; Social Meliorists thought that education was used for the betterment of society. For the Social Meliorists, schools were the major sources of social change and social justice and believed that the power lay in the schools to create a new social vision. The Developmentalists' view was for the curriculum to be guided by children's interests (Kliebard, 2004). Social Efficiency educators were steeped in creating a society that runs smoothly by controlling the curricular components to include skills that would transfer to the adult life roles of working as productive citizens in the industrial society (Kliebard, 2004). While each of these groups had its own ideas about how education should be run, the current high-stakes testing system of audit culture problematizes any individualistic platform that challenges the accountability system (Taubman, 2009). Education, with its scientifically-based core curriculum, would somehow come to the rescue of ailing America with a laser focus on the teacher as its sole rescuer (Kliebard, 2004; Taubman, 2009).

Progressive Practices, Accommodationism, and Power

One of the answers to the problems of American education was to embed progressive educational practices in state expectations as strategies regimented with specific standards and accountability measures. Teachers at schools with lower socioeconomic status are expected to

"[conform] to a hidden curriculum based on social class," which often becomes skill-and-drill and teaching to the test exercises (Schultz, 2018, p. 155). In America, it is the unfortunate truth that only proficient students are given the opportunity to participate in their education autonomously, can use their creativity to make their own meaningful connections to the subject matter, and experience unique teaching. This rhetoric "suggests that only middle- and upper-class children are able to respond to the curriculum question of what is worthwhile" (p. 155). Children who come from more affluent homes, one might assume, will be presented with more choices in their life experiences and should be given the chance to make such choices about the curriculum while in grade school. There is a disheartening reality that students from lower socioeconomic families will not have choices as they grow up, and the question becomes: Why should students from low-income homes be given the opportunity to practice making decisions in school? This presents a problem of theory, practice, and equity in education. The answers lie within the decision-making practices of policymakers and politicians who influence legislative bills and laws. Those who make educational policies are proponents of sit-and-get schooling where teachers transmit knowledge to students and students are required to regurgitate that which has been taught them. Educator Brian Schultz explains the dilemma:

> Blacks and Latinos, who comprise the majority of students in poor schools in the inner city, are exposed to drill-and-kill and teaching-to-the-test curricula because policymakers believe that urban children are not able to engage in the problem-posing, interest-based questioning, and critical thinking inherent in progressive curricula. Unfortunately, this belief reinforces the conviction that certain children need to be taught in certain ways dependent on their class. (p. 157)

This type of educational classism dates as far back as the nineteenth century, which includes the influences of major wealthy foundations—namely Rockefeller and Phelps Stokes, that introduced the philanthropic movement. These foundations were not elected but were agencies that had tremendous "government-like power" (Watkins, 2001). Because they had the money, these agencies could fund and organize educational efforts and projects and "their actions had the effect of law" (p. 20). The Rockefeller and Phelps Stokes organizations set and achieved their goals of becoming brokers and creating a new culture and ideology. Their views of capitalism, race, education, social change, and the political culture became cemented in the American way. Foundations stepped in to assist when government entities did little to help. The philanthropists needed to promote their ideology of a corporate capitalist economy in order to thrive in the Black communities. Hence, the idea of cultural hegemony arises from the philanthropic ideals of symbolic and cultural control. The goal was to enhance the power of dominant groups and to dictate the division of wealth by presenting colonialism and capitalism as the natural order of things as though the two concepts were "natural, inevitable, rational, and optimal. The existing social order need only be touched up and refined around the edges" (p. 21). The philanthropic hope was to "politically socialize" Blacks and "[give them] at least minimal access to survival" (p. 21). Semi-feudal sharecropper labor, cheap semi-skilled and skilled industrial labor became the heart of American industrialism "built on the backs of Black labor" (p. 21). As a result, a middle class of entrepreneurs, clergy, clerks, teachers, preachers, postal workers, and even beauticians was created in the new formula of the segregated society. These were the beginnings of the politics and ideology of "accommodationism," meaning that African Americans must "[accept] the world the way it was" (p. 23). Accommodationism was the idea of the natural order of evolution wherein Blacks had to rely on the notion that race relations would improve if they

only followed the premise of "acceptable behavior" (p. 23). The aims of the missionary organizations were to "Christianize" and "civilize" Black people, while the corporate philanthropic agencies had political objectives in preparing Blacks for their new roles in America (p. 23).

A new role in the American way meant that the identity of Black and immigrant people was being formed by where they fit in within society. This notion of governmental-supposed power is central to understanding the social system. Michel Foucault posits that power is "productive [and] it is dispersed throughout the social system; it is intimately related to knowledge" (Peters, 2005, p. 437). For Foucault, "power creates new knowledge" and "power's existence is local, capillary, and reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives…*within* the social body rather than *from above it*" (p. 437, emphasis in original). Foucault coined the term *savoir* to describe knowledge that has been constructed by an individual based on their experiences and relations with other people (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Savoir "captures a subject's process of modification and transformation" and changes the way a person actively participates in the world (p. 60). Post-structural critique allows us to examine these power structures and how difference plays a major role in the development of contemporary cultural ideology.

Statement of the Problem

Taubman (2009) paints a vivid picture in his book *Teaching by Numbers* about the interests of corporate America, the inception of "audit culture" in education, and how the system creates an identification hierarchy of human ability (p. 13). *Audit culture* is a term coined by Taubman to indicate a "reliance on numbers that embodies a freedom from passion and from

political interests" (p.13). Taubman's research into how the therapeutic and emancipatory sides of education are linked to the current education system sheds light on the current state accountability system. The language of public policy, as determined by the state legislatures, leans heavily on state standardized test data to justify the public policy. The goal of the current accountability system is to create public transparency for school and school district performance (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The accountability system actually serves as a way to control teachers virtually from a distance, using tests as a way to "shock the system into compliance" (Taubman, 2009, p. 52). Standardized testing offers a "false promise of certainty and security" while the language of the policy makes teachers feel like they are finally being heard and validated as professionals, like in the medical field (p. 53). Standardized tests represent the cattle prod that pokes at the education system, shocking it into compliance. Professional learning communities (PLCs) were created as a way to reduce the constant jolting of the accountability prodding system, providing a safe sanctuary for teachers and administrators to dialogue about student learning, the instructional strategies they have attempted to implement to no avail, and how they seemingly are unable to meet the needs of a constantly changing system of unreachable expectations. In other words, PLCs' overall purpose has been to shape, reform, improve, and adapt the official curriculum in the schools in which they are embedded. However, from a curriculum theory perspective that recognizes multiple curricula at work in schools, this research posits that PLCs themselves have an inherent curriculum that instructs teachers how to view their pedagogy, their students, their relationship to larger societal structures, and their classroom's operating curriculum. National, state, and local standardized assessment is the conduit through which audit culture thrives, becoming the conversation within the PLC process while placing attention on the inequities of high-stakes testing.

The NAEP Test has historically provided substantial data that supports the ever-widening education gap for student populations that come from families who earn a lower income since the 1970s (Nation's Report Card, 2022; Wing, 2018). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, "the average mathematics score for White fourth-grade students was 29 points higher than their Black peers (compared to 25 points in 2019) and 21 points higher than their Hispanic peers (compared to 18 points in 2019)" (Nation's Report Card, 2022). Fourth-grade students were given the NAEP Reading test across the nation and the results showed African American and Hispanic students scored considerably lower than White students at 199 and 205 respectively, with White students' average score at 227 (Nation's Report Card, 2022). NAEP reading data shows "the average reading score for Asian/Pacific Islander students at grade 4 was 12 points higher than the average score for their White peers" (Nation's Report Card, 2022). Tests like the NAEP are a testament to the inequalities that pervade learning communities as leaders and teachers work diligently to meet the requirements of high-stakes testing. The average reading score for Black students in 1992 was 192 and the average reading score for Black students in 2022 was 199. It has taken 3 decades to increase the national average reading score of the African American student population by 7 points.

Amid the quest for answers to Black and Latino underperformance on nationwide assessments, Kelisa Wing (2018) takes a more direct approach in her book *Promises and Possibilities: Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, by penning an ode to the systems within education that send our students to mental and physical solitary confinement. Students arrive in our schools to receive an education, but they leave our schools with a record (Wing, 2018). Wing's (2018) research has led her to coin the term *belief gap* which refers to the deep, intrinsic faith in what students of color can do (p. 16). Wing began noticing the differences

between students of color and the students who were not as a "feeling in the culture and the climate of the school" (p. 16). The *belief gap* represents the gap between our expectations of Black and Latino students and students from a low socioeconomic background, in contrast with students whose families are more financially stable, which, in turn, shapes the current education system. As a result, expectations of students of color are often much lower than what is expected of students from more prosperous families (Wing, 2018).

According to Terrell et al. (2018) the *belief gap* is considered to be the result of a lack in cultural competence. Cultural competence is defined as the behaviors, dispositions, and systemic qualities of a leader to interact effectively and positively to connect with other cultural groups (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). School leaders and teachers must be able to model the appropriate attitudes in a learner-centered environment to promote the importance of cultural diversity and belief in the upward achievement of all students (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). The school is the one place within the community that should be a safe haven for students' voices to be heard and for them to feel they belong.

After sentencing former officer Derek Chauvin, Judge Peter A. Cahill wrote in a statement:

> Part of the mission of the Minneapolis Police Department is to give citizens 'voice and respect.' Mr. Chauvin treated Mr. Floyd without respect and denied him the dignity owed to all human beings and which he certainly would extend to a friend or a neighbor. (Arango, 2021, p. 1)

The children in our schools are the next generation and it is our call of duty and responsibility to ensure that they receive the excellent level of education they deserve. Not simply to become productive citizens of the world, as most school mission and vision statements prelude for each

school year. All human beings should be treated with respect and dignity. Our schools deserve a process by which children are given a voice and allowed to become the curriculum versus the curriculum continuously making them. Albion Small, an understudy of Lester Frank Ward, was a devout Social Meliorist who stood on the premise that "educators shall not rate themselves as leaders of children, but makers of society" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 53). John Dewey spoke in opposition to Granville Stanly Hall's rhetoric on simplifying the value of children's intellectual ability by urging educators to "treat the intellectual resources, capacities, and needs of our children with the full dignity and respect they deserve, and not sentimentalize nor symbolize the realities of life, nor present them in the shape of mental, [miniscule triviality] " (p. 58). Early curricular educators made it their duty to answer the challenging inquiry: "What knowledge is of most worth?" (p. 5).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the effect of teachers studying the Currere Writing Process on teachers' views of students and teacher collective memory of the data meeting process (Pinar & Grumet, 2015). Currere is a process that begins with writing an autobiography of the past, continues with writing about the imagined future, an analysis of one's past, present, and future; and a synthesis of their experiences as they relate to larger, global contexts (Pinar, 1975). The conceptual framework of this research study is grounded in Jacques Derrida's *Theory of Deconstruction* and his theory of the trace (Roy, 2003, p. 21). Within discourse emerges a vacillating post-structural synthesis of what should be taught in the curriculum, when it should be taught, and which strategies will increase the likelihood of increasing student learning. This qualitative study will challenge teachers' views of students.

This study will answer three research questions:

1) Will the study of currere allow teachers to view students in a way contrary to audit culture? (Taubman, 2009)

2) What will the study of currere open up?

3) What will the study of currere produce?

Significance of the Study

The assemblage of PLCs and determining what works best requires a "plugging in" of ideas which involves a process of "arranging, organizing, and fitting together…to ask what new territories are claimed as they encounter the process of plugging data into theory into data in the threshold" where data and theory "collapse" to create something new (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, pp. 6, 9). Thinking theoretically includes three critical moves that can be employed to further examine the PLC process by: 1) decentering and/or disrupting the theory by showing how they make one another, 2) identifying questions that emerge in the plugging-in process, and 3) showing the effectiveness of data and theory once it is plugged in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Professional learning communities began as a process for providing a space for commitment by teachers and administrators to collaborate and dialogue about instructional ideas. The local education system has created the PLC process as a way for educators to share best practices and maximize the collective efficacy of all members of the grade level team.

Examining the PLC process requires thinking with various theories to determine the preexisting curriculum of a PLC prior to the changes this research hopes to trace. If we think with the theory of Gayatri Spivak, then we are able to deconstruct the notion of marginality often used in PLCs when reviewing data by "[calling] out the ways in which a particular teaching machine assures and validates its own center by shaping the contours of its margins, wherein, the "margin itself, too, is involved in the construction of a new object of investigation" (Jackson &

Mazzei, 2012, p. 44). There is a point where the margin and the center collide and collude, and the center receives validation from the margin (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Spivak describes what she calls the "teaching machine," which refers to the academic disciplines that "determine and overdetermine [the] conditions of representability" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 44). She argues that the "teaching machine is a centering apparatus of colonization in that it recognizes a select, elite group as its margin; the teaching machine's center attempts to define authentic academic marginality—or the center of the margin" and those within the margin "collude with the center," supporting the "certainty of authentic marginality" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 44). The center personified says: "Claim your identity, but stay over there, out of our way…claim your identity that is different, but don't disrupt our norms" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 44). Are there certain processes that collude with the teaching mechanism of the professional learning community? Judith Butler would offer a response with her theory of agency and performativity: the idea that the government, in education's case—the legislature, determines what serves the teaching machine and what is important in education. The norms are pre-determined by the legislature and the margin is often in conflict with what should be the center of education—the learner. Butler's theory contends that "Hegelian tradition links desire with recognition, claiming that desire is always a desire for recognition and that it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 77). The PLC process is to delineate the objectives that students will learn, how they will learn them, how we will know if students have learned the objectives, and what we will do when students do not learn them. PLCs were created to outline what would be done when students have already learned the material. Another tenet of PLCs is that teachers can discuss and share ideas about teaching strategies to increase student learning and student achievement on state-mandated

exams. While the PLCs are to serve as a mechanism for dialogue about techniques, teachers often find themselves in a deadlock of silence, which can become detrimental to the productivity of the PLC process. This silence could be a fear of data, trepidation about implementing new and different ideas that might stray from the set curriculum, or anxiety about accountability standards for teachers, administrators, and school districts. In the end, PLCs are dominated by a neoliberal discourse that prioritizes standardized testing as the only measure worth considering as teachers and administrators discuss how best to educate students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historical Work of Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities have evolved as one of the contemporary solutions to the education systems' attempts to close educational gaps prevalent throughout our schools (DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Easton, 2011; Fisher et al., 2020; Rambo-Hernandez et al., 2019; White, 2018). With a history dating back 60 years, professional learning communities emanated from the traditionally seclusive environment of teachers (Fisher et al., 2020). The need for a more collaborative approach to teaching and learning made PLCs the antidote to isolated teacher planning, instructional reflection, and curricular decisions. Historically, teachers made the statement: "What happens in my classroom is my business and what happens in yours is yours" (p. 5). Such a practice has had tremendous effects on the education system, even requiring teachers to become the experts in their subject areas and to adapt their instruction to student learning based on their own pedagogical insight. Susan Rosenholtz conducted a study of 1,213 teachers and discovered that teacher collaborative planning strengthened teachers' ability to provide quality instruction (Fisher et al., 2020). Judith Warren Little took this premise a step further by recognizing that teachers simply gathering to meet does not promote a collective commitment. There must be "shared beliefs, visions, and norms that promote positive professional relationships" among the PLC members (p. 6).

Lois Brown Easton (2011) brings the work of W. Edwards Deming to the forefront as one of the reasons why PLCs have progressed. Deming's work in Japan after World War II concentrated on the culture of the workplace (Easton, 2011, p. 25). Ford Motor Company consulted with Deming to examine the problems of management and declining sales in the 1980s (Easton, 2011). Deming's formula of Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) and his stance on the

collective responsibility for quality led to "quality circles," which influenced the education

system in the 1990s (p. 25). In *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning*

Communities at work, DuFour et al. (2010) revisit their goals of publishing teacher resources on

PLCs since 1998. They argue teachers must develop their capacity to work as a PLC and provide

techniques for establishing PLCs in schools. The literature on the history of PLCs is limited.

However, the residual effect of a few pioneers is evident in published educational resources that

trumpet the potentiality of professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour &

DuFour, 2012; Easton, 2011; Fisher et al., 2020; Venables, 2018). There are five resurfacing

themes that are prevalent throughout the literature: a) defining professional learning

communities, b) characteristics of effective PLCs, c) determining what the PLC should consider

as its primary focus, and d) a shift in rhetoric from decades-old research on PLCs.

Professional Learning Communities Defined

The literature contains a multifaceted description of what constitutes a professional

learning community (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Easton, 2011; Fisher et al.,

2020; Venables, 2018). The PLC process is driven, according to DuFour and DuFour (2012), by

three "big ideas": a) the understanding that students must learn at high levels, b) the process

requires the collective effort of all teachers and leaders, and c) willingness of members to

examine the evidence of student learning and review the evidence in order to prompt continuous

improvement (pp. 4-5). The literature connects these three fundamental ideas with guiding

questions that become the foundation of the PLC process (DuFour & DuFour, 2012):

1. What do we want our students to know?

2. How will we know if students are learning?

3. How will we respond when students are not learning?

4. How will we expand on the learning of those students who have already learned what is taught?

Members of the PLC process work in collaborative teams, are provided time within the school's schedule to collaborate and understand the intended purpose and focus of the PLC as principals and leaders support the ongoing PLC process (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). The members of the PLC work together to create a list of norms for collaborative work and use the norms to refocus their continual work as time progresses (DuFour, 2010; Mesa & Pringle, 2019). The literature synopsizes two foundational premises of professional learning communities in the Pre-K through 12 system: a) to enhance the pedagogical capacity and content knowledge of teachers via collective efficacy among collaborators and b) to improve student learning (Donohoo, 2017; Fisher et al., 2020).

What Makes an Effective Professional Learning Community?

Fisher et al. (2020) posit that the addition of teaching practice to the PLC process is imperative. Hence the title of the professional resource, *PLC+*, Fisher et al. (2020) gives deference to the educator, whose expertise in the actual practice of teaching has been missing in the previously published literature on PLCs and is indicated as the plus sign in the title. Examining our teaching, as it is a connection to the "crucial gap" that exists between student learning and instructional practice, is the missing piece of the equation (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 7). Bryk et al. (2015), Fisher et al. (2016), Hammond (2015), and Wilson (2018) urge us to examine both sides of the equation of teaching and learning since "to examine only one side of the equation," such as only student learning, "limits our ability as educators to take action" (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 7).

The PLC+ framework is an extended version of the work that DuFour and DuFour (2010) and Robert Marzano (2007) established at the start of the 21st-century. The four "crosscutting values" of PLC+ create a deeper, paradigmatic shift in the focus of PLCs and what they should accomplish (Fisher et al., 2020, p. 9). As educators, not only should we know the curriculum pedagogy and content, but educators must consider the issues of equity and whether or not the instructional practices demonstrate an understanding of the value that each student brings to the classroom (Fisher et al., 2020). The idea of equity is the setting of high expectations and the belief that each student can reach a high level of success should run in parallel with this practice, as each student takes their own pathway to achieve success. With the understanding of instructional differentiation comes the acknowledgment of individual and collective efficacy that is required for the PLC process to make a significant impact on student learning. One of the key roles of the PLC+ is the activator's responsibility to serve as a part of the PLC process. In contrast to being referred to in previous literature as the facilitator, the activator is a fully functioning member of the team, proposes solutions, poses quandaries, pays attention to the affective contributions of the members, and assists the PLC team with decision-making.

Collective Efficacy and the Focus of PLCs

Equity is one aspect of teaching and learning that is not frequently mentioned in earlier published literature (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Venables, 2018). Jenni Donohoo (2017) defines collective efficacy as "the collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (p. 1). Teachers' views about their competence in reaching students should be welcomed as a part of the ongoing discussion and progressively enhanced by the collective efficacy of the PLC team (Donohoo, 2017).

Collective teacher efficacy is "the judgements of teachers [that they] as a whole can organize and execute the [actions] required to have a positive effect on students" (Donohoo, 2017). This concept encompasses self-efficacy, which is the "conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes" (Donohoo, 2017, p. 3). The collective efforts of all members of the PLC determine the focus and lens through which teaching and learning are viewed.

Theoretical Foundations of Professional Learning Communities

The framework for PLCs is determined by the purpose for which they function (Brodie, 2013; De'Ardenne et al., 2013; Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017; Mesa & Pringle, 2019; Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018; Wright et al., 2020). The literature contains an array of approaches to PLCs and picturesque descriptions of the thinking behind the various cycles and steps (Bryk et al., 2015; Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Hammond; 2015; Wilson, 2018).

Focusing on Curriculum and Content Pedagogy

Professional learning communities that focus on curriculum are highly organized, intentional, and have a specific set of guiding questions regarding the learning resources, curriculum documents, and content that will be discussed regularly during the time together (Easton, 2011). The agenda is hyper-focused on the resources that students will be using to engage with the learning objectives. This process is critical for all members of the PLC, as some teachers' preferences for curricular materials vary from those of their colleagues. The time allotted for each team to collaborate can be from 30 minutes to an hour (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). The agenda for the meeting contains set times for members to review each resource and time to engage with each of the materials.

As teachers review the curriculum materials and resources, they connect their content knowledge and pedagogy to the review and discussion of their reasons for selecting specific materials to teach the content of the learning objective (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). DuFour and DuFour (2012) outline the components of a PLC team whose primary focus is to review content:

- The teachers examine the pieces of the curriculum together as a team.

- The team comes to a consensus regarding the most important objectives.

- PLC members refine the objectives into the required competencies.

- The PLC team reviews curriculum timelines and pacing guides.

After the teachers have completed the above listed activities, they must make a collective agreement to, indeed, teach the prearranged curriculum. The literature includes studies of teachers who sought to initiate PLCs to gain a better understanding of certain terms included in science textbooks (Mesa & Pringle, 2019). Mesa and Pringle (2019) provide insight into this process. When a sixth-grade science teacher named Amanda began the unit of study on energy, she came to the instant realization that she was unable to articulate a viable answer to the unit's question "what is energy?" (p. 5) Amanda became entranced with reading more and more about the term that is considered one of the focal points of her state's new science curriculum. She diligently researched the term. The more she read about energy the deeper her angst grew with the curriculum timeline that required the unit to be taught in three weeks. Amanda reached out to her science teacher peers regarding her quandary, which led to the forming of a PLC.

The literature includes the work of D'Ardenne et al. (2013) in which she and a group of reading teachers from schools around her district collaborated to design lesson plans for students who needed reading intervention. The foundational belief of each teacher on the team was "the common belief that all readers need appropriate-level, high-quality, engaging texts that foster

enthusiasm and critical thinking" (p. 144). They used *The Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Book List K-8* and *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: Grades 3-8*, aligning with their belief that reading selections needed to be developmentally appropriate books that covered curriculum content (D'Ardenne, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). D'Ardenne et al. and the PLC team individually selected their preferred leveled books to teach the literacy curriculum. This PLC process was meticulous and illuminating for the teachers, as they championed support for their selected books. The key point of this collective effort is that the teachers' favorite books became the curriculum for addressing struggling readers.

Directed and Planned Change

The literature on PLCs is based on the idea of intentionality and purposeful planning. Venables (2018) focuses our attention on human and social capital:

> When the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve…Strong social capital can go a long way toward offsetting any disadvantages students face when their teachers have [developing] human capital. (p. 7)

Venables (2018) urges us to examine the actions that increase social capital. Venables (2018) and Wilson (2018) purport that directed change involves a "low organizational complexity and a low socio-technical uncertainty" (Wilson, 2018, p. 38). Planned change requires a "high business complexity and a low-medium socio-technical uncertainty" (p. 38).

Agendas and Protocols

The intentionality of the PLC process includes the drafting of agendas and protocols for the team meetings. Previously referred to as the "facilitator," the role of the team member who crafts guiding questions and the agendas for the PLC process, is contemporarily known as the

"activator" (Fisher et al., 2020; Venables, 2018). Fisher et al. reminds us that "a high-functioning PLC+ doesn't happen by chance" (p. 10). The activator keeps the dialogue centered on the set vision and action steps that must occur for the mission to be a success. A facilitator's role differs from that of the activator; the facilitator does not actively participate and is concerned with the process. The activator fully participates and presents innovative strategies; whereas, the facilitator does not impart ideas.

Focusing on Instruction and Data

One of the more recent aspects of the PLC process is the focus on instructional and student outcome data. The historical nature of PLCs has always been regarded in the literature as a collective effort for planning instruction (DuFour et al., 2010). The current trend of focus for PLCs is on the data of teaching and learning (Killion, 2015). While the principal as the instructional leader assists with the guidance of the collaborative structures and scheduling of PLCs, the principal becomes a vital resource for member motivation. Studies of how teachers respond to teaching and learning data emphasize the influence of coaches and the PLC process. A study showed that "more than two-thirds of the instances in teacher data response that resulted in changing delivery of instruction involved a coach or a PLC" (p. 58). The "vertical and horizontal expertise" of coaches and instructional leaders is key in the PLC process (p. 58). The success of the PLC is dependent upon building relationships, collective efficacy, and critical data analysis competence (Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Fisher et al., 2016; Killion, 2015). The teachers in the study conducted by Marsh et al. (2015) demonstrated their ability to use data to change instruction (Killion, 2015). The coaches' and instructional leaders' "vertical skills" of content expertise and the "horizontal expertise" of the teachers made the change possible

(Killion, 2015, p. 60). The concentration on data and instruction is a powerful tool, mainly in low-performing schools that are traditionally opposed to change.

Iterative Changing

In *The Human Side of Changing Education*, Julie Wilson (2018) provides a deeper-dive analysis of what she terms "iterative changing" (p. 39). Iterative changing involves a "high business complexity" and a "high socio-technical uncertainty" (p. 39). While the literature includes PLC processes that are direct and planned, the iterative changing approach is, according to Wilson, "the land of 'you don't know what you don't know'" (p. 39). One of the unique aspects of PLCs is that each member brings a different set of skills to the group. Iterative changing capitalizes on this uniqueness because the specific change agents or processes to affect change are unknown. When PLC members do not know the particular path that must be taken, they must make a collective commitment to experiment with possible solutions and accept the incidences of trial-and-error along with the vulnerability to failure. Iterative *changing* versus iterative *change* is a noteworthy comparison. *Changing* implies that the target or the source is unclear, that the process is continually ongoing, and that the "change problem" must be discovered (p. 40). The introduction of this type of disequilibrium in the literature on professional learning communities is a pivotal point for the research into how teachers and instructional leaders can make a greater impact via PLC implementation.

Wilson (2018) describes a situation where a superintendent convened a committee of teachers to review the curriculum and to create a rubric for how to assess the 4Cs of communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. There was a significant resistance to her efforts by the teachers. The superintendent discovered that the resistance was due to the teachers' lack of content knowledge and inability to create rubrics. The district implemented

professional learning opportunities for the teachers to build a foundational knowledge of the skills required to create rubrics for effective curriculum assessment. Hammond (2015) refers to this as *productive struggle*, a term adopted from neuroscientists to describe the growth of brainpower via challenging and open-ended situations that require an open-minded approach.

Focusing on Assessment in the PLC Process

Formative assessment can take the form of a quick check, a cold call on students during instruction, an exit ticket at the end of a lesson, or a quiz. Summative assessment usually happens at the end of a unit or is represented by a state assessment. More recent literature on PLCs includes the analysis of student errors, which takes the assessment process a leap forward in analyzing student learner needs. Karin Brodie (2013) defines learner errors as "systematic, persistent and pervasive mistakes performed by learners across a range of contexts" (p. 223). Learner errors are also called misconceptions and are prevalent even when corrected during the instructional process (Brodie, 2013). The PLC work of schools today primarily focuses on these misconceptions. Brodie (2013) points out the theoretical premise of constructivism as the reason why students develop misconceptions. Students take their background knowledge to create their own meanings of the concept for it to make sense in their schema. Students often attempt to apply one learned math concept in one standard to a math concept in a different standard, causing an internal schematic conflict. The strategically imperative component of PLCs is for teachers to collaboratively study and unpack the thinking of learning and student understanding. Social practice theory, in contrast to the constructivist approach, centers on the idea of practices that are learned in communities. The literature on PLCs and the idea of teachers taking the PLC process a step further into a deeper understanding of student errors and misconceptions

distinguishes the work of PLCs at the start of the twentieth century to the present-day efforts of teachers to increase learner outcomes and to close the performance gaps of student populations.

When teachers on the PLC team embrace the notion of iterative changing and accept that they, too, can learn from their students, the effects of the PLC are magnified. Brodie (2013) highlights a study conducted with ninth-grade math students, in which students were to write an equation with variables in it. When one group wrote 4x x 5x = 20x, students and teachers were in a quandary as to whether the example was correct (p. 234). The group's example challenged teachers' and students' mathematical expertise in ways that strengthened teachers' ability to see the distinct difference between "an equation and an identity" (p. 235). The equation caused a disequilibrium within the mathematical thinking process because the group was thinking of the equation as an identity, compartmentalizing their knowledge along these lines (p. 235). If the problem were in a set of quadratic equations, it would have been solved as a quadratic. Since the unit study was on the laws of exponents at the ninth-grade level, the responses tended to be that it was incorrect because ninth-graders are supposed to learn the exponential rules.

Academic Mindset Cycle

The neuroscience of the academic mindset is present in the literature to bridge the gap between the work of the PLC and student learning. Hammond (2015) notes our schema contains four main elements: a) past experience, which affects our feelings of preparedness, b) our sense of freedom in the world and our ability to control it, c) our self-efficacy and our belief in our ability to achieve, and d) the self-talk we provide ourselves when we are unable to learn something effectively. Our limbic brain, which is our old brain, determines if we will adopt a fixed mindset or a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008; Hammond, 2015). The Academic Mindset Cycle begins with academic mindset, which leads to the engagement of the brain in an intriguing

learning activity. Engaging in the process leads to a significant amount of effort and energy devoted to the task at hand and an adjustment of task performance as to how much grit is required to complete the activity, and the feedback on the progress further solidifies the academic mindset (Hammond, 2015).

The literature on professional learning communities can be quite complex due to the multi-layered purposes for which they can be implemented (Bryk et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2020; Rodman, 2019). The multi-faceted approaches to PLCs can even place the learning of teachers on the depth of knowledge spectrum depending on the level of expectation and engagement of the PLC. Some PLC group work is at the structural and protocol level of gathering to review curriculum. Some PLC groups might have a goal of simply applying certain instructional practices to specific units of study while others seek solutions to more abstract needs of the teaching and learning cycle. Overall, an underlying theme that lies beneath the surfaces of professional learning communities is the issue of equity and how we reach historically marginalized student populations with the resulting teaching practices at the helm of PLCs. Lois Brown Easton (2011) synthesizes "the importance of reinventing the wheel" (p. 28). Directed and planned change often lead directly to solutions because that type of change involves less difficult processing; iterative changing, or what Easton (2011) calls "wicked problems," requires the critical step of "reinventing the wheel" (pp. 28-29). Easton (2011) captures the essence of the angst in an effective PLC process:

> The problems we encounter in education are usually wicked, not simple, linear problems. They are tenacious and nonlinear. They contain unpredictable barriers and recur, folding back on themselves…Existing ways of thinking cannot handle wicked problems.

Individuals and groups require new mental models for problem finding and problem

approaches. (p. 29)

Teacher Perceptions of Students

As teachers do the heavy lifting required in PLCs with varying agendas and protocols,

assessment requirements, student data analysis, instructional planning, curriculum content

requirements, and shifting academic mindsets, one of the issues that arises is how teachers view

their students. A study conducted by Garcia et al. (2019) at Stanford University found evidence

that teachers viewed boys, African Americans, and students who are limited in English

proficiency as having a higher deficiency in higher-order cognitive skills than girls, White

students, and students proficient in English. These executive functions are the skills that students

need to control their actions, complete academically challenging information, and adapt to

changing situations (Garcia et al., 2019). Teacher perceptions of executive functions could affect

students' progress on standardized report cards in grades Pre-K through 2 at the district level.

Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of students can be affected by the pressures and requirements

of the local and state-level accountability system.

A study of teachers' perceptions of students' motivation and students' views of their own

motivation conducted at The University of Texas at Austin by Harvey et al. (2016) is evidence

that the effects of teacher bias on students who come from households with lower incomes are

much stronger than the effects found for White students in previous studies. The study by Harvey

et al. (2016) supports that teacher perceptions of student motivation significantly impact

students' end-of-year grades. Students of teachers who have a positive teacher bias might receive

instruction that aligns with the teacher's view of student ability, which may result in higher final

grades. Brophy (1983) posits that teachers adjust their feedback to students and their teacher-

student interaction based on levels of expectations. A teacher who has lower expectations of student performance may be less friendly or warm toward a student whom the teacher sees as a student who performs better. Hughes et al. (2005) found that teachers provided more academic assistance to the students who they thought were able to engage with the lessons at a higher level.

Teachers' perceptions of students become a serious factor in classroom instruction and content delivery. When the added pressure of state accountability measures weighs heavily on the teacher, the effects can possibly determine the consequent success or failure of students.

Using Currere to Inform Instruction

Pinar and Grumet (2015) begin their book *Toward a Poor Curriculum* with two critical questions: "What is a poor curriculum?" and "What is currere?" They define a poor curriculum as "one stripped of its distractions" and they define currere as "running a course" (p. xiii). The word curriculum comes from the Latin form of the word currere, translated as to "run a course" (p. 23). The process of currere "refers to [our] existential experience of external structures" as "a strategy devised to disclose the experience, so that we may see more of it and see more clearly," which leads to a deeper understanding of the running with "deepened agency" (p. xiv).

One way that children can actively participate in the critique of the world around them and to project their thoughts about theories and ideologies is through the process of currere. Currere is a form of curriculum research that involves the "critique of mainstream social science" and is a "phenomenologically related type of autobiographical curriculum theory" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 414). The educational experience of the individual learner is the central focus of currere, as seen from the eyes of the individual as a reporter (Pinar et al., 2008). Currere does not center itself on causality, nor does it attempt to quantify behaviors; but rather currere centers attention

on what a person "makes" of the behaviors (p. 414). Pinar et al. (2008) describe the process of

currere according to Grumet as:

> Objective constitution [that] is the life of the subject; knowledge of self becomes
>
> knowledge of self as knower of the world, not just as a passive recipient of stimuli from
>
> the objective world, not as an expression of latent subjectivity, but as a bridge between
>
> these two domains, a mediator. The "homunculus" of educational experience resides in
>
> each cogitation. (p. 414)

Pinar et al. (2008) explain the phenomenon of how someone can reject passivity and embrace the

understanding of human experiences in the world from the perspective of Edmund Husserl:

> When phenomenology examines objects of consciousness—regardless of any kind,
>
> whether real or ideal—it deals with these exclusively as objects of the immediate
>
> consciousness. The description—which attempts to grasp the concrete and rich
>
> phenomena of the cogitations—must constantly glance back from the side of the object to
>
> the side of consciousness, and pursue the general existing connections. (p. 414)

Currere focuses on lived experiences and knowledge can be extracted from these instances.

Contemporary education focuses on the "end products of the processes of the consciousness,"

what we call "concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations—"what we often refer to

as "knowledge" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415). Currere "seeks to slide underneath these end

products and structures to the preconceptual experience that is their foundation" (Pinar et al.,

2008, p. 415). Currere requires an "engagement with the world" in which the researcher

describes both the subject and the object phenomenologically to connect the "preconceptual

experience to formal intellection" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415). Currere can serve as a form of

reflection for the researcher in the research process that evolves into what Pinar et al. (2008) call

an "aesthetic experience" that embodies the subjectivity and objectivity of the student's and teacher's interaction with the curriculum (p. 415). The student and the teacher both possess an "artist's awareness that subjectivity transforms the objectivity it seeks to describe" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415). This awareness is further described by William Pinar et al. (2008) as a "phenomenology and aesthetic process [that distances one] from the everyday and familiar in order to see them with a freshness and immediacy which is like seeing them for the first time" (p. 415). The autobiographical form of currere influences questions as posed by Husserl:

- Does currere detach one from the more concrete world?

- Is there a "reflecting self" and a "public self"? (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 416)

Currere is "grounded in context" and allows the simultaneous study of one's "lived experience and the social milieu upon the experience" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 416). It also allows a look at the person's past and how the past affects the present (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 416). Figure 1 explains the Currere Writing Process.

Figure 1

The Process of Currere

Method of currere. Adapted from Pinar, 1975, p. 424.
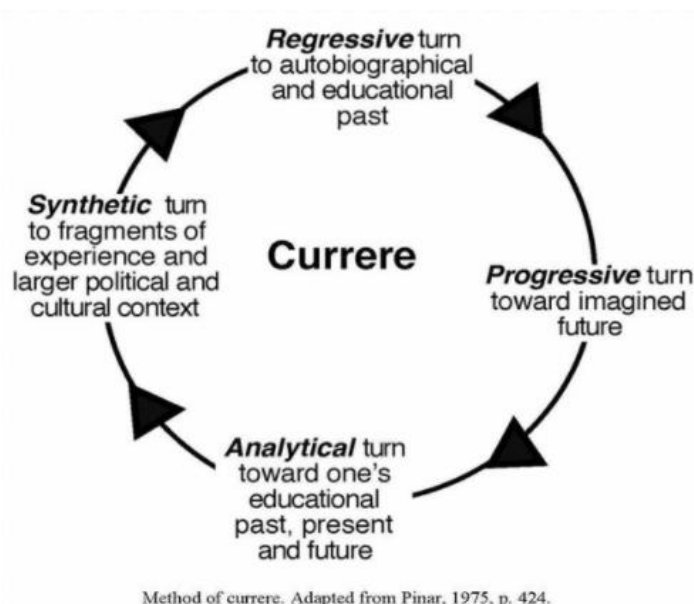
The age-old question of how to make the content more student-centered and individual to each student can be solved by implementing currere into the curriculum as an autobiographical window into the student's being; we must learn from the self (Pinar et al., 2015). Placing the individual at the center of learning should be the nucleus of education and is "politically and socially imperative" (Pinar et al., 2015). The individual's psyche has been neglected as high-stakes testing and career readiness standards have taken precedence over authentic, intrinsic psychological connections to the subject matter.

When PLC Meets Purpose: Culturally Responsive Leadership and Influence

Professional learning communities can be an effective way for teachers and leaders to collaborate regarding instructional strategies that meet students' needs. My experience with PLCs has been multi-faceted and multi-layered. As an assistant principal, I was able to observe the PLC implementation process as my school onboarded the team to begin implementation. My role as data analyst gave me the opportunity to see PLCs up close and personal. In 2015, I began serving as the facilitator of PLCs. I created the agendas based on what we discussed as a leadership team. I made the shift from facilitator to serving each of the grade-level PLC teams as an activator. My role as activator was far more effective than the facilitator role because I supported teachers and assisted them with locating resources. I began to ask thought-provoking questions and serve as a critical thinking partner with the teachers. As a facilitator, I was more of an accountability partner.

I believe that PLCs are most effective when we take deeper dives into the instructional practices and misconceptions of student learning. The disaggregating of student summative assessment data should not be the focus of the PLC. A closer look at the nuances of student learning as it is accessed throughout the teaching and learning cycle is critical to learning more

about student needs. Deeper dives of analysis and understanding of crystallized knowledge and the interactive experiences that increase learning are required of the PLC team to do the heavy lifting of providing the best instruction for students.

The Original Intent of PLCs and School Culture

As stated in the literature review, professional learning communities can be used for many different purposes. For them to be used effectively in schools, the school must have the commitment and support of district officials and principals. The principal must embrace the idea of iterative changing and be proactive in ensuring that the school is an environment where teachers and students feel comfortable discussing what they do not know about the curriculum (Wilson, 2018). Situations will not always have a perfect or textbook answer. It takes for teacher leaders to take on the responsibility of sharing their ideas and being vulnerable to the learning process for the PLC implementation to be effective. Vulnerability in the PLC process is a key element that makes PLCs a place where teachers can learn from each other and their students.

The student should be the central locus for PLCs along with equitable access to high levels of instruction for all students, which includes rigorous learning experiences and high expectations of student learning (Spiller & Power, 2019). School leaders should encourage teachers to implement lessons using on-grade-level texts (Spiller & Power, 2019). The principal demonstrating continual understanding through daily experiences—that the curriculum is for all students and will serve as the foundation for a healthy school culture (Spiller & Power, 2019). High levels of student-centered, interactive learning activities and a positive school culture are essential for equity to thrive (Spiller & Power, 2019). Through the PLC process, teachers should learn the willingness to take risks and attain a level of integrity to share weaknesses. Along these lines, the principal must be forthcoming about supporting teachers in their innovative endeavors

(Tait & Faulkner, 2019). The equity-oriented instructional leadership of the principal and the content pedagogical expertise that they bring to the culture of the school are effective in advocating for all students in all subject areas (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). An equity-oriented leader asks questions like (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012):

- Are high interest level books available for all students?

- Does literacy instruction meet the needs of all students?

- Are math teachers using effective instructional strategies that involve differentiated problem solving?

- Do science teachers need to share ideas of how to best implement inquiry-based teaching?

- Do students who qualify for special education services or students who have a specific learning disability have equal access to high quality instruction and learning resources?

- Are English Language Learners provided instructional practices that allow them to acquire English in an equitable manner?

- Am I using the appropriate tool to observe students and teachers so that I can provide the most effective and actionable feedback?

The core of this type of culturally responsive leadership requires one to become a culturally responsive practitioner (Hammond, 2015). A culturally responsive leader and teacher calls for the teacher to understand cultural diversity. They are attentive to their actions, beliefs, and instructional practices; paramount to this process is paying closer attention to how they respond to students. Culturally responsive leadership is a game changer because the leader is vulnerably comfortable in their own skin. The true essence and power of the PLC process is

when teachers continually keep themselves as a part of the equation and as a committed people in the adventure of teaching and learning (Hammond, 2015). This requires self-reflection, an awareness of self-implicit biases, and a keen awareness of social and emotional responses (Hammond, 2015).

What is missing in the literature about professional learning communities is somewhat baffling, considering that student-centered learning should include our number one priority—the student. Professional learning communities are used as a way for educators and administrators to dialogue about the latest instructional strategies or to review student achievement data. The disconcerting fact is that most PLC processes do not have the student in mind. They are meetings for teachers to be able to voice their disgruntlement with the requirements of the accountability system or to talk about a lesson that did not go as planned. The action research that I am proposing will delve deeper into answering the critical questions:

1) Will the study of currere allow teachers to view students in a way contrary to audit culture?

2) What will the study of currere open up?

3) What will it produce?

Conceptual Framework

Gilles Deleuze, known by curriculum theorists as the "Philosopher of Difference," proposes concepts that place us in a "transformational matrix—a space of potential difference through which passes, from time to time, a spike of lightning that is the active realization of the transformative power of life" (Roy, 2003, p. 23). Deleuzian concepts "shatter existing modes of thinking about the everyday…[allowing] us to access sudden breathless hollows that can make curriculum swerve from the old terrain" (p. 1). Deleuze allows us to experience the

disequilibrium that arises within cognitively dissonant spaces. It is within the cognitively dissonant spaces that we find the questions that students will ask, those unplanned moments of inquiry and discovery in the learning process. Barad expands on this notion of disequilibrium by rejecting the idea that we have an essentialized, fixed position that allows us to see perfectly (McKnight, 2016, p. 197). Deleuze and Barad are theorists who have influenced my thinking. The traditional tenets of the professional learning community primarily focus on the collaboration of teachers and are structured around what students are to learn, how students will demonstrate that they learned the concept, and what will happen in the curriculum when students learn the objective or already know the material. The dialogue of the PLC is based on this set structure.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Derrida's theory of deconstruction and his theory of the trace (Roy, 2003, p. 21). Deconstruction is a theory that allows us to break apart and question certain structures or ideas. Deleuze calls this "deterritorialization…a movement by which we leave the territory, or move away from spaces regulated by dominant systems of signification that keep us confined within old patterns, in order to make new connections" (Roy, 2003, p. 21). Deconstruction, according to Derrida, is a "textual labour in the form of *double reading*" (Rasiński, 2011, p. 11, emphasis in original). The first reading is the interpretation that is in line with the original interpretation, ideas, and arguments (Rasiński, 2011). Deconstruction "seeks to account for the undecidable oscillation between the different textual strategies that the inscription of a metaphysical hierarchy must necessarily presuppose" (Rasiński, 2011, p. 12). Derrida also theorizes that in the absence of a center or origin, everything becomes discourse (Rasiński, 2011). Rasiński (2011) states that, within this discourse emerges a vacillating post-structural synthesis of what should be taught in the

curriculum, when it should be taught, and which strategies will increase the likelihood of increasing student learning:

> Undecidability is always a determinate oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly determined in strictly defined situations (for example, discursive-syntactical or rhetorical but also political, ethical, etc.). They are pragmatically determined. (p. 12)

This qualitative study will challenge the set structure of professional learning communities by exploring the variations of the set curriculum of PLCs. Derrida's theory of the trace purports that every experience has a trace:

> For experience is the present consciousness of a past and future; every present understands itself as not being its own origin (it has a past, which is elsewhere, and 'elsewhen'), and also understands itself as incomplete (it has a future, which is not here, not yet). (Quora, 2021)

Derrida analyzes the function of the center as to "orient…balance, and organize the structure…[to] limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure" (Derrida, 1970, p. 1). Parkes et al. (2010) reminds us of the freeplay of the structure in curriculum:

> Pedagogy should draw on the talents and strengths that students bring to their education by rejecting deficit perspectives that have characterized much of the education of marginalized students. Such framing views all students – not just those from privileged backgrounds – as having resources that can be a foundation for their learning. (p. 8)

One of the truths that we must accept is that "part of the loss we confront in the field of curriculum is the loss of our capacity to recognize our own psychical reality as being out of joint with ordinary reality" (Roy, 2003, p. 22).

The article by Peter Trifonas (2004) seeks to paint a picture of what post-structuralism is by stating that "poststructuralism destabilizes the disinterestedness of knowledge… It grounds texts firmly within the literary contexts or the situations of their constructions to expand the inter-subjectivity of the world to the variegated dimensions of 'possible worlds'" (p. 155). This Post-structuralist idea of "possible worlds" is the foundation for following the trace in the study of currere in PLCs (p. 155). Rasiński (2011) explains that Deconstruction, according to Derrida:

> …Is not content with a simple reversal of textual hierarchies of interpretations by privileging the suppressed one over the dominant one, but seeks to account for the undecidable oscillation between the different [textual] strategies that the inscription of a metaphysical hierarchy must necessarily presuppose. (p. 12)

What presuppositions will be revealed in the attitudes of teachers after studying currere? Roy (2003) offers a framework by Deleuze and Guattari called schizoanalysis:

> Schizoanalysis looks for schisis, or a break from dominant significations and usual patterns of thought that hold us captive by means of what William Blake had aptly called 'mind-forg'd manacles.' Its work is to disorient and displace us from the transcendent plane of the sovereign individual to one of composites and multiplicities, in which, instead of representation and resemblance, we have differential constructions and becomings. (p. 32)

Janzen (2015) summarizes the teacher subject, which is the central premise to the writing strategy of currere:

> Teachers are caught in a tug of war between what they are supposed to be and who they are trying to become. The teaching subject, striving to be recognizable, is socially constructed and discursively constituted through ongoing relations with power—an

identity essentially determined in advance. Yet, the teaching subject often struggles to resist the multitude of forces imposed upon it—desiring to enact teacher differently. The tensions between the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses on and in teacher becoming are the paradoxical forces of power that both subordinate and form the subject. (p. 115)

Deconstruction is a theory that gives us permission to break apart and question certain structures or ideas. Deleuze calls this "deterritorialization…a movement by which we leave the territory, or move away from spaces regulated by dominant systems of signification that keep us confined within old patterns, in order to make new connections" (Roy, 2003, p. 21). This qualitative study will challenge the set structure of data meetings by teachers' exploration and connections to the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments*,"* noting the various traces as a result of the study of currere (Sierk, 2014).

Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments by Jessica Sierk

Sierk (2014) explores Pinar's (1975) writings on the Currere Writing Process. She shares her experience as a K-12 teacher and higher education professional with the reader, positing that the curriculum is a "living entity" and that deviations from the scripted curriculum should be allowed (p. 2). She discusses her short-lived 3-year journey as an educator and the cynicism she experiences because of focusing on test preparation and accountability; explores the idea of currere in the classroom as a "space" to recognize the "[uniqueness] of students' pasts, presents, and futures"; and addresses the question of how currere can "breathe new life" into the teaching and learning process (p. 3). She argues that standardized testing is a "snapshot in time" and that goals are supposed to be "directions" in which teachers travel during instruction and not "stable targets" with a "definite end" (p. 4). Building on Eisner (1992) and Dewey (1934), Sierk (2014)

concludes that preconceived theses in teaching are "a bow that is already tied, or in the context of classroom procedures, a lesson that does not allow for student-derived digressions" (p. 4). The title of Sierks's (2014) article is derived from Gaudelli and Hewitt's (2010) description of "the beauty of soulful moments," which Sierk explains in the article, as an accurate way of thinking about student deviations from the plan (p. 3). "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" includes an analysis of communication in the classroom, the "messiness of creative teaching," and who follows and who leads in the instructional process (Sierk, 2014, p. 6). The article is a story of Sierk's teaching journey and is a demonstration of how teachers are affected by the current requirements of education policy and accountability systems.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the effect of teachers'
study of the currere Writing Process on teachers' views of students and teachers' collective
memory of the data meeting process (Pinar & Grumet, 2015). The methodology of the research
includes analysis of semi-structured interviews of the teacher participants, pre- and post-
interviews, analysis of the transcripts of the Currere Writing Study sessions, article reflection
questions, thought catcher activities, and the culminating currere writing activity (Pinar &
Grumet, 2015; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). I hoped to discover what happens when teachers
study the Currere Writing Process and to explore how teachers change throughout the Currere
Writing Study in replacement of the usual focus on a typical standards-based discussion. I
wanted to examine the level of teacher concern about factors outside of standardized test scores;
to see if the study of currere will allow teachers to view students in a way contrary to audit
culture (Taubman, 2009).

Research Design

This qualitative research study included the analysis of semi-structured interviews of
teacher participants, analysis of pre- and post-interviews, analysis of participants' responses to
article reflection questions, discussions during Currere Writing Study sessions, teacher Thought
Catcher Activities, and analysis of the culminating teacher currere writing activity.

I introduced the Currere Writing Process to teacher participants. Currere is a form of
writing that involves the "critique of mainstream social science" and is a "phenomenologically
related type of autobiographical curriculum theory" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 414). Currere focuses
on lived experiences and knowledge can be extracted from these instances. Contemporary
education focuses on the "end products of the processes of the consciousness," what we call

"concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations"—what we often refer to as "knowledge" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415). Currere "seeks to slide underneath these end products and structures to the preconceptual experience that is their foundation" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415). Currere requires an "engagement with the world" in which the researcher describes both the subject and the object phenomenologically to connect the "preconceptual experience to formal intellection" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 415).

This study took place after school hours, (i.e., after teacher contract hours during the week, on the weekend, at a non-school district location). Participants attended six, 45-minute study sessions over a six-week span of time. Participants answered interview questions in a one-hour interview prior to the first session and after the last session. Participants read the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk (2014) and answered reflection questions. Each participant completed Thought Catcher Activities at the end of each study session. Participants wrote a reflection paper using the Currere Writing Process during the last study session.

Positionality of the Researcher

I have been an educator for 24 years: three years as a teacher and 21 years as a school administrator. I have had the opportunity to become familiar with both C.B. Dansby and B.P. Campbell Elementary Schools as a school administrator. Derrida stated that "thinking with deconstruction…we are on the lookout not for what deconstruction is, or for what it means, but for what it produces, what it opens up" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 27). My research, according to Derrida, will "produce different practices and knowings" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 27). I have worked as a data analyst and an assistant principal. From Zero Tolerance, to Boys Town Skills and from Boys Town Skills to Positive Behavioral Systems, I have been able to observe

various paradigm shifts in education. I have witnessed two decades where student-centered is becoming almost a figment of our proposed imaginations. I seek answers to my research questions and look to an ethnographically-styled qualitative study for answers. Just as the words that the participants use will become the data that will enlighten my quandaries, the statements, silence, and nonverbals will provide insight into the answers to my research questions. My research is constantly suspicious of the status quo and seeks to "criticize the given determinations of culture, of institutions…to respect this relation to the other as justice" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 26). Derrida states that "it is through difference/différance that sources of tension and disruption signal the deconstruction event" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 26). Deconstruction is "not simply a reversal of the binary: good professor/bad professor…but it is a search for the irruption and destabilization of seemingly fixed categories" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 28).

As I have conducted the research protocol of this qualitative case study, I have made sure to understand my own positionality regarding the Currere Writing Process, explored the artifacts with a non-biased lens, and upheld a standard of integrity throughout the entire research process.

Procedures and Data Analysis

I followed the approved TCU IRB Protocol and the approved Exemplary ISD Protocol. I sent out 1,100 e-mails containing my recruiting flyer and my EISD Research Approval Letter (see Appendices A and B). I received 2 responses from the e-mails I sent.

Participants of the Currere Writing Study

Bartholomew Darby is an African American male teacher who has taught fifth- and sixth-grade reading and language arts.[1] Mr. Darby has been a teacher for 23 years and speaks in a

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[1] Bartholomew Darby is a pseudonym.

conversation-like tone. Henrietta Golston is a White female teacher who has taught fourth- and sixth-grade math and reading.[2] She has been teaching for over 20 years. I was able to hear Ms. Golston thinking carefully through her responses. When she is passionate about a subject, she speaks about the topic at length.

I read the Informed Consent Form to participants in a Zoom session held at a non-EISD location (see Appendix C). As an agreement with the school district, I made sure to emphasize that this study would take place after school hours, (i.e., after teacher contract hours during the week, on the weekend, at a non-EISD location). I read the Informed Consent section regarding what the study entails; participants would attend 3-6, 45-minute study sessions over a six-week span of time; participants will answer interview questions in a one-hour interview prior to the first session and after the last session (see Appendix D). Participants read the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk (2014) and answered reflection questions (see Appendix E). Each participant completed the Thought Catcher Activity at the end of each study session (see Appendix F). Participants wrote a reflection paper using the currere process during the last study session (see Appendix G). Participants read the Informed Consent in its entirety and asked any questions they had. Each session was recorded on the Zoom video capture system and transcribed using the closed caption option in the Zoom system.

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[2] Henrietta Golston is a pseudonym.

Figure 2

Currere Writing Process Coding Tree
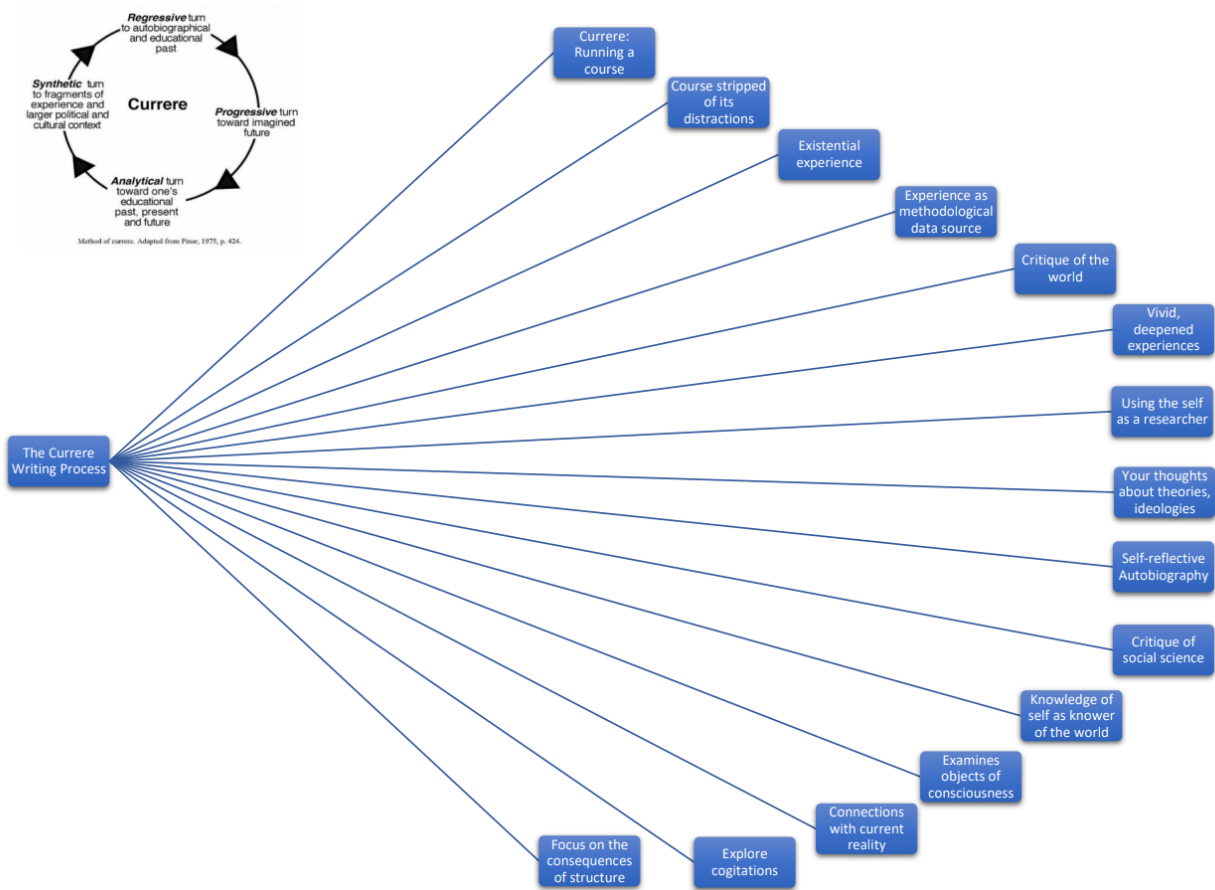
Note: The Currere Writing Process Coding Tree represents aspects of the Currere Writing

Process. The Currere Writing Process Coding Tree was adapted from Pinar, W. (1975, April)

Method of currere [Paper presentation]. Annual Meeting of the American Research Association,

Washington, D.C., United States. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED104766.pdf; Pinar, W.

(2012) *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge; Pinar, W., & Grumet, M. (2015).

Toward a poor curriculum (3rd ed.). Educator's International; Pinar, W., Reynolds, W., Slattery,

P., & Taubman, P. (2008). *Understanding curriculum.* Peter Lang.; and Smith, B. (2013).

Currere and critical pedagogy: Thinking critically about self-reflective methods. *TCI:*

Transnational Curriculum Inquiry, 10(2), 3–16.

Data Analysis

The first step in analysis of the collected qualitative data was to begin with the Currere Writing Process Coding Tree (See Figure 2). I created the Currere Writing Process Coding Tree from an in-depth study of the writings of William Pinar (1975, 2012), the combined works of Madeline Grumet and William Pinar (2015), and the collaboration of Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman (2008). The origination of the Currere Writing Process Coding Tree will be the guide when determining the emerging themes of the collected pre- and post-interviews, the transcripts of the dialogue of the participants in the study, the reflection questions, the Thought Catcher Activities, the notes captured by participants, and the culminating currere writing activity. The a priori Codes with similar attributes were highlighted the same color on the list to guide the analysis process (Table 12).

Table 1

Highlighted List of A Priori Codes According to Similar Attributes

Running a course
Course stripped of its distractions
Existential experience
Experience as a methodological data source
Critique of the world
Vivid, deepened experiences
Using the self as a researcher
Your thoughts about theories and ideologies
Self-reflective autobiography
Critique of social science
Knowledge of self as knower of the world
Examines objects of consciousness
Connections with current reality
Explore cogitations
Focus on the consequences of structure

The process used to analyze the collected data is a form of line-by-line coding and analysis with the codes of the Currere Writing Process Coding Tree listed as the a priori codes

and descriptive codes (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moran, 2004; Pinar, 1975, 2012; Pinar & Grumet, 2015; Pinar et al., 2008; Smith, 2013). The recorded interviews and Currere Writing Study sessions were recorded on Zoom. Transcripts of the Zoom recordings were created by closed-captioning on the Zoom video system, producing a video file, closed-caption file, and an audio file. The closed-caption document is paginated with specific times giving me the ability to make note of time stamps of verbiage that indicate alignment with the pre-originated Currere Writing Coding Tree and evidence of an unfolding theme.

I printed the closed-caption transcripts of each Currere Writing Session and the pre- and post-interviews, listened and watched the Zoom recording of each video, and re-read the transcripts. As I listened, I used a different color highlighter to indicate evidence of the a priori codes.

I reviewed the highlighted transcripts and completed the process of determining the a priori themes by selecting the color-coded highlighted lines of the scripts and copying and pasting them into sections of a table created in a Word Document (Dey, 1993; Lindsey et al., 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moran, 2004). After completing this in-depth activity, I was able to stop and jot down the themes that are listed in the findings. This process was completed for the collected pre- and post-interviews, the transcripts of the dialogue of the participants in the study, the reflection questions, the thought catcher activities, the notes captured by participants, and the culminating currere writing activity.

Teacher Study of Currere in the Currere Writing Study Sessions

Teacher participants in the Currere Writing Study read the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk (2004). Each week, participants read 1-2 sections of the article and completed a Thought Catcher Activity. Teachers wrote a currere

writing selection at the culmination of the currere study. Table 2 contains the schedule of currere Writing Study Sessions, objectives, and currere reading activities. Appendix E contains the pages of the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" that teachers read during the sessions (Sierk, 2014). Appendix F contains the Thought Catcher Activity. Appendix G contains the Currere Writing Activity.

Table 2

Schedule of PLC Meetings and Objectives

Week	Data Collection	Reading Material
Prior to Week 1	Co-Investigator conducts pre-study session one-hour participant interviews	
Week 1 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants read the ***Abstract*** and ***Introduction: One Educator's Journey***. • Participants complete Reflection Questions and Thought Catcher Activity	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk
Week 2 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants read ***Leaving Loose Ends*** and ***Dialogue and Communication in the Currere Classroom*** • Participants complete Reflection Questions and Thought Catcher Activity	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk
Week 3 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants read ***The Messiness of Creative Teaching*** and ***Contaminating the Classroom Environment*** • Participants complete Reflection Questions and Thought Catcher Activity	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk
Week 4 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants read ***Attending to the Medium of Curriculum*** and ***Following the Leader and Leading the Follower***	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk

	• Participants complete Reflection Questions and Thought Catcher Activity	
Week 5 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants read **Conclusion: Returning Anew** • Participants complete Reflection Questions and Thought Catcher Activity	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk
Week 6 Study Session 45 min.	• Participants complete Currere writing activity and Thought Catcher	"Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk
After Week 6	Co-Investigator conducts post-study session one-hour participant interviews	

Sierk, J. (2014). Currere and the beauty of soulful classroom moments. *The Nebraska Educator: A Student-Led Journal* (16). http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebeducator/16

Two Schools in the Study: Dansby and Campbell Elementaries

African American and Hispanic students at C.B. Dansby Elementary performed, on average, 24 percentage points lower than the White student population on the state reading test in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (Texas Education Agency, 2022).[3] This student population earned an Approaches Level designation, but it is likely that students will need assistance in Reading (Texas Assessment, 2022). From 2021 to 2022, the performance of African American students on the 6th grade State Reading test decreased by 7% and, within the Hispanic population, the performance decreased by 8%, which unmasks the disproportionate risk for underachievement of African American and Latino students (Kim & Calzada, 2018; Texas Education Agency, 2022).

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[3] C.B. Dansby is a pseudonym.

The data collection that took place at C.B. Dansby from 2015-2022 resulted in a list of artifacts from my experience as the data analyst.

B. P. Campbell Elementary is the second campus included in this research study.[4] B.P. Campbell Elementary's state test performance data showed that Hispanic, African American, and White students performed, on average, 23 percentage points lower on the 3rd-grade state reading test than Asian students. African American and Hispanic students, on average, performed 17 percentage points lower than Asian students on the 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-grade state reading test (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

This qualitative study examines the language used in education to describe student achievement. Words like "underachievement" and the numbers used to represent students become the linguistic subjects that this study will call into question. While the data shows a disparity between specific groups of students, the imposed regulating audit culture that should make improvements in education through teaching has further strengthened the inequities that schools like Dansby and Campbell seek to address.

The traditional professional learning community processes have yielded stagnant academic performance of students in grades 3-6 at Dansby Elementary for 8 years and at Campbell Elementary since its opening in 2013. Dansby Elementary received a Met Standard rating from the year 2013 to the year 2018, with an accountability rating of a C for the 2021-2022 school year. Campbell Elementary received Improvement Required rating in 2014-2015 and has received an accountability rating of Met Standard or a C each year. Note that schools were not rated in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 due to the state-declared disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic (Texas Education Agency, 2022). The disheartening discovery is that both Dansby and

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[4] B.P. Campbell is a pseudonym.

Campbell Elementaries are implementing the requirements outlined by the state through audit culture, but both schools have not been able to exceed an accountability rating of C (Taubman, 2009; Texas Education Agency, 2022).

This study examined the attitudes of teachers before, during, and after learning about the Currere Writing Process with the absence of a standards-based focus on testing. Standardized testing is a comprehensive test of grade-level skills that assesses students' ability to "regurgitate content or produce cookie-cutter written responses" (Abeles, 2015, p. 102). A system based on standardized testing places our focus on the "product" of learning (Abeles, 2015, p. 103). The "process" of learning is even more important as we give students the opportunity to be innovative, express their inquiries, and be original thinkers (Abeles, 2015, p.103). Judging students' abilities based on a test score only allows teachers to see a small slice of student performance. Schultz (2018), teacher and author of *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way: Lessons from an Urban Classroom*, expresses that he "did not function well in such prescriptive circumstances" (p. 148). He shares his experience as a 5th-grade teacher at a predominately African American urban school that was struggling to meet the achievement requirements of high-stakes testing:

> As a teacher, I felt like a theorizer throughout the course of the year, and suggest that all teachers are actually theorizers. Each day, and possibly every moment, teachers make decisions, adjust lessons, and attempt to learn the classroom dynamic… Teachers' ability to make decisions based on their best judgement and experiences has been stripped away by the current accountability craze. Students can and do theorize. By allowing space for students to determine what is worthwhile to them, we help them to better meet their own

needs and desires while simultaneously achieving on external measurements. (pp. 147-

148)

The test scores of students at Dansby Elementary and Campbell Elementary are only one aspect

of academic performance and are not a representation of who students truly are as individuals.

This research study seeks to discover the traces, destabilizing moments, and snags in the data

through a process of thinking that aligns with Derrida's theory of deconstruction (Jackson &

Mazzei, 2012). Contrary to the traditional ways of viewing data, seeing through the lens of

deconstruction problematizes and allows thought at the edges of its folding with the possibilities

or impasses of there likely being something new discovered.

Exemplary ISD

Exemplary ISD has an enrollment of 60,000 students and is the tenth-largest school

district in the state.[5] EISD is the largest employer in the area with a staff of about 8,500. The

district has 24 secondary schools and 53 elementary campuses. The City of Exemplary is the

sixth-largest city in the state (EISD, 2021).

The Population of Dansby Elementary[6]

Dansby Elementary is one of 53 EISD elementary campuses and is a Title I campus. The

school serves 568 students including 62 Pre-Kindergarten students, 74 Kindergarten students, 74

first-grade students, 69 second-grade students, 65 third-grade students, 75 fourth-grade students,

69 fifth-grade students, and 80 sixth-grade students. The ethnic distribution of Dansby is 48.6%

Hispanic (276 students), 34.9% African American (198 students), 9% White (51 students), 3.9%

Asian (22 students), 2.6% students who are two or more races (15 students), and 0.9% American

Indian (5 students). The economically disadvantaged percentage is 76.4% (434 students) and the

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[5] Exemplary ISD is a pseudonym.
[6] All demographic data is sourced from Texas Education Agency, 2022

English Learner population is 18% (102 students). The Gifted and Talented enrollment is 6.7% (38 students) and the Special Education enrollment is 10% (57 students). The student mobility rate at Dansby is 15.6% (78 students). The average student-to-teacher ratio at Dansby Elementary is 15:1.

The number of staff members at Dansby Elementary is 57.8. There are 37.9 teachers, 5 professional support staff members, two school administrators (school leadership), one librarian, one counselor, and 12.9 educational aides. There are 3.3 male teachers and 34.6 female teachers. The ethnicity of the staff is: 71.5% White (27.1 teachers), 15.5% African American (5.9 teachers), 7.9% Hispanic (3 teachers), 2.4% Asian (0.9 teacher), and 2.6% of staff who are of two or more races (1 teacher). The majority of Dansby teachers have 11 to 20 years of experience (34.3%).

The Population of Campbell Elementary[7]

Campbell Elementary is a campus that includes a Bilingual program and is one of the newer schools of the 53 EISD elementary campuses. Campbell is a Title I campus. The school serves 754 students including 11 Early Childhood Education students, 69 Pre-Kindergarten students, 95 Kindergarten students, 93 first-grade students, 96 second-grade students, 100 third-grade students, 88 fourth-grade students, 110 fifth-grade students, and 92 sixth-grade students. The ethnic distribution of Campbell is 46.7% Hispanic (352 students), 34.7% African American (262 students), 5.6% White (42 students), 12.5% Asian (94 students), 0.4% students who are two or more races (3 students), and 0.1% Pacific Islander (1 student); and 0.0% American Indian student population. The economically disadvantaged percentage is 91.8% (692 students); the English Language Learner population is 46.4% (350 students). The Gifted and Talented

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[7] All demographic data is sourced from Texas Education Agency, 2022

enrollment is 10.2% (77 students), and the Special Education enrollment is 9.2% (69 students). The student mobility rate at Campbell is 19.6% (133 students). The average teacher-to-student ratio at Campbell Elementary is 20:1.

The number of staff members at Campbell Elementary is 68.7. There are 46.4 teachers, 7 professional support staff members, 3 school administrators (school leadership), one librarian, 2 counselors, and 12.3 educational aides. There are 7.3 male teachers and 39.0 female teachers. The ethnicity of the staff is: 29.3% White (13.6 teachers), 33.8% African American (15.7 teachers), 34.7% Hispanic (16.1 teachers), 0.0% Asian (0 teachers), and 2.2% of staff who are of two or more races (1 teacher). The majority of Campbell teachers have 6 to 10 years of experience (30.7%).

Dansby Achievement Gap Widening Due to the Pandemic

The lesson planning and feedback process is one way for teachers to receive resources and support they need in the classroom. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers relied upon online technology applications and teachers also moved away from a consistent lesson planning process. The state testing data from the 2020-2021 school year presents further complications in the academic readiness struggle of African American and Hispanic students. The data results do not include factors like whether or not a student attended campus for in-person learning or if the student participated in learning virtually during the pandemic. These factors definitely affect how students perform, and according to the data, the gap of learning between White, Black, and Hispanic students is further widening. The target percentage for African American student achievement in math is 31%. Only 11% of Dansby's African American population achieved Meets in math (see Table 3). The target for African American Meets performance in reading is 32%. Twenty-one percent of Dansby's African American population scored at the Meets level in

reading (see Table 4). The target Meets level score is 40% for Hispanic students on the Math

State Test; 19% of Dansby's Hispanic population score at the Meets level (see Table 5). Table 6

shows a target of 37% for Meets in reading for the Hispanic population and 21% of Hispanic

students scored at the Meets level on the State Reading Test. The Meets target for the White

population on Math is 50% and 43% of White students achieved Meets on the State Math Test

(see Table 7). Table 8 shows the required target for the White population on the State Reading

Test as 60% with Dansby students scoring at 52% in the Meets category. The White population

at Dansby Elementary is within 7-8% of reaching their target Meets performance while the

African American population is 12-20% away from the Meets target. The Hispanic population

missed the Meets target by 16-21%. The overall achievement of Dansby students shows that a

majority of the populations perform at the Approaches level, which is actually below on-grade

level performance. The percentages in the Meets category demonstrate that students struggle to

perform at the expected levels of high stakes testing; this dynamic intensifies when factoring in

traditionally marginalized student population performance (see Table 9).

Table 3

Grades 3-6 African American Population 2021 State Math Test Scores

AA Math								
	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total			Target
#	21	22	21	31	95			
Approaches	6	2	11	16	35			
Meets	1	0	6	3	10		11%	31
Masters	1	0	3	0	4			

Table 4

Grades 3-6 African American Population 2021 State Reading Test Scores

AA Rdg	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total		Target
#	21	22	20	32	95		
Approaches	8	8	14	16	46		
Meets	5	3	5	7	20	21%	32
Masters	1	0	2	4	7		

Table 5

Grades 3-6 Hispanic Population 2021 State Math Test Scores

H Math	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total		Target
#	18	35	28	33	114		
Approaches	9	11	13	23	56		
Meets	3	5	8	6	22	19%	40
Masters	0	1	3	4	8		

Table 6

Grades 3-6 Hispanic Population 2021 State Reading Test Scores

H Rdg	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total		Target
#	18	35	28	33	114		
Approaches	7	16	16	23	62		
Meets	1	6	8	9	24	21%	37
Masters	0	2	3	3	8		

Table 7

Grades 3-6 White Population 2021 State Math Test Scores

W Math	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total		Target
#	5	4	6	8	23		
Approaches	3	1	4	6	14		
Meets	2	1	2	5	10	43%	50
Masters	0	0	0	1	1		

Table 8

Grades 3-6 White Population 2021 State Reading Test Scores

W Rdg	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total		Target
#	5	4	6	8	23		
Approaches	4	3	5	6	18		
Meets	3	1	3	5	12	52%	60
Masters	1	1	2	4	8		

Table 9

C.B. Dansby Elementary 2021 State Test Scores at Approaches, Meets, and Masters

Approaches	Reading	Math	Science	Writing
3rd	53%	39%		
4th	44%	26%		36%
5th	66%	50%	52%	
6th	61%	63%		

Meets	Reading	Math	Science	Writing
3rd	25%	8%		
4th	18%	9%		8%
5th	29%	30%	16%	
6th	27%	14%		

Masters	Reading	Math	Science	Writing
3rd	10%	1%		
4th	6%	2%		0%
5th	10%	8%	0%	
6th	14%	7%		

In 2018 and 2019, Dansby Elementary achieved an accountability rating of C; in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 Dansby received an accountability rating of Met Standard. In 2008, Dansby received an accountability rating of Academically Acceptable with Gold Performance Acknowledgements in Comparable Improvement in Reading and English Language Arts; Dansby received Gold Performance for being Commended in Science in 2009 and 2011. With an

accountability rating of Academically Acceptable in 2010, Dansby received Gold Performance

Acknowledgement in Reading and Mathematics. (Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2020)

The school year 2011-2012 was the first year of the series of consecutive years that Dansby did

not receive a state recognition; the state did not issue accountability ratings. This year was the

first of a new and different accountability system.

The New State Testing Accountability System

Year 2011 marked the start of special education Alternate and Modified tests, the new

English Language Learner Progress Indicator, and Commended Performance recognition. The

minimum score for Acceptable performance increased by 5 percentage points. The performance

guidelines shifted to the new federally mandated definitions for race and ethnicity; the ELL

Progress indicator included all ELL students and Commended Performance included all students

plus the economically disadvantaged groups (Texas Education Agency, 2021

rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov). One of the most groundbreaking changes was that all test commended

performance acknowledgments included Alt. and Modified. The State Legislature began to sift

through the status-quo data of the previous Academic Excellence Indicator System, which placed

all students on the same, supposedly leveled playing field. (Texas Education Agency, 2021)

In 2013, the 83rd Texas Legislature passed House Bill 5, which specifically outlined

school accountability, assessment, and curriculum requirements. Most educators see House Bill 5

as the most pervasive piece of legislation to affect education in over 25 years (E3 Alliance:

Education Equals Economics, 2015). The Bill modified high school requirements to emphasize

workforce and college readiness, 22 credits for graduation, End-of-Course exams, and college

career counseling. Under House Bill 5, schools can earn distinctions for academic growth based

on the top 25% and their comparison schools' academic growth and making progress in

eliminating achievement gaps. One of the goals of House Bill 5 was to create a community level of transparency of schools' and districts' academic achievement. Schools still received the Unacceptable, Recognized, or Exemplary rating, and the State Legislature also implemented the A-F Accountability System that represents the most sweeping change to school accountability. The State School Accountability Dashboard was created as a way to bridge the gap between the school and the community and to improve public understanding. The dashboard allowed the public to see the comparisons of school districts' performance across the state. Data also included the percentage of students who graduated with endorsements and distinguished diplomas, keeping track of the efforts to guide students toward more rigorous career pathways.

In 2018, the 85th Texas Legislature gave the Commissioner the ability to evaluate school district and campus performance and assign each district and campus an overall performance rating of A, B, C, D, or F (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Table 10 outlines the new labels and grades:

Table 10

A-F Accountability

A	Exemplary Performance
B	Recognized Performance
C	Acceptable Performance
D	In Need of Improvement
F	Unacceptable Performance

The calculation of the overall ratings included 3 domains: Student Achievement, School Progress, and Closing Gaps. Student achievement at the elementary level is based on state test results. Table 11 represents an explanation of how the student achievement score is determined:

Table 11

Calculating a Score
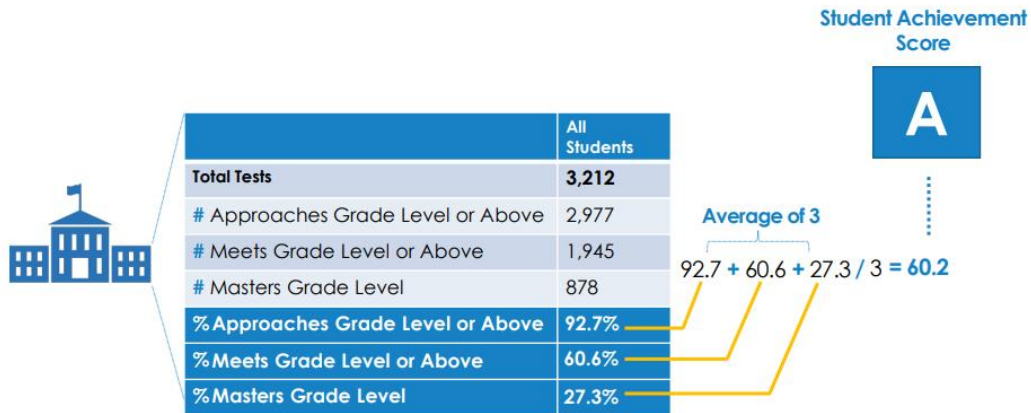
Note: The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board set a goal that by 2030, at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 will have a certificate or degree. The example represented in this table is based on 3,212 total tests and the number of students who performed at the Approaches, Meets, and Masters levels of the state test, with the average of the 3 percentages equal to the achievement score.

(https://www.esc11.net/cms/lib3/TX21000259/Centricity/Domain/489/ACET%20Overview%20 of%202018%20Accountability.pdf)

The School Progress Domain includes two aspects to progress: Part A is academic growth and Part B is relative performance. Academic growth includes all assessments with a test progress measure. Table 12 contains an explanation of how students earn progress points from one grade level to the next.

Table 12

Part A — Academic Growth: Measuring Advancement
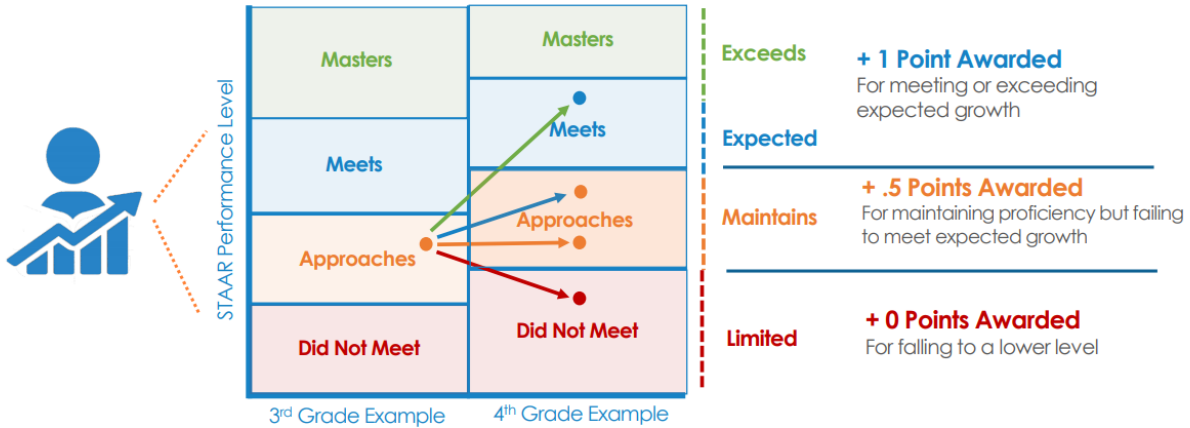
Note: Table 12 is an example of a 3rd grade student who could be awarded 1 point if they meet or exceed expected growth, .5 points if they maintain proficiency but fail to meet expected growth, and 0 points awarded if they fail to a lower level.

(https://www.esc11.net/cms/lib3/TX21000259/Centricity/Domain/489/ACET%20Overview%20of%202018%20Accountability.pdf)

     C.B. Dansby Elementary state testing data of Meets and Masters levels are evidence of the continued widening education gap between White, Hispanic, and special education students. On third-grade state reading, the percentages of students who achieved at the Meets level were disproportionate: 20% of African American third-grade students achieved at the Meets level; 33% of Hispanic students, and 56% of White students earned Meets. Only 11% of third-grade students who receive special education services earned Meets on the third-grade State Reading Test. Only 15% of African American third-grade students, 11% of Hispanic, and 22% of White students achieved Masters level. On third-grade state math, 20% of African American, 30% of Hispanic, and 44% of White students achieved Meets. Fourth-grade state math test results

showed that only 19% of African American students earned Masters while 33% of White students earned Masters (Texas Education Agency, 2021). See Table 13 for how growth measure points are allotted.

Table 13

Part A — Academic Growth: Percentage of Students Gaining

STAAR		Current Year			
		Did Not Meet Grade Level	**Approaches** Grade Level	**Meets** Grade Level	**Masters** Grade Level
Previous Year	**Did Not Meet** Grade Level	Met/Exceeded Growth Measure = 1 pt Did not meet = 0 pts	Met/Exceeded Growth Measure = 1 pt Did not meet = .5 pts	1 pt	1 pt
	Approaches Grade Level	Met/Exceeded Growth Measure = 1 pt Did not meet = 0 pts	Met/Exceeded Growth Measure = 1 pt Did not meet = .5 pts	1 pt	1 pt
	Meets Grade Level	0 pts	0 pts	Met/Exceeded Growth Measure = 1 pt Did not meet = .5 pts	1 pt
	Masters Grade Level	0 pts	0 pts	0 pts	1 pt

Note: Table 13 provides scenarios of how met/exceeded growth measure points are determined. If a student Did Not Meet the grade level in the current school year, Did Not Meet the grade level the previous year, but Met/Exceeded the growth measure, the student is assigned 1 point. If a student Did Not Meet on STAAR during the current year and Did Not Meet grade level on STAAR in the previous year, then the student is assigned 0 points. If a student Did Not Meet in the current school year, achieved Approaches in the previous school year, and Met/Exceeded their growth measure, then they receive 1 point. If the student Did Not Meet their growth measure, then they are assigned 0 points. When a student does not meet the grade level during the current school year on STAAR, but achieves Meets or Masters in the previous year, the student earns 0 points in the formula. If a student achieves Approaches on STAAR during the

current school year, scored Did Not Meet or Approaches in the previous school year, and achieves their growth measure, they are assigned 1 point. If they did not meet the growth measure, then they are assigned .5 points. If a student fails to meet their previous year performance of Meets or Masters by scoring at the Approaches level, then they are assigned 0 points. When a student achieves Meets or Masters during the current school year on STAAR, and they were at the Did Not Meet or Approaches levels in the previous school year, they earn 1 point. When a student achieves Meets during the current school year and also achieved Meets the previous school year, they can only earn a point if they met or exceeded their growth measure; they will not receive the full point if they did not meet their growth measure (.5 points). A student who earned at the Masters grade level the previous year, but only earns Meets during the current school year, receives 0 points. A student earns 1 point if they achieve Masters on STAAR during the current school year and had made Did Not Meet, Approaches, Meets, or Masters during the previous school year.

(https://www.esc11.net/cms/lib3/TX21000259/Centricity/Domain/489/ACET%20Overview%20 of%202018%20Accountability.pdf)

Part B of the School Progress Domain is Relative Performance: Measuring School Progress. Figure 3 displays the average line and how campuses with fewer economically disadvantaged students have higher levels of student achievement on average; campuses with more economically disadvantaged students tend to achieve at lower levels (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The accountability formula rewards schools and school districts for accelerated instruction and meeting or exceeding expected growth. In years past, the overall achievement score was misleading and often created an evasive response by educators in closing achievement gaps. The Texas Legislature and TEA Commissioner's commitment to seeking answers to

Texas' statewide shortfall in providing excellent instruction to students to prepare them for the workforce shifted to a laser lens focus on teacher accountability. Standardized testing becomes the conduit through which the state holds teachers, administrators, and school districts accountable for the heavy lifting of data analysis while assessing schools consistently to determine if the teaching practices are effective (Abeles, 2015). Standardized testing and "America's devotion to exams has spun out of control" (Abeles, 2015, p. 99). The fill-in-the-blank and bubble-in tests of the 1980s and 1990s are of the ancient past. No longer are the testing situations low stress and carefree (Abeles, 2015). America has a "national testing obsession of monstrous proportions," and the constant testing of students has "driven American education into a vise grip of regimentation" (Abeles, 2015). The reading and writing process is now segmented into the individual skills of identifying the main idea, the author's purpose, making inferences, and writing the traditional 5-paragraph writing sample (Lead4ward, 2021).

Figure 3

Part B — Relative Performance: Measuring School Progress
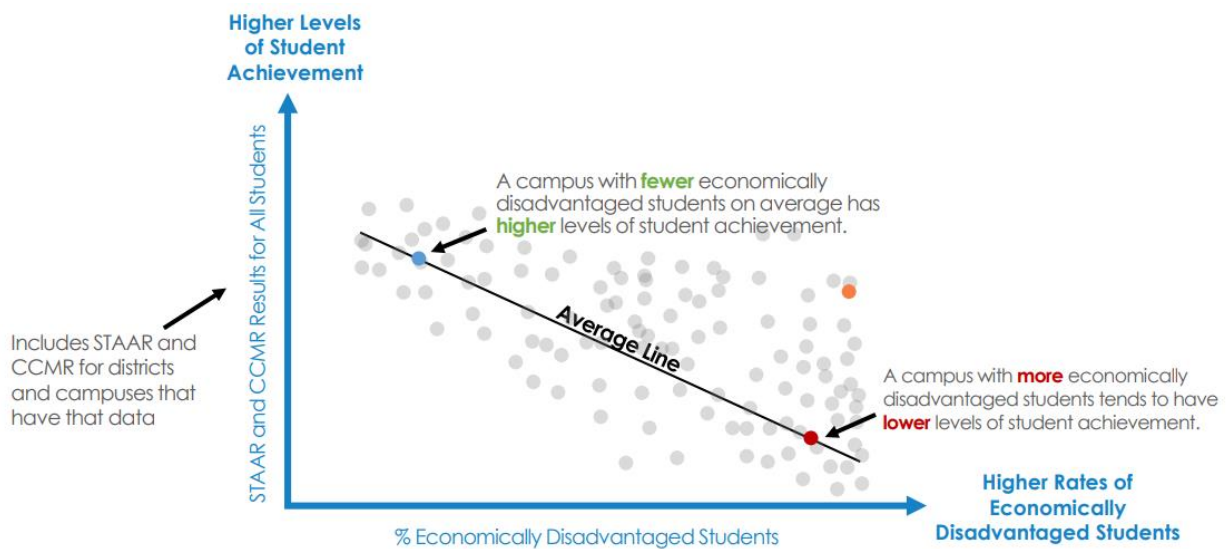
Since legislators have attached student performance on standardized tests to teacher success, the education system has evolved into a "culture of fear" (Abeles, 2015). An education system that "judges success through narrow, fearsome exams is not a nation of geniuses; it is a nation schooled in narrow, fearful thinking" (Abeles, 2015, p. 100). Abeles (2015) refers to the new educational system based on fear as "Zombie Nation," where the Bush Administration tried to "level the playing field [by mandating] a national exam regime" of testing each child in grades three through eight, and at least once in high school, creating high-stakes accountability standards for students from both "affluent and less privileged communities" (p. 100). The Obama Administration added more pressure to the accountability measures of *No Child Left Behind* by imposing the *Race to the Top* initiative, a $4 billion federal funding competition for the states that requires teachers to be evaluated on their students' test scores, adoption of career readiness standards, and testing students on the Common Core standards each year (Abeles, 2015). Teachers began to feel the pressure of the new standards while students started to sense a difference in the teaching styles and testing frequency. Performance expectations increased for coursework completion and Advanced Placement, SAT, and ACT tests (Abeles, 2015). Today's education has produced the most frequently tested generation in American history, developed a "deadening effect" on the true character of what education should be, and created a psychological dissonance for students by making high-stakes testing the priority (Abeles, 2015).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The PLC Process at Dansby Elementary School

The PLC process at Dansby Elementary began about 10 years ago in 2013. PLCs were held during teachers' conference periods. During the 2020-2021 school year, PLCs were held once a week, and students had learning time in the library, computer lab, maker-space lab, or attended a guided counseling group lesson while teachers attended PLC meetings. The PLC process for each grade level varies based on the needs of the grade level.

Professional learning communities were created for teacher and administrator collaboration. C.B. Dansby Elementary, a PK-6 school in Exemplary ISD, is no exception, having implemented the PLC process for 10 years. As such, Dansby Elementary is a representation of how neoliberal education reform impacts the school and its implementation of the PLC process. A Title I school and one of 53 elementary schools in the district, C.B. Dansby has received a grade of C and has almost been listed as a school that "Needs Improvement" (Texas Academic Performance Report, 2022). The education gap that persists at Dansby between African American, Hispanic, and White students has widened with the 2022 state math test performance. African American and Hispanic students performed, on average, 19 percentage points lower than White students at the Approaches level in grades 3, 4, and 6 (Texas Academic Performance Report, 2022). This demonstrates a significant gap in achievement. The Approaches level of performance means that the student shows some knowledge of the academic content but is unable to demonstrate critical content material they might need additional support in the upcoming school year (Texas Assessment, 2022). The data is evidence that African American and Hispanic students have difficulty achieving the minimum standard of Approaches. This trend

continues as accountability requirements increase and the expectation to meet each learner's needs becomes the basis for academic recognition.

The professional learning community process at C.B. Dansby Elementary School began in 2013. Implemented as a response to the state increasing accountability standards, the PLC process at Dansby started with tremendous excitement. With senior staff members at the helm, the PLC process promised to be one of the leading strategies for hearing the voices of teachers and meeting strict accountability requirements. The instructional trainer on campus led the first PLC meeting. Teachers met at least once a week to discuss the Teaching for Understanding Planning Cycle (Figure 4) that included the following steps (Harvard Graduate School, 2022):

1. Identify the Priority Standards

    - What are the priority/readiness standards for the upcoming six weeks?
       (Choose 2 highest needs)

    - Proficiency of these priority/readiness standards for my students looks like...

    - How did our students perform on these priority/readiness standards last year?

    - How did our students perform on the pretest?

2. Clarify the Learning

3. Identify any verbs/concepts that need clarification.

4. Analyze the learning targets.

5. Identify Long-Term Takeaways.

6. Create Learning Progressions.

7. Design Formative and Summative Assessments.

8. Plan and Align Instruction

9. Teach, Assess, and Adjust

- Review Post-Test Data and Reflect

Figure 4

Example of the Teaching for Understanding Planning Cycle
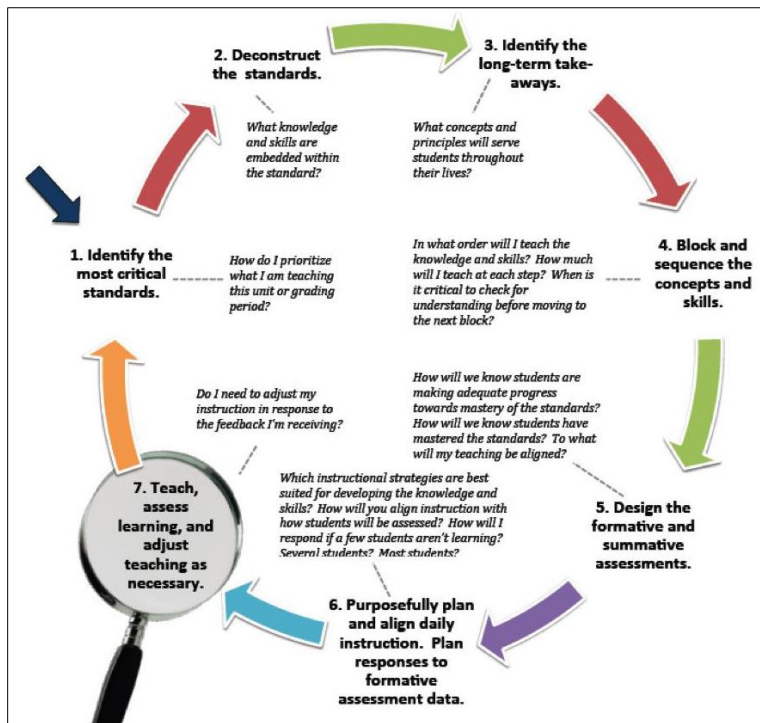
The step that teachers at Dansby Elementary spend the least amount of time on is step 3 in Figure 4 and step 5 in the above list: identifying the long-term takeaways. Teachers in PLCs often skip step 3 to spend more time on the other steps. Students' connections to concepts and principles of the lesson are essential to students understanding how they will use the information they are learning. Students checked out during instruction because they did not know why the skill was important.

In 2015, Exemplary ISD began a program for inspiring leaders called the Emerging Leaders Program. With a goal of preparing leaders for principal roles, the Emerging Leaders Program, as a part of the New Leaders Program (2014), introduced the Corrective Instruction Action Plan as its central tool for examining the teaching and learning process (Table 14).

Table 14

The Corrective Instruction Action Plan PLC Form

Corrective Instruction Action Planning Form
Assessment: Subject: Grade:
DATA ANALYSIS / MISCONCEPTION TO ADDRESS
What is the standard in which students are demonstrating a misconception according to the data??
What is the misconception or skill?
What data supports this conclusion?
SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH
Is this a previously taught concept? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, please provide a brief summary of the strategies previously used to teach the standard or skill in which students demonstrated the misconception in bulleted form below: Concepts taught:
NEW CORRECTIVE-INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH
High Impact Instructional Strategies and Opportunities for Practice:

How are students involved in setting goals or next steps? What strategies are you using to motivate students to reach a certain goal? (e.g., motivational language, written work, feedback, exit slips, etc.)
How will students know when they have reached their goal? (Providing opportunities to self-monitor and reflect on his/her own progress)
ACCOUNTABILITY: What evidence will be collected and reported back to the team?
What are the next steps for team members? What are the due dates? Who is responsible?

What high impact strategies will be used to ensure the misconception is addressed? What opportunities will students be given for adequate practice of the standard/skill?
Whole Group: If you choose a whole group, what data supports the non-differentiation? Are you basing this off of one question or a concept that has 3-4 questions attached to it?
Small Group: Which students need a deeper level of support than the whole group?
Individual: Which students need an individual level of support to reach proficiency?
Assessment: How will the skill/standard be reassessed for mastery?
SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT EFFICACY
How will the students be engaged so that they understand what standard/skill still needs to be learned?

The Corrective Instruction Action Plan (CIAP) is focused on whole-group, small-group,

and individual re-teaching. Teachers answer the questions and place the data in the document

that supports the misconception. For example, if 44% of students master the objective, then the concept is re-taught whole group. If 64% of students master the objective, then the teacher re-teaches the skill in small and individual groups. The issue with this kind of analysis in the example with 44% and 64% mastery, is that there are 56% and 36% of students who are not learning the skill. Re-teaching the skill while adhering to specific curriculum timelines and expectations is difficult for teachers. Teachers focus on re-teaching instead of ensuring that instruction is excellent from the start. When teachers know there is time to complete a CIAP and the only focus is data and the misconception, teachers spend less time focusing on making their lessons fun and creative.

The PLC focus shifted from The Teaching for Understanding Planning Cycle and the CIAP to a focus on creating learning progressions in 2017. In 2018, teachers and the instructional trainer focused on creating content conversations and an Instructional Focus Document with embedded guiding questions for each grade level. Dansby began research into the 4 PLC Questions during the 2018-2019 school year (DuFour & DuFour, 2014): 1) What do we want students to learn?, 2) How do we know students have learned it?, 3) How will we respond when some students do not learn it?, and 4) How will we extend the learning for students who are already showing mastery? The year 2019-2020 began a focus on creating norms for the PLC meetings. Each grade level created its own norms and SMART goals. SMART goals are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

SMART Goals: PLC Guiding Questions

The year 2020 was a laser-focus on online assessment programs, pre-assessment,

Response to Intervention (RtI), stair-step goals, and teamwork within the PLC meeting. School

year 2021-2022 was when technology applications with an attempt to provide student-centered

instruction as a result of the pandemic, became the triage for increasing accountability standards.

Since a majority of students were far behind in their mastery of reading and math skills,

Exemplary ISD started the scramble for technology that could supplement instruction and help

teachers with closing student learning gaps. Teachers discussed standards-based instruction, how

to use student data to inform instruction, Tier 1 whole class instruction, Tier 2, and Tier 3 small

group instruction, and tracking individual student data using data trackers. With the requirement

of House Bill 4545, EISD implemented various data trackers to identify trends in student

learning, campus needs at the school level, and ensured that each PLC included the Data-Driven

Instruction Process as implemented by the Regional Educational Department. Data-Driven

Instruction (Figure 6; Children's Literacy Initiative, 2020) includes scripts that the principal, data

analyst, and teachers use to discuss performance on specific standards, the strategies

implemented that caused growth, and protocols for guiding discussion with teachers regarding

standards-based instruction. Exemplary ISD began implementing the 4 Best Practices in

instructional leadership training and required the PLC process to include discussions that aligned

with the 4 Best Practices of Standards Alignment, Assessment, Small Group Instruction/Tiered

Instruction, and Scaffolded/Differentiated Instruction. Table 15 contains an example of a Dansby

Elementary PLC Agenda for the 2021-2022 school year.

Figure 6

Data-Driven Instruction in the PLC Process

Table 15

Dansby Elementary PLC Agenda 2021-2022

Dansby Elementary
PLC Agenda

	Present:	
Time	**Objective**	**Action Steps**
10:55	Determine the norms that will lead our work.	Create Norms for 2021-2022 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
11:00	Review Math Pre-Assessment Data to Analyze Student Success on Power Standards Place student work into various levels of mastery Determine the Focus Power Standard	Answer Guiding Questions: 1. What does this data tell us? 2. Where do we begin our instruction on the Lead4ward Math Scaffold? 3. What will that look like? 4. What hands-on activities will students complete?
11:15		How will we ensure that we are teaching to the standard?
		How and when will we assess to know where our students are and to use the data to inform our instruction?
		What will our Tier 1 and small group instruction look like? What resources will we use for students to demonstrate mastery?
11:45		What will we implement to ensure that students are participating in hands-on experiences with each scaffolded step of the standard?

The PLC and Data Meeting Cycle at Campbell Elementary School

Campbell Elementary implemented the Lesson Alignment Formative Assessment lesson planning process during the 2022-2023 school year (Texas Instructional Leadership Training, 2022). The Lesson Alignment Formative Assessment process, also formally called LAFA, is a lesson plan template that teachers use to complete their weekly lesson plans (Table 16).

Table 16

Formative Assessment Lesson Planning Template

Lesson Alignment Formative Assessment Lesson Planning Template

Teacher:	Grade:		Subject:		Week of:	
	Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	
Dates						
Pace						
Standards (SEs)						
Lesson Objectives						
Demonstration of Learning (DOL)						
Vocabulary						
Activities						
Teacher Exemplars						
Success Criteria						
Exit Tickets						
What I Need (WIN) Time						
Weekly Data Reflection:						

In contrast to Dansby Elementary, Campbell Elementary has a specific lesson planning template that aligns with an Observation Feedback Form (Table 17). Dansby Elementary teachers followed the EISD Comprehensive Literacy and Math Plans to create their lesson plans using the school's master schedule and the literacy and math blocks outlined by the district. The lesson planning feedback process is much more difficult at Dansby Elementary because there is not a specific form to provide feedback to teachers. The lesson plan feedback form is different from an appraisal walkthrough form. The lesson plan feedback form aligns with the teacher's lesson plans.

Table 17

Formative Assessment Lesson Plan Feedback and Observation Form

Campbell Observation Tool: Lesson Alignment

Teacher Name: Date & Time:
Grade Level: Curriculum Area:
Lesson Objectives:

Lesson Plan Review			
Focus: Alignment	Yes ✓	No ✗	**Evidence and/or Follow-up Questions**
Lesson Objective (LO)			
Aligns to the Instructional Planning Calendar			
Rigorous: vocabulary matches the standards, SE, and STAAR questions			
Manageable: can be taught in one day			
Distinct: specific to one lesson and not repeated over multiple days			
Measurable: can know whether or not students mastered the daily objective			
Data Driven: rooted in what students need to learn based on analysis of student work, formative assessment			
Exemplar Response (Teacher I DO from the GRR)			
Contains evidence of all success criteria			
Demonstrates full mastery of objective			
Illuminates work done to solve-problems			
Aligns to the exit ticket response			
Success Criteria (list of laps)			
Specific and concrete			
Aligns to the objective and exemplar response			
Lists qualities that must be present to prove mastery of objective			
Student friendly language			
Measurable or observable in a student's response			
Exit Ticket (This is not the You Do)			
Aligned to the objective and upcoming assessment			
Assesses what is most important			
Short and sweet: feasible to grade before the next school day			

Quick Resource Links

Kinder Planning Support: ELAR, IFD, Reading Workshop (21 mins)	How to Create Aligned LPs	TIL/LAFA Resource Links	Lead4Ward IQ Tool
K-12 ELAR Vertical Alignment	Instructional Strategies	IPC Pacing Calendar	MRS Strategies

Classroom Observation Coaching Session Feedback	
Date & Time:	
Glows	
Grows	
Goals	
Next Steps	

Varied in format: gives a complete picture of what students understand			
Varied in level of rigor: to help assess the depth of understanding			
Able to be completed independently			
Content/Lesson Activities			
Do the general content and structure of lesson activities align to the objective and exit ticket?			
Action Step			
As a next step, please make sure the action listed is evident in your lesson plan			

Classroom Observation (Look for evidence of...)
Date & Time:

Is the learning objective on the lesson plan aligned to the lesson happening in the room?		
Do the teacher and students successfully utilize the exemplar response and criteria to: - Provide students with a clear vision of how to be successful? - Monitor learning throughout the lesson? (Laps)		
Do the students complete the exit ticket independently to get a true measure of their learning?		
Is the content of the lesson generally clear, and paced appropriately?		
Are there any content misconceptions that need to be corrected/explored?		
What is the highest leverage Action Step for this teacher?		

Notes:

Campbell Elementary currently is conducting individual teacher Data Meetings to discuss specific students and their weekly assessment data (Table 18).

Table 18

Campbell Elementary Individual Teacher Data Meeting Protocol

Data Meeting Date:_____	Data Analysis Protocol

Teacher:_____ Grade Level:____ Section____ Subject:_____
 	
Meeting Objectives:
 	
• To discuss the progress of students towards mastery of previously tested SEs showing concrete evidence of their progress.
 	
• To create plans for address weak SEs from CAs
 	
Meeting Materials: *(Bring/Be able to access and speak about these items)*
 	
• Data Tracker by SE for CA 1
• Individual Progress Tracker and Overall by Section
• Pacing calendar, unit assessment calendar and intervention plan
 	
DATA MEETING AGENDA
 	
Welcome: Review meeting objectives and agenda
 	
How are you tracking student data?
 	
Student CA 1 Data Review
*Share one SE you want to celebrate. Be prepared to discuss why this is a celebration for your students.
*Identify two targeted SEs/skills. Are readiness or supporting?
*What is the intervention plan?
How will you target these SEs?
What:
• has already taken place -
• SEs have been re-taught-
• students have mastered SEs (identify by name)
 	
Next Steps:
*Schedule weekly visits to check on intervention lessons
*Implement new intervention plan
*Create & schedule an assessment to address weak SEs/skills from CA1 *Other:
_____
 	
Meeting wrap-up: Questions, thoughts and concerns
	STUDY YOUR DATA
	
	STUDY and note facts and make quantifiable statements about the data for all students, student groups, and individual students.
	
	Δ Identify the "standouts"
	  ○ What do you notice immediately?
	Δ What about the data surprises you?
	
	Δ What are the key findings when looking at the data?
	
	UNDERSTAND the context and limitations of the data.
	
	Δ What does the data tell us? What does it NOT tell us?
	Δ What information is not accounted for in the data?
	
	POINT OUT the bright spots for Highly Tested SEs
	What good news is there to celebrate?
	
	Δ Identify good news
	  ○Strongest indicators of success?
	  ○Areas of high performance? Areas of growth? Any signs of emerging mastery?
	  ○On which SEs were students most successful?
	
	EVALUATE concerns for highly tested SEs
	Examine data-based indicators and discuss struggles, observations, and new understandings.
	
	Δ Identify areas of concern
	  ○ Greatest need for improvement?
	  ○ Areas of low performance? Areas of decline?
	  ○ Which skills were most missed?
	
	Δ Identify practices or student learning needs which may have contributed to low/ declining performance.
	
	REACH conclusions
	Adjust strategies and plans in response to data-based indicators and observations made. Incorporate new strategies and modify existing ones as needed.
	
	Δ Note key conclusions about the data.
	  ○What are the greatest learning needs and changes in practice going forward?
	
	Δ Make recommendations for addressing identified needs.

The Findings of the Currere Writing Study

Meticulous analysis of closed-caption transcripts of each of the currere writing session Zoom recordings, closed-caption transcripts of the pre- and post-interview Zoom recordings, participants' answers to the article reflection questions, participants' contributions on each session thought catcher, notes taken by the participants, and currere writing selections captured the findings of the Currere Writing Study. The Currere Writing Process Coding Tree contains the categories of a priori codes (see Figure 2) (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moran, 2004). Each a priori code represents the criteria for determining the significant quotes from the transcripts. The a priori Code Tables contain specific lines from the transcript that align with the

code and the emerging themes (see Tables 25-26) (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moran, 2004). The resulting themes were traces of what Taubman (2009) calls audit culture. Audit culture is the "emergence of systems of regulation in which questions of quality are subordinate to logics of management and in which audit serves as a form of meta-regulation whereby the focus is on control of control" (p. 108). Coined by British anthropologists in England as a response to Thatcherite and New Labour's accountability for institutions in the late 1970s, audit culture has resurfaced in 2023 in the reticent form of standardized testing (Taubman, 2009).

Lines of Evidence and the A Priori Codes

The thought catcher activity contains 82 lines of evidence of the a priori codes. the currere writing activity contains 95 lines of evidence of the a priori codes. The transcripts of sessions 1 and 2 produced 177 lines that have evidence of the a priori codes; the article reflection questions contain 315 lines that included evidence of the a priori codes. The pre-interview has 427 lines with evidence and the post-interview contains a total of 631 lines listing evidence of the Currere Writing Process a priori codes (see Tables 19-24).

Participants focus mainly on their critiques of the world, using themselves as researchers, and their critiques of the social sciences in the pre-interview (142 lines), sessions 1 and 2 (57 lines), and the article reflection questions (107 lines). Participants focus more on deepened experiences, objects of consciousness, and cogitations on the thought catcher activity (32 lines) and during the post-interview (267 lines). The currere writing activity (30 lines), the article reflection questions (105 lines), and the thought catcher activity with 30 lines show evidence of an increased focus on knowledge of the self as knower of the world and participants connecting with current reality. The pre-interview contains 132 lines of evidence of participants' experiences as a methodological data source and the consequences of structure (see Tables 19-

24). The post-interview contains the greatest number of lines of script that contain a priori codes at 631 lines (see Table 24).

Table 19

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes in the Pre-Interview

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	25
Existential experience	0
Experience as a methodological data source **Focus on the consequences of structure**	**132**
Critique of the world **Using the self as a researcher** **Your thoughts about theories and ideologies** **Critique of social science**	**142**
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	0
Self-reflective autobiography	28
Knowledge of self as knower of the world Connections with current reality	100
	Total: 427

Table 20

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes During Sessions 1 and 2

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	19
Existential experience	49
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	0

	57
Critique of the world **Using the self as a researcher** **Your thoughts about theories and ideologies** **Critique of social science**	
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	23
Self-reflective autobiography	10
Knowledge of self as knower of the world Connections with current reality	19
	Total: 177

Table 21

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes in the Article Reflection Questions

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	18
Existential experience	42
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	9
Critique of the world **Using the self as a researcher** **Your thoughts about theories and ideologies** **Critique of social science**	**107**
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	0
Self-reflective autobiography	34
Knowledge of self as knower of the world **Connections with current reality**	**105**
	Total: 315

Table 22

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes in the Thought Catcher Activity

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	3
Existential experience	13
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	0
Critique of the world Using the self as a researcher Your thoughts about theories and ideologies Critique of social science	4
Vivid, deepened experiences **Examines objects of consciousness** **Explore cogitations**	**32**
Self-reflective autobiography	0
Knowledge of self as knower of the world **Connections with current reality**	**30**
	Total: 82

Table 23

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes in the Currere Writing Activity

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	0
Existential experience	0
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	0

Critique of the world Using the self as a researcher Your thoughts about theories and ideologies Critique of social science	25
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	15
Self-reflective autobiography	25
Knowledge of self as knower of the world **Connections with current reality**	**30**
	Total: 95

Table 24

Number of Lines of Script Containing A Priori Codes in the Post-Interview

A Priori Code	Number of Lines
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	0
Existential experience	14
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	68
Critique of the world Using the self as a researcher Your thoughts about theories and ideologies Critique of social science	73
Vivid, deepened experiences **Examines objects of consciousness** **Explore cogitations**	**267**
Self-reflective autobiography	9
Knowledge of self as knower of the world Connections with current reality	200
	Total: 631

Table 25

A Priori Codes, Response Source, Participant Responses, and Themes

P1 = Participant 1; P2 = Participant 2; PrI = Pre-Interview; PoI = Post-Interview; CWA =

Currere Writing Activity; RA = Reflection Activity; S1-S5 = Session Number; TCA =

Thought Catcher Activity

A Priori Code	Source	Participant Responses	Themes
Course stripped of its distractions	P1 S5 RA	• Think of how very different a classroom can be when that certain student is absent for one day compared to all the other days that certain student is present.	Fear of chaos in the classroom
	P1 S5 RA	• Besides the cast of characters affecting the curricular environment, seasons, holidays, and even weather can make a difference in the moods, attention, and behavior of the classroom so that the teacher must also adjust.	
Running a course	P2 S1	• I feel like I'm a football coach every day. It's halftime and we're losing 80 to 10. As a coach, you [have to] tell them…you can't go in there at halftime and say we're going to lose. You've got to in there at halftime and say – Hey, you can do this! I believe in you! And so, that's what I'm having to do with these kids.	Fantasies of grandeur
Existential experience	P2 S1	• I haven't read anything educational wise that has brought me happiness. Just thinking about – what if I taught in this setting? What if I was able to do it effectively? Being able to improvise…to where…it's not dead learning. Not just focused on standardized tests [and] Are we above the district? Are we above the schools that are, basically, similar to	Feelings of ineffectiveness Shame of not living up to the ideal

	P2 S1 **P1 S1 TCA**	ours? I LOVE IT! It just seems like a happy place. It really does. • It's just tough. Teaching kids and trying to get them to buy into – we have to be successful with the curriculum. You have to pass this test. We're giving benchmarks, curriculum assessments, [and] we're constantly trying to get the kids to buy into this and… it's NOT a happy place. • The sterilization of the curriculum over the last couple of decades has been a slow process, so slow that I didn't even recognize that it was happening until I found myself crying in my principal's office and saying, 'My joy is gone.' I truly felt that every drop of myself had – and has – been removed from the curriculum. It seems that a properly programmed robot could do what I was being asked to do, and maybe even do a better job of it. I felt ineffective, helpless, and almost worthless as a teacher. So, by reading the introduction to this article, I feel seen. I feel like I'm not the only one struggling with this. I feel like I'm not alone in this vast universe of education where the teacher—truly who she is—doesn't matter anymore.	
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	**P1 PrI** **P1 RA S1**	• There are some topics to avoid, like politics…want to stay away from that other than just to present a very balanced opinion or a not opinion, a balanced view without sharing an opinion. • Although I know that district experts are always working to make improvements and changes, those alterations are not very fast in coming down to the teacher/classroom. They cannot	Embracing the structure of audit culture

	P1 PrI	• possibly anticipate and react to the real-life of the classroom and my students. • The social emotional learning curriculum very shallowly talks about metacognitive thinking, thinking about your thinking. I don't think our curriculum addresses or talks about or even considers consciousness.	
	P2 PrI	• I try to keep it just straightforward. I'm a teacher. I'm showing you respect; you show me respect. We're going to learn and we're going to make sure we do things correct, and don't ask any questions.	
Critique of the world Using the self as a researcher Your thoughts about theories and ideologies Critique of social science	**P1 PrI** **P1 S5 CWA** **P1 PrI** **P1 PrI**	• I feel like I can share my views about general behavior like about science topics…fossil fuels leading to climate change. I feel like that is very scientifically backed. • My opportunities to share my love of learning have been diminishing. As the demands on educators have increased – demands for more meetings, more detailed planning, more documented ways of teaching that will reach every single possible student without falling behind, more parent contacts, more paperwork, more rigorous expectations of alignment with state standards… • The curriculum is written…I think it's not written with humans in mind. <laugh> It's written kind of like test subjects. We're trying to put this input so that we can get a certain output. It's not really written with personal people, actual people in mind. • I think we are very, very focused on the structure of the curriculum and you have to stay on schedule with it, and you have to go in this order. I don't feel we are allowed to explore	New norms of conduct and professional behavior New kinds of subjectivity that are auditable

		in an unstructured way. I was in a district where you were told you could cover it however you want to, just as long as it gets covered. If you don't have an idea where to start, here's a framework you can use if you want to; so, for teachers who have no idea where to start, they did offer some structure if you want it; but it's not a requirement. It was more of an option, but if you thought that you knew a better way to teach this thing, then go for it; as long as it all gets covered.	
	P1 PrI	• It's been a few years in my own classroom since I've had someone, a student who just refused to pick up a pencil, but I have one this year, so I'm dusting off what I remember, and I'm keeping my eye out for whatever might come through my newsfeed. I shared the ideas and teachers responded, "Thank you so much for this. This is great. This is useful information.' I know it's helpful.	
	P1 PoI	• Well, the way that society is today; it seems like if anybody says anything offensive in any way to any person or group, anytime, a person or group doesn't agree with something that you have said, then people may equate disagreement with offense. And so, because of that, when someone begins to feel offended, even if really they just disagree, then they feel that that is something that must be punished. And usually that means making a public example of that person in social media, or the news, or just the mainstream media, or getting that person fired, or totally ruining their life. And however, they feel, they can get away with it. So, with the world, the way it is now, I feel like people tend to overreact	

		P1 PoI	when there is just a difference of opinion.	
			• So, I feel nervous about saying anything that could possibly cause someone to not disagree, but feel offended. So that they would want to come after me, and also being in a position of educating children, being around children, they tend to take that the teachers are held, not necessarily to a higher standard, but maybe a stricter standard than just a sitting person on the street. [Clears throat] And because I'm talking to children, I am aware that children don't always understand clearly what is being said or the conversation, or how it's going. So, there is a chance that they could go home and say something to someone at home about something. 'I said that either how I really did say, but didn't mean it. The way they're saying it or I… they didn't quite get it right when they recounted my words. So, it makes me want to back off even farther from whatever the line is of what's okay to talk about.	
		P1 PoI	• Students are not able to offer their critiques of the world. Certainly not in the curriculum. Everybody's afraid of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing… and that bleeds down to our students, because if I'm afraid to express my beliefs or my opinions or my views about something xyz, then I'm sure not going to ask my kids what they think about xyz' because then I feel like I would have to share my opinion. A student may ask me, 'what is your opinion? What do you think about xyz?' 'Well, I can't say. I can't really tell you what I think, but I want to know what you think.' So, that's why we don't often see in the curriculum,	

	P2 PoI	or even other teachers asking students what they think about the world or sharing their opinions. • The State says the passing rate is already at 55%. I always associate it to our teacher exams. We have to make at least 80 in order to be proficient to teach, but yet we're teaching kids and we have the mastery of the test at 55%, that's passing. Then they bring open-ended questions, and these are extra skills that are being tested.	
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	**P2 S3 TCA** **P2 S3 TCA**	• First of all, we don't like all of the added expectations for our lesson plans. These added expectations are stressing us out. Before we plan our lessons, we're supposed to create know and shows for our students. This is very tedious and time consuming. We have to create these exit tickets. I feel forced. Why can't it be called independent practice anymore? As teachers, we're forced to do all of these things. I can't even follow one of the forks in the road with how I would like to organize my lesson plans. • One-on-One data meetings are the worst. You're sitting at the head of a table with all of the administration. You're forced to explain why you believe your students weren't successful on the TEKS. You're looking at your lowest objectives and your highest objectives. You're trying to say all the right things, but you really want to tell them that this way of teaching—teaching to a test, giving the kids the punchline before you tell the joke isn't working. These students aren't enthused about learning. It's not fun. Teaching it isn't fun either. As I'm typing this I	Traces of Eugenics Collective memory

		keep thinking about the forks in the road. I'm thinking about how much more fun learning could be if it was led by students' interests. I want to traverse over yonder to that creek hiding behind those trees. We can't get creative with our students' interests.	
	P2 S3 TCA	• Teaching isn't as fun anymore. You're constantly thinking about your teacher expectation checklist. This list has all the recommended instructional activities and computer programs students must complete monthly. It's just too much. Here I am rambling about myself. Let's think about the kids. They have no control over the direction of their day. It makes me wonder if we're really giving the kids what they want. Yes, they should learn and shouldn't they have a say so about the topic or even the activities? They might even want to extend the lesson, but we can't because I had to submit my calendar with all of the TEKS I'll cover for the month.	
	P2 S3 TCA	• The curriculum has changed a lot. My grandmother taught for over 40 years. She's now in her late 80's. Whenever I see her, I think about her duties as a teacher compared to ours today. I don't believe she would be happy teaching. This is my 23rd year teaching reading. I first taught at a learning center for a nearby district. We were very data driven. We had to differentiate our instruction. The big difference from this learning center to this school is that we had a 15 to 1 teacher student ratio.	
	P1 PoI	• When you stare into the sky at night. You don't know how big it is. Those stars could be close. They seem close, but they're not. I need to know	

		my kids better. I need to ask them more questions, but I also know that kids, just like all of us, we're protective of our…I'm not going to say 'secrets,' but we're protective of our personal histories and our information. We're not just going to go tell everybody this thing because they asked us. And I'm not saying I should not try to get to know them and to understand their backgrounds. But I also know that, to a point, there's nothing I can do about what they're telling me or not telling me.	
P1 PoI		• So, when I look at myself in the mirror, my brain has an image. You know of what my brain thinks I'm supposed to look like. When I look at myself in the mirror or in this camera on Zoom, I see mostly brown hair. When I see my own picture of myself, which is then flipped, so it's not the way that my brain sees it, it's enough of a change to register a change in my brain, and then I see way more gray hair. I'm learning things about myself. Other people see things about me that I don't see myself, because I have an image in my mind of who I am and confirmation bias. You see what you think you're going to see, but other people sometimes see more of the truth.	
P2 PoI		• In my life growing up, not really seeing a positive black male role model other than in the gym. I never really had that guy. I used to come to work in suits in a certain time back in the day. I feel like they need to see that. I didn't see that myself. I always wish I had an African American teacher, a Black guy, growing up. I always had a woman [teacher] and they were great teachers; they influenced me. That's why I have	

		Fun Friday and a reward system. Wanting to see a male African American teacher motivated me to become a teacher, that I wish I had. A male African American teacher could have possibly made me more successful, to kind of give me the cheat code and let me know this is what happened and you need these skills.	
Self-reflective autobiography	**P1 S5 CWA**	• I think my educational past was, for the most part, not very exceptional…For first grade, I made the move [from a church preschool and Kindergarten] to a private Catholic school. It had a good reputation, but the student behavior was atrocious and the education was lacking: there was no science taught at all.	Self-Sacrifice and Excellence
	P1 S5 CWA	• I earned a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership in one year. I was one of just a few students who had never taught yet. We went straight through to grad school. All the other students were current and experienced educators returning for their advanced degree. I learned how very much I did not know. I also learned that I was not so sure about actually being a school administrator, despite what my degree might allow me to do.	
	P1 S6 CWA	• Getting out of the classroom seems like the next logical step, and I feel ready for it. I don't think I will miss the stress, the deadlines, the endless requirements, and the feeling of overwhelmed that comes in the daily life of a teacher.	
	P1 PoI	• The last time I was asked to think about my educational experience was way back when I was in college to become a teacher, working on my	

		undergraduate degree. That's almost a quarter century ago. Nobody asks teachers. Nobody thinks to ask teachers what was school like when you were in school, or how things were done back then; what you had as a student when you were a kid. Is it still the same or what things have changed? Nobody asks that.	
Knowledge of self as knower of the world Connections with current reality	**P1 S1 RA** **P1 S5 RA** **P1 PrI** **P1 S4 TCA** **P1 CWA**	• …Looking back as the Covid Pandemic started in January of 2020. I wanted to talk about it and discuss it with my students, but my curriculum did not provide me the room to do that. • We are basically erasing the human students from the equation and replacing them with robot students who will only respond in the expected ways. We are not meeting the students where they are. • I can remember some elections that caused my students concern for themselves and their families. That's got to be pretty heavy on them. They were elections in our government that doesn't directly affect the students, but they had heard enough about it from their parents and other sources on social media. • 'Johnny, you're struggling with learning how to use a multiplication chart when you're trying to work with fractions? Well, I'm not scheduled to work with you on that today; today we're supposed to be learning about division with remainders. Just do the best you can to figure it out on your own!' There goes another neat looking fork! Maybe we can go back and visit it someday. • In one possible future, the professional educators that call the	Curriculum void of teacher and student input

		shots will begin to be more aware of how the students learn and what their brains are capable of at various ages and stages. In another possibility, education will get farther and farther away from the actual needs of students. Students and teachers will be led farther and farther down a road that ends up nowhere near where they need to be to be successful in society. They will be really good at old-fashioned schooling, but that doesn't prepare them for modern life.	
	P1 PoI	• Nobody ever asks teachers: What do you think about the curriculum? I have been told that when the State revamps a curriculum of a subject that they put together a committee of lots of people, including classroom teachers, but I've never been consulted. There's never been any kind of a poll or anything. And then, when the state puts out the new curriculum, the list of standards, then the districts, then take the State… correct the State standards and they build the curriculum around it. They pull a few, handful of teachers and other educational experts like instructional coaches and stuff to build a curriculum around the state standards. But again, they don't really ask for input other than just the handpicked few that they choose to do the work. They don't ask us anything. They don't. They make a way for us to give feedback, but I mean, it's not really published that there is a way to give feedback, and I have given feedback before. I didn't see any changes or anything.	

Table 26

Themes Determined by the A Priori Codes, Currere Writing Process Coding Tree, and Data

Analysis

A Priori Code	Themes
Running a course Course stripped of its distractions	Fear of chaos in the classroom Fantasies of grandeur
Existential experience	Feelings of ineffectiveness Shame of not living up to the ideal
Experience as a methodological data source Focus on the consequences of structure	Embracing the structure of audit culture
Critique of the world Using the self as a researcher Your thoughts about theories and ideologies Critique of social science	Auditable subjectivity
Vivid, deepened experiences Examines objects of consciousness Explore cogitations	Traces of Eugenics Collective memory
Self-reflective autobiography	Self-Sacrifice and excellence
Knowledge of self as knower of the world Connections with current reality	Curriculum void of teacher and student input

Deconstruction as a Snag: The One Student

Henrietta Golston, Participant 1 in this research study, stated in her reflection activity

during session 5: "Think of how very different a classroom can be when that certain student is

100

absent for one day compared to all the other days that certain student is present." Ms. Golston wrote the comment in response to Jessica Sierk's (2014) statement in the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments." Jessica Sierk (2014) states in the article:

> The dynamic nature of curriculum means that it is always changing, never static…in a classroom, the cast of characters is not always constant…new students come midway through the year, students move out of the district…all changing the trajectory of the curriculum as a living entity. (p. 10)

Ms. Golston's comment is evidence of her fear of classroom disruptions. I placed Ms. Golston's comment about how the one student affects the classroom with the a priori code "course stripped of its distractions," because the one student in her comments represents the distraction. Teaching can be inspiring, gratifying, and a way to make a difference in the next generation through academia; teaching also has its many challenges due to the dynamic nature of the curriculum. Ms. Golston gave insight to the fear that she has of a chaotic classroom absent of effective classroom management. Taubman (2009) refers to the fear of chaos mentioned in the work of Glassner's (1999) *The Culture of Fear* in which he posits that power and money are the motives for people who seek to explore moral insecurities and temporal remedies. Fear and insecurity are constant variables in the teaching profession. In this case, Ms. Golston mentioned the inherent fear of the one student. Taubman (2009) focuses on how teachers spend long nights grading papers, stay late after school to organize and prepare for the next day, arrive early so they can greet their students, and pour their hearts into their daily instruction. The fear of losing control in the classroom can be a nightmare for a teacher who has spent numerous hours preparing for the students who could, at any moment, embarrass the teacher or call into question the teacher's ability. This trace of fear and anxiety opens the door to a deeply-seated topic that educators have

long since awaited to candidly address after the recent COVID pandemic (Taubman, 2009). Student discipline is a consistent challenge for the education system. Ms. Golston's reflection on how one student can affect the classroom represents what Derrida calls a snag in the data that points toward the underlying criticism that the media places on teachers, schools, and school districts for their performance on standardized tests (Jackson & Mazzei, 2014; Taubman, 2009). This snag in Ms. Golston's response allows me as the researcher to "permit the frailty and insufficiencies of the data to emerge" to allow "nuanced readings of situations" to "become attentive to the snags in the data" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, p. 31). The snags are where "imperfections are revealed, where loose ends abound, and where we (and our participants) trip up, catch an opening, and sometimes stumble," a process that permits the participant to "not know exactly 'who' they themselves are" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, p. 31). This process took hours and hours of me reading and re-reading the transcripts, not just for patterns and a priori codes within the data, but for a deeper snag by thinking with Derrida in the threshold—a point where I "push theory to its limit" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, p. 6). Thinking at the threshold is a difficult process, as thinking with Derrida is not simply an aligning of themes and patterns, but a candid account that is a truth-telling, blatant moment in the data. The trace in Ms. Golston's response about the *one student* connects to inherent fears within the education system that involve race, crime, and the economy.

Watkins (2001) explains, in the words of Thompson, the significance of cultural hegemony in context of the history of education. Cultural hegemony is "exercised by dominant groups in a society [is defined as] the limits of what is possible and inhibits the growth of alternative horizons and expectations" (p. 21). Watkins posits that "intellectuals and schools were crucial to the development of consensus in society, to the rationalization and legitimation of

a given social order…[mitigating] the necessity for the State to use its coercive apparatus to control groups" (p. 21). Philanthropists' influence in society helped to build consensus; philanthropists were capitalistic power brokers, economically driven to become stakeholders in education's "marketplace of ideas" (p. 21). Foundations sought to justify their corporate hierarchy of society with the subsequent divisions of wealth, according to Watkins. The corporate ideals and structural, cultural colonialism of the philanthropic movement sought to create a new social order that presented itself as "natural, inevitable, rational, and optimal" (p. 21). The philanthropic agenda was merely a touched-up and refined presentation of cultural hegemony where Blacks were "politically socialized, given hope, and given at least minimal access to survival [as compradore] or middle class…Black entrepreneurs, clergy, clerks, and teachers were indispensable to the new formula" (p. 21). Black Americans would have their positions as "preachers, morticians, insurance agents, postal employees, and beauticians in the segregated society…while capitalist labor required an abundance of semifeudal sharecropper labor alongside cheap semiskilled industrial labor" (pp. 21-22). In the words of Watkins, "American Industrialism would be built on the backs of Black labor" (p. 22). Latent with accommodationism, post-Civil War race relations in the South dictated that Blacks "learn their place in the new industrial order," meaning that Blacks had to

> accept the world the way it was and embrace the ideology that this was a part of the natural order of the world [with] race relations gradually [changing], presumably for the better, if Blacks were willing to remain within the boundaries of 'acceptable' behavior. (p. 23)

The snag of the *one student* in Ms. Golston's reflective response after reading about the dynamic nature of the curriculum in Sierk's (2014) "Attending to the Medium of Curriculum" section of the article opens up the connections between race, crime, and the economy.

Taubman (2009) characterizes the coercive nature of the discourses and practices that are the essence of audit culture as not explicitly coercive, but rather, represented by the system's "recoding of the fears of violence, particularly black violence, fears reinforced by the media, in terms of procedures that are presented as helping kids" (p. 132). The resulting recoding is "a system that reconstitutes disciplinary control in terms of monitoring and ensuring academic achievement. Taubman follows the traceability of the *one student* by offering a further analysis of the practices of the discipline system:

> Three strikes and you are out, tough love, holding kids accountable, ensuring there are consequences for not reaching the standard, keeping kids under surveillance and monitoring behavior – these practices and language are part of 'governing through crime,' but translated into education they become the language and practices of standards and accountability. (p. 132)

Audit practices of high stakes testing, the marketing of the predictability of the system, procedures and routines, and the assurance of success that a standardized testing system promises, are practices of control that impose punitive discipline consequences that "criminalize" students (p. 132). Discipline issues are the second-most reason why teachers leave the teaching profession with low compensation being first (Taubman, 2009). Teachers expect for administration to address student discipline incidents expediently and by assigning a higher level of consequences according to the district's Student Code of Conduct. With the media's focus on the increasing role of violence in schools and how it has affected America nationwide, teachers,

who possess a love for teaching and seek to make an impact on students' current interactions with educational experiences, Taubman (2009) posits that educators recode focusing on the causal roots to the discipline problems and violence in schools as the need for "highly qualified teachers" and "crime itself is recoded as low test scores" (p. 133). The language of standards and accountability does not include a deeper analysis of why Black and Hispanic students do not perform as well as White or Asian students on standardized testing or the underlying reasons why African American and Hispanic students experience more discipline problems in urban schools (Taubman, 2009). Holding teachers accountable for such a vast problem in student achievement is unfair and not leading to the root of the problem. African American students disproportionately represent increased dropout rates and districts' discipline data shows a disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic males being assigned discretionarily to alternative education placements for violations of the Student Code of Conduct. The inequities of parenting skills, poor teachers, and increased anxiety and depression as a result of the pandemic, district-wide inequities in distribution of resources, an ineffective curriculum, and student non-performance have been re-coded by education policymakers as placing a "qualified teacher in every classroom" (p. 133). This heroic aspect of teaching is one of the major reasons why teachers have accepted and embraced audit culture. The save-the-day mentality of the teacher, especially when competitive teacher pay is central to the decision for an aspiring teacher to enter the education profession, thrives within audit culture.

The Deconstructive Moment: The Coach at Halftime

The work of deconstruction required me to become more "attentive" and "almost obsessed with the snags in the data" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 31). The reading and re-reading of the transcripts took several ten to twelve-hour days of silent study in the library alone

to immerse myself in the data as the researcher, which is a part of the process. I wanted to be sure that I did not miss any critical moments in the responses. After closer study of the data, I would readily discover a snag that led to thinking on the threshold with an imperfection of loose ends, of uncertainty, of irruptive nature, that enhanced my understanding of audit culture through teachers' study of the Currere Writing Process. During session 1 of the Currere Writing Study, Bartholomew Darby, Participant 2, made a statement that captured my attention:

> I feel like I'm a football coach every day. It's halftime and we're losing 80 to 10. As a coach, you gotta' tell them…you can't go in there at halftime and say we're going to lose. You've got to go in there at halftime and say—Hey, you can do this! I believe in you! And so, that's what I'm having to do with these kids.

Participants read the abstract and the "Introduction: One Educator's Journey of Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk (2014). The abstract explains that Sierk (2014) explores John Dewey's (1934, 1938) "themes of improvisation, participation, communication, and experience… and the idea of 'the unexpected turn'" for discussing curriculum and learning (p.2.). The article is written in narrative form as a presentation of Sierk's 3-year journey as an educator and problematizes standardized testing through the lens of the currere classroom. Sierk's (2014) article is a key part of this study. Teachers read sections of the article and complete the article reflection questions and thought catcher activity during each of the currere writing study sessions. Sierk (2014) states in the introduction that she "barely recognized [herself]…[she] had become cynical and jaded…[she] had stopped believing that education had the power to change the often-inequitable status quo of our society" (p. 3). She states in the article that through her "encounters with the ideas of Dewey, Pinar, and Eisner…[she has reclaimed] a passion for and sincere belief in the power education can hold for

students and teachers alike" (p. 3). She uses a quote by John Dewey (1938) about improvisation, stating that "improvisation that takes advantage of special occasions prevents teaching and learning from being stereotyped and dead" to come to a stark conclusion. She concludes: "One could say that the disconnect [she] was feeling at the end of [her] K-12 teaching experience was due to the fact that [her] teaching was, in the words of Dewey, dead" (p. 3).

Starting the first Currere Writing Study session with the participants reading the abstract and introduction led to the teachers being open to discussing their current feelings about standardized testing. I placed Mr. Darby's quote with the a priori code of "running a course," because the comment provides evidence that the course has been set by audit culture and accountability; he is required to encourage students to achieve on the test. Mr. Darby compared his job as a teacher in the current audit culture to that of a coach at halftime who must make the odds look and sound better than they really are, indicating that he is running a course. Putting on the façade of heroism is a sense of self-sacrifice that teachers experience daily. Mr. Darby's comparison of himself to a coach who must encourage his team even when they are down by seventy points at halftime contains traces of conscious fantasies of grandeur, as explored by Taubman (2009). Conscious fantasies of grandeur are narratives of selflessness, salvation, and tenacity in which the teacher emerges as the rescuer of the student. The rhetoric of audit culture supposedly places the student at the center of the education system with all the students' needs as the primary focus of the school system. The teacher is reduced to instructional best practices for student success or failure (Taubman, 2009). Audit culture is a continuous illumination for teachers to believe that they are placing the students at the center by "sacrificing their autonomy, inner life, and political engagement for the promise of certainty, professionalism, and local celebrity" (p. 146) Taubman (2009) provides analysis of teacher "omnipotence," when the

teacher sacrifices themselves for the sake of the students (p. 147). This feeling of omnipotence is a way for teachers to "defend against feelings of humiliation and worthlessness," while inadvertently producing those same feelings when teachers act as if they are all-knowing (p. 147). Teachers' acceptance of the "all about the kids" mantra is an acquiescence to their own self-monitoring and self-regulating practices that produce feelings of worthlessness (p. 147).

Mr. Darby expressed that he has the responsibility to encourage the students at "halftime" in the game, even when the students are behind in their learning. The language of audit culture makes teachers the most important factor to students in school and pressures teachers to be highly qualified to satisfy policymakers who keep a watchful eye and to enhance their professional status in the teaching profession. Teachers are made to feel a false sense of confidence that they can increase student achievement by closing achievement gaps, cure the race issues, solve the inequities in the school, prepare students for their future selves in society, and if teachers can do all of this—then they will receive nationwide recognition for the self-sacrifices they have made (Taubman, 2009). Teachers do not revolt against audit culture because they have grown to embrace the "fantasy of grandiosity and worthlessness" that Taubman (2009) discusses in *Teaching by Numbers*. Teachers enjoy the idea of being recognized for their efforts and receiving praise for making students progress in their achievement data. Taubman (2009) characterizes this fantasy of grandiosity:

> I am a true professional now, like a physician, recognized by those in the know, and possessing scientifically based research practices. I am saving poor kids of color. We are making sure those terrible failing schools will be held accountable. Oh, but my classes are not going so well, kids are not passing their high stakes exams, what a failure I am. I'd better focus more on the tests, data, and best practices. (pp. 148-149)

The juxtaposed feelings of grandiosity and worthlessness become the cycle in which the teacher becomes accustomed to as they commit to the language of standards and accountability and audit practices.

The Existential Experience

The a priori code of existential experience contains quotes from the teacher participants that hover between the negative and the positive and show evidence of a freedom after despair. Existentialism is the "combining of the focus of phenomenology on the intentional character of human existence with a radical insistence on individual authenticity" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 103). Existential sociology promotes "a return to the direct, lived experience of the individual fieldworker as the source of knowledge about the social world" and that "inquirers are a part of the phenomenon they seek to understand" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 103). Qualitative inquiry deals with "emotionality, subjectivity, and the lived experiences of the fieldworker as the source of knowledge about the social world" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 103).

The Currere Experience: The Tension of Memory and Fidelity

During session 1 of the Currere Writing Study, Mr. Darby expressed his views of the currere process after reading the abstract and introduction of "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" by Jessica Sierk (2014):

> I haven't read anything educational wise that has brought me happiness. Just thinking about— what if I taught in this setting? What if I was able to do it effectively? Being able to improvise…to where…it's not dead learning. Not just focused on standardized tests [and] Are we above the district? Are we above the schools that are, basically, similar to ours? I LOVE IT! It just seems like a happy place. It really does.

Mr. Darby's question of, "What if I was able to do it effectively?" is a destabilizing moment that represents the "tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to [him], and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 30). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe deconstruction as "what happens" and is a "reading/doing/thinking that requires the continuous opening and exploration of the spaces, passions, and meanings not yet understood or *deconstructed*" (p. 28, emphasis in original). Mr. Darby feels that he is ineffective by asking this question specifically, candidly, and directly.

I approach Mr. Darby's comment with a deconstructive lens that "prevents closure;" with a "reading/rending/rendering that allows that which is threatening to the order and stability of the hierarchy to emerge" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 28). The established audit culture has made Mr. Darby feel ineffective. Taubman (2009) provides an analysis of the "loss, melancholic embrace of audit" that has lulled teachers into a false sense of security (p. 150). He posits that a laser focus on standards and accountability defers the blame to teachers and also deflects the attention from larger issues, such as the failure of true integration and how the increase in poverty has affected the school systems, which has led to inequities in schools. Important topics like racial integration and the effects of poverty are "excised" from the public dialogue (p. 151). The topics of poverty and racial integration have been recoded as multiculturalism or "cultural sensitivity" by policymakers to address structural racism in schools (p. 151). Instead of actually taking a stand on inequities in schools and economic injustice, educational establishments focus on what can be controlled—the teacher in the classroom. Mr. Darby expressed in his comment the pressure that he feels as he continually compares his students' scores to those of general students in the district and scores of students in similar schools. Mr. Darby is being open and

honest about how the process of looking and comparing his students' data to the data of others' makes him feel. He expressed that he loves the idea of improvisation and that the currere classroom is a "happy place."

Mr. Darby continued his reflection on currere and the candid account of Sierk's (2014) educational journey by stating:

It's just tough. Teaching kids and trying to get them to buy into – we have to be successful with the curriculum. You have to pass this test. We're giving benchmarks, curriculum assessments, [and] we're constantly trying to get the kids to buy into this and…it's NOT a happy place.

Mr. Darby spoke about the difficulty of getting students to see the rationale behind standardized testing and the importance of performing well on the test. The field of education has experienced many losses; it is the loss of resources, status, and power that have led to a sense of dependence on the laws of audit culture (Taubman, 2012). There are two specific ideals that have been "rendered unspeakable" which cause educators to experience a sense of "melancholy suffused with feelings of guilt" that make teachers "susceptible to audit systems;" racial integration and economic equality have been swept under the educational rug of inequity (p. 153).

Recent school research on integration in schools shows that schools are now more segregated since *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Hammond, 2015; Taubman, 2009, 2012; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007; Wing, 2018). We mostly hear about diversity and sensitivity to other cultures in education. However, we hear more about closing the achievement gap. Audit culture, "like the law, offers a reprieve from the feeling of guilt caused by the loss of the ideal of integration, and allows us to talk about diversity while remaining silent about the loss of an ideal" (Taubman, 2009, p. 154). The guilt that teachers feel is a result of the suppressed feelings

of decades of not being able to reach the levels of ideal that were set forth by national integration and economic policies. Cases like *Brown vs. Board of Education* sought to flatten the hierarchies of racism and classism. Teachers feel the hefty pressures of standards and accountability, as policymakers have shifted the responsibility to the factors that they can control: the teacher and what she or he teaches each day. The guilt of not being able to meet the expectations of achieving student success is heavy and intolerable. The argument that Taubman makes in *Teaching by Numbers* (2009) is critical and essential for understanding the findings of this research study:

> What the discourses and practices of standards and accountability offer is the opportunity to find reprieve…the tenet that teachers are most responsible for student success, and that by holding schools of education and teachers accountable, we will be able to close the achievement gap between whites and blacks and Latinos, offers those who feel guilty an opportunity to talk about diversity and through the implementation of standards and high stakes testing to feel they are really doing something about racism. (p.154)

The attention placed on diversity and standards with accountability masks the very real problems of racism and economic inequities (Taubman, 2009). The recoding of the issues in education are a part of the audit culture that allows for the continuation of the status quo. Policymakers recode the war against poverty to reflect corporate language of preparing students for the 21st century global market. Audit culture reinforces teachers' belief that they are helping students who are experiencing poverty to get jobs. Mr. Darby expressed this recoding in his comment above. Mr. Darby recognized that it is "tough," but that the audit culture prevails by him continually selling the idea that students must pass the test and by him constantly having to get the kids to buy into the audit culture.

A Destabilizing Moment of Truth

Ms. Golston provided a candid response in her thought catcher activity that is evidence of how the auditee embraces the tenets of audit culture without even realizing the process is taking place:

> The sterilization of the curriculum over the last couple of decades has been a slow process, so slow that I didn't even recognize that it was happening until I found myself crying in my principal's office and saying, 'My joy is gone.' I truly felt that every drop of myself had— and has— been removed from the curriculum. It seems that a properly programmed robot could do what I was being asked to do, and maybe even do a better job of it. I felt ineffective, helpless, and almost worthless as a teacher. So, by reading the introduction to this article, I feel seen. I feel like I'm not the only one struggling with this. I feel like I'm not alone in this vast universe of education where the teacher— truly who she is— doesn't matter anymore.

The words "truly who she is" captures the destabilizing moment in Ms. Golston's response. Ms. Golston used the phrase "sterilization of the curriculum," which indicates that the curriculum is not productive. The thought catcher activity has captured the essence of audit culture. Ms. Golston expresses that she cannot be who she truly is in the classroom with the practices and requirements of audit culture.

The obsession with high stakes testing causes teachers stress as they struggle to teach tested content according to the schedule, analyze their students' data to determine the misconception in the learning process, and the heavy mantle of being accountable for their students' subsequent performance on the state test (Abeles, 2015). Federal and state requirements have tied student performance to school funding and teacher evaluations, representing a re-

coding of school financial inequities into teacher accountability. Ms. Golston's response to how the sterilization of the curriculum has been a slow process and how she did not realize it until her joy was gone, is evidence of her pulling from her collective memory. Collective memory is "distinct from individual memory in terms of substance, rather than manifestation… [it is] patterns of social distribution wherein sets of memories regarding major cultural moments…manifest themselves into an individual understanding of the world" (Winfield, 2007). Ms. Golston is expressing her inner voice that has been suppressed by audit culture unbeknownst to her; her subconscious had not yet processed the tremendous affect that the requirements of the audit culture has placed on her, causing her to even compare her duties as a teacher to that of the effectiveness of a robot. She continues by stating that she feels "seen" knowing that the author of the article and she have similar thoughts about their journeys in teaching.

Embracing the Structure of Audit Culture

During Ms. Golston's pre-interview, she stated: "There are some topics to avoid, like politics…'want to stay away from that other than just to present a very balanced opinion or a not opinion, a balanced view without sharing an opinion." The professional practices and standards of the teaching profession are relegated by state and local district requirements. The Education Code states that teachers can discuss politics in a balanced and objective manner. The Code of Ethics states that teachers are prohibited from using their classrooms for political advocacy or for indoctrination (Texas Education Agency, 2023). The findings of this qualitative study are not in any way questioning the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards set for the professional practices of teachers. This qualitative study examines the effect of teachers' study of the Currere Writing Process on teachers' views of students and teacher collective memory of the data

meeting process. Teachers should not, however, be fearful of addressing current events in the classroom through healthy, balanced dialogue.

Ms. Golston wrote in her reflection activity during the first session, a response regarding how the school district works swiftly to adopt changes:

Although I know that district experts are always working to make improvements and changes, those alterations are not very fast in coming down to the teacher/classroom. They cannot possibly anticipate and react to the real-life of the classroom and my students.

Ms. Golston's response provides evidence that she is embracing audit culture. Her statement is indicative that she supports the district and demonstrates an empathetic understanding of how the district works to make changes. This comment is in significant contrast to her response during the post-interview. Ms. Golston explained during the post-interview her frustration with not being able to give input on the curriculum:

Nobody ever asks teachers: What do you think about the curriculum? I have been told that when the State revamps a curriculum of a subject that they put together a committee of lots of people, including classroom teachers, but I've never been consulted. There's never been any kind of a poll or anything. And then, when the State puts out the new curriculum, the list of standards, then the districts, then take the State… correct the State standards and they build the curriculum around it. They pull a few, handful of teachers and other educational experts like instructional coaches and stuff to build a curriculum around the state standards. But again, they don't really ask for input other than just the handpicked few that they choose to do the work. They don't ask us anything. They don't. They make a way for us to give feedback, but I mean, it's not really published that there

is a way to give feedback, and I have given feedback before. I didn't see any changes or anything.

After six sessions of participating in the Currere Writing Study, I began to see Ms. Golston express her thoughts and opinions more freely. I placed her empathetic comment about how the district moves swiftly to make improvements and how the district "cannot possibly anticipate and react to the real-life of the classroom and [her] students" in the a priori code of *Experience as a methodological data source* and *Focusing on the consequences of structure*, because Ms. Golston's complacency with the district's slow response to the needs of students is indicative of audit culture. Ms. Golston's acceptance of the untimeliness of the district indicates that she embraces the requirement that teachers must complete tasks in a timely manner, especially when it comes to instruction and getting students to pass the state exam. The post-interview response demonstrates that her responses have, in some way, been affected by the Currere Writing Study. While I placed her comment in the *Knowledge of self as knower of the world* and *Connections with current reality*, I decided to present it here to show how the Currere Writing Study affects teacher participants' responses. Ms. Golston's comment regarding the state only asking the instructional coaches and the "handpicked few" for their input regarding the standards represents a snag in the data that is a trace leading toward the idea that possibly the teachers who are selected as lead teachers have been trained in accepting the tenets of audit culture and, perhaps, a random teacher would not be sensitive to the expectations of providing input that would support the accountability culture.

During the pre-interview, Ms. Golston talked about the social emotional curriculum of the district: "The social emotional learning curriculum very shallowly talks about metacognitive thinking, thinking about your thinking. I don't think our curriculum addresses or talks about or

even considers consciousness." One of the consequences of an objective, audit-centered curriculum is the extraction of the affective aspects of humanness, the subjective self, and the excision of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis allows us to analyze and understand who we are in the world and how the world affects us personally; psychoanalysis permits deeper exploration of feelings, emotions, and even anxieties (Taubman, 2012). Whereas audit culture is concerned with evidence of progress that can be prescriptively analyzed and generalized across education systems.

Mr. Darby made a comment regarding the expectations of his classroom that is indicative of the historic zero tolerance of the early 2000s in education: "I try to keep it just straightforward. I'm a teacher. I'm showing you respect; you show me respect. We're going to learn and we're going to make sure we do things correct, and don't ask any questions." Teachers use this rule as a way to gain control of their classrooms. The mitigating factor is whether the students are accepting of the rule. Mr. Darby's expectation of students to reciprocate respect might temporarily affect strict rules; the part about not asking questions will definitely be challenged by students' inquisitiveness.

Teachers' Critique of the World

Ms. Golston shared her critique of the world, her thoughts on her being a researcher, her thoughts about theories and ideologies, and her critique of social science during her pre-interview. When asked if she can share her critique of the world in her classroom, Ms. Golston stated how she feels she can share her views: "I feel like I can share my views about general behavior like about science topics…fossil fuels leading to climate change. I feel like that is very scientifically backed." Teachers feeling more comfortable with teaching science has an historical significance. The mantra of optimizing learning for all students became popular during the

George W. Bush Administration. The professionalization agenda to place the professional prowess of teachers on the level with doctors and lawyers set the groundwork for a scientifically-backed research practice for teaching and curriculum influenced by applied psychology and the learning sciences (Taubman, 2009). Simple, predictable, and the regulatory control of behaviorism with its strict standards and rigorous training impresses policymakers (Taubman, 2009). The military's influence on education was responsible for learning objectives, analysis of tasks, and criterion-referenced standardized testing (Taubman, 2009). The military led education in the efforts to better understand successful instruction. Taubman (2009) turns to the work of Mager who asserted that:

> …Successful instruction requires the instructor to precisely define the objectives to be accomplished…A useful objective includes…what the learner is expected to be able to do…the conditions under which the performance is expected to occur…and the level of competence that must be reached…In order to measure whether the objective is met, the instructor needs to phase it in terms of demonstratable behaviors…A change in behavior suggests successful instruction. (p. 163)

Audit culture depends upon task analysis, a step-by-step process of implementation, and a generalizable result that can be replicated and shared with all schools. Ms. Golston continued to share her thoughts about her experience in her currere writing activity at the end of session 5:

> My opportunities to share my love of learning have been diminishing. As the demands on educators have increased – demands for more meetings, more detailed planning, more documented ways of teaching that will reach every single possible student without falling behind, more parent contacts, more paperwork, more rigorous expectations of alignment with state standards…

Ms. Golston's responses during session 5 of the Currere Writing Study indicate that the study of the Currere Writing Process is affecting her views of teaching. Ms. Golston shared during session 5 that the demands of teaching are oftentimes overwhelming. During her pre-interview, Ms. Golston explained her views of the curriculum:

> The curriculum is written…I think it's not written with humans in mind. <laugh> It's written kind of like test subjects. We're trying to put this input so that we can get a certain output. It's not really written with personal people, actual people in mind.

Ms. Golston's response in the pre-interview is reminiscent of the military's influence on education. The military imported the terms of outcomes, performance objectives, and task analysis into the field of education (Taubman, 2009). The military's "quest for certainty" is a trace that led to educators' "desire for command and control" and a continual focus on behaviorism, proven scientific processes, the learning sciences, and cybernetics (p. 169). In 1996, the term "learning machines" appeared in an article written by Ann Brown and Joseph Campione titled "Psychological Theory and the Design of Innovative Learning Environments: On Procedures, Principles, and Systems" (Taubman, 2009, p. 169). They wrote: "People are excellent all-purpose learning machines" (Brown & Campione, p. 289 as cited in Taubman, 2009, p. 169). The military's influence on teaching introduced more problems, as the military's concern with World Wars was far removed from the microcosmic issues close to home in the classroom (Taubman, 2009). The solutions proposed by the military for education were devoid of the understanding of the emotional needs of classrooms, a neglect of the depths of knowledge and curriculum, and representative of an overall mismatch in complexity; this practice led to a strengthening of the Eugenics Movement in America—"a reliance on the premise that human worth was the function of a hierarchical system based on race and class" (Taubman, 2009;

Winfield, 2007, pp. 4-5). Eugenics is a science that involves processes of "improving the 'stock' of human populations" and the collective memories of how certain ideologies have withstood the test of time (Winfield, 2007, p. 14).

During the pre-interview, Ms. Golston continued to speak on the structure of the curriculum and her critique of EISD's specificity in the order of how the curriculum is taught:

> I think we are very, very focused on the structure of the curriculum and you have to stay on schedule with it, and you have to go in this order. I don't feel we are allowed to explore in an unstructured way. I was in a district where you were told you could cover it however you want to, just as long as it gets covered. If you don't have an idea where to start, here's a framework you can use if you want to; so, for teachers who have no idea where to start, they did offer some structure if you want it; but it's not a requirement. It was more of an option, but if you thought that you knew a better way to teach this thing, then go for it as long as it all gets covered.

Ms. Golston brought up a valid point of view that would give teachers some autonomy within the curriculum. Central to audit culture is the need to monitor teacher implementation of objectives and adherence to the curriculum schedule. The Currere Writing Process is in direct contrast to audit culture in that it allows improvisation within the learning environment. Ms. Golston mentioned that in her previous district, she could cover the subject matter however she wanted to, as long as she taught the necessary information. Districts whose accountability status are in question based on testing and accountability measures, must adhere to strict, specific expectations to show that students have made progress on the state test.

Sierk (2014) examines the current testing culture and concludes that the supposed scripted environment of the classroom can be "contaminated" by how the teaching occurs in the

during instruction (p. 9). She analyzes the classroom environment by explaining John Dewey's idea of the "human contribution" and how the human contribution is a factor in "what actually happens" in the classroom (p. 9). Teachers will ultimately change the daily instruction to meet the needs of the students and students will influence the changes by how they interact in the classroom. Ms. Golston spoke of the changes that occur in the classroom by stating:

> It's been a few years in my own classroom since I've had someone, a student who just refused to pick up a pencil, but I have one this year, so I'm dusting off what I remember…

The topic of discipline post-Pandemic is one that presents a constant point of quandary for educators. The psychology of the student and her or his intrinsic motivation becomes a concept worthy of exploration. The issue of the absence of psychoanalysis, again, resurfaces in the education system. The social efficiency movement took over the nation in the early part of the twentieth century. School administrators looked to psychology for answers to questions about how to manage student behavior, needing a rationalization for placing restrictions on students. Social efficiency educators believed that education prepares the learner for life and that schools should provide what society needs through curriculum requirements (Kliebard, 2004). According to the theory of social efficiency, education prepares children for fifty years of adult life and "not for twenty years of childhood and youth" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 105). Psychologists are experts in the field of education; educators seek answers from psychologists to gain understanding of human character and the changes in human behavior (Taubman, 2012). Behavioral issues are at the center of psychoanalysis. The Currere Writing Process is a subjective way to give students a voice in the curriculum, means to providing agency for students to actualize their learning, and a psychoanalytic tool for students to explore the subconscious mind and reasons for their behaviors

and emotions (Pinar, 2012). Pinar (2012) explains that "without the agency of subjectivity, education evaporates, replaced by the conformity compelled by scripted curricula and standardized tests" (Pinar, 2012, p. 43).

Ms. Golston's student who refuses to pick up a pencil must be motivated in audit culture so the teacher can reach them in order to show that the student has made progress. Ms. Golston must answer the question of why the student is refusing to pick up a pencil to do the work. She is even committed to "dusting off what she remembers" and will read up on strategies. Motivation is how we persuade others to do something or have a desire to do something and the incentives that "could control or condition individuals" (Taubman, 2009, p. 176). The research on motivation has led to further investigation of the factors that create deeper, intrinsic motivation. As schools spend more money on school-wide reward programs, the classroom strategies for motivating students to adhere to the requirements of audit culture have become ineffective, as students are increasingly less enthused to participate in accountability practices of self-monitoring (Taubman, 2009).

Thinking with Theory at the Threshold

During Ms. Golston's post-interview, she talked about how society deals with differences of opinions. Taubman (2009) has deconstructed the language of standards and accountability and his thinking with theory has produced questions of irruptive nature as snags. He asks:

But what if real education happens when something doesn't work? …What if education consists of some interruption in the homeostatic circuit, an interruption that exceeds, jams up, or interrupts that circuit? What if the aim of education is not learning? What if there is no aim to education other than the brief coming together of teachers and students to

question, explore, study, compose, create, and experience a kind of life that most will

rarely experience again in our market-driven world? (p. 195)

I introduce Ms. Golston's response about how society views differences of opinion as offense in

alignment with Taubman's thinking with theory questions, because Ms. Golston concludes that:

We are generally conditioned in our society to see disagreement as bad and something to

be avoided…but it is through civil disagreement that we stretch ourselves and help to

expand others' thinking. This is often where the aha moments come along; it's where the

growth happens.

Taubman enters the threshold, (the limits) of his thinking with deconstruction by stating

that the real education happens when something does not work, even asking the question: "What

if the obsession with learning keeps us on track but also keeps us from being educated?" (p. 195)

The regulatory practices of audit culture are shackles that prevent true learning. Policymakers

and the state are obsessed with proving to financiers that teachers are worthy of the money they

are paid for their services. The accountability system tracks the data on state tests with the

objective of students performing at Meets or Masters on the test and the obsession with this

tracking is the center of education. Ms. Golston continued her explanation and critique of society

during the post-interview:

Well, the way that society is today; it seems like if anybody says anything offensive in

any way to any person or group, anytime, a person or group doesn't agree with something

that you have said, then people may equate disagreement with offense. And so, because

of that, when someone begins to feel offended, even if really they just disagree, then they

feel that that is something that must be punished. And usually that means making a public

example of that person in social media, or the news, or just the mainstream media, or

getting that person fired, or totally ruining their life. And however they feel, they can get away with it. So with the world, the way it is now, I feel like people tend to overreact when there is just a difference of opinion.

A destabilizing moment occurred when Ms. Golston mentioned social media. The media plays a major role in how teachers are viewed in society. Peter Taubman (2009) helps us to understand the recoding of national macro-level fears of institutional racism and class structure into a "more manageable fear that teachers and teacher educators were not measuring up" (p. 107). Social media further exacerbates the issues in education latent with racism and class inequities. Teachers are depicted in the media as "a dysfunctional population in need of intervention" (p. 107). Teachers are boots on the ground on a battlefield of learning in the classroom setting while policymakers continue to impose increasing expectations on teachers. The teacher, especially when the media brings to the forefront the issues of teacher pay, applies self-regulation, and compares their previous teaching strategies with scripted teaching; this thinking process leads teachers to begin to believe that their teaching, prior to its scripting by the accountability system with specific actions that lead to specific outcomes, was dysfunctional and ineffective.

Ms. Golston continued to speak on the nervousness and fear that she feels about possibly offending someone in her classroom:

So, I feel nervous about saying anything that could possibly cause someone to not disagree, but feel offended. So that they would want to come after me, and also, being in a position of educating children, being around children, they tend to take that the teachers are held, not necessarily to a higher standard, but maybe a stricter standard than just a sitting person on the street. [Clears throat] And because I'm talking to children, I am

aware that children don't always understand clearly what is being said or the conversation, or how it's going. So, there is a chance that they could go home and say something to someone at home about something. 'I said that either how I really did say, but, didn't mean it. The way they're saying it or I... they didn't quite get it right when they recounted my words. So, it makes me want to back off even farther from whatever the line is of what's okay to talk about.

Ms. Golston is verbalizing how standards work; "standards work...by standardizing people and making them into self-monitoring, self-motivating persons who use [them] to align themselves with...regulations," recoded as "empowerment, standards and standardization" (Taubman, 2009, p. 114). Ms. Golston is self-monitoring her own professionalism. The snag in her response is a destabilizing moment where she becomes deeply entranced in a fear of being depicted by a student or parent in a way that would portray her negatively. Ms. Golston's response is a trace latent with the heaviness of the teachers' responsibility to connect with the microcosmic learning community while ensuring that she monitor herself according to the problems and needs of the community (Taubman, 2009). Ms. Golston is constantly reflecting on self-improvement in order to meet the needs of set performance standards that "strip the individual of any autobiographical idiosyncrasy" (p. 117). Ms. Golston expresses the pressures she feels of the obsessive-compulsive self-monitoring imposed by the standardization of her work routine.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a chronic mental disorder in which a person has reoccurring thoughts and compulsions that she or he feels compelled to repeat over and over. Taubman (2009) provides an adapted account of Collier and Ong's explanation of the standardization of the curriculum:

Standards require substantial changes in work routines, in the physical organization of production processes, and in record-keeping procedures to allow the production of a vast quantity of information that is 'legible' to…regulators…in diverse sites…In order to determine how well standards are met, how successful one is at meeting the performance standards, some form of commensurability is required. Quantification emerges as the way to further make commensurable diverse phenomena. (p. 117)

Ms. Golston expresses the fear that has been instilled in teachers, that they must not veer away from the expectations of the curriculum and that, if they do, they will face consequences. As teachers should use their professional discretion when addressing certain topics in their teaching, teachers should not be nervous or fearful. The curriculum includes performance standards to ensure that "work can be broken down into behaviors that can be easily transported across boundaries, and reproduced regardless of the location, school, classroom, or students" (p. 117). Standards "erase differences among individuals, populations, histories, locations" with the nation-wide goal of so-called equity and the mantra of providing all students with an excellent education (p. 117).

Ms. Golston continues with a more detailed account of her critique of the curriculum and how the curriculum affects her instruction as a teacher:

Students are not able to offer their critiques of the world. Certainly not in the curriculum. Everybody's afraid of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing… and that bleeds down to our students, because if I'm afraid to express my beliefs or my opinions or my views about something xyz, then I'm sure not going to ask my kids what they think about xyz' because then I feel like I would have to share my opinion. A student may ask me, 'what is your opinion? What do you think about xyz?' 'Well, I can't say. I can't really

tell you what I think, but I want to know what you think.' So, that's why we don't often see in the curriculum, or even other teachers asking students what they think about the world or sharing their opinions.

Taubman (2009) candidly explains the phenomena that Ms. Golston speaks of in her post-interview:

…In reducing everyone and everything to quantifiable data, ranging from test scores and attendance records to performance on behavioral check sheets, all historical, personal, idiosyncratic, and context-specific details about the person or event are erased, creating, as the anthropologist Geoffrey C. Bowker states, 'the least possible information that can be shared about events, objects and people while still maintaining a viable discourse around them.' (p. 117)

Deeper than simply applying a Code of Ethics or Professional Standards, Ms. Golston expresses an inner dilemma that most educators experience at some point in their teaching. The continual self-monitoring and monitoring of data and outcomes produces a fear that affects how she relates to her students and the instruction in her classroom. Constant self-monitoring is an unhealthy space to ruminate. This is partly due to the pressures that were placed on the education system by lawyers' and accountants' views that public finances in a particular service must be validated by the success of the outcomes. In the field of education, the investment in teaching is justified by student outcomes of standardized testing (Taubman, 2009). This leaves no room for the peculiarity of the individual. Ms. Golston mentioned before that, who she really is, is being left out of the curriculum. Ms. Golston and her students' lived experiences are detached from her teaching.

Mr. Darby expresses in his post-interview his quandary with the passing rates and expectations for students compared to the passing rates for teacher exams:

> The state says the passing rate is already at 55%. I always associate it to our teacher exams. We have to make at least 80 in order to be proficient to teach, but yet we're teaching kids and we have the mastery of the test at 55%, that's passing. Then they bring open-ended questions, and these are extra skills that are being tested.

Mr. Darby is essentially asking the question: Why are our expectations of students so low? Yet, the expectations to teach students is so high? The disparity in the passing rate of aspiring teachers mirrors the inequities across the nation in our schools. White teacher candidates score higher on teacher exams than Black or Hispanic teacher candidates. The 2021-2022 state data shows that, of 21,616 newly certified teachers, only 12% are African American and 29% are Hispanic, while 53% of the State's newly certified teachers are White (Texas Education Agency, 2023). I have met many African American educators during my 24 years of experience who were unable to continue their service in education due to missing the passing rate by only one or two points. The field of education turns away excellent teachers on the basis of a number.

Examining Cogitations on a Deeper Level

Mr. Darby refers to Sierk's (2014) metaphor of a "fork in the road" that she uses to describe the new paths and changes of a dynamic curriculum, to express the pressure that he feels when planning his lessons (p. 9). He expresses his cogitations at a deeper level in his comment in the session 3 thought catcher activity (p. 9):

> First of all, we don't like all of the added expectations for our lesson plans. These added expectations are stressing us out. Before we plan our lessons, we're supposed to create know and shows for our students. This is very tedious and time consuming. We have to

create these exit tickets. I feel forced. Why can't it be called independent practice

anymore? As teachers, we're forced to do all of these things. I can't even follow one of

the forks in the road with how I would like to organize my lesson plans.

Mr. Darby reflects upon data meetings after reading the section of the article titled "Attending to

the Medium of the Curriculum":

One-on-one data meetings are the worst. You're sitting at the head of a table with all of

the administration. You're forced to explain why you believe your students weren't

successful on the TEKS. You're looking at your lowest objectives and your highest

objectives. You're trying to say all the right things, but you really want to tell them

that this way of teaching—teaching to a test, giving the kids the punchline before you tell

the joke isn't working. These students aren't enthused about learning. It's not fun.

Teaching it isn't fun either. As I'm typing this I keep thinking about the forks in the road.

I'm thinking about how much more fun learning could be if it was led by students'

interests. I want to traverse over yonder to that creek hiding behind those trees. We can't

get creative with our students' interests.

Mr. Darby takes time during the session to dig deeper into how audit culture and the regulating

expectations make him feel. He even pauses for a moment to think about how the audit culture

makes the students feel. He takes his reflection into a level of cogitation that causes him to think

about his grandmother:

Teaching isn't as fun anymore. You're constantly thinking about your teacher expectation

checklist. This list has all the recommended instructional activities and computer

programs students must complete monthly. It's just too much. Here I am rambling about

myself. Let's think about the kids. They have no control over the direction of their day. It

makes me wonder if we're really giving the kids what they want. Yes, they should learn

and shouldn't they have a say so about the topic or even the activities? They might even

want to extend the lesson, but we can't because I had to submit my calendar with all of

the TEKS I'll cover for the month.

Mr. Darby's response in his thought catcher contains evidence of destabilizing moments and

snags that arise as traces of his collective memory of data meetings; his memory of data meetings

leads him to reflections on his grandmother who was a teacher for over 40 years and is now in

her 80s:

The curriculum has changed a lot. My grandmother taught for over 40 years. She's now

in her late 80s. Whenever I see her, I think about her duties as a teacher compared to

ours today. I don't believe she would be happy teaching. This is my 23rd year teaching

reading. I first taught at a learning center for a nearby district. We were very data driven.

We had to differentiate our instruction. The big difference from this learning center to

this school is that we had a 15 to 1 teacher student ratio.

In a deeper sense, collective memory includes "sets of memories regarding major cultural

moments" (Winfield, 2007, p. 13). These "major cultural moments," like slavery or the Civil

War, "manifest themselves into an individual understanding of the world" (p. 13). Mr. Darby's

thought catcher response is a powerful, riveting moment in the data where he even begins to

think about his grandmother who started teaching in the 1960s. He shares in his post-interview

memories of him growing up that really capture his collective memory as a young African

American man without a Black male figure to teach him in the ways of the world:

In my life growing up, not really seeing a positive black male role model other than in the

gym… I never really had that guy. I used to come to work in suits in a certain time back

in the day. I feel like they need to see that. I didn't see that myself. I always wish I had an African American teacher, a Black guy, growing up. I always had a woman [teacher] and they were great teachers; they influenced me. That's why I have Fun Friday and a reward system. Wanting to see a male African American teacher motivated me to become a teacher, that I wish I had. A male African American teacher could have possibly made me more successful, to kind of give me the cheat code and let me know this is what happened and you need these skills.

Mr. Darby's responses are traces of his collective memory. He reflects on his grandmother and her duties as a teacher who taught 40 years ago. He concludes that she would not be happy teaching in the audit culture of high stakes testing. Winfield (2007) explains collective memory:

Collective memory challenges democracy by requiring of us that we acknowledge that our thoughts and actions in the present are not wholly autonomous from the past…[providing] the intellectual foundation for present-day paradigms is essential for critical thought about society, each other, and ourselves. (p. 13)

Mr. Darby reaches into the past, using "memory as an investigative tool" to understand the "long-standing and deeply held intellectual assumptions that drive present behavior" (Winfield, 2007, p. 13). Eugenics persist over time and is ever-present as traces in our memories of the history of the imposed hierarchy of race and ability; Eugenics is a part of our collective memory that hinges itself to each of us, no matter what the individual's perspective (Winfield, 2007). Audit culture allows the feelings reminiscent of the fight for equality to reveal the innerworkings of a system that binds the idiosyncrasies and nuances that comprise the human spirit. Mr. Darby, unknowingly, reaches into his past to unravel the traces of his collective

memory, his ancestry of educator legacy, and how data meetings are the shackles of regulation recoded as collaboration.

Ms. Golston provided analogies throughout her post-interview that were evidence that she has been thinking about the currere process. When she spoke of her students, she compared their experiences to the night sky:

> When you stare into the sky at night. You don't know how big it is. Those stars could be close. They seem close, but they're not. I need to know my kids better. I need to ask them more questions, but I also know that kids, just like all of us, we're protective of our…I'm not going to say 'secrets,' but we're protective of our personal histories and our information. We're not just going to go tell everybody this thing because they asked us. And I'm not saying I should not try to get to know them and to understand their backgrounds. But I also know that, to a point, there's nothing I can do about what they're telling me or not telling me.

Ms. Golston's response in her post-interview indicates that she has been thinking about the currere classroom on a deeper level. She says that she "needs to ask them more questions" but she knows that we are all "protective of our personal histories." She concludes that "there's nothing [she] can do" about what students are not sharing. Ms. Golston demonstrates that she embraces the effects of a scripted classroom. Sierk (2014) problematizes the scripted curriculum and its disallowing the influence of students and improvisation. Ms. Golston's statement is an acceptance of the status quo classroom where students are unable to contribute to the culture of the classroom. Sierk calls standardized tests merely snapshots in time of student learning. Sierk posits that teachers should "leave loose ends" for student-led dialogue and communication that flourishes with possibilities (p. 5). When teachers follow a scripted curriculum, they inhibit the

freedom of students; a scripted curriculum shields complexity and ingenuity (pp. 5-6). Audit culture promotes the idea of neglecting the peculiarities of the individual in exchange for predictable, quantified inputs and outputs.

Furthermore, during the post-interview, Ms. Golston provides an analysis of when she looks in the mirror and how her brain sees the reflection:

So, when I look at myself in the mirror, my brain has an image. You know of what my brain thinks I'm supposed to look like. When I look at myself in the mirror or in this camera on Zoom, I see mostly brown hair. When I see my own picture of myself, which is then flipped, so it's not the way that my brain sees it, it's enough of a change to register a change in my brain, and then I see way more gray hair. I'm learning things about myself. Other people see things about me that I don't see myself, because I have an image in my mind of who I am and confirmation bias. You see what you think you're going to see, but other people sometimes see more of the truth.

Ms. Golston's statement that "other people sometimes see more of the truth" provides a point of quandary. Are other people able to see more of our truth? Is it possible for others' views of us to be seen as truth? There is a saying in education that is still spoken by educators today: perception is truth. Ms. Golston states that what other people think of her and what they see in her is the truth. The accountability process and the instructional improvement process requires teachers to be open to coaching and feedback regarding their teaching practices and even their planning routines. Ms. Golston states that she is "learning things about [herself]." However, I am unable to determine if she is learning more about herself as a teacher or if the feedback she is receiving, how others see her, is becoming ingrained in how she views herself. The trace of Ms. Golston's

analysis of how others view her leads me to Taubman's (2009) teacher profile of the "auditee," as presented by Michael Power in the article entitled "Evaluating the Audit Explosion":

> The auditee is undoubtedly a complex being simultaneously devious and depressed; she is skilled at games of compliance but exhausted and cynical about them too; she is nervous about the empty certificates of comfort that get produced, but she colludes in amplifying audit mandates in local settings; she fears the mediocrity of the auditors at the same time as she regrets their powerlessness to discipline the 'really bad guys'; she loathes the time wasted in rituals of inspection but accepts that this is probably what "we deserve." (p. 125)

Ms. Golston writes in her session 5 currere writing activity her true feelings about teaching:

> Getting out of the classroom seems like the next logical step, and I feel ready for it. I don't think I will miss the stress, the deadlines, the endless requirements, and the feeling of overwhelmed that comes in the daily life of a teacher.

I continue with Taubman's (2009) focus on Power's description of the "auditee":

> …She sees the excellent and competent suffer as they attempt to deal with the demands of quality assurance at the same time as the idle and incompetent escape its worst excesses; she hears the rhetoric of excellence in official documents but lives a reality of decline…she knows the past was far from being a golden age but despairs of the iron cage of auditing…[she] wonders why, after all these years of training, she is not trusted as an expert anymore. (p. 125)

Ms. Golston continues her currere writing activity with her vision of the future:

> In one possible future, the professional educators that call the shots will begin to be more aware of how the students learn and what their brains are capable of at various ages and

stages. In another possibility, education will get farther and farther away from the actual needs of students. Students and teachers will be led farther and farther down a road that ends up nowhere near where they need to be to be successful in society. They will be really good at old-fashioned schooling, but that doesn't prepare them for modern life.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The state-level accountability system has embedded requirements for students to demonstrate standards-based mastery in math, reading, science, and social studies. Each state has its own way of meeting the federal accountability requirements. The state in which this study takes place has set stringent requirements for students to show their academic progress. The affective component of these requirements has been seemingly addressed by the collective efficacy of professional learning communities; therefore, giving teachers the false promise that their voices will be heard when, in reality, the PLC process is actually data-driven and gives the teacher limited ability to give input in the teaching and learning process (Donohoo, 2017). This qualitative study examined whether the study of the Currere Writing Process would allow teachers to view students in a way contrary to audit culture and to see what the study of currere would open up and produce as a result of teacher participants reflecting on Sierk's (2014) account of her teaching experience (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Taubman, 2009). The findings of the study have produced a rich dialogue about the Currere Writing Process and how the participants relate to the writer Jessica Sierk (2014) as she describes her journey in the currere classroom. The teachers in the Currere Writing Study opened a conversation that allowed them to analyze with angst, and oftentimes challenging determination, their views, critiques, and even frustrations with the way the state-level of education system has evolved into a high-stakes testing and standardized test-focused entity.

Research Question One: Currere Contrary to Audit Culture

The first research question in the Currere Writing Study was: Can teachers view students in ways contrary to audit culture? *Audit culture* is a term that has been described by British anthropologists as "discourses and practices that have accelerated the standardization and

quantification of educational experience and turned it into an education market worth billions of dollars" (Taubman, 2009, p. 13). State governance over education has transformed into an "assemblage" that embraces "business practices associated with Neoliberal economic policies" (Taubman, 2009). At the center of audit culture is a "heroic narrative" of excellent teachers called to deposit a hefty "psychic investment" in the rhetoric of business practices that acts as an agent to promote the business of education (Taubman, 2009, p. 13). Audit culture is a "night that has fallen on our field;" when teachers are fearful and buy-into the gloriousness of achievement coupled with media and political-figures' influence on the critical eye of teachers in the classroom (Taubman, 2009, p. 13). This study confirms that the study of currere allows the teacher participants in this study to view students in a way contrary to audit culture. Bartholomew Darby is one of the teacher participants in the Currere Writing Study. He is African American, in his late 40s, and has been teaching for 23 years. Mr. Darby's existential experience as he shares his reflection on teaching as "NOT [being] a happy place," is evidence that the study of currere allows him to view students contrary to the tenets of audit culture. Mr. Darby refers to the teaching process as "tough, trying to get kids to buy into [the curriculum]." He continues by describing how he imagines the currere classroom and "the positive impact this style of teaching will have on our students." Mr. Darby then states that changing the curriculum "based upon the students' interest, can't be nothing but a positive thing." Mr. Darby expresses that he has not "read anything educational wise that has brought [him] happiness." He continues putting his existential experience into words:

Just thinking about 'What if I taught in this setting? What if I was able to do it effectively? Being able to improvise…to where…it's not dead learning. Not just focused on standardized tests [and] Are we above the district? Are we above the schools that are,

basically, similar to ours? I LOVE IT! It just seems like a happy place. It really does. I'm

happy just reading it!...This right here would make the class a happy place. Kind of like

those suburbs…really LIVE this currere life and…and…it's making me sad.

Mr. Darby shares his thoughts on what the currere classroom would look like, saying that "[he's]

never read something like this that brought [him] happiness… just to think that,'" as he thinks

out loud:

> I'm literally visualizing [speeds up speaking joyfully] how the room would be – if I was
>
> able to run with the lesson, run with the curriculum. But the main thing I put in bold is
>
> discipline, improvisation, and that's deep. And I'm seeing this! And it makes me want to
>
> get smarter. So, how about this. We all get smarter. And… and… this is a happy place.
>
> That's a real place!

The Currere Writing Study allows Mr. Darby to view students contrary to audit culture by

allowing him to move outside of his comfort zone to iterate his view of how currere could be a

positive influence in the classroom. Moving away from speaking of students as their test results

is an action that is contrary to audit culture.

Audit culture, as explained by British anthropologists, is a term that first began in

England as a response to earlier Thatcherite and retrospectively, New Labour's, endeavors to

impose accountability on establishments (Taubman, 2009, p. 108). Taubman explains further in

Teaching by Numbers:

> Audit culture refers to the emergence of systems of regulation in which questions of
>
> quality are subordinate to logics of management and in which audit serves as a form of
>
> meta-regulation whereby the focus is on control of control. (p. 108)

Taubman (2009) courageously focuses on "standards and accountability, as quilting points, as disciplinary practices of governmentality, and as examples of audit culture" (p. 108). He candidly understands the "dangers in mixing these heuristics":

> I find that [standards and accountability] each offer vocabularies for articulating distinct practices that through a series of loosely connected operations regulate the actions of teachers and students, translating them into governable behaviors, produce teacher-selves that are calculable and self-regulating, and reduce knowledge and what occurs in classrooms to quantifiable, portable data, which in turn is used as evidence of the pre-existing educational reality these practices actually fabricate. (p. 108)

Mr. Darby spoke about the currere style of teaching as he read the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" (2014) by Sierk:

> When I think about this style of teaching, it makes me want to experience a school that follows this philosophy…It seems like currere would remove some of the standardized tests we give. Teachers, in my opinion, would love to teach in this manner…We are definitely hog-tied today in education… [quoting a line from the article] …The punchline of our joke is told daily at the beginning of class informing students of 'Today's Objectives.'

Instead of teachers telling students what to do for homework, Mr. Darby reflects upon the possibility of the Currere Writing Process as an impetus for students going home and wanting to learn more about a topic and researching it on their own. He states that students would be "really learning" once they want to learn more about a topic on their own without teacher prompting.

Ms. Golston is the second teacher participant in the Currere Writing Study. She has been teaching for over 20 years. Her responses are oftentimes calculated and candid. Ms. Golston

provides her interpretation of students learning about concepts without a connection to personal experience. Her reflection is further evidence of participants in the study being allowed to view students contrary to audit culture:

> …But, if [students] don't have any personal experiences to attach things to, then in their mind, they have all these pieces, this knowledge, these facts that are just floating around. They're not attached to anything. So, they can't build anything with it. But if you give them personal experiences, then they're able to attach the ideas to a paradigm to create knowledge that they can use; they can apply it. The curriculum is written…I think it's not written with humans in mind. <laugh> It's written kind of like test subjects. We're trying to put this input so that we can get a certain output. It's not really written with personal people, actual people in mind.

Ms. Golston becomes more confident during the Currere Writing Study in her own critique of the ideological and theoretical stance on standardized testing and the curriculum. She even compares the curriculum to inputs and outputs, which is business terminology that can affect growth within a company or organization (Richmond, 2020). She explains how she sees engagement increase when students share their learning experiences, prior to the imposition of stringent test requirements:

> I can definitely see how [currere] can impact learning. The teacher's intention for teaching the lesson is obvious, but what would the students' intentions towards the lesson be when the lesson taught has been changed due to their interest? I enjoy it when students get so interested in a topic that they start asking questions I didn't plan for or when they want to share their own related experiences. I see far more engagement in my students' faces when that happens. I just have to use a little skill to finagle the discussion to cover the

information I need to cover… In my career, I feel that I can look back and see some beautiful soulful classroom moments, and I feel like those times were when I was most connected with my students…the learning sticks so much better…Had many times when parents would tell me about their child quoting some things I'd said with much affection… I feel that currere and soulful classroom moments have been [so far] removed to the point where the curriculum feels very sterile now.

Mr. Darby gives his candid opinion about students and the current accountability system. He uses some of Sierk's (2014) terminology in his typed response:

You're trying to say all the right things, but you really want to tell them that this way of teaching—teaching to a test, giving the kids the punchline before you tell the joke isn't working. These students aren't enthused about learning. It's not fun. Teaching it isn't fun either. As I'm typing this I keep thinking about the forks in the road. I'm thinking about how much more fun learning could be if it was led by students' interests. I want to traverse over yonder to that creek hiding behind those trees. We can't get creative with our students' interests.

As Mr. Darby reflects on his teaching practice, he begins to share how his students might view the current teaching practices and explores his cogitations on a currere-inspired classroom where students can learn amidst a class where students are aware of each other's learning needs and differences. His response is evidence that he can view students contrary to audit culture as result of his study of the Currere Writing Process:

I look at students as if they were my children. Unfortunately, this makes me care too much about their actions and their educational abilities. I care so much that I'm putting my heart and soul into seeing them grow…Here I am rambling about myself. Let's think about the

kids. They have no control over the direction of their day. It makes me wonder if we're really giving the kids what they want. Yes, they should learn and shouldn't they have a say so about the topic or even the activities? They might even want to extend the lesson, but we can't… I'm trying to make them become lifelong learners and readers on their own. What is a good genre for you? Let's find something you like to read. Therefore, I'm not forcing you to read… let the kids take ownership. I feel like this right here would make them go home and they would want to learn on their own…I just see kids on their knees, on their elbows, just talking to each other and just happy, just learning, just growing, and they're seeing themselves grow. They're seeing their neighbors grow…They know what each kid can do. They've worked in groups before. This kid doesn't capitalize his letters, this kid can't write too well, so it looks like sloppy handwriting; so, they know what they're able to do and it'll be great to see these kids seeing each other grow or seeing each other improve. Not just their behavior. Oh, you didn't get fussed at today. Oh, Dojo points. You have 80% great job! Not that—It'll be more like: I admit it, Dude. You're learning! You're getting SMARTER!

Ms. Golston's response during the post-interview confirms that she can view students contrary to audit culture as she explains how teachers learn more about students in the teaching and learning process:

When you stare into the sky at night. You don't know how big it is. Those stars could be close. They seem close, but they're not. I need to know my kids better. I need to ask them more questions, but I also know that kids, just like all of us, we're protective of our…I'm not going to say "secrets," but we're protective of our personal histories and our information. We're not just going to go tell everybody this thing because they asked us.

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And I'm not saying I should not try to get to know them and to understand their backgrounds. But I also know that, to a point, there's nothing I can do about what they're telling me or not telling me. So, you have an idea about them from the first time you lay eyes on them like when they walk in your door on the first day of school; and then it's interesting how every now and then you'll have a kid, who, as you get to know them, and they start to learn about and shed a light on some of that void, so that lights some of it up. You really learn that there's more to this student than you thought.

Ms. Golston explains that there needs to be more teacher and student self-reflection in the instructional and learning process.

Mr. Darby expresses how he thought the Currere Writing Process would affect the learning environment:

Kids would skip to class knowing that the assignment they are about to work on originated from their wants or that the subject matter they must work on comes from a simple idea in their head. That's motivational. This would motivate any kid to do their best…

Ms. Golston spoke about how an individual's perspective develops and how varying views can affect the classroom:

Especially in the elementary world, mostly kids' views are parroting. They are parroting what they hear. Their people, and for the better or for the worst…sometimes the parents have limited exposure themselves to various world views of their own. They also have a stunted ability to really see other people and recognize different opinions and understand it. There are different ways to be right and peoples' opinions are different from facts. Sometimes those bleed over into the classroom with the students.

Ms. Golston provides an explanation of her understanding of currere:

> I understand [currere] means movement, and applying it to curriculum allows for
>
> movement, like a runner or, in my mind, an improvisational dancer…I think of [students]
>
> like plants in a garden. They will grow, most likely, no matter what. But we can train
>
> them to grow in a certain way. Without discretion (pruning) and encouragement
>
> (fertilizer), they will grow wild.

Research Question Two: Currere as the Key to Unlocking Teacher Voice

The second research question was: What will the study of currere open up? Teachers were very candid and transparent when answering the pre- and post-interview questions, completing the article reflection questions, thought catcher pages, and on the currere writing activity. There was a level of comfortableness each participant exuded during each of the currere Writing Study Sessions; each teacher participant's confidence level increased with each session. The Currere Writing Study opened up a rich dialogue between the participants during Sessions 1 and 2. Ms. Golston preferred to read the article selections aloud. Mr. Darby preferred to read silently and answer the questions as a silent solo with a discussion at the end of the session. The Informed Consent session was held with both participants on Zoom. Sessions 1-4 took place with both participants on Zoom. Sessions 5 and 6 were conducted with each participant individually on Zoom in different sessions due to participants' scheduling conflicts. Mr. Darby and Ms. Golston were transparent and completed each of the sessions and activities. The teacher participants in the Currere Writing Study were completely invested in their commitment to their participation in the study. Ms. Golston was on time to each session. Mr. Darby demonstrated a willingness to reschedule due to calendar conflicts and persevered through the sessions as he balanced his commitment to church activities and caring for his family. Each teacher participant

expressed that they wanted to learn more about currere after reading the abstract and the introduction of "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" (Sierk, 2014). Mr. Darby stated: "I've never read anything like this." Ms. Golston stated that she wanted to learn more about currere and that she was "looking forward to the next session." The schedule was adjusted to the one-hour pre-interview, from 8 sessions to 6 sessions due to participants reading ahead during the sessions, and the one-hour post-interview. Each Zoom session was held at a non-EISD location and after school hours when teachers were not on contract.

The Exemplary ISD made sure that I understood and agreed to not refer to the actual word "professional learning communities" in the title of my dissertation. EISD Research and Accountability Office made sure that my Protocol did not include the PLC process, as the district, due to state and federal accountability requirements had to ensure that my study did not affect the normal requirements of the professional learning community processes as outlined in the EISD Strategic Plan or State Documents. My research of professional learning communities is included in my dissertation, because that was the intent of the study, to learn more about the PLC process. I agreed to use the term "data meeting." My research was about professional learning communities and had to be adjusted to include the verbiage of the "data meeting" to ensure that the district was not affected by my research. My research protocol of the location was revised for the Currere Writing Study sessions to be held off-campus at a non-EISD location and for the study to take place after school hours, during teachers' non-contract time, during the week or on the weekends. Each of the sessions were held according to the research protocol and TCU IRB. Each participant demonstrated interest in learning more about the Currere Writing Process in each of the sessions. Mr. Darby even asked at the end of the pre-interview if he could go back to a few of the questions to ensure that he had answered all of the questions. I

recognized that each of the participants demonstrated a professional level of commitment and eagerness to find out more about the Currere Writing Process.

The pre- and post-interviews, the article reflection answers, the thought catcher activity, and the currere writing activity all contained evidence that teacher participants' study of currere opened an avenue for them to feel free to speak their thoughts without judgement. I was an active listener and also the researcher, paying attention to each breath, sigh, smile, silence, pause, and level of participation during each session. Mr. Darby talked about his own role as the teacher:

> I feel like I'm a football coach every day. It's halftime and we're losing 80 to 10. As a coach, you [have to] tell them…you can't go in there at halftime and say we're going to lose. You've got to in there at halftime and say— Hey, you can do this! I believe in you! And so, that's what I'm having to do with these kids.

Mr. Darby spoke of the tenacity required to teach. Both Mr. Darby and Ms. Golston have mentioned that teaching has become even more difficult post-pandemic due to students' gaps in learning and lack of social interaction. Mr. Darby addressed the paradox in teacher certification testing requirements and the state requirements for students:

> The state says the passing rate is already at 55%. I always associate it to our teacher exams. We have to make at least 80 in order to be proficient to teach, but yet we're teaching kids and we have the mastery of the test at 55%, that's passing. Then they bring open-ended questions, and these are extra skills that are being tested.

Mr. Darby expressed how he felt about the new lesson plan format required by the state. He felt comfortable and confident in his critique and continued with a personal connection to how the lesson planning and one-on-one data meeting processes make teachers feel. Mr. Darby used the pronoun 'we' as he spoke on behalf of teachers:

First of all, we don't like all of the added expectations for our lesson plans. These added

expectations are stressing us out. Before we plan our lessons, we're supposed to create

know and shows for our students. This is very tedious and time consuming. We have to

create these exit tickets. I feel forced. Why can't it be called independent practice

anymore? As teachers, we're forced to do all of these things. I can't even follow one of

the forks in the road with how I would like to organize my lesson plans.

Mr. Darby opened up about his opinions of one-on-one data meetings:

One-on-One data meetings are the worst. You're sitting at the head of a table with all of

the administration. You're forced to explain why you believe your students weren't

successful on the TEKS. You're looking at your lowest objectives and your highest

objectives. You're trying to say all the right things, but you really want to tell them

that this way of teaching—teaching to a test, giving the kids the punchline before you tell

the joke isn't working. These students aren't enthused about learning. It's not fun.

Teaching it isn't fun either. As I'm typing this I keep thinking about the forks in the road.

I'm thinking about how much more fun learning could be if it was led by students'

interests. I want to traverse over yonder to that creek hiding behind those trees. We can't

get creative with our students' interests.

Mr. Darby was jovial yet serious as he stated that he wanted to "traverse over yonder to that

creek behind those trees." He spoke in a straightforward and enlightening tone; he was

transparent with a critical eye of the data meeting process. He was candid about what he really

wanted to say to campus administrators about teaching to the test. I actively listened and took

notes as he spoke. Mr. Darby more deeply explored his thoughts about how he thought about

what he is going to teach, which further created a sense of excitement in his voice:

How should I introduce it? What activities should we do together to ensure you know that they're getting it? And then, you know, hopefully create the next activity that they're able to do on their own. And then thinking about what kind of problems they might have, questions they might have. And then thinking about what can I do differently if they don't. We think very deeply into how we teach what we teach.

Mr. Darby opens up about the absence of a male African American mentor or role model in his life:

…In my life growing up, not really seeing a positive black male role model other than in the gym. I never really had that guy. I used to come to work in suits in a certain time back in the day. I feel like they need to see that. I didn't see that myself. I always wish I had an African American teacher, a Black guy, growing up. I always had a woman [teacher] and they were great teachers; they influenced me. That's why I have Fun Friday and a reward system. Wanting to see a male African American teacher motivated me to become a teacher, that I wish I had. A male African American teacher could have possibly made me more successful, to kind of give me the cheat code and let me know this is what happened and you need these skills.

Mr. Darby revealed that "not having teachers who pushed [him] hard, not having teachers who pushed [him] is what pushes [him] to be the teacher [he] is today." He became somewhat melancholy and his voice cracked as he spoke about his experience of not having a male African American role model growing up.

Ms. Golston was calculated and careful in stating her answers at the beginning of the pre-interview, often referring to situations in third person. There were longer pauses and I could see her thinking through her answers:

Besides the cast of characters affecting the curricular environment, seasons, holidays, and even weather can make a difference in the moods, attention, and behavior of the classroom so that the teacher must also adjust.

She spoke about teacher bias and bias awareness: "It's important for teachers to be aware of their own biases and the importance of not imposing those biases on the students." As the interview progressed and she participated in the next session, Ms. Golston spoke in first-person as she provided insight to her experience as a teacher and her opinions. Ms. Golston became more sure of her answers. Her increased level of confidence was apparent in each of the sessions as she shared her critiques, opinions, and connections:

> Before we had PLCs, data meetings, and planning meetings, I had much more time to spend on preparing lessons. I planned guest speakers and field trips to interesting places that might not have been totally, explicitly academic…I still had time to prepare students for state exams, and they still passed at about the same rate as my students do now, but they had much more fun and learned much more— not only academically but also about life and learning itself.

After reading the abstract and introduction of "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments," Ms. Golston shared her reflections on the paradigm shift that occurred over the last 20 years (Sierk, 2014):

> The sterilization of the curriculum over the last couple of decades has been a slow process, so slow that I didn't even recognize that it was happening until I found myself crying in my principal's office and saying, 'My joy is gone.' I truly felt that every drop of myself had – and has – been removed from the curriculum. It seems that a properly programmed robot could do what I was being asked to do, and maybe even do a better

job of it. I felt ineffective, helpless, and almost worthless as a teacher. So, by reading the introduction to this article, I feel seen. I feel like I'm not the only one struggling with this. I feel like I'm not alone in this vast universe of education where the teacher—truly who she is— doesn't matter anymore.

Ms. Golston cited the numerous demands placed on teachers:

My opportunities to share my love of learning have been diminishing. As the demands on educators have increased—demands for more meetings, more detailed planning, more documented ways of teaching that will reach every single possible student without falling behind, more parent contacts, more paperwork, more rigorous expectations of alignment with state standards…

She described the requirements of data meetings and the requirement of preparing for small groups:

Data meetings spend a lot of time looking to see if teachers' demonstrations of learning match up with their target student expectation; for teachers who consistently successfully do that, this feels like a waste of time. For data meetings, several pages of data worksheets must be completed beforehand; you must be prepared to discuss plans for what you're going to do in small group and intervention for the next several weeks or months. Planning small groups ahead of time doesn't allow for pulling students who unexpectedly need help with the day's assignment, or for working with kids you pull who need help with a different facet of the assignment…There goes the fork in the road. Looks cool, wish we could visit, but not today…'Johnny, you're struggling with learning how to use a multiplication chart when you're trying to work with fractions? Well, I'm not scheduled to work with you on that today; today we're supposed to be

learning about division with remainders. Just do the best you can to figure it out on your own!' There goes another neat-looking fork! Maybe we can go back and visit it someday.

Ms. Golston referred to the term that Sierk (2014) used in the article "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments." Ms. Golston appeared poised and ready talk. She began to talk about the new Lesson Alignment Formative Assessment process (Texas Education Agency, 2023):

> The Lesson Alignment Formative Assessment Process means we must fill out knowledge and skill charts; we must identify objectives for the upcoming week, create and choose exit tickets, create and upload teacher exemplars, and identify success criteria. The process doesn't include any opportunities for planning with student interests in mind or for deviating from the plan in order to allow for conversation that may meander around a topic… I don't give my students the ability to change or control the flow of the lesson. I can definitely see how this can impact learning. The teacher's intention for teaching the lesson is obvious, but what would the students' intentions towards the lesson be when the lesson taught has been changed due to their interest?

She reflected upon a time when she was in a previous district and was given the opportunity to plan with more autonomy:

> I think we are very, very focused on the structure of the curriculum and you have to stay on schedule with it, and you have to go in this order. I don't feel we are allowed to explore in an unstructured way. I was in a district where you were told you could cover it however you want to, just as long as it gets covered. If you don't have an idea where to start, here's a framework you can use if you want to; so for teachers who have no idea

where to start, they did offer some structure if you want it; but it's not a requirement. It was more of an option, but if you thought that you knew a better way to teach this thing, then go for it; as long as it all gets covered.

Ms. Golston revealed how she deeply feels about the current education system. She was sure of herself and explained her answers thoughtfully and expanded her answers:

This was all started with the best intent, but you know intent doesn't always work out the way people intend it…Eisner suggests that 'goals are not stable targets at which you aim, but directions towards which you travel,' and that's something we need to remember in our field because we're not trying to hit a passing score. We're just trying to go in that direction, and if we go in that direction, then we will get where we need to be.

She talked further about how education is not meeting the needs of students and the political interests of the curriculum establishment process:

We are not meeting students where they are. We are meeting them where they are supposed to be at the end of the previous school year…The curriculum is a one-size-fits-most…and if it doesn't fit, then the students will have to find a way to make it fit…It seems to me that, while our society as a whole has become more accepting of, and sometimes even celebrates – differences, the world of education has become more narrow… Then there are the opposite political groups who seek to eliminate or hide differences. They also seek to limit education, and they also want to narrow the field of what is taught in some subjects, but they want to do it in a different way by banning books and prohibiting certain topics in some subjects.

Ms. Golston shared her feelings about the curriculum development process in-depth:

Nobody ever asks teachers: What do you think about the curriculum? I have been told that when the State revamps a curriculum of a subject that they put together a committee of lots of people, including classroom teachers, but I've never been consulted. There's never been any kind of a poll or anything. And then, when the state puts out the new curriculum, the list of standards, then the districts, then take the State… correct the State standards and they build the curriculum around it. They pull a few, handful of teachers and other educational experts like instructional coaches and stuff to build a curriculum around the state standards. But again, they don't really ask for input other than just the handpicked few that they choose to do the work. They don't ask us anything. They don't. They make a way for us to give feedback, but I mean, it's not really published that there is a way to give feedback, and I have given feedback before. I didn't see any changes or anything.

Ms. Golston explained her current level of belief in the education system:

I do not believe the current educational system is preparing our students for the real world that is ahead of them. I've heard education compared to a factory, preparing kids to be great factory workers. This, unfortunately, is the direction I see…In one possible future, the professional educators that call the shots will begin to be more aware of how the students learn and what their brains are capable of at various ages and stages. In another possibility, education will get farther and farther away from the actual needs of students. Students and teachers will be led farther and farther down a road that ends up nowhere near where they need to be to be successful in society. They will be really good at old-fashioned schooling, but that doesn't prepare them for modern life.

Ms. Golston explored her critique of society and how society currently views offense and disagreements. She then provided insight to her thoughts about her nervousness with the possibility of her saying something that might offend someone in the learning community:

Well, the way that society is today, it seems like if anybody says anything offensive in any way to any person or group, anytime, a person or group doesn't agree with something that you have said, then people may equate disagreement with offense. And so, because of that, when someone begins to feel offended, even if really they just disagree, then they feel that that is something that must be punished. And usually that means making a public example of that person in social media, or the news, or just the mainstream media, or getting that person fired, or totally ruining their life. And however, they feel, they can get away with it. So, with the world, the way it is now, I feel like people tend to overreact when there is just a difference of opinion…So I feel nervous about saying anything that could possibly cause someone to not disagree, but feel offended. So that they would want to come after me, and also being in a position of educating children, being around children, they tend to take that the teachers are held, not necessarily to a higher standard, but maybe a stricter standard than just a sitting person on the street. [Clears throat] And because I'm talking to children, I am aware that children don't always understand clearly what is being said or the conversation, or how it's going. So, there is a chance that they could go home and say something to someone at home about something. "I said that either how I really did say but didn't mean it. The way they're saying it or I… they didn't quite get it right when they recounted my words." So, it makes me want to back off even farther from whatever the line is of what's okay to talk about.

Mr. Darby and Ms. Golston's reflective responses opened up rich dialogue and statements about their existential experiences of teaching, their critiques of the world, a deeper knowledge of their sense of self, their connections with current reality, and their ability to explore cogitations and deeper levels of consciousness (Dey, 1993: Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moran, 2004). The Currere Writing Study was the key that unlocked Ms. Golston and Mr. Darby's voices so they could provide their candid feedback and reviews of the current audit culture.

Research Question Three: Currere Generates a New Dialogue

The teacher participants in this study both expressed that they had not read an article like "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" (Sierk, 2014). They were both almost in awe that I was presenting such an article for their study and reading. Perhaps they were surprised because I have been a school administrator for over 20 years, and they did not expect the level of conversation or research to be explored by an administrator. This qualitative study has generated the need for a new dialogue about the needs of our current education system. Both teachers in the study stated that they wished that they had the opportunity to implement the Currere Writing Process in their classrooms. They expressed that they had never read anything like the article (Sierk, 2014) and wanted to investigate this type of philosophy for the benefit of all students.

Conclusion

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) analyze the "privileging" of voice in qualitative research, positing that "voice makes present the truth and reflects the meaning of an experience that has already happened" (p. 3). Voice in the qualitative research study can be listened to, recorded, coded, and collected as evidential data. According to Jackson and Mazzei, poststructural understandings of voice and the limits that dwell within voice are complex and not easily captured. This qualitative work involved the constant process of plugging in to produce a new construct, something new. Plugging in requires "making and unmaking," termed an assemblage; an assemblage is pieced together and is a process of organizing and making connections (p. 1). As the researcher in this study, I embraced the idea of the threshold, described by Jackson and Mazzei as thinking at the limit of one's ability in order to create new analysis and questions while recognizing that data and theory collapse. Derrida's theory of deconstruction as explained by Jackson and Mazzei was the theoretical framework that guided the analysis of the collected voices of the participants in the study. The process of the currere writing study sessions, the interview sessions, and the coding analysis were all key components of building, folding, and making connections to the participants' responses. Using the a priori codes to determine the emerging themes, I discovered a consensus in the answers to each of the research questions that pointed to audit culture. Data was used to push the connections to the threshold to further understand what the teachers' study of the Currere Writing Process opened up and produced. Thinking with the theory of deconstruction required that I pay attention to what participants specifically stated as well as the silence during participants' responses. Following the trace of the snags and destabilizing moments in participants' responses produced moments where I was able to identify when the phenomena of deconstruction was occurring. The deconstructive moments

when the teachers expressed their experiences with the current data-driven practices of data meetings and when they spoke about how the data meeting process and required paperwork that they must complete to prepare for individual data meetings makes them feel, were moments where there were often breaks of silence. The events of deconstruction that occurred during the interviews were moments when each teacher began to speak of their students and how their students do not have input in their daily experiences with the curriculum. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe Jacques Derrida's trace:

> The trace is the always-ready absent present "that is the condition of thought and experience." The trace is that which dwells in our language before we inhabit and use it. Because our language is imbued with the trace, to employ Derrida's strategy permits us to use "the only available language while not subscribing to its premises." Trace, as used by Derrida…carries with it notions of tracks, footprints, imprints. The trace, then, is the absent presence of sometimes imperceptible imprints on our words and their meanings before we speak or write them. The trace is that which contributes to our being and doing in a tug-of-war with the competing meanings that we both resist and accept—both acknowledged and unacknowledged. (p. 21)

According to Jackson and Mazzei (2012), Derrida calls deconstruction "the experience of the impossible" (p. 22).

The Implications of Thinking with Deconstruction

The inspiration for this research study was generated from my experience as a school leader and my passion for the instructional process. My first encounter with Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives* was enlightening and ignited my interest in qualitative work. "Thinking with

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Theory" was my instruction manual for how to read and re-read the transcripts to analyze the data through the theory of deconstruction. I pushed beyond the traditional ways of simply coding to produce a theme by viewing the participants' responses through a different lens, which produced a new meaning and extension of thought.

The results of this study provide evidence of the need for a new dialogue to take a closer look at the assessment-inspired audit culture at the state and local levels. The evidence in the teachers' responses is an indication that audit culture is a tough cycle to break. The intention of the PLC process was to give teachers a space to collaboratively share their ideas. PLCs, instead, are now used as a monitoring tool to track student performance outcomes and teaching practices. PLCs are a means of checking on teachers to see if they implement curriculum requirements.

One of the most startling discoveries in this research study is that the PLC process fails to include the most important reason that education systems are in existence: the student. Students should be at the center of the PLC process. Numbers and quantifiable data are at the center of local and state accountability measures while school systems suffer from deadened teaching practices infused with neoliberal agendas to erase the idiosyncrasies of the human spirit that could enhance the classroom experience. Freud warned us of the relation between education and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is not recognized in the field of education, teacher education, and in educational policy (Taubman, 2012). Business approaches took over education and curriculum. The inner lives of teachers and students are supplanted with quantifiable techniques that produce specific outcomes. The subjectivities and mysteries of psychoanalysis are ignored when the psyche provides insight to the "dreams, desires, ideals, and terrors that shape our understanding of education" (p. 2). Studying the relationship between education and psychoanalysis offers us a way to reframe our current state and local practices to discuss

alternatives to self-monitoring and self-regulating, obsessive-compulsive routines. Sustaining the level of grandiosity and heroism that audit culture promises will eventually lead to teacher burnout and revolt. The constant checking and re-checking data with mounting paperwork has resulted in the current exodus of education professionals to other fields.

Thinking with Derrida's deconstruction opened the dialogue about audit culture. Audit culture remains in the snags and destabilizing moments of the teacher participants' responses. Thinking with Derrida's deconstruction opened the possibility of an intervention to break through audit culture. Audit culture is deeply engrained in teachers' everyday lives; the consequent damage to teachers and students might be irreversible. The trace of audit culture is strong and requires an overhauling of the current regulatory practices of local school districts and the state to view students as more than just numbers (Taubman, 2009).

Through the Currere Writing Study, I have discovered that students, teachers, and school leaders need meaningful time to engage in creative writing or journaling during the school day to make real sense of the teaching and learning process. The myriad documents currently used to audit teacher practices should be minimized, with the writing process as the priority in determining changes in instruction.

State and local districts should determine ways to include students in the PLC process. Hearing from students as to how they learn best and teachers receiving actionable feedback as they teach a unit of study is far more valuable than the current ways teacher conference times are used. Students, teachers, and school leaders need time to think about their educational past, look toward the imagined future, analyze their educational past, present, and future; and view their experiences in larger political and cultural contexts (Pinar, 1975). When educators at the local, state, and federal levels experience the currere-inspired curriculum, they will see and understand

the need for a true student-centered assessment process that will ultimately prepare students for the future. Although the Currere Writing Process is not a direct way to increase student performance on tests, the results of this study have shown that currere writing opens a much-needed dialogue about the ways that teaching and learning can be improved to truly meet the needs of students and teachers.

The Heart of the Matter

I understand audit culture on a deeper level as a result of this qualitative study. The teacher participants shared their hearts, opinions, and candid views during each of the currere writing sessions. Teachers are overwhelmed by the new requirements of lesson planning and data meetings. The evidence in the teacher responses revealed that teachers are fearful, live behind a façade of heroism, often feel ineffective and hopeless, and are on the edge of depression. The existential experiences of teachers' waning between happiness, sadness, and crying, indicate deeper issues with the stringent requirements of the state accountability system. Teachers feel like they do not matter anymore. Detailed lesson plans and paperwork are vital to audit culture, as teachers are held to a higher standard to prove they deserve the pay. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that each student does not fall behind. Amid strict pacing calendar requirements, teachers must balance dealing with student behaviors and maintaining classroom management. A hard day's work with only a 30-minute lunch and a conference period taken up by admission, review, and dismissal meetings, data meetings, or planning days, teachers go home to face an accusatory social media. Social media paints the bleak picture of teaching as a profession of takers and not givers; schools that have earned below a school report card grade of C or lower are labeled the worst in the state. The pressures of knowing how social media portrays teachers' hard work is disheartening and disappointing.

When I e-mailed my recruiting flyer to over 1,000 teachers in grades 3-6 in Exemplary ISD, I expected to receive an overwhelming response from teachers across the district. I received only 2 responses out of the hundreds of e-mails I sent out. My hopes for a larger scale study with more participants came to a disappointing halt.

My original research protocol request included the step of implementing the Currere Writing Study during a STAAR-tested grade-level PLC for 6 weeks. Since the Office of Research and Accountability would not allow the study to take place during the school day, the study sessions had to be scheduled for after school, after teacher contract hours during the week, or on the weekend. Audit culture is the reason why the research approval process took longer than I had planned. District personnel wanted to ensure that my study did not affect the daily PLC practices of the school.

The findings of this study helped me to deconstruct the traces of audit culture. I discovered that audit culture is deeply woven into the daily practices of PLCs and data meetings. When students are viewed as numbers, their inner selves are ignored, who they truly are as unique, thinking individuals is left out. What remains are quantifiable outcomes that can easily be labeled by the state as a letter grade.

I discovered that structural racism is overemphasized in audit culture, disallowing teachers to see students in ways different from numerical descriptions. Following the trace of audit culture in this study opens the possibility that students can be viewed in other ways, contrary to the requirements of accountability measures. A new movement to break the cycle of audit culture starts with teacher dialogue about the current practices and requirements that de-center the student. The teacher-participants in this study have, indeed, taken the first steps to breaking the cycle of audit culture through their study of the Currere Writing Process.

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APPENDICES
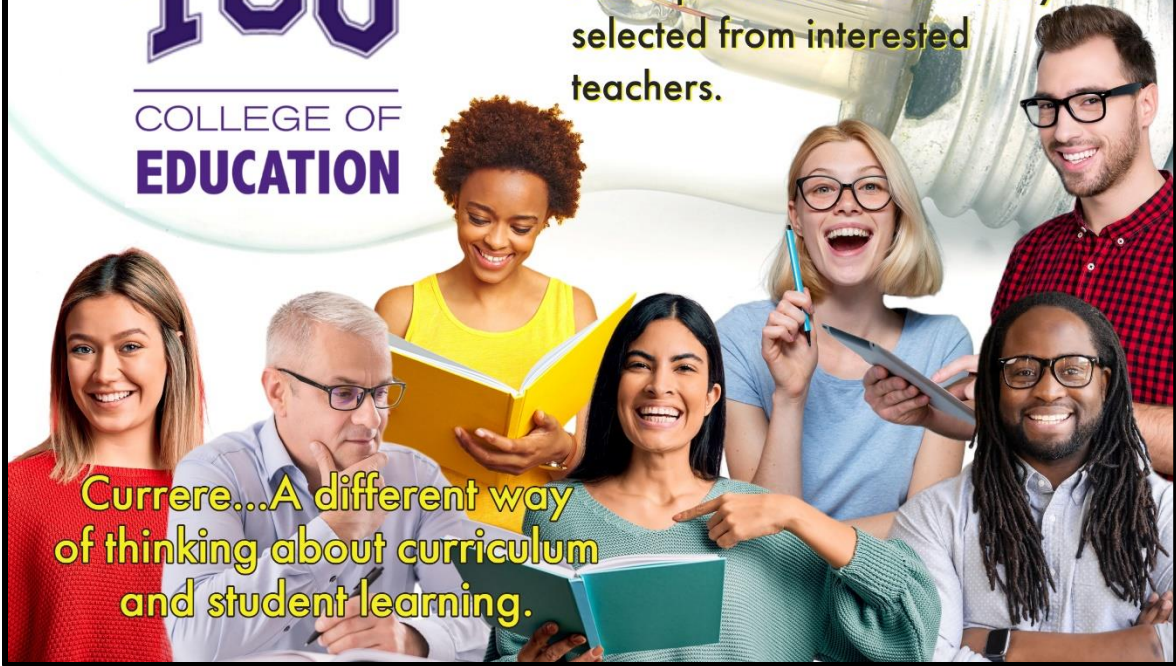
5/16/2022

Ms. Tabatha Roy-Evans
t.royevans@tcu.edu

Project Title: Following the Trace: Examining the Affect of Teachers' Study of the Currere Writing Process on Teachers' Views of Students and Teacher Collective Memory of the Data Meeting Process
Institution Affiliation: Texas Christian University

Dear Ms. Roy-Evans,

The Exemplary Research Review Committee has approved your research proposal titled **"Following the Trace: Examining the Affect of Teachers' Study of the Currere Writing Process on Teachers' Views of Students and Teacher Collective Memory of the Data Meeting Process."** This approval indicates you have obtained a statement of approval or exemption from your university IRB before your research has commenced. We understand that Exemplary ISD's participation will only take place during the study's active IRB approval period. Additionally, all study related activities must cease if IRB approval expires or is suspended. Approval from the Exemplary Independent School District's Department of Research and Accountability indicates permission to proceed with your research study, but does not guarantee or mandate participation from Exemplary ISD schools, staff, parents and/or students.

It is our understanding that you have read and agreed to the terms outlined in the Exemplary *Independent School District Research Proposal Guidelines.* Any student, staff, school, or district information should be used solely for completion of your research study and should remain strictly confidential. If you are an Exemplary ISD employee and your research is for a non-EISD entity, all correspondence regarding your proposal should be sent through a non-EISD email address. In all correspondence you must represent yourself as a researcher affiliated with the sponsoring institution rather than as an EISD employee. Please provide the EISD Research Review Committee with a copy of your research study documents upon completion of your project. We look forward to reviewing the results and wish you luck in your study.

Thank you,

Exemplary ISD Research and Accountability Team

TCU

Texas Christian University

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Research: Following the Trace: Examining the Affect of Teachers' Study of the Currere Writing Process on Teachers' Views of Students and Teacher Collective Memory of the Data Meeting Process
Principal Investigator: Dr. Gabriel Huddleston
Co-Investigators: Tabatha Roy-Evans

Overview: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an adult, age 21-70, and a general education teacher of grades 3-6.

Study Details: This study is being conducted after teacher contract hours during the week, on the weekend, and at a non-EISD location. The purpose of this study is to find out if the study of Currere will affect teachers' views of students and instruction. You will participate in 3-6, 45-minute study sessions over a six-week span of time. The research includes two one-hour interviews (one before the study session schedule begins and one at the end of the study session schedule). You will read *Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments* by Jessica Sierk during each of the study sessions, answer reflection questions, and complete one thought catcher writing activity during each session. You will write using the Currere writing process during the last study session.

Participants: You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a general education teacher of grades 3,4,5, or 6, and we want to see your response to the study of the Currere writing process. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of 4 participants in this research study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time prior to data analysis. You have until 3 days after each interview and until 3 days after each study session to inform the investigators that you do not want your data used in the study. After this 3 days, your data cannot be removed from the study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Confidentiality: All personal information will remain private and confidential. Your information will be deidentified in the study. Anyone with authority to look at your data or records must keep them confidential.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of this study is to find out if the study of Currere will affect teacher's views of students and instruction. You will participate in 3-6, 45-minute study sessions over a six-week span of time. The research includes two one-hour interviews (one before the study session schedule begins and one at then end of the study session schedule). You will read *Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments* by Jessica Sierk during each of the study sessions, answer reflection questions, and complete one thought catcher writing activity during each study session. You will write using the Currere writing process at the end of the last study session.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

You will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview prior to the week that the study session schedule begins and again at the end of the 3-6 sessions. You will also be asked to read *Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments* by Jessica Sierk during each of the study sessions, answer reflection questions, and complete a thought catcher activity. You will be asked to complete a Currere writing activity at the end of the six weeks. The study will take place at a non-EISD location.

The study will include 3-6, 45-minute study sessions and two 1-hour interview sessions. The total time for the study is up to 6.5 hours, (including the interviews). This study will take place after teacher contract hours during the week, on the weekend, and at a non-EISD location.

The interviews and study sessions will be recorded using a handheld recording device. The Co-Investigator will have access to the recordings. All information concerning participants' identities will be deidentified in the transcription process. Deidentification is not guaranteed during the recording process.

The signed Informed Consent Documents, notes from the study sessions, the handheld recorder with recordings, the transcriptions of the interviews, the completed reflection question pages, the completed Thought Catcher Activities, the Currere reading selections, and the Currere writing activity will be kept in a locked cabinet. All audio files will be transcribed, removing all identifying data in the process. Audio files and transcriptions will be stored on a password secured computer. The documents and recordings will be maintained until April of 2025.

Are there any alternatives and can I withdraw?
Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time prior to data analysis. You have until 3 days after each interview and until 3 days after each study session to inform the investigators via e-mail communication that you do not want your data used in the study. After this 3 days, your data cannot be removed from the study.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?
There is minimal risk associated with this study. You may feel uncomfortable in writing about your own personal experiences. You can withdraw at any time prior to data analysis. You have until 3 days after each interview and until 3 days after each study session to inform the investigators via e-mail that you do not want your data used in the study. After this 3 days, participants' data cannot be removed from the study.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You might benefit from participating in this study. You will learn more about an innovative writing process called Currere that could lead to furthering your professional development in student-centered instruction. You will gain more insight into thinking about student performance from a lens different from standardized and standards-based assessment.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?
No.

What are my costs to participate in the study?
None.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
Your information will be deidentified in the study. The signed Informed Consent Documents, notes from the study sessions, the handheld recorder with recordings, the transcriptions of the interviews, the completed reflection question pages, the completed Thought Catcher Activities, the Currere reading selections, and the Currere writing activity will be kept in a locked cabinet. All audio files will be transcribed, removing all identifying data in the process. Audio files and transcriptions will be stored on a password secured computer.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?
The data from this study will be used as a part of the dissertation and for future research publications. The data in the study is deidentified. The documents and recordings will be maintained until April of 2025.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?
You can contact Dr. Gabriel Huddleston at (817) 257-6782 or g.huddleston@tcu.edu with any questions that you have about the study.

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

In the event that the 45-minute sessions or the 1-hour interview are held via Zoom:
By selecting "Agree to participate" below, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you agree. You will be given a copy of this document for your records upon request. If you have any questions about the study after you agree to participate, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____
Printed Participant Name

_____
Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name of the person obtaining consent

_____
Signature   Date

Consent to be audio/video recorded

I agree to be audio/video recorded.   Yes _____   No _____

_____
Signature   Date

<u>Teacher Interview Protocol and Questions</u>

I will discuss with the interviewee the purpose of my study. I will review the protocol for the interview and inform the interviewee that if there is a part of the interview that she or he would prefer not to be recorded, she or he can pause and I will stop the recording. I will record the interview with a recording device and inform the interviewee that I am recording the interview so that I can refer back to the recording for purposes of transcription at a later time. I will explain to the interviewee that the interview and the recording will be kept confidential, pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality, and that the transcript of the interview and assignment will be available for review prior to submission for the class. At the culmination of the interview, I will thank the interviewee for their time and ask if they would like to expound on any part of the interview. I will then ask if they have any questions about the interview or the research process.

<u>Teacher Interview Questions</u>

1. What writing process do you use within your instruction?
2. Are students given the opportunity to complete focused free-writing activities?
3. How do students communicate their experiences or connections to the curriculum?
4. Are student experiences a part of the curriculum?
5. Do you feel that, as a teacher, you are able to offer your critique of the world to students?
6. Are students given the chance to offer their critiques of the world?
7. Can you recall a time when you were able to write about your past educational experience at a deeper level?
8. Do you consider yourself to be a researcher?
9. To what extent do you make connections or offer your thoughts about the theories or ideologies within the curriculum?
10. How important is your autobiographical experience to your teaching?
11. How important is your students' autobiographical experience to the curriculum?
12. How important are your thoughts about the behaviors of others as they relate to social sciences?
13. What are your thoughts on one's knowledge of oneself and knowledge of the world?
14. Are the aspects of consciousness explored within the curriculum? If so, in what ways?
15. What impact does your view or your students' view of current reality have on the learning process?
16. How deeply are you as the teacher able to explore the topics, themes, or units in your instruction? How do students make connections to the curriculum at more than surface level?
17. Are you able to explore the curriculum at a non-structural level? If so, how?

Week 1 – Abstract and Introduction: One Educator's Journey
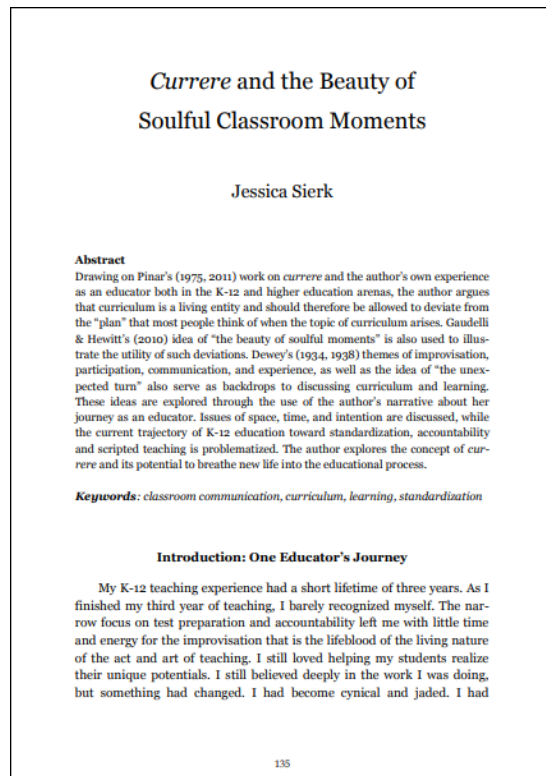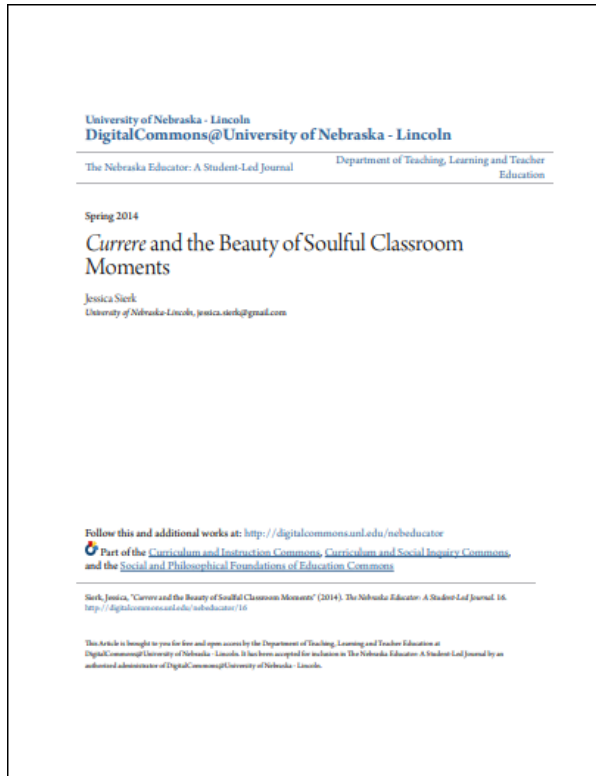
Sierk, J. (2014). Currere and the beauty of soulful classroom moments. *The Nebraska Educator: A Student-Led Journal* (16). http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebeducator/16

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stopped believing that education had the power to change the often inequitable status quo of our society. The bureaucratic nature of the institution of education had stolen a crucial part of my identity. I carried this cynicism with me as I started my doctoral studies. However, through my encounters with the ideas of Dewey, Pinar, and Eisner, among others, and my experiences teaching in the realm of higher education, I have come to reclaim what was originally mine: a passion for and sincere belief in the power education can hold for students and teachers alike. This repossession is encapsulated in the following quote from Dewey (1938): "Improvisation that takes advantage of special occasions prevents teaching and learning from being stereotyped and dead" (p. 78-79). One could say that the disconnect I was feeling at the end of my K-12 teaching experience was due to the fact that my teaching was, in the words of Dewey, dead.

However, my life as a teacher has since been resuscitated. Macintyre Latta (2013) states, "The space generated a movement of thinking that invited and valued my participation" (p. 104). I now realize that space was the missing variable in my K-12 teaching experience. Although I always had a physical space to work within, there was not much curricular or creative space with which to play. Reeves (2010), drawing on Sawyer (2004), describes expert teaching as "disciplined improvisation, wherein teachers plan instruction using their knowledge of content, students, and context while simultaneously opening space for improvisation around that plan, space that invites digression and the 'collaborative emergence' of learning" (p. 245). Leaving room in the curriculum for students' interests is of the utmost importance. The idea of *currere* allows for this space in the curriculum.

Currere's most literal definition stems from Latin, in which it means "to run." *Currere* is used here to represent a postmodern philosophical approach to education that acknowledges personal and temporal dimensions of the learner, and the effects such dimensions have on the curriculum. Utilizing *currere* in the classroom, then, recognizes that all students have unique pasts, presents, and futures. It allows for students' biographical idiosyncrasies to mold and shape classroom life and practices. *Currere* acknowledges that curriculum is a living entity and therefore should be allowed to deviate from the "plan" that most people think of when the topic of curriculum arises (Pinar, 2011). Gaudelli and Hewitt (2010) men-

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tion "the beauty of soulful moments" which, to me, is a perfect way of framing instances that illustrate such deviations. Students and teacher, in effect, co-create the curriculum in a *currere* classroom. "To run" implies movement. *Currere*, then, suggests a dynamic entity, constantly changing as it continues to develop.

The current trajectory of K-12 education is aimed at standardization, accountability, and scripted teaching (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Derthick & Dunn, 2009; Eslinger, 2012; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). In an era when improvisation and exploration are devalued, it is essential to consider the question: How can *currere* and the beauty of soulful classroom moments be utilized to breathe new life into the educational process? Potential answers to this question will be explored through the lens of existing literature and the author's own journey in both the K-12 and higher education arenas.

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Week 2 – Leaving Loose Ends from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments

(Sierk, 2014)

Leaving Loose Ends

Within the last decade, teaching has become more and more tied to accountability measures. The practice of "teaching to the test" has become rampant in classrooms across the country. Barone (1983) states, "The use of objectives in this way is the educational equivalent to revealing the punch line before telling the joke" (p. 23). One can imagine that the joke would not be as enjoyable if the punch line was revealed too early. In the same manner, education that strictly relies on external objectives, to the exclusion of all else, is often less gratifying and less intellectually stimulating. How then, can *currere* flourish in this testing culture?

Eisner's (1991) work presents an alternative to the current system's unyielding approach to standards. "Teaching that is not hog-tied to rigid specifications often moves in directions and explores ideas that neither the students nor the teacher could envision at the outset" (p. 46). This notion suggests the idea that there is more to learning than is generally included in your typical standardized test. These tests, as students and teachers have come to know them, only account for a handful of educational possibilities. Pateman (1997) compares life's infinite possibilities to art, stating that "not all the permissible moves are prescribed in ad-

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vance" (p. 7). Similarly, when used as one measure of student success, rather than an end-all-be-all, students are encouraged to go above and beyond what the test is able to measure.

Benchmarks meant to serve as a minimum boundary now function to delimit student achievement. Eisner (1991) suggests that "goals are not stable targets at which you aim, but directions towards which you travel" (p. 47). To assume that goals are stable targets implies that learning is something that has a definite end. However, there is an infinite amount of knowledge in this world and one cannot possibly ever know everything there is to know about everything. Therefore, to consider goals as "directions towards which you travel" allows us to instead view learning as a process that is never fully accomplished. The summative nature of standardized tests directly contradicts this train of thought. Therefore, these measures of student achievement should be seen as a snapshot in time. We must all recognize that there is a broader realm within which these snapshots are captured. Such measures only give us a narrow view of what students are capable of, as any teacher can attest.

The strict adherence to scripted curricula is problematic as it does not allow for the influence of students and other contextual factors. Dewey (1934) asserts, "Those who carry on their work as a demonstration of a preconceived thesis may have the joys of egotistic success but not that of fulfillment of an experience for its own sake" (p. 144). Dewey's idea of "a demonstration of a preconceived thesis" may be thought of as a bow that is already tied, or in the context of classroom procedures, a lesson that does not allow for student-derived digressions. If teachers leave some ends loose in their lesson preparation, the end result may surprise them in its complexity and ingenuity. One way of leaving loose end is through the incorporation of open dialogue and communication as a classroom norm.

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Week 3 – Dialogue and Communication in the Currere Classroom from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments (Sierk, 2014)

Dialogue and Communication in the *Currere* Classroom

Communication cannot freely occur when one is subscribing to a scripted curriculum. The *currere* classroom, in contrast, allows for the free exchange of ideas via open dialogue and communication. Pinar (2011) describes communication as "an ongoing social ceremony aspiring

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to shared understanding while engaging difference and protecting dissent" (p. 19). This type of exchange cannot be planned ahead of time. Rather, it must be lived in the present moment. It allows for and respects conflict, tackling it head on rather than sweeping it under a metaphorical rug. It is authentic, honoring students' responses and building off of the knowledge students bring to the classroom context. Allowing for this kind of communication in the classroom means relinquishing some control as a teacher; this is not to say that nothing is planned in such situations. "Strong professors prompt, guide, enrich, but often simply observe student conversation" (Barone, Berliner, Blanchard, Casanova, & McGowan, 1996, p. 1122). Through thoughtful prompts and watchful guidance, teachers are still able to move the class in the direction it needs to go. However, the path taken to get from point A to point B may look different than the teacher originally expected.

Information and knowledge is shared through processes of communication. Dewey (1934) stated, "Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular" (p. 253). The richness of curricular conversations is increased by the exchange of different opinions and points of view. This resonates with my experience of teaching multicultural education. It is through agreements, disagreements, new ideas, shared opinions, and differing perspectives that true learning occurs. In educational ventures, teachers often rely solely on one perspective for insight and information (e.g. the required textbook). However, the world is made up of many different viewpoints, and students must be prepared to encounter viewpoints with which they agree, disagree, or had not previously considered. Therefore, giving students opportunities to share their viewpoints allows for the widening of others' horizons. It also allows for the student sharing their viewpoint to practice articulating their opinions. This exercise gives students the opportunity to find and hone the language they use in explaining what they believe and why, an important life skill for all to possess.

Education is a means by which we socialize our youth. Schooling aims to impart certain values and reinforce a shared culture and experience so that students may become productive citizens who contribute positively to society. According to Dewey (1934), "[I]t is by activities that are shared and by language and other means of intercourse that qualities and values become common to the experience of a group of mankind" (p.

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298). This is not to say that everyone comes away from the dialogue in complete agreement, abandoning their original train of thought. However, it does mean that everyone comes away with a new understanding that has been influenced in some way by other people's ideas.

Many times, boisterous conversation, that often occurs when students disagree with one another, is not welcomed in classroom settings. Such conversation is seen as disruptive and off-task. However, Dewey (1938) states, "Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from disclosing their real nature" (p. 62). In not giving students adequate opportunities to openly express themselves in classroom settings, we are oftentimes asking them to be something they are not. We are sending the message that who they are as a person is not something that fits within classroom expectations. In communicating ideas with others, students are able to add their unique twist on the curriculum, making it something that is meaningful to them... something with which they want to engage. Open dialogue and communication often occurs extemporaneously. This process is not predictable, rather it is quite messy.

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Week 4 – The Messiness of Creative Teaching from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom

Moments (Sierk, 2014)

The Messiness of Creative Teaching

To the untrained eye, the *currere* classroom may be seen as chaotic or disorganized. Barone (1983) speaks of "spontaneity in teaching" and "instantaneous responses" (p. 25) as essential to teaching as a creative practice. These elements of the *currere* classroom occur when teachers take advantage of their students' unique interests and questions. May (1991) argues that "unusual events" that naturally occur in the world of teaching and learning are "extraordinarily meaningful to students for a variety of reasons" (p. 146). These unusual events are usually overlooked by students and teachers alike... ruled as things that "don't fit," things that are outside the realm of what counts as teaching and learning. However, these moments of eccentricity are what we often remember of our own schooling experience. They stand out from the dull moments that tend to blur together... the note taking, the cramming for tests, the filling out of worksheets, and the reading of textbooks.

Taking tests and completing rote tasks, such as filling out worksheets, is oftentimes not a natural inclination students possess. However,

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learning is an innate ability that students constantly engage in, whether they are conscious of it or not. Dewey (1934) states, "An activity that was 'natural' – spontaneous and unintended – is transformed because it is undertaken as a means to a consciously entertained consequence" (p. 65). In traditional classrooms, teaching generally revolves around what is natural for the teacher. However, the level of influence students are allowed to have on that practice depends on the level of openness that teacher possesses. Eisner (1992) states:

The arts teach that goals need to be flexible and that surprise counts; ...that being open to the unanticipated opportunities that inevitably emerge in the context of action increases insight; and that purposeful flexibility rather than rigid adherence to prior plans is more likely to yield something of value (p. 594).

If the teacher is flexible and open to surprises and unanticipated opportunities, as suggested by Eisner in his discussion of the arts, then the students are able to develop the teacher's natural inclination into an intended, designed part of the class through the manipulation of that particular classroom practice. This manipulation creates something that is unique to that group of learners... something that can never be recreated in the same, exact way, and something that feels natural for both the teacher and the students.

This act of manipulation mirrors Dewey's (1934) idea of "the unexpected turn," something that is not originally envisioned, but that saves the work from becoming habitual, routine, and lifeless. In this respect, the students' manipulation of the teacher's natural inclination to teach represents an unexpected turn. No one knows what the end result will be until that end is reached and they turn to look back at where they have been. This element of surprise keeps students guessing and wondering... reverent of the educative experiences they are living. Dewey suggests, "To generate the indispensable excitement there must be something at stake, something momentous and uncertain – like the outcome of a battle or the prospects of a harvest. A sure thing does not arouse us emotionally" (p. 69). The uncertainty present in the *currere* classroom maintains students' interest while encouraging them to press on. The spontaneity of

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engaging with "the unexpected turn" alters, or contaminates, the classroom environment.

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Week 5 – Contaminating the Classroom Environment from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful

Classroom Moments (Sierk, 2014)

Contaminating the Classroom Environment

In the current testing culture, the classroom environment is largely used as a place to administer the information necessary for students to pass standardized, high-stakes tests. Dewey (1938) states, "The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without" (p. 17). Development from within allows for individuals to choose their own educational pathway; whereas, formation from without imposes a standardized educational pathway on all students, regardless of their own unique interests. Although written over 75 years ago, Dewey's sentiment still rings true. Through policies like No Child Left Behind and the imposition of the Common Core, formation from without has become an increasingly prevalent influence on educational realities across the nation. However, individual teachers have been known to tug back in the form of development from within in this perpetual game of tug-of-war.

Educational policy, as a method of formation from without, may dictate that certain things should be happening in classrooms, and those things usually do happen to varying degrees; however, to expect full fidelity to policy would be foolish. Dewey (1934) states, "There is no experience in which the human contribution is not a factor in determining what actually happens" (p. 256). Teachers and students, whether they intend to or not, alter educational policies to meet their needs and the needs of the particular classroom, district, and regional contexts within which they reside. Pinar (2011) states, "There is no 'pure' school subject to be transmitted uncontaminated by those who study and participate in it" (p. 6). There are certain topics that obviously must be taught in each specific subject area; for instance, teaching the types of triangles in geometry or the difference between a noun and a verb in English language arts are seen to be essential components of such classes. Nevertheless, how one goes about teaching these concepts effectively contaminates the "pure" subject.

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Similarly, students may choose to follow exactly what the teacher says, does, or demonstrates. Conversely, they may deviate from the teacher's approach, making their own path. Dewey (1938) describes "the plan" as "a co-operative enterprise, not a dictation," stating that "the teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process" (p. 72). The teacher, in this situation, acts as a facilitator. Students' ways of doing are honored as having a place in the inner workings of the curriculum. They are allowed to "contaminate" the classroom environment. Teachers, too, are allowed this right as they attend to the medium of curriculum.

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Week 6 -Attending to the Medium of Curriculum from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful

Classroom Moments (Sierk, 2014)

Attending to the Medium of Curriculum

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines medium as "the materials or methods used by an artist." Therefore, the "medium of curriculum" may be seen as the materials or methods used by an educator. May (1991) wrote, "Curriculum is the dynamic interaction of persons, artifacts, and ideas in a particular context over time – it is not a script. It has no formulaic and definitive beginning, middle, and end" (p. 143). The dynamic nature of curriculum means that it is always changing, never static. More specifically, in a classroom, the cast of characters is not always constant. New students come midway through the year, students move out of the district, substitute teachers come and go as needed, all changing the trajectory of the curriculum as a living entity. New artifacts and ideas are introduced, also altering the learning route taken. Forks in the road emerge as new directions are discovered through changes in the curricular environment.

Successful navigation of these forks in the road requires that teachers be open to and skilled at improvisation. Sawyer (2004) argues that this improvisation allows students to participate in the co-construction of their own knowledge in ways that scripted, teacher-centric instruction does not. Continuing with the analogy of forks in the road, if a route has been preselected, the possible forks in the road that could be taken would still exist; however, they would be mere sights on the journey, taunting all who desired to take them as the car passed them by. Taking the im-

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provisation out of teaching reduces the act and art of teaching and learning to something one-dimensional and superficial. Attending to particularities, and allowing students to traverse the forks in the road, adds dimension and depth to teaching and learning.

One argument, that is often alluded to, against improvisation in the classroom is that there is not enough time to allow students to go down these proverbial forks in the road. However, as Dewey (1934) suggests, sensitivity to a medium does not "lug in extraneous material" (p. 207). In being sensitive to the medium of curriculum, teachers should carefully consider what information, skills, and knowledge is pertinent to their subject area and to the particular group of students that will be tasked with engaging with it. Students should also play a role in this decision. What do they want or need to know? What information interests them? How will what they learn in this particular class help them meet their individual and collective goals? In asking students these questions, teachers will begin to see what material is extraneous and how to best use their limited time with students. In essence, students lead teachers to the core of the matter.

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Week 7 – Following the Leader and Leading the Follower from Currere and the Beauty of

Soulful Classroom Moments (Sierk, 2014)

Following the Leader and Leading the Follower

Who, then, is the leader in a *currere* classroom, and who is the follower? According to Walker (2003), teachers should not force students to "follow adult interests" (p. 62); instead, teachers should follow the interests their students possess. Curriculum is often centered on what adults think students should know or be able to do. It is a rare occurrence for a student's interest to play a central role in the development of curriculum. When students' interests are considered, they are often relegated to the periphery, a minor consideration at best. Students are expected to follow the teacher. We underestimate students' ability to lead the way; after all, how could they possibly know how to get from point A to point B having never travelled that road before? As anyone who has ever visited a new place can attest, even if you do not know the way, you can manage to find what you need. You may not travel the most direct, efficient route, but through trial and error, many wrong turns, and possibly even a helpful stranger's directions, eventually, you will arrive at your destination. So is

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the case with following students' interests in the classroom and in the curriculum.

The teacher's expertise is not null in this scenario, however. Barone (2001) describes the teacher's role as follows:

It is the role of the educator consciously to select and arrange features of the classroom environment so as to increase the likelihood of such encounters… she must never coerce students into particular activities, or attempt to force upon them 'correct' descriptions of their selves and their world (p. 129).

The same curricular objectives can be accomplished while following students' interests. Teachers are tasked with creating a classroom climate and an instructional framework that allows for students' identities to be known, appreciated, and developed. Students are forced to "do school" in classrooms that do not honor who they are as individuals, classrooms that do not leave space for student identities to influence the curriculum. Students in this position are playing a role in an act of fiction. The teaching and learning that occurs in such situations is inauthentic and contrived. Students are not deeply impacted by this type of education, because they are removed from it. In order for education to have a profound effect on students, they must be invited to engage in the curriculum as they truly are, not as we wish they were.

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Week 8 – Conclusion: Returning Anew from Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom

Moments (Sierk, 2014)

Conclusion: Returning Anew

Returning, then, to my journey to becoming the educator I am today. You may ask yourself why I share my meager story in conjunction with the theoretical work of great minds like Pinar, Dewey, and Eisner. In the words of Pinar (1975), "I discern that the theme of my current situation differs from, say, yours, but the fact that we are both facing an issue is the same" (p. 14). In one way or another, we are all affected by the current trajectory of educational policy.

In my own journey as an educator, I feel as though I have, in a sense, come full circle. Since the beginning of this journey, I have experienced many ups and downs. Comparing my experience as a student in multicul-

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tural education and my experience as an instructor of the same course, I cannot help but recognize that I am not the same person that started this journey several years ago. There are bits and pieces of the original me that remain. However, there have been chunks of me that have been broken, rearranged, replaced, and altered forever. I have wished that I knew then what I know now. However, was I ready to hear these messages at that time? I now realize that I got exactly what I needed when I needed it the most.

The phrase "come full circle" is misleading, however. When the circle is closed, one may think that the journey is complete. There is a sense that you've returned to the place from which you began, and I would argue that you can never do that. I have in fact returned to the physical place, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, from which I began this journey. However, since I am a different person in many ways, I am not experiencing it in the same way. Although I came back knowing many of the professors, they have also changed and our interactions demonstrate the inadequacies of the phrase "come full circle."

A better phrase may be "returning anew." Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines return as "to go back or come back again" and anew as "in a new and different form." These definitions, when put together, embody what I feel I have accomplished at this stage in my journey... I have come back again in a new and different form, rejuvenated from having experienced *currere* and the beauty of soulful classroom moments.

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Thought Catcher Teacher Writing Activity
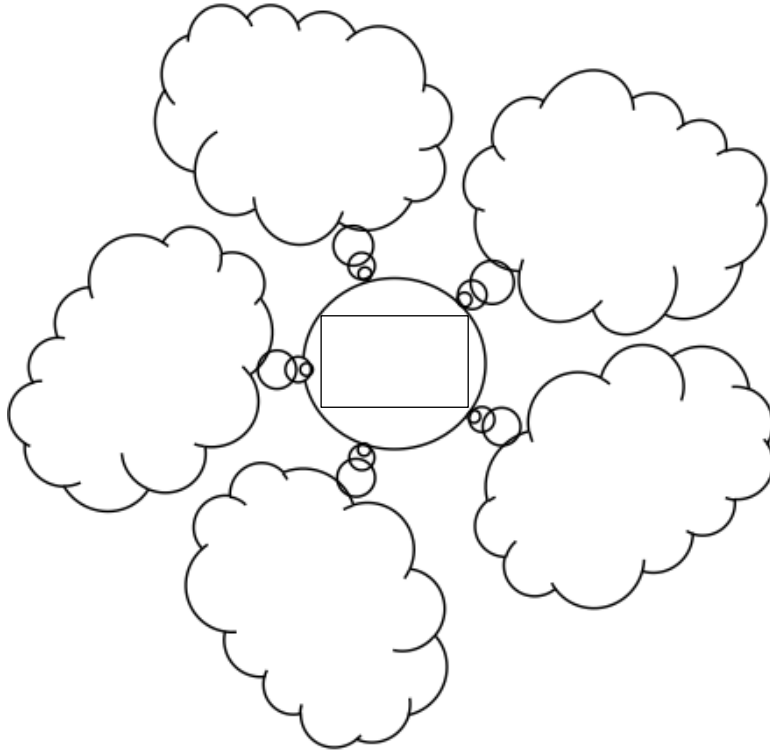
Note: Teachers will complete the Thought Catcher while reading each section of "Currere and the Beauty of Soulful Classroom Moments" (Sierk, 2014). The center title of the circle will reflect the title of the current section of study for the week's Currere Writing Study session. Figure 2 lists the first section of the article. Sierk, J. (2014). Currere and the beauty of soulful classroom moments. *The Nebraska Educator: A Student-Led Journal* (16).

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Appendix G

Week 8 – Teacher Currere Writing Activity

Teacher Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

Currere Writing Activity

1. Reflect on a memorable moment in your educational experience that made a significant impact on who you are today. Stop-and-jot the story here:

2. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

3. If you could describe your past, present ,and future in 1 word, what would it be? Explain.

4. How does your current experience connect to your cultural experience?