Abstract

Juxtaposing currere with elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought to inform a
cosmopolitan concept of spirituality, I seek to articulate how I have engaged in my own
subjective reconstruction. In this dissertation I aspired to describe how my subjectivity has been
reconstructed through autobiography and academic study, toward a coherent self capable of
sustained, critical, and creative engagement with the world (Pinar, 2009, p. 62).

All the chapters are focused on the concept of currere. The first chapter explains why I
employ the autobiographical method of currere to explore my life and study in Canada. The
second chapter provides an example of how I used the method of currere to acquire self-
understanding. The third chapter emphasizes the concept of attunement that emerged from my
own autobiographical research, described in the second chapter. The fourth and fifth chapters
document how my subjectivity has been informed by academic study through the study of
ancient Chinese philosophical thought.

This dissertation comprises the following theoretical contributions: first, I have contributed
to the scholarly effort to understand currere by proposing the concept of Chinese currere.
Derived from my subject position as a Chinese woman who has studied in Beijing and Hong
Kong, studying now in Vancouver, I hope to contribute to the uniqueness of a Chinese
cosmopolitan theory of curriculum as experienced – the initial formulation of a Chinese currere.
Second, central to the concept of Chinese currere is the concept of attunement. Attunement
incorporates traces of ancient Chinese philosophical thought as it manifests itself in my life
writing and reflection on the writing. In keeping with currere, attunement also emphasizes how
even informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside the classroom) can
contribute to self-understanding and wisdom acquisition. Third, this study juxtaposes understandings of subjectivity from Western and Eastern perspectives, and provides an example of how subjectivity can be reconstructed by academic knowledge and experience. Fourth, this study provides a spiritual understanding of curriculum – especially expressed as currere. Fifth, this dissertation provides a study of the affinities between ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the concept of currere.
Lay Summary

This dissertation describes how I have evolved intellectually and emotionally and allowed my viewpoints to be transformed through writing my autobiography and three theoretical papers. The idea of currere runs through my own autobiography and these papers.

I begin with an autobiographical study of myself, a Chinese woman who is studying in Canada. I seek to provide understandings of the issues I face as student, teacher, woman, and Chinese national studying in Canada. Attunement is the concept that emerges from my own autobiography which suggests that learning not only happens in the classroom but also within the context of a person’s life. As I studied and practiced the method of currere, I came to suspect its affinity with certain elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought. Spontaneously, I have found that the idea of spirituality may follow from the study and practice of the method of currere.
Preface

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Dedication

To my mother.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Curriculum as Complicated Conversation

If curriculum is conceived as complicated conversation, currere – in Latin, the running of the course – points us to the experience of its participants. Hence, how participants experience curriculum becomes the focus of research. Research in this sense becomes a site of attentiveness and contemplation to what is (and is not: the so-called hidden curriculum) studied. In this proposed dissertation research, I will study my present lived experience as a Chinese woman studying in Canada, juxtaposing this reflection with elements of the philosophic past in China and the understanding of the concept of spirituality.

Associating ancient Chinese philosophical concepts with currere, suggesting its spiritual meaning and potential, embedded in a single life, this research articulates my life (academic, social, and cultural, etc.) as an international student grappling with my own life history, my present preoccupations, my dreams of a future, both continuous and unprecedented. My subjectivity has been reconstructed through autobiography and academic study.

During the process of writing autobiographically, I have evolved intellectually and emotionally and allowed my viewpoints to be transformed. That I describe these developments autobiographically becomes one instance of a theory of education in the first person singular. That theory suggests that learning occurs not only in and out of classrooms but also within the context of a person’s life. In such a theory of education learning becomes situated not only in school-subject specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labour. I term this particular form of study attunement. Its occurrence includes but also goes beyond
classroom or formal study. In this theory, intellectual, more broadly, academic labour is also emotional labour. This intellectual pursuit is also emotionally engaged, since, as noted by Grumet (1976), one cannot isolate emotional responses from intellectual ones, especially when, for example, one struggles to understand what is not readily comprehensible, when one (dis)likes the subject matter and/or the teacher, or when one feels distracted by more compelling interests. By engaging oneself autobiographically, one can become an observer to oneself; one can become a teacher to and with oneself, encouraging self-questioning and sustained academic study.

Autobiographically speaking, this self-self pedagogical relation becomes one instance – later reconstructed – of classroom teaching. It resembles classroom teaching in terms of its conversational character, no matter how loudly or silently in solitude that dialogue is conducted. In this sense, I am a teacher first to myself, then to others, although it may not be sequenced in a linear way. My students teach me, too, if I am open to being influenced, as I have asked myself to be in relation to myself as well as others. In contrast to educational theories that focus on the relations among school, society and the state, or those that emphasize “best practices” of teaching, or those that explore the neurological bases of learning, this autobiographical educational theory starts from the human subject encountered as a subjective and social presence, acknowledging the complex roles that institutional structures, political and policy agendas, teaching protocols, and learning theories play in the process of education but embodying them in the subject’s lived experience. In this educational theory, these influences, pressures and directives are threaded through the subjective experience of the individual person and articulated autobiographically. These can be expressed allegorically, as lessons to be learned from experience. Educational theory is, then, contextualized and concretized in myself. Studying this construction of “I” theory can contribute to the understanding of currere.
1.2 Is Autobiography Research?

I was listening to the teacher very carefully in a math class. A classmate behind me tried to poke me, and I felt itchy. When I turned around and told him not to touch me again, I was caught by the teacher in the platform. He hit me fiercely and shouted at me: “You will be kicked out and not allowed to take my class if you talk again in my class!” I tried to explain, but he did not listen to me. I was furious! I swore that I would no longer listen to him in his class! I promise!

Jiayu Feng (2015)

I was in the Grade 3. The teacher was a scholar of the Qing Dynasty. He had a round face, dark skin; always had a smile on his face. I could always answer his questions in class about historical events because my grandfather taught me a lot of history when I was at home. One day, when we were learning the Analect, he suddenly asked, “Confucius says that there are three kinds of worthy friends: honest friends, understanding friends and learned friends. Who is the learned friend?” All the boys in the class answered: “Shudi He!” It was me. I felt shy. It was already 60 years ago! But I still have a fresh memory of the experience, moved by these kids’ innocence and teacher’s recognition. The warmth remains in my heart, and it brings a smile to my face whenever I think about it.

Jiayu Feng (2015)
These two short passages remain vivid, even though they just depict what was happening in one class in China. One incident occurred about 100 years ago and the student – Bingdi He, is a famous Chinese historian; the other is more recent. What is evident is that students have very different experiences when attending school. What can teachers learn from these two stories?

There have been numerous efforts to understand curriculum – and educational experience more broadly - autobiographically. Morris (2015) argues that autobiography is more than someone simply telling his or her story; she explains, “The story of the self is always webbed inside of an historical context. Stories of the self are also stories of history. The self does not live in a vacuum. Self is always in relation to the larger world” (p. 211). The story of self is, then, one manifestation of a world where one resides. Susan Edgerton (1991) also affirms that autobiography does not exist in isolation; it is connected to many pressing issues:

Autobiographical writing enables students to study themselves. Such study links self to place, and place is simultaneously historical, cultural, and racial….Via another’s life one understands more fully one’s own, as well as social and historical ties that link both lives to a particular place. (p. 112)

Grumet (1976) contends that autobiography is a form of self-revelation with a focus on “a transfer of our attention from these forms of themselves to the ways in which a student uses them and moves through them” (p. 68). Grumet shows how autobiography works in and for the self. As a result, the autobiographical lens can be an act of self-creation and can be potentially self-transformative (Ayers, 1990, p. 274).

Graham (1991) reveals the rationale for using autobiography either for school programs or for university students reflecting on their educational experience. He associates autobiography with the seven forms of knowledge proposed by Hirst (1974): the empirical, the moral, the
aesthetic, the mathematical, the philosophical, the religious, and the historical/sociological. Hirst (1974) argues that irreducibility criteria can be applied to any of the seven forms: any of them cannot be reduced to any other. Some subjects such as language arts embody the moral, aesthetic, and historical forms, but they are not identical with any of them. According to Graham (1991), autobiography embodies a distinct form of knowledge. Thus, he suggests: “Autobiography can stand as the exemplar of another equally valuable and irreducible way of thinking and knowing” (Graham, 1991, p. 11). In this respect narrative is a mode of thought proposed by Bruner (1986), a mode “whose truth is discovered in verisimilitude and not in appeals to procedures for establishing formal and empirical proof” (Graham, 1991, p. 11).

Graham (1991) also tries to understand autobiography from a constructive approach. For him, writing autobiographically is a process of self-construction:

For many students, perhaps all, a primary object of attention and interest is the self; and to construct the self means to pursue the consequences of inquiry or active experimentation into or on that self, as well as providing access to the forms of knowledge… The student self might be considered as object of inquiry or experiment, thus turning the writing of autobiography and autobiographical discourse into a way of thinking, a conceptual instrument of cognition. (p. 13)

Autobiography is, he suggests, a socially constructive process, engaging students in constructing and reconstructing the self (Graham, 1991). The two reasons seem to provide a strong rationale for the employment of autobiography in research.

In the following, I am going to review the autobiographical theory of education in terms of teaching, study, and curriculum in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of
autobiography in education. Pinar et al. (1995) describe three major streams of scholarship linked to autobiographical and biographical research. The first stream of scholarship is autobiographical theory and practice, which includes: *currere*, collaboration, voice, dialogue journals, place, post-structuralist portraits of self and experience and so on. The second stream is feminist autobiography including concepts such as community, middle passage, and reclaiming the self. The third stream refers to those efforts to understand teachers biographically and autobiographically. Bullough Jr. and Pinnegar (2001) identify the origins of self-study in four developments within education: the growing prominence of naturalistic inquiry methods, the rise of the reconceptualist movement in curriculum studies, the increased involvement of international scholars in teacher education research, and the re-emergence of action research and its variations. Various autobiographical theories have been proposed. In the following section, I will discuss autobiography in teacher education and autobiography in the reconceptualist movement of curriculum studies due to its relevancy to my research.

1.2.1 Autobiography in Teacher Education

Self-study in teaching is a systematic and rigorous process designed to explore and extend teacher knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 1993, cited in Clarke and Erikson, 2003, p. 3). Ken Zeichner (1999) acknowledges self-study as one of five categories of “work in the new scholarship of teacher education” (p. 11). This autobiographical and biographical research in curriculum studies is comprised of four streams: teachers’ collaborative autobiography, personal practical knowledge, teacher lore, and studying teachers’ lives (Pinar, et al., 1995). A number of scholars have published papers on teachers’ lives and lived experiences (see Abbs, 1974; Butt, 1984, 1990, 1991; Butt & Raymond, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1992; Clandinin, 1985, 1986; Clandinin

1.2.1.1 Collaborative Autobiography

Several scholars such as Nel Noddings and Janet L. Miller have noticed the collaborative character of autobiographical/biological research (Pinar, et al., 1995). Noddings (1986) regards such research as one in which all participants regard themselves as members of a community. She argued: “we approach our goal by living with those whom we teach in a caring community, through modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation” (p. 502, cited in Pinar, et al., 1995). Miller contends that in order to understand the complex constraints of those who want to uncover as yet unrecognized forms of oppression, collaborative relationships with teachers need to be long lasting. Miller (1990) further explicates the necessity of collaboration and the social nature of autobiographical research in her report of collaborative work with graduate students:

This narrative, then, attempts to bring teachers’ voices to the center of the dialogue and debate surrounding current educational reform, teacher education restructuring efforts, and research on teachers’ knowledge. Our group’s exploration of the possibilities of collaborative and interactive research as one way in which we might “recover our own possibilities” are at the heart of this chronicle. (p. 10)

Miller uses the “creating spaces” to refer to the process of “creating an interpretative community in which lived experience can be discovered, expressed, and interpreted” (Pinar et al., 1995). Collaborative research shows the social process embedded in autobiography. Collaborative efforts such as those Miller describes offer the possibility of passages back and
forth between private and public; such passages allow an envisioning and sharing of possible worlds for teachers and those with whom they work in schools (Miller, 1990, cited in Pinar, et al., 1995).

Butt (1991) also highlights the importance of collaboration in the interpretation of experience. According to Butt (1991), teachers as co-researchers acquire enhanced understanding of the professional knowledge they possess and use in collaboration with other teachers and researchers. As pointed out by Pinar et al. (1995), Butt’s contribution in part lies in his formulation and refinement of a methodology to generate autobiographical “data” regarding teachers’ experiences.

1.2.1.2 Narrative Inquiry (personal practical knowledge)

As claimed by Chambers (2013), F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin are “undoubtedly Canada’s best-known curriculum scholars of narrative inquiry” (p. 21). They present a view of knowledge and theory as residing in the heads of real teachers (Britzman, 1991, p. 50). They term this personal practical knowledge. Clandinin (1985, p. 362) defines personal practical knowledge as knowing which is imbued with all the experiences that make up a person’s being. Its meaning is derived from and understood in terms of a person’s experiential history, both professional and personal. She (1985) further argues that teachers’ personal practical knowledge is to be found in practice: “Personal practical knowledge is revealed through interpretations of observed practices over time and is given biographical, personal meaning through reconstructions of the teacher’s narratives of experience” (p. 363). Teachers understand and reconstruct meanings of their lives in class through narrative accounts of their lived experience. This method focuses on the experience of the individual. “Their method offered
teachers a way to document narratives of their own experience as research data on their own experience” (Chambers, 2003, p. 22). As acknowledged by Miller (2005):

Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin have provided a discussion of methodological issues involved in narrative inquiry as well as an overview of narrative storytelling approaches…to help locate narrative in a historical intellectual context. (pp. 93-94)

Similarly, Soto and Swadener (2005) suggest that the power of this line of inquiry lies in the potential to locate experience within complex contexts to make sense of daily-lived world reality (p. 10). Other scholars also contribute to the understanding of this narrative inquiry. Leggo (2008) identifies three principal dynamics involved in narrative inquiry: story, interpretation, and discourse. According to Leggo (2008), story involves asking the questions: who? what? where? why? how?. Interpretation addresses the basic question: what is the significance of the story. Discourse is all about how the story is told. These dynamics guide the writing process. Narrative inquiry has helped scholars to bring personal experience to bear on research and to validate and respect diverse voices (Carger, 1996; He, 2003; Phillion, 1999; Soto, 1997).

1.2.1.3 Teacher Lore

William H. Schubert and William Ayers are primary scholars associated with the study of teacher lore (Pinar, et.al, 1995). The Teacher Lore Project, housed at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has been funded in part by the Chicago Area School Effectiveness Council (CASEC). Schubert (1991) defines teacher lore as:

The study of the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and understandings of teachers. In part it is inquiry into the beliefs, values, and images that guide teachers’ work. In
this sense, it constitutes an attempt to learn what teachers learn from their experience.

(p. 207)

For Schubert, praxis refers to the blend of theory and practice embedded in teachers’ work. Teacher lore research aims to disclose “the experiential knowledge that informs their teaching or the revealed stories about their practical experiences” (Schubert, 1991, p. 208). Schubert suggests that teachers learn from their own experiences and knowledge is embedded in practical experience. Teacher lore, in this sense, closely resembles the “personal practical knowledge” that Clandinin and Connelly propose (Pinar, et al., 1995). Schubert summarizes the findings of the Teacher Lore Project. There are two types of findings: the first is a literature review including the bodies of knowledge that provide insights into teachers’ experience, and the second is primary studies that involve research with teachers directly via interviews and observations. A number of Ph.D. dissertations exploring teacher lore were completed at the University of Illinois at Chicago (Melnick, 1988; Hulsebosch, 1988, 1992; Millies, 1989; Jagla, 1989; Koerner, 1989). Pinar et al. (1995) point out that this strand of autobiographical research, with its emphasis on reflexivity and lived experience, shares with the work of Clandinin, Connelly, Goodson, Butt and Raymond a commitment to exploring the lived experiences of teachers.

1.2.1.4 Autobiographic Praxeology and “Living Pedagogically”

Other scholars also contribute to the study of autobiography in teacher education. For Butt (1991), autobiography exhibits how teachers’ knowledge is formed, and how it can be studied and understood. Accordingly, it is deemed as one form of educational praxis. Butt characterizes his methodology (by means of which he studies teachers’ knowledge) as autobiographic praxeology. This is a methodology with which the researcher studies teachers’ knowledge,
including “the process of how it has been and is being elaborated, how it is expressed through autobiographic inquiry” (Butt et al., 1988, p. 120, cited in Pinar et al., 1995). The four basic questions raised by Butt are: “What is the nature of my working reality? How do I think and act in that context and why? How, through my work life experience and personal history, did I come to be that way? How do I wish to become in my professional future?” (Butt et al., 1990, p. 257, cited in Chambers, 2013).

Clarke (2012) also writes autobiographically about the “inner work of teachers,” describing his experience with a group of “award winning educators” (p. 59) to identify the connection between attending to inner work as an educator and successful teaching. He proposes the notion of living pedagogically, arguing that teaching is something that is deeply embedded in and becomes part of the way in which one makes sense of, negotiates, and gives shape to one’s life both within and beyond the classroom. Clarke (2012) explains “inner life” as a more accessible, and possibly more generative, way of thinking about living pedagogically. Clarke portrays this attentiveness as the process in which he “identifies, problematizes, and specifies what it is that he is being attentive to” (p. 59).

Autobiographical research in education, as observed by Goodson and Walker (1991), “begins to force a reconceptualization of models of teacher development. We move in short from the teacher-as-practice to the teacher-as-person as our starting point for development” (p. 145). All of these autobiographical scholars have reconceptualized our understanding of studying teachers and teaching (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 565). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) point out that there is a growing literature on self-study that will increasingly have an influence on teacher education (see p. 14).
1.2.2 Autobiography in the Reconceptualist Movement in Curriculum Studies

Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo (2009) claim that “if curriculum is currere, then autobiography is the theorizing of currere” (p. 31). The systematic effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text was initiated in the 1970s by Pinar and Grumet, and their establishment of autobiography as a major curriculum discourse was elaborated in their series of works, such as Toward a Poor Curriculum and Currere: Toward Reconceptualization (Pinar, et al., 1995). Pinar et al. (1995) trace the historical antecedents of autobiography: David Hamilton (1990) perceives the link between curriculum and life history, for Calvinists “already had a fondness for using curriculum in the form vitae curricul (course or career of life)” (cited in Pinar et al, 1995, p. 535).

Contemporary efforts to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text are often associated with the formulation of the concept of currere (Pinar et al., 1995). In Working from Within, “Like some modern painters,” Pinar (1972) writes, “my students and I have come to feel that we rarely need to refer to subject matter outside ourselves. We work from a different source. We work from within” (p. 331). Early exploration of the autobiographical method suggested withdrawal from the public world as a means of rediscovering both the private and public worlds (Pinar et al., 1995). The search for an autobiographical method was continued in Pinar’s (1974) “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” In the essay he argued that the field of curriculum had forgotten the existing individual and attention needed to be directed to the individual:

It is not that the public world—curriculum, instruction, objectives—become unimportant; it is that to further comprehend their roles in the educational process
we must take our eyes off them for a time, and begin a lengthy, systematic search of our inner experience. (p. 3)

Pinar (1978) employs the notion of “blind spot” to refer to the link between intellectual development and biographic movement:

The blind spot has to do with my experience of biographic and intellectual movements as steps. There is always a next step, although it may be veiled. It is as if it is a dark spot to be illuminated, and once illuminated, the step may be taken. (p. 112)

This “next step” was the formulation of a method—currere. The method of currere contains four steps: 1) regressive, 2) progressive, 3) analytical, and 4) synthetical, and signals the establishment of autobiography in curriculum studies. Grumet studies the foundations of currere in psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and existentialism (1976, 1992); therefore, as argued by Pinar et al. (1995), "This scholarship makes clear that the apparent simplicity of autobiography—as employed in the method of currere—is just that: apparent" (p. 521).

Grumet (1981) describes currere as an attempt to “reveal the ways that histories and hopes suffuse our moments, and to study them through telling our stories of educational experience” (p. 118). Currere discloses new structure in the process of naming old ones. Pinar (2004) emphasizes the importance of thinking, writing, and studying autobiographically:

My work in curriculum theory has emphasized the significance of subjectivity (or thinking autobiographically) to teaching, to study, to the process of education. The significance of subjectivity is not solipsistic retreat from the public sphere. (p. 4)
Morris (2015) argues that what is private becomes public through the writing of autobiographies: “Without the notion of *currere* – put forth by Pinar and Grumet – these forms of autobiography would not have arrived on the scene. Pinar and Grumet opened an entirely new avenue of scholarship” (Morris, 2015, p. 155). Autobiography as a new educational discourse has been reshaping educational studies. In the following, I will review two themes in this stream of autobiographical research: voice and place.

1.2.2.1 **Voice**

As pointed out by Pinar et. al (1995), Janet Miller, D. Jean Clandinin, and F. Michael Connelly all emphasize the concept of voice for its central position in several strands of autobiographical and biographical scholarship. “In breaking the silence, scholars worked to report and honor the voices of the formerly marginalized in curriculum research” (Pinar, p. 63). For Grumet (1990), the notion of “voice” in the 1970s enabled her “to differentiate my work from male work and my text from male text” (Grumet, 1990, p. 278, cited in Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 525). As Britzman (1990) argues:

> Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community…The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process…Voice suggests relationships: the individual’s relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual’s relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (p. 4)
Grumet theorizes a more complex notion of voice. She identifies three elements or parts to educational voice: situation, narrative, and interpretation. She explains:

The first, situation, acknowledges that we tell our story as a speech event that involves the social, cultural, and political relations in and to which we speak.

Narrative, or narratives as I prefer, invites all the specificity, presence, and power that the symbolic and semiotic registers of our speaking can provide. And interpretation provides another voice, a reflexive and more distant one...None is privileged. (Grumet, 1990, pp. 281-282, cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 526)

Grumet understands the autobiographical voice as the site in which one reflexively reconfigures elements embedded in narratives while taking into consideration the social, cultural, and political conditions. Narratives here, I suggest, might involve a multi-dimensional manifestation of life.

Ayers’ research focuses on children’s voices in order to portray children’ lives as they present them, to show the world with the immediacy they experience, to convey how children can be conscious collaborators (Ayers, 1990, cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 527). He also points out the problems in utilizing autobiography in conveying the lived experience of young children: “how to convey a sense of individual life and collective design, of local detail and general structure, of personal integrity and social dimension” (p. 274). He addresses the difficulty in writing children’s autobiography, as children tend to be more direct in expressing their feelings and thoughts. Paula Salvio (1990) reports undergraduate voices, and Bonnie Meath-Lang (1990) reports deaf students’ voices via dialogue journals, both of which have been marginalized for long time.
Scholars also have labored to describe the voices of women teachers. The research conducted by Kathleen Casey (1990) deserves much attention. She reports the narratives of four groups of women teachers. These four groups of women teachers came from different social classes with various cultural backgrounds. Based on these women teachers’ narratives, Casey argues that, “These voices which capture the ‘lived’ quality of teaching exhibit considerable psychological sophistication” (cited in Pinar, et.al, 1995, p. 529). The narrative, written by a woman teacher vividly express women teachers’ thoughts and feelings about school and schooling:

And the reason I left that school was that I didn’t agree with a lot of the philosophy in the school. I really believe that a school is a place where people come together, and form some kind of community and it’s not a prison, and if it’s likened to anything it’s likened to a family rather than a prison. And, my experience in that school was that it was much closer to a prison. And I was not into prison ministry at the time! So I decided, I will get out of here. (quoted in Casey, 1990, p. 308, cited in Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 529)

Her research portrays how women teachers have struggled with their lives in school, revealing women teachers’ lived experiences and allowing their voices to be heard.

1.2.2.2 Place

The concept of place also emerges as crucial to understanding curriculum autobiographically and biographically. In Curriculum as Social Psychoanalysis (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991), seven writers discuss issues of curriculum as related to “place,”; the “place” in this article here refers to the American South. As argued by Pinar. et.al (1995), place is always associated with a life style infused with particular modes of thought, feeling, and perspectives.
Place is not just where one lives. “Fiction – novels, short stories – express daily human experience, situated in concrete places with specific characters (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 533). Autobiography expresses particular ways of thinking associated with place. The work of some scholars’ shows an overtone of displacement. Edgerton (1991) writes autobiographically of her childhood in northern Louisiana. While depicting how the place plays a role in her life history, she shares a fundamental experience of displacement and “otherness” with Maya Angelou, despite their racial difference. An autobiographical understanding of pedagogical practice is clearly informed by the complexity of place (Pinar et al., 1995).

**Conclusion**

This research requires me to articulate my life and study (how I experience the curriculum in UBC) as Chinese, as a woman and as a student in Canada. Autobiography helps reveal what I have experienced as a doctoral student with a Chinese background, and how I have reconstructed my subjectivity. This autobiography discloses the voice of an international female student and the process of reconstructing myself. This review provides a preliminary understanding of autobiographical research in education and inspires me to attend to aspects of writing autobiographically I did not notice before, such as anticipation and frustration.

**1.3 Research Questions**

Informed by autobiographical research in education, especially currere, I embarked on a journey of autobiography.

I began with an autobiographical study of myself as a Chinese woman who is studying in Canada. I sought to provide understandings of subjectivity from both Western and Eastern
perspectives to articulate the issues I face as a student, teacher, woman, and Chinese national studying in Canada.

While writing my autobiography, I expected to discuss how academic knowledge contributes to self-understanding. Attunement is the concept that emerges from my own self-study, which captures the essentials of how I acquire self-understanding through \textit{currere}.

Heidegger understands attunement as a mental optic, which makes things visible, through “unlocking” their phenomenality (Demuth, 2012, p. 11). What becomes visible is informed by our cultural background and our conceptual approach. As Demuth (2012) notes: “To be in certain attunement means that we have sensibility to see some aspects of things, or that we are capable of understanding things in a certain way. In this way, we can ‘unlock’ things as phenomena so that we can grasp them” (p. 15).

As I studied and practiced the method of \textit{currere}, I began to discern its affinity with certain elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought such as Wang Yangming and Lao Tzu. Through articulating \textit{currere}’s affinities with Chinese philosophical thought, I have gained a deepened understanding of \textit{currere} and, at the same time, an enriched, even reconstructed subjectivity. Spontaneously, I have found that the idea of spirituality may follow from the study and practice of the method of \textit{currere}. The method of \textit{currere} is the educational method in service of understanding, and in so doing it enables one to examine the spiritual potential of study.

\textbf{Research Questions:}

1) How can \textit{currere} be employed to acquire self-understanding?

2) Is there any relation between \textit{currere} and ancient Chinese philosophical thought?
3) Can *currere* contribute to the understanding of the spiritual potential of study, and can this research contribute to our understanding of the spirituality of education?

Summary

Juxtaposing self-understanding with elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought and hopefully informing a cosmopolitan concept of spirituality, I seek to articulate how I have engaged in my own subjective reconstruction. In this dissertation I aspired to describe how my subjectivity has been reconstructed through autobiography and academic study. While writing autobiographically, an educational theory of my own has come to shape, which is temporarily called attunement. This educational theory, transcending school subject specific knowledge, lies in a subjective sense of intellectual labor and constitutes self-self model in which self is both teacher and student. In this theory, all the institutional directives, cultural constraints, and social (political) influences are threaded through the subjective experience of the individual and are articulated autobiographically. These are allegorically articulated in myself – through these experiences. This curriculum theory is contextualized and concretized in myself.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

All the chapters are focused on the concept of *currere*. This first chapter explains why I employ autobiography-*currere* to explore my life and study in Canada. As a Chinese woman studying in Canada, sometimes I feel personally and culturally estranged from my home, my home culture. Autobiography enables me to explore what I have experienced as a doctoral student with a Chinese background, how I have experienced the curriculum, and how I have attempted to reconstruct my subjectivity. This autobiographical research reveals the voice of an
international female student and the process of reconstruction of my subjectivity. I also propose my own educational theory based on currere – attunement. This theory suggests that learning occurs not only in and out of classrooms but also within a person’s life. In such a theory of education, learning becomes situated in not only school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labour.

The second chapter provides an example of how I use currere to acquire self-understanding. This chapter consists of three sections: 1) a review of the concept of currere, subjectivity, subjective reconstruction and self-formation; 2) a discussion of the autobiographical method; 3) and my practice of it – a writing of my own autobiography.

The third chapter emphasizes the concept of attunement that emerges from my own autobiographical research in the second chapter. In this chapter, I identify the concept of attunement as the particular method that shows how academic knowledge contributes to one’s understanding of one’s life. It allows one to move from one ontological level to another, attuned to a different way of understanding, different way of thinking, or different perspective. Attunement occurs within oneself and goes beyond classroom and school.

The fourth and fifth chapters document how my subjectivity has been informed by academic study. In the fourth chapter, I work to associate currere with elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought. I identified three affinities between currere and ancient Chinese philosophical thought, also informed by my Chinese lived experience and study. The ancient Chinese philosophical thought refers mainly to that advanced by Wang Yangming, Mencius and Lao Tzu. This thought includes pure knowing (Liangzhi), investigation of mind/heart (Gexin) and voidness. I will explore these affinities, which includes: 1), pure knowing and pre-
conceptual, 2), investigation of mind/heart and working from within, and 3), voidness and invisibility.

In the fifth chapter I connect *currere* to the spiritual understandings of the study. I address the issue of the spiritual dimension of education (and specifically of study) which *currere* mainly attends to. How does *currere* show the spirituality of academic pursuits? I note that *currere* is not limited to this “spiritual dimension”; however, in this essay I will primarily focus on this spiritual understanding of *currere*. In addition, this essay will also review other scholars’ work related to the spirituality of education. If, as argued by Pinar, the method of *currere* is an educational method in the service of self-understanding, it can, I suggest, be invoked to examine the spiritual potential of study.

The sixth chapter provides a summary of the contribution and limitations of the research. First, derived from my subject position – a Chinese woman who has studied in Beijing and Hong Kong, studying now in Vancouver – I hope to contribute to the uniqueness of Chinese cosmopolitan theory of curriculum as experienced. My research contribution can be summarized as the initial formulation of a “Chinese” *currere*. Second, this study proposes a concept – attunement – central to this Chinese *currere*. Attunement is employed to describe the particular form of study during writing the process. Third, this study juxtaposes understandings of subjectivity from Western and Eastern perspectives, and provides an example of how subjectivity can be reconstructed by academic knowledge and experience. Fourth, this study provides a spiritual understanding of *currere*. Fifth, this dissertation provides a study of the affinities between ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the concept of *currere*.

The limitation of the research involves two aspects: first, it is mainly based on Pinar’s work; in the future I hope to incorporate other theories of life writing and narrative inquiry. Second,
this dissertation research is limited by the particularity of my own lived experience, academic background and interests, as well as cultural identity.
Chapter 2: *Currere*, Subjective Reconstruction and Autobiographical Theory

Education in this sense means taking what is observed and understood and incorporating it, swallowing it whole, and allowing it to alter one’s intellectual-chemical-psychic condition.

William Pinar (1975, p. 15)

**Introduction**

This chapter is an exploratory study of a Chinese woman who is studying in Canada. The study provides understandings of subjectivity from both Western and Eastern perspectives as well of the method of *currere* to articulate the issues I face as a student, teacher, woman, and Chinese person in Canada. It provides an example of how I use *currere* to acquire a deeper understanding of self. This chapter is comprised of three sections: 1) a review of several key concepts, including *currere*, subjectivity, and subjective reconstruction; 2) a discussion of the autobiographical method; 3) my practice of it – a writing of my own autobiography, organized around these themes: a search for understanding my self-growth, confronting my cultural background, and understanding autobiographical research.
2.1 *Currere, Subjectivity and Subjective Reconstruction*

This review has three sections. First of all, Pinar’s perspective on curriculum is discussed; after the review of the concept of subjectivity, the concept of subjective reconstruction is briefly discussed.

### 2.1.1 *Currere*

William F. Pinar (2015, 1976) initiated the systematic effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text in the 1970s. He introduced a method “by means of which students of curriculum could sketch the relations among school knowledge, life history and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 515). Pinar proposes the concept of *currere*, revolutionizing in a radical manner the notion of curriculum as a noun to curriculum as a verb, thereby extending the definition of curriculum. He defines curriculum as complicated conversation, which includes the lived experience of curriculum – *currere*, to run the course – but also includes the social, political, and cultural enactment of experience through conversation:

Curriculum becomes a complicated, that is, multiply referenced, conversation in which interlocutors are speaking not only among themselves but to those not present, not only to historical figures and unnamed people and places they may be studying, but to politicians and parents alive and dead, not to mention to the selves they have been, are in the process of becoming, and someday may become. (Pinar, 2011, p. 41)

Curriculum as complicated conversation takes people far beyond the conception that curriculum is simply a body of academic knowledge separated from us who study it; on the contrary, curriculum as a conversation emphasizes the ongoing reconstruction of knowledge – subjective reconstruction of academic knowledge and life experience which courses through
one’s life. This method of *currere* understands curriculum as a lived path as well as an object and a course of study. Curriculum is not merely a “thing” to be studied; it is a path that is lived. Because the running of the course occurs socially and subjectively through academic study, the concept of *currere* highlights the meaning of the curriculum as a complicated conversation, and thereby encourages educational experience. It is a conversation threaded through academic knowledge. In other words, the method of *currere* seeks to understand the interaction between academic study and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction (Pinar, 2012). As Pinar further argues:

The method of *currere* re-conceptualizes curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation. It is a conversation with oneself (as a private person) and with others threaded through academic knowledge, an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engagement in the world. Conceived as a complicated conversation, the curriculum is an ongoing effort at communication with others that portends the social reconstruction of the public sphere. (2012, p. 47)

*Currere* is a conversational process in which participants, threaded through the study of academic knowledge, reactivate the past, reconstruct the present, and look to the future by talking with themselves, with figures across time and space. “The running of the course – *currere* – occurs through conversation, not only classroom discourse, but dialogue among specific students and teachers, and within oneself in solitude” (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, it of course transcends the boundaries of classrooms or schools since it involves working from within. Participants embark on a journey of conversation.
The concept of *currere* emphasizes the interaction between academic knowledge and life experience. It is “a conception of curriculum that directs school knowledge to individual’s lived experience, experience understood as subjective and social, that is, as gendered, racialized, classed participants in understanding and living through the historical moment” (Pinar, 2012, p. 195). In this complicated conversation, academic knowledge and life experience are intertwined with each other, mutually informative and constitutive. Academic knowledge enables a more sophisticated understanding of the world. With academic knowledge, one can understand life experiences more deeply and can make connections that may not have been noticed or may not have been previously recognized as important. One may begin to think about pressing issues more deeply. While searching for the connection between the private and the public, *currere* also creates opportunities to consider the particularity of each experience. It is a temporal and recursive process.

While acknowledging society, culture and history, the concept of *currere* underscores an individual’s experience. *Currere* emphasizes the everyday experience of individuals and his or her capacity to learn from experience, to reconstruct experience through thought and dialogue to enable understanding (Pinar, 2012). Through this everyday experience one can learn and reconstruct experience and consequently gain a deepened understanding of the world. *Currere* emphasizes how each individual is socially and culturally situated in a particular historical moment and what his or her situatedness means to each. Informed by phenomenology and existentialism, this autobiographical theory of curriculum suggests a shift in focus “from external, behaviorally oriented learning objectives and predetermined subject matter content to the interrogation of students’ and teachers’ inner experiences and perceptions” (Miller, 2010, p. 62). Therefore, Grumet (1976) argues that “*currere* is what the individual does with the curriculum,
his active reconstruction of his passage through its social, intellectual, physical structure” (p. 111). As Pinar (2012) points out, “the method of currere seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of one’s life, and how they both are imbricated in society, politics and culture” (p. 45). Currere enables one who situates socially, politically, and culturally, to understand the meaning of educational experience.

Currere portrays the individual’s lived experience. This lived experience can be understood as educational experience (Pinar, 2016). Pinar designed four steps (regression, progression, analysis and synthesis) to reveal educational experience, understanding what principles and patterns have been at work in one’s educational experience (Corttazi, 2014, p. 13). Educational experience allows people to consider the world from different perspectives, understand various possibilities, further question the unquestioned, and thus bring about transformative change. Educational experience fosters one’s interest in a certain field of study. Educational experience may impact, enrich, even contradict academic knowledge learned from school curriculum. As a result, this might trigger or foster real learning, and a deepened understanding might ensue.

Pinar also proposes an associated curriculum concept: “allegory.” Understanding curriculum allegorically is to self-consciously incorporate the past into the present, gesturing toward an educational significance of what is studied. “In speaking allegorically, we are not merely exchanging information. When we speak allegorically we do not do so for the sake of a future in which such information will, we imagine, become usable. Rather, we self-reflexively articulate what is at hand, reactivating the past so as to render the present, including ourselves, intelligible” (Pinar, 2012, p. 50). The past is not stuck in the past. It implies that something may not be identifiable immediately or may not be identified by “simple” means, and it calls for excavation. Through allegory, subjectivity, history, and society become articulated through one’s
participation in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum. “Allegory underscores that our individual lives are structured by ever-widening circles of influences: from family through friends to strangers, each of whom personifies culture, symbolizes society, and embodies history” (Pinar, 2012, p. 53). Allegory further elaborates how each individual is socially and culturally expanded by highlighting the “mechanism”—reflexively incorporating from the outside world. This mechanism functions as reflection and rethinking.

One can reactivate, reconsider, and re-examine the past, and one’s or another’s experience. Reactivation is different from reexamination, as the latter is conducted from the standpoint of the present, the very standpoint reactivating the past aspires to dissolve or at least augment. Reactivating the past is another conceptualization of the regressive phase of the method of *currere*. The method of case study allows us to examine others’ experiences, whereas autobiography emphasizes one’s own lived experience which might also function educationally, enabling us to learn from experience. Broadening memory, together with a new perspective, renders past experience into a new outlook.

### 2.1.2 Subjectivity

To enact curriculum conceived as subjectively situated, historically attuned conversation means associating academic knowledge with the individual him or herself, teaching not only what is, for instance, historical knowledge, but also suggesting its possible consequences for the individual’s self-formation in the historical present, allowing that knowledge to shape the individual’s coming to social form. Doing so is an elusive and ongoing threading of subjectivity through the
social forms and intellectual constructs we discover through study, reanimating our original passions through acting in the world.

William Pinar (2015, p. 31)

Subjectivity takes form, achieves content and singularity, in the world, itself reconstructed by subjectivity’s engagement with it.

Pinar (2008, p. 20)

According to Pinar (2010, p. 3), “by subjectivity, I mean the inner life, the lived sense of self, non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented—that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen, those circumstances of everyday life, those residues of trauma and of fantasy, from which one reconstruct life” (p. 3). Subjectivity refers to the inner life, the process of becoming, which can be ongoing if one engages in "becoming" all the time. From the moment one begins to experience, subjectivity is to exhibit. Weedon (2004) asserts that “an individual’s conscious and unconscious sense of self, emotions and desires” (p. 18) constitute subjectivity, whereas “identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual or a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is” (Weedon, 2004, p. 19). In this sense, identity is the boundary between subjectivity and sociality, between one’s inner self and one’s public or social self. Suggesting that identity is an effect, not a cause, Jonsson locates identity at the intersection between an individual and the social, a site of negotiation between subjectivity and society (Pinar, 2009, p. 33). For Jonsson, subjectivity refers to that “ineffable agency that precedes language, culture and ideology” (2000, p. 17). Thus, subjectivity surrounds and saturates identity (Pinar, 2009, p. 33). Agency animates action but does not presume
transcendence of the given, only the possibility of its reconstruction. Subjectivity enables engagement with the world, informed by study and experience (Pinar, 2009). Subjectivity, compared with identity, tends to be more genetic, and it is a sense of self, manifested discursively. Subjectivity may contradict identity since identity may be imposed by a group or a culture. This creates a gap between the subjectivity and identity, but Pinar affirms the importance of non-coincidence. This non-coincidence can be cultivated through academic study and autobiography.

Identity is in between subjectivity and the social world. It is informed by the "inward" pre-linguistic, even private "self" and by your social "self," what others have made of you, and the qualities they ascribe to you (Pinar, 2014). For example, I am identified as a "woman" and this social, gendered identity of a "woman" is informed, even constructed, by my culture, my family, and my interactions with others. It has changed over time (for example, as a result of spatial, cultural or geographical, in Hong Kong and now Canada). Within this fluid mix of influences, I can detach myself from being (only a) "woman" by affirming my structural principle of "non-coincidence", thereby creating a subjective space in which I can act (e.g., reconstruct what I and others have made of me). I can act in the world differently from what others expect and from what I expect. One may subjectively experience tensions due to cultural expectations around the concept of a woman. Over thousands of years, Chinese society has adopted a set of moral principles to govern women. Chinese women have been required to follow the “three obediences and four virtues” which govern all walks of life. There are four edifying behavioral characteristics for women: the first is womanly virtue (fiude), the second is womanly speech (fuyan), the third is womanly manner (fuyong), and the fourth is womanly merit (fugong). What is womanly virtue? She does not distinguish herself in talent and intelligence. What is
womanly speech? She does not sharpen her language and speech. What is womanly manner? She
does not seek to be outwardly beautiful or ornamented. What is womanly merit? She does not
outperform others in her skills and cleverness. All these principles seem to still function today in
China to some degree, and people tend to view women in terms of these principles – an identity
assigned by the public. But many women in China may choose to live differently at their own
will. As a result, they might be judged as “abnormal” or “weird”, and may experience tensions
due to historical and cultural expectations, clashing with her own inner sense of herself
(subjectivity).

McKnight (2010) argues that the notion of passionate inwardness resembles the concept
of subjectivity proposed by Pinar. According to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard,
passionate inwardness is an intensification of one’s focus on the particularity of his or her life
that calls into question universal codes and conventions presented as true and good by any
community (cited in McKnight, 2010, p. 501). McKnight (2010) uses an example of the
“unconscious despair of the teacher” (p. 502) to make his point clear. The teacher, in
“unconscious despair” (McKnight, 2010, p. 502), who views him or herself as a professional
acting upon the written and unwritten ethical rules prescribed or implicitly prevailing within the
institution of schooling, never challenges who these rules serve and for what purpose these rules
were made. The teacher assumes that the rules are morally good or are politically neutral acts of
instruction. Therefore,

his or her identity becomes overly determined by the finite institutional attributes,

and less by the subjective reflection upon the infinite possibilities of “what could be”

that always call into questions any such claim or privileges of those individual and
discourses that dictates the real of material existence. (McKnight, 2010, p. 508)
Deriving from the particular, concrete situation, a teacher can search and explore for a better or more appropriate way of teaching. He or she opens up possibilities and seeks to create a space for teachers and students to engage in creatively. No universal rule dictates belief or conduct. The mis-relation between teacher and institution’s claim on teacher is intensified when a teacher succumbs to the “normalizing tendencies” instead of engaging in the tension of the finite and infinite that enables a process of self-becoming in a critical way (McKnight, 2010, p. 508). As McKnight (2010) argues:

A proper relation would mean that a teacher develops a disposition to create an ironic distance from institutional conversations that claim reality. Such a disposition is necessary to navigate and alter the landscape in subtle ways that begin to favor the principles of critical pedagogy and existential becoming. This disposition is a passionate inwardness that existentially removes one from the ethos of the institution, always presented as universal, normative and common sense, in an effort to confront the concrete particularities of the existing world. (p. 510)

McKnight notes that passionate inwardness is to remove one from the institutional ethos (not to follow the ethos without thinking), and to confront the particular world. Such a move that resembles putting oneself back into a tension characterized by struggle with despair, is an “existential leap” (p. 510). “Such a doubled move, a reasoned madness creates possible spaces for the individual to advance criticality and generate a new, proper relation that dissipates that specific form of despair” (McKnight, 2010, p. 510). However, instead of rejecting the institutional ethos, Kierkegaard argues that to make a passionate, concentrated turn toward subjectivity is of great importance though it leads to paradox and suffering. As Dooley (2001) explains, a critical distance is a useful method:
Inwardness is the movement the individual makes while becoming subjective; that is, in order to transform impersonal objective reflection into engaged and passionate subjective reflection, the individual is required to adopt a critical distance from the prevailing ethical, political and religious truths governing his or her reality, with the object of responding to the claims of singularity. (p. 5)

The subjective challenge is to balance between finite demands of sociopolitical milieu and that which is eternal within us. When the individual stays closest to inner or subjective being, s/he lives at the “highest pitch of subjectivity.” (McKnight, 2010, p. 513) If the individual can deliberate upon existential becoming within this particular time and space, a comprehensive analysis of the degree to which one participates as an actor within the social milieu can be generated. As McKnight (2010) argues:

Passionate inwardness produces questions: Who do the rules serve? Who and what do the rules protect? How do the rules discriminate and what inequities are embedded? And, to what degree do I as a moral agent existing within this institution embody, reflect, and participate in the maintaining of those ethical constraints presented by the institution as universal good? How can I engage in a meaningful act of becoming alongside other existing individuals within this institution? (p. 513)

McKnight (2010) argues that the notion of passionate inwardness resembles the curriculum theory work of William Pinar, who developed what could be called a method of passionate inwardness; in Pinar’s work, it is known as currere. Much like currere, passionate inwardness also seeks to begin with the principle that one must interrogate any claim to universal ethics forced upon the individual. In other words, passionate inwardness does not indicate a blind
repudiation and permanent exit from institutional ethics. Very similarly, *currere* is an educational structure of subjectivity, emphasizing reflective thinking about the past, present and future. According to Pinar and Grumet (1976), the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. The method of *currere* is a strategy devised to disclose this experience, so that we may see more of it and see more clearly (Pinar, 1975). With such seeing can come deepened understanding of the running course of life, of educational experience, and with this, can come deepened agency (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. vii). As Pinar (2012) argues:

*Curriculum as currere* emphasizes temporal distinctions, not for the sake of simplistic proceduralism, but to enable the reconstruction of the present through the reactivation of the past, differentiating present-mindedness into the co-extensive simultaneity of temporal attunement, expressed individually in social context through the academic knowledge. (p. 51)

Grumet (1976) notes that in the research method described by Pinar, *currere* is pursued not in reflective retreat from the world but through a response to literature. As a research methodology, *currere* proposes to use literature as a foil for one’s own reflection. As the reader voluntarily recreates that which the writer discloses, he too creates a fictive but true (as lived) world, drawn from the substance of his experience and his fantasy. This participation in an aesthetic experience is one way of demonstrating the reciprocity of objectivity and subjectivity and their interdependence. It is also about how subjectivity operates in the individual. Weedon highlights the influences of discourses on subjectivity. As Weedon (1987) explains:

The individual is both a site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly...Language and the
range of subject positions that it offers always exists in historically specific
discourses which inhere in social institutions and practices and can be organized
analytically in discursive fields. (p. 34)

As for Pinar, he tends to focus on how subjectivity can fail to coincide with the discourses
that inform it, how subjectivity can be reconstructed, such as by lived experience and academic
study. Pinar highlights how academic study and lived experience play a crucial role in
reconstructing subjectivity and how subjectivity is stimulated and reconstructed by engagement
with the world.

2.1.3 How is Subjectivity Constructed?

How does a person show his subjectivity? Here is an example to illustrate subjectivity.
When students are asked to write an essay, it might not be possible to identify the same writing
(the same word selection or way of thinking) among these students though they engage in
the same topic. Different persons tend to demonstrate different perspectives that could be said to
be associated with their subjective standpoints. How experiences work may transcend language,
for some experiences do not just add up, but transform fundamentally in an unpredictable way.
Subjectivity can become animated and expressed when a person addresses a situation, a
challenge, or a question. By studying, one begins to understand one's subjectivity.

I reference Jane Addams’ story to illustrate how subjectivity is informed by study and
experience (Pinar, 2009). Addams went to a youth center in east London, which was similar to
the People’s Palace in the novel she read, and this experience led to the opening of the settlement
house—Hull House. “Moved by her experience in London, informed by her ongoing academic
study, she was able to imagine her future course of action” (Pinar, 2009, p. 62). As a result, she opened the settlement house – Hull House. Pinar (2009) explains:

> Her experiences – along with key books she read provided the passage from the individualistic, absolutist, benevolent ethics of her father and her own class in favor of what she perceived to be the working-class ethic of cooperative justice, which she found less selfish and self-righteous. Though no doubt idealized, such an ethic enabled Addams to distance herself from the self her upbringing has formed, thereby providing the self-reflective opportunity to reconstruct her subjectivity according to the commitments she had acquired and cultivated through study and experience. (p. 64)

Driven by her newly formed ethic of “cooperative justice”, Addams distanced herself from her previous self, and this experience, together with the self-reflective opportunity, led to the reconstruction of her subjectivity. “It is self-reflection—including social and self-criticism—that enable experience to be illuminated” (Pinar, 2009, pp. 64-65). It might be termed as persistent rethinking which, Knight (2005) argues, integrates lived experience with one’s points of view, and reconstructs subjectivity:

> This persistent rethinking, and not only the experiences, produced her profoundest insights and taught her the most about her class, her gender, and herself. Addams’ love of abstract theory, of sweeping generality, of uplifting philosophy had almost trapped her in her given life of reading, but it was the same passion for larger meaning that drove her to break free of that life, to struggle to integrate her experiences with her thoughts, and to change her mind. (p. 86, cited in Pinar, 2009, p. 64)
By reflectively examining experiences, and through academic study, one may engage in the process of forming (reconstructing) one’s own subjectivity informed by experience and consequent rethinking. When these rethinking are stable and consistent, subjectivity might be regarded as being reconstructed. Therefore, from experience, self-reflection, and academic study, Addams “synthesized a coherent self capable of sustained, critical, and creative engagement with the world” (Pinar, 2009, p. 62). Addams’ story shows how subjectivity functions as a site for engaging with the world, coherently, innovatively, and critically.

To sum up, subjectivity entails beliefs, thinking, commitments, desires, feelings that may not be nameable but locate the site of experience; subjectivity constitutes the uniqueness of a person, with which a person differentiate him/herself from what is.

Pinar further illustrates how Addams’ reading influenced her and helped form her subjectivity. As mentioned by Pinar (2009), “study does not just yield information, it restructures one’s subjectivity, animating and focusing one’s engagement with the world” (p. 63). Several writers – among them W. H. Fremantle, Brooke Foss Wescott, Giuseppe Mazzini, Mathew Arnold – influenced her. By reading Arnold, for instance, Addams strengthened her commitment to improving society and cultivating a moral and social passion for doing good; by reading Mazzini, she was able to combine two ideas: education was central, but so was the opportunity for people from social classes to come to know each other. All the influences of these readings became reconstructed when Addams established the Hull House and enacted her ideas on social improvement.

How lived experience – and its study – functions for each individual seems unpredictable. Studying or reading a book may help offer useful supplements on issues concerned, or cause very radical change that might be regarded as turning points; studying may provide contradictory
perspectives that make people further reflect on what they already hold; studying may help experience different situations and events that only happen to others. Nussbaum (1997) appreciates how different academic disciplines can have impact on personal growth. For example, she argues that philosophy can help students reason and analyze, and look for evidence to support their opinions; literature can help people acquire sympathetic imagination by envisioning that they are in a vulnerable position.

Pinar (2009) also mentions Addams’ teacher—Caroline Potter, who taught rhetoric and history. “Potter’s influence is discernable in an essay Addams wrote in her sophomore year in which she employed George Sand in an argument for women’ rights” (p. 65).

“Without study—knowledge, reason, self-reflexivity—one cannot experience subjective meaning or participate in one’s self formation, an idea centuries old” (Jay, 2005, p. 89, cited in Pinar, 2009, p. 8). Without knowing, one cannot acquire understandings completely or pertinently; without reasoning, one cannot obtain deepened thoughts. Moreover, “without academic study, subjectivity succumbs to narcissism, presentism, and commodification of experience consumer capitalism compels” (Pinar, 2009, p. 65). All these “isms” work at the surface level when subjectivity fails to obtain insights or inspiration from academic study. Subjectivity without academic study may not be able to foster humility, historical consciousness, and judgment. What does academic study offer? Academic study might provide important elements and offer enduring insights for better understanding the world. “Such a curriculum for cosmopolitanism juxtaposes the particular alongside the abstract, creating collages of history and literature, politics and poetry, science and art. Such a curriculum provides a passage between the subjective and the social, between self-subjectivation and alterior interpellation” (Pinar, 2009, p. vii). This curriculum always builds connections between the private and public.
Engaging the philosopher of education Maxine Greene, Pinar (2011) points out that aesthetic education also engenders subjective and social reconstruction. By emphasizing the “lyrical moments” (p. 92) that comprise the “vivid present” (p. 92) in aesthetic education, Pinar argues that such intensification of perception is not only about art apprehension on its own terms, but also about how the person undergoing such experience can break free of one’s socially determined location. “For me,” Pinar (2011) continues, “such intensification of experience implies self-shattering insofar as the boundaries of the self dissolve into aesthetic experience that extricate us from identification with – even submersion in – the banal, the provincial, and presses us into the world” (p. 96). After the self is shattered, subjective reconstruction can occur. As Pinar (2011) argues: “What the arts offer us is the releasing of our imagination, enabling us to move into the as-if – to move beyond the actual into the invented world, to do so without our experience. The experience of arts pulls us into the world as it refracts the world through our subjectivity” (p. 100). As McBride (2006) says:

The ecstatic experience triggered by aesthetic feeling favors a reshuffling in the individual’s perception of reality and disrupts formulaic modes of experience, releasing the individuals from the spell of established pictures of the world and opening up a space for the imaginative play with, and the emancipatory reaggregation of, given elements of experience. (cited in Pinar 2011, p. 99)

Aesthetic experience shatters the self because it breaks the boundary which the self inhabits, extends imagination beyond experience, and finally invites a new way of living or thinking, all of which encourage the reconstruction of subjectivity. Greene (2001) argues that teachers are like artists – teachers submit themselves to inner transformation as they refashion
their “raw material” through communicative enactment of their subjectivities with others, specifically their students. By reanimating the speech of others, teachers incorporate their understanding to their teaching in class:

Such aesthetically structured teaching encourages students to reconstruct their own lived worlds through their reanimation of the material they study. This subjective restructuring—that process is also an animation, rendering one’s intellectual passions contagious, is a matter of bringing to surface forces, stirring, desires we often cannot name. (Pinar, 2011, p. 103)

With new perspectives incorporated, teachers might be able to broaden and/or deepen the topic being discussed, and lead students to think differently. Transformation in students may proceed thereafter. This could lead to a fundamental transformation of classroom teaching, in the sense that the whole process parallels art creation. Like artists, teachers seek means to express and engage others in the journey of exploration.

2.2 Methodology--Autobiographical Inquiry

There is no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 31)

The narrative, an autobiographical account of educational experience, serves to mark the site for excavation. What is returned in the process of excavation is hardly the original experience but broken pieces of images that remind us of what was lost. What is restored is our distrust of the accounts, as the experience, pieced together
and reassembled, fails to cohere. There in the interstices, the spaces where the pieces
don’t quite meet, is where the light comes through. What the restoration returns to us
is doubt in the certainty of our own assumptions. (Grumet, 1981, pp. 122-123)

2.2.1 Introduction

This autobiographical project examines what can be revealed through a reflective lens in
understanding – and through understanding, perhaps intensifying – one’s experience of education
(Grumet, 1981, p. 118). William Ayers (1990) argues that autobiography is “understanding the
situation from within” (p. 272). Such research provides a passage for me to describe my
educational experience. The autobiographical lens can be an act of self-creation and it can be
potentially transformative (Ayers, p. 274). Autobiographical inquiry helps me make sense of and
reflect on lived experience by attending carefully to more details, instances and cases. This
research method draws from phenomenology. As argued by Grumet (1991), “Reliance on the
lived experience of the individual in autobiographical method of inquiry draws support from
Husserl’s conviction that it was only in the freshness and immediacy of encounter that certain
knowledge can reside” (p. 34). This phenomenological approach offers a more vivid, fresh
description of lived experience.

*Currere* has projected itself into the world through autobiography and theatre (Grumet,
1976). Autobiography and theatre are two forms of *currere*. In education, autobiographies are
those forms of self-revelation with a focus on “a transfer of our attention from these forms of
themselves to the ways in which a student uses them and moves through them” (Grumet, 1976, p.
68). Felman (1993) notes that “one goal of autobiography is to create, use, and explore readings
and writings of autobiography that recognize their own social construction and cultural
conditioning” (cited in Miller, 2005, p. 53). Leggo also affirms the importance of writing
autobiographically. As acknowledged by Leggo (2007), “Because so much of my teaching, writing, and researching emerges from the intersections of the personal and the public, I contend that autobiographical writing is always both personal and public, and that we need to write autobiographically in order to connect with others” (p. 121). By pointing out that autobiography involves the realms of the private and public, Leggo shows why autobiography is important. According to Grumet (1976),

Autobiographical entries reveal the genesis of the assumptions and commonsense attitudes of the individual. When in reflection, the student brackets those assumptions and identifications with the everyday world, it is not to remove himself from that world, but to move closer to it by seeing through the structure of objectivity to the pre-objective, pre-reflective contact with the world upon which they rest. (p. 70)

Through autobiography, one can detach oneself from the structure of objectivity, and move closer to a pre-reflective realm. As a result, Pinar (1995) says, “Writing, and in particular, the craft of autobiography, can soar, and from the heights, discern new landscapes, new configurations, especially those excluded by proclamations of Government, State and School” (p. 217). Writing autobiographically will see new landscapes, new configurations hidden previously. At the same time, “interpretations of autobiography are always incomplete, always interminable” (Felman, cited in Miller, 2005, p. 53) since the constantly expanding self “incorporates what it fears and resists as well as what it desires” (Pinar, 1985, p. 220). We may need to accept that we can never fully understand ourselves, but through autobiographical work we can perceive and reconstruct our subjectivity and our subjective sensitivity to the biographic and educational significance of our lived experiences. Autobiographical theories have provided me with a way to
have a more authentic relationship with myself and to be more fully myself, as I hope
demonstrate in my own autobiographical dissertation research.

As to how to conduct autobiographical research, Grumet (1976) argues that autobiography
involves two steps:

Autobiography is two steps removed from the pre-reflective events enacted by the
body subject. The first step requires the reflection upon the moments already lived
that leads to a conscious grasp of their meaning. The second step involves the
presentation of those events and their meanings as they now appear to the storyteller
in terms of his relation with his audience. (p. 73)

In other words, first of all, autobiographical inquiry requires the storyteller to reflect on the
“meaningful” moments; and then, the storyteller needs to present those events and their
meanings. As formulated by Grumet (1976), autobiography presents the past within the present
perspective of the storyteller, and uses the past to reveal the present assumptions and future
intentions of the storyteller.

Grumet explores how students and teachers use autobiography to enhance learning and
teaching. Grumet (1976) describes how the academic disciplines provide forms for students to
express their private life:

The student can observe his use of the objective forms provided by the academic
disciplines as public symbol through which he can express his private experience…

By concentrating on the students’ biography and life-world, we will examine the
ways in which these disciplines provide metaphor for daily experience, functioning
as models of and models for human thought and behavior. (pp. 75-76)
As for teachers, Grumet (1976) argues that autobiographical writing can help teachers examine the ways in which they have moved within conventional forms to express their own subjectivities. Leggo (2007) also mentions that autobiographical writing can help his professional development: “All my autobiographical research is devoted to my own professional development and the professional development of other educators. Autobiographical writing is both transcendent and immanent, both inside and outside, both internal and external, both personal and public” (p. 124). In order to write personally, Leggo (2007) argues that:

A different culture is needed, a culture that supports autobiographical writing that is marked by an understanding that writing about personal experiences is not only egoism, solipsism, unseemly confession, boring prattling, and salacious revelation. We need to write personally because we live personally, and our personal living is always braided with our other ways of living—professional, academic, administrative, social and political. (p. 90)

Leggo acknowledges the interplay of personal living and other ways of living such as professional, academic and so on.

2.2.2 The Characters of Autobiography

Autobiography can serve as a method for enlarging, occupying, and building the space of mediation. It can enlarge the space of subjectivity by pushing back the edges of memory, disclosing more of what has been forgotten, suppressed, and denied. The stories one tells cannot function to embellish and disguise the past and present, for an imagined effect. Rather autobiography, which makes the architecture of self more complex, moves below the surface of memory, requiring the dismantling of self-defense. It allows a re-entry into the past, a re-
experience of the past moment now somewhat present in its multidimensionality and orderlessness (Pinar, 1995, p. 217).

Autobiography invites one to look at the past in a more critical way and identifies problems embedded in the past which may still have an impact on oneself in the present. In *Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi*, an Ancient Chinese Philosopher narrates a story about a man who keeps running to avoid his shadow while never stopping to reflect. Likewise, autobiography enables slowing down, to reflect on and engage in inner dialogue with one’s shadow. Autobiography provides the opportunity to gaze back and investigate.

Autobiography enlarges and complicates the telling subject, as well as the listening subject. “We are not the stories we tell as much as we are the modes of relation to others our stories imply, modes of relation implied by what we delete as much as what we include” (Pinar, 1995, p. 218). What we delete can be as significant as what we include in autobiography. Or as argued by Clarke (2012), “I am deeply implicated in the retelling. The story and I are interwoven and although the difference between the two might not be readily apparent … the rendering of the other is always the rendering of self” (p. 61). Autobiography allows lived experience to be revealed and expressed, whereas mainstream educational research, in its obsession with measurement, quantifies and threatens to destroy subjectivity. With autobiography, one might reconfigure elements of oneself, and find a unity within the diversity of oneself: “…with every word, this most affirmative of all spirits; all opposites are in him bound together in a new unity” (Nietzsche, cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 225).

Autobiographical method invites us to struggle with those social and cultural determinations and decisions. “It is that struggle and its resolve to develop ourselves in ways that transcend the identities that others have constructed for us that bonds the projects of
autobiography and education” (Grumet, 1990, p. 324). Autobiography allows us to transcend the identity constructed by the social, cultural, and political. Autobiography invites us to see how these constraints are internalized, how we consciously, semi-consciously, and unconsciously comply and/or modify them. There are, then, multiple ways that one can comprehend, even struggle, with determinations. When you are aware of something restrictive or disruptive, one might begin to interrogate them and one’s responses to them. One comes to remember the marks and influences that structure one’s subjectivity.

Miller (2008) introduces the concept of institutional autobiography, which is “a genre which, as I have sought to demonstrate here, unites the seemingly opposed worlds of the personal—where one is free, unique, and outside of history—and the institutional—where one is constrained, anonymous, and imprisoned by the accretion of past practices” (p. 138). He lists questions that show how the institutional autobiography can be very specific: “What experiences have led you to teach, study, read, and write in the ways you do? What institutional policies have promoted or inhibited your success? What shape and texture has your life in the institutions given to your dreams of release?” (p. 158). For Miller, to answer these questions, it needs understanding of the two opposed worlds of the personal. Miller (2008, p. 139) suggests that “the challenge lies in how to work within and against its (institution) constraints simultaneously, so as to acknowledge without overstating the influence of past teachers and one’s own work in the classroom” (p. 139).

Autobiography helps portray the path on which one evolves. Autobiography has become one means of “rewriting the self in relation to shifting interpersonal and political contexts” (Martin & Mohanty, 1986, p. 208). As suggested by Miller (2005): “Autobiography can be a means by which individuals draw their own ever-changing portraits and trace as well as interpret
multiple versions of their educational experiences, perspectives, assumptions and situations” (p. 152). And, autobiographical writing allows one to express personally, as noted by Riley-Taylor (2002):

The autobiographical interludes woven through my work allow me to write in the language of personal voice, a language based in lived experience, experience that excludes neither rational thought nor the more aesthetic possibilities for coming to know the world. We are creatures of both reason and emotion, mind and body, matter and spirit. The language of personal voice lends a dimension to academic writing that cannot be filled by expository scholarship alone. (p. 67)

Riley-Taylor captures the inseparability of conceptual and ontological existence of human beings, akin to Pinar’s biographic situation—we are ontologically and conceptually existing. The use of autobiography can more vividly reflect the lived experience filled with multiple ways of thinking and doing, and acknowledges the complex web of various relationships and modalities.

To sum up, “currere focuses on an individual biography, forsaking general structures to discover the path of experience that has led a particular person to a specific choice, place, cognitive styles” (Grumet, 1976, p. 84). It is the path of experiences that has led one to a specific place or choice. In the essay that follows, I write autobiographically in hopes of disclosing the evolving process of my subjectivity, the process of becoming structured, by a subjective thread of coherence and continuity.
2.3 My autobiography

My autobiography is articulated and analyzed around three themes: the search for understanding self-growth, my cultural background, and a new research paradigm.

2.3.1 Understanding My Self-growth

2.3.1.1 The Decision to Pursue a Second Doctoral Degree—the Search for Self Care

“I am studying for my second degree.”

“What, are you crazy?”

Very soon, I think, people will change their attitude toward me. They may become more polite, or more meticulous while talking with me, or….

I started studying again in September, 2013. Another doctoral study. My mother opposed my decision. But this time I did not take her advice. It seemed to me that there were some puzzles inside my heart to which I wanted to attend. There were still mysteries in my mind that I wanted to explore. It seems that I am not loyal to my culture. I am far away from the culture in which I am supposed to be mother, a female member who bear the responsibility of fulfilling certain duties. Am I the one destined to journey all the time?

What self do I want to become? What does my decision to study again mean? What has pushed me forward constantly? What call in my self is calling me? Is there a stranger inside calling me to do this? I started searching the answers to these questions from the time I was enrolled in the doctoral program in UBC. This educational experience allows me to engage in thinking about these issues. As argued by Foucault (1986), “education should concern the care we take of ourselves in order to know and transform ourselves” (p. 55). Foucault’s ethics begins with the relationship to oneself, introducing a personal self-examination of how we should treat
ourselves. As pointed out by Moghtader (2015), “The spirit in which one works on oneself, takes care of oneself is for the sake of conversion and self-transformation” (p. 4). To take care of self is to engage oneself in a complicated conversation, and then to expect a self-transformation. “Foucault’s œuvre is demonstrative of an ethic of transformation that aims to change the way we accept, reject and come to know ourselves by attending to the ways we come to discover a truth about ourselves and take care of ourselves” (p. 4). What has led me to this specific place or choice? How shall I discover the truth about myself? I am going to attend to the path of transformation, and take care of myself.

Moghtader (2015) noted, for Foucault, “care for others is already implied in care of the self” (p. 43). The relationship of self implies the relationship with others. Self and others are not mutually exclusive, and they live together in the world. Essentially in order to care for others, one first must be able to care of the self. Foucault (1987) insists that, “care for self is ethical in itself, but it implies complex relations with others, in the measure where this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others” (p. 118). The “care of the self” is concerned not only with the freedom available to oneself but the freedom recognized in others (Moghtader, 2015). It seems that freedom can only be ethical when it is acknowledged by others for certain behaviors may bring inconvenience to others. For instance, students have the freedom to listen to music, but they have to turn down the music after midnight when the pursuit for the care of self interferes with the care of others.

According to Foucault (1986), the care of self in the Greco-Roman tradition is embedded in the idea that one ought to attend and constantly return to oneself and care for oneself so that one’s soul can be perfected by reason. Without sufficient reason, one may not take care of oneself well. The return might involve asking questions of oneself; it is a posture of attending to
one’s inner experience, as well as to the material aspects of one’s reality. Therefore, asking these questions concerning the self might be important for caring for self. The care of the self is “a rational mastery of the self regarded as an object to be reflected upon and transformed (Wang, 2004, p. 29). The reflection on self becomes the main activity for the care of self. “It is a soul-oriented activity conducted throughout one’s life…It is the practice of freedom through mastery” (2004, p. 29). It is a freedom about looking at self and examining self critically. It seems that everyone possesses the potential for subjective freedom. Do I examine myself and reflect on myself? Still, “in the tradition of the care of the self, one is called upon to take oneself as an object of contemplation and knowledge and to follow the principles of rational conduct in correcting one’s faults and perfecting one’s soul” (p. 29). I hereby take myself as the object of contemplation.

The central truth might well be who I have been conditioned to be, and its realization is living in accordance with it (Pinar, 1994, p. 202). How has myself been conditioned? I reactivate my past.

My life has been centered on campuses, especially university campuses. After I finished my doctoral study in Hong Kong, my joy did not last long. Returning from the United States, I worked as a curriculum developer in one of the biggest education companies listed on the Nasdaq Stock Exchange (the Company is located in Beijing). I kept busy: meetings, discussions, endless projects, evaluations, developing new curriculum. These were the major obligations of each day. But I felt something strange. I felt unsettled, anxious to know why. I felt a call from inside. But what was it? I was lost in the midst of this work. I could not help asking myself: What does it mean for me to gain a doctoral degree? To get more knowledge? Or to be in more chaotic complexity? Am I the one who got trapped? After reading Pinar’s essay on Franz
Kafka’s *The Trial*, I felt an answer. The essay was recommended by a professor who used to supervise me at the University of Hong Kong.

Joseph K. was arrested without knowing why. K. had been leading an unexamined life before his arrest. As pointed out by Pinar (1995): “He is dissociated from his subjectivity, and consequently clings to outer character structure, i.e. social role” (p. 33). He was lost to his role, dissociated from what was individual in him, attentive to only what was common with others (p. 34). “K. is his career, his socio-historical identity, and thereby an arrested being” (p. 36). He was incapable of self-reflection, and arrested intellectually, psychologically, and socially. Pinar uses this example to express dilemmas people face. I asked myself: Was I conscious of the problems I faced? Did I ask questions about probing why, not just when, what, and how questions? Was I able to reflect on myself? How should I attend to myself, to my soul? As argued by Carl Jung, “I quite agree with you that those people in our world who have insight and good will enough, should concern themselves with their own soul’s, more than with preaching to the masses or trying to find out the best way for them”(Cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 53). Am I arrested? “As one becomes conscious of one level of arrest, and through a self-reflexive understanding of that level, one moves to another level that will someday become experienced as static.” (Pinar, 1995, p. 40).

I decided to resign and to study for a second doctorate, driven by a passion to search for the deeper or central truth and for the home that houses my soul. As argued by Pinar (1995):

What does it mean to be brought nearer to the central truth? For one who has been lost in Heideggerian public world of false self and false values, it means returning home. For Heidegger, it meant literally staying home, refusing to accept university appointment in large, sophisticated cities such as Munich and Berlin. He preferred to remain in Freiberg, a city nearby his birthplace. (p. 203)
Pinar (1995) suggests returning home means being relatively conscious of origins, being open to the disclosure of unconscious material (through dreams, waking fantasy and so on) and to integrating these origins with present circumstances (p. 203). The consideration of origin might be twofold: physically and psychologically. “For many, returning home means moving away” (p. 204). Maybe it is true for me. I returned to Beijing but I felt myself a stranger.

The care of the self is “more than an exercise done at regular intervals…is a constant attitude that one must take toward oneself” (Foucault, 1986, p. 63). Wang (2004) argues that it is “a lifelong project of creating an ethically and aesthetically pleasing life” (p. 30). I kept thinking, searching for these answers. Will I be able to create an “ethically and aesthetically pleasing life” unless I find answers to my questions?

I engaged myself in the contemplation during many quiet nights. Rumination and writing are two major ways of investigation for me (Leggo, 2014). I made my own decision – to pursue the second doctoral study. It is not just an act of independent will or the exercise of my autonomy. It is for me a deadly serious decision. It poses a big question to myself, to my life. It has meant a looking forward to exploring, an attempt to reveal the “truth” about myself. It is a decision under which many aspects (self, other and the world) are considered with rationality and study. I find myself now living with peace, which comes after I made the decision. This is the path I find to my “heart”. As Wang (2004) knows: “The care of the self is a practice of freedom. It is characterized as the exercise of self mastery and the governing of pleasure and desires by an active individual who practices moderation, rationality and wisdom to achieve a state of beauty in his existence.” “It is a freedom first exercised over oneself, which refuses the enslavement of the self by oneself or others to institution” (Wang, 2004, p. 31). Am I really free? Like the figure described by Pinar (1995) in the novel: “Joseph K is reminiscent of many of us, in some degree.
K is a prototypical being of an urbanized, industrialized, cerebral twentieth century in the West. His life history, with its emphasis upon career, on instrumentally-defined social relations, is a major constituent element of the historical present” (p. 37).

It seems that most people do not do a second doctoral study. But, must I follow the path most people do? Will a person with a doctoral degree mean adequate for being a researcher and cannot pursue a doctoral degree again? Does it matter to learn in such a way (pursuing a second doctoral degree)? “As a practice of freedom, the care of the self also emphasizes one’s independence from the external world in order to focus on the cultivation of the soul. Such a turning away from the external to a retreat into oneself is a personal choice of abstinence and moderation in the exercise of active freedom” (Wang, 2004, p. 31). It is not appropriate to judge or interpret according to certain cultural or social values or rules that may not fit for the particular individual. As argued by Pinar (1995): “culture cannot be reduced to biographic. Social and economic structures are sufficiently frozen as to force work in the individual realm” (p. 41). The standard is “heart”. It is not right or wrong. The decision to pursue a second doctoral degree seems to be a retreat, a retreat from external reality into self. Through advanced study, I search the meaning of being myself. As discussed by Wang (2004):

What is freedom? Freedom is based upon rational self-mastery; in non-identity politics, freedom is a form of resistance against social domination; in the new ontology of the self, it is embedded in a limit attitude which valorizes transgression against historical limitations, emphasizing the creativity of producing new existential possibilities. (p. 32).
Freedom invites one to go beyond limits. What is the limit? The limit varies under various circumstances. It might be a dominant cultural or social value. It might be cultural, conceptual, or spatial, racial and so on, or a combination of some, even all. Freedom is also a representation of “biographic reality,” a reality portraying your current lived situation.

This decision (pursuing a second doctoral study) signifies an attitude: contemplation toward life by myself, and it means a staying where thoughts and actions are interwoven, resonating with my “authentic” self – the inner one. In a certain sense, this decision often feels like a voyage out, from the habitual, the customary, the taken-for-granted, toward the unfamiliar, the more spontaneous, the questionable (Pinar, 1995).

I have the freedom.

2.3.1.2 The Pursuit to be No. 1

The Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT)

The social lounge was filled with people. It was the first time that I found the room to be quite small. As the host stood up and greeted all the audience, the competition started. I was the sixth among the participants. From the moment it began, my attention was abruptly drawn to the front area where every participant was supposed to give the competition speech. The first participant was from India, and she looked different from before. “She paused several times in her speech partly because she was nervous,” I thought.

The host said, “Now let’s welcome Wanying. The title of her thesis is ‘The Yuanpei Program in Peking University – a case study of curriculum innovation.’” I walked to the front and turned around facing all the audience. I heard my heart beat faster and I could barely lift my
arm. I thought it would be fine only if I could remember what I should say. I stood still while
comforting myself. I started.

“I should keep my smile and the posture throughout the process. Gesture needed here. My
brain worked excitedly, but in a negative way. I could hear a reminder whispering around my
head after I commenced. However, I was only able to half control my body. I was speaking but
my face muscles and my arms seemed frozen. The designed pauses and gestures slipped away. I
was just there, talking.”

Finally I finished. Applause arose from the audience. Twenty minutes after the last
participant finished his speech, the judges announced the results. I did not know where I was
located, but I was not one among the first two. I tried to suppress my unhappiness, clapping my
hands to celebrate the two winners. I was talking with other people as I became sad, even a little
bit mad. How could I get such a result? I felt frustrated and depressed. After the event, I talked
for several hours with two friends who had attended the competition.

I could not fall asleep for the rest of the night. When I closed my eyes, my brain even
worked faster. I could not accept the failure. Scenes from the competitions and other fragmented
memories came to mind. They overlapped, imbricated and swirled. I felt pain and sorrow. Why?
I had finished my first doctoral study and the dissertation had been published as a book. My three
minute thesis was just about this research. Was it because I failed to demonstrate the academic
value of that research, or was it due to my poor presentation skills? Was I too nervous? Being
nervous reminded me of past experiences and my childhood memories. Through this three
minute thesis competition I finally found the lost past which I thought “lost.” In fact, the past not
only exists, but still permeates my life. Why do I always want to be No. 1 and why do I feel so
sad and frustrated when I fail? With the “lost” past in hand, the connection is easily perceived.
This 3MT competition experience serves as a site for autobiographical excavation, through which I can come to recover the social, cultural structures that formed me, how they have worked on me, and how these lost memories still function.

“**I am from Chinese Society**”

In order to perform well, I worked very hard for the 3MT competition. I spent weeks on writing, modifying, and reciting the short passage. Just before the real competition, I spent five hours unceasingly practicing the speech. Like the overcooked food, I found that I had overprepared for the competition. What caused me to be so nervous? Why did I struggle so? It seems that I am still a “product” of Chinese culture. From the strong desire to win to the sense of frustration caused by the failure in the competition, it can be seen how Chinese culture and Confucius education has imprinted my subjectivity.

I wanted to win the 3MT competition. I deemed winning the competition central to my academic success. Therefore, it was of great importance to me. Though in the end it turned out it might be a performance. It has been quite a while that I have not acknowledged the influence of Chinese culture on me. But I think the influence still remains.

Confucius Education communicates the notion that academic success is the most important goal for a student to achieve. According to Confucius, there are four social strata, comprised of occupations: scholars (Shi), farmers (nong), workers (gong), and businessmen (Shang) (Park & Chesla, 2007). The highest class, scholars, did mental labor, and usually made decisions that influenced the whole society. There are many Chinese sayings such as: “Doing scholarly work excels over any other type of work.” “You can see beauty in Book; you can see gold in Book.” All of these manifest that academic success tends to be the most valuable aspect. My life has been centered on the pursuit for academic success since childhood.
In Confucius education diligence compromises intelligence. It is believed that if one works hard, one can succeed finally. Suffering is part of personal cultivation in Chinese culture (Tu, 1998). Wang (2004) argues that the capacity to bear pain is essential to coming maturity. I thought the pain that arose in the process should be a guarantee for success. Therefore, no matter how tired I felt during the preparation, I persisted.

Reflecting on this competition, I clearly see the influence from my parents. My parents also explain why I have been so devoted to academic success. As Salvio (1990) observes:

We have to be aware of the meaning generated by intimate social relationships. In such a relationships, as in aesthetic experience, the look, the touch, the distance we keep from one another and the objects framing our lives are all meaningful, and this meaning is grasped in a moment. (p. 234)

My mother has been and is with me all the time, no matter where she is, no matter where I am. She was a teacher at a middle school that shared the same school yard with my elementary school. This created a situation wherein she was the one who first knew my examination results. She then would tell me. I guessed my score according to her attitude. Each time I received a good score brought a smile to her face, I felt so relieved. She cared about my education, my examination results, and my place in the class.

According to Huang and Gova (2012), educational achievement is visible and measurable. It encompasses one’s test performances, schools entered, and degrees received. It is generally believed that earning higher grades, attending higher ranking schools, and receiving higher degrees are indisputable routes to success in the society. In addition, education is associated with a person’s social class (Huang & Gova, 2012). Social class is associated with occupations as well as the moral character related to the occupation, as Confucius decreed.
My mother regarded my education as a family business, an interdependent process for many Chinese families (Huang & Gova, 2012). Though children are responsible for their own educational success, Chinese parents believe that their children’s educational achievement is greatly influenced by their parenting practices as well. They believe that they have the obligation and responsibility to contribute to their children’s success in education. When parents have a difficult time exerting influence over their children’s academic success, they may regard themselves as failures as a parent.

They take their children’s academic failure as their own responsibility because they feel that they did not do their best to work with their children. Pressures can be high on both parents and children. When Chinese children do not achieve an intended goal, parents feel disappointed, anxious, and embarrassed (Kim, 2006). It brings shame and embarrassment to the family. Children are impacted by parents’ emotions and expectations. On the other hand, if the child succeeds academically, it represents the triumph of the entire family. It is considered a family achievement. My mother believes this and put the belief into practice. She supervised me by sitting beside me when I studied at home. Each time I finished an essay, I handed it to my mother for revision. Chinese parents are concerned that too much praise may have a negative effect on their children’s achievement. Therefore, parents usually provide little praise to their children for academic success.

That may explain why my parents placed a high value on education and academic success, which implicitly or explicitly had a great impact on my choice, on what to focus on, and the time distribution since I spent a lot of time studying after school. I was directed to study all day and gradually this demand became internalized, the only guiding principle for me.

However, where I am is another aspect deserving consideration.
Displacement (social and cultural)

Place as an important concept for understanding curriculum autobiographically emerged decades ago. As Pinar (1995) argues, “place and human feelings are intertwined. When events take place, they achieve particularity and concreteness; they become infused with feeling. Fiction—novels, short stories—express daily human experience, situated in concrete places with specific characters” (p. 533). Kincheloe and Pinar (1991, cited in Pinar et al, 1995, p. 533) say, “place is the life-force of fiction, serving as the crossroads of circumstance, the playing field on which drama evolves.” Place represents certain notions, certain social and cultural norms.

I was born in a middle sized city in the Northeast of China. Living in the city at that time meant a routinized life that might never change. I come from the vast land in Northeast China that is dark and fertile. It is a city with 100 years of history and an industrial base where 8 huge factories operated. These factories made steel and manufactured train compartments; each factory had more than 10,000 workers. Fifty percent of the population worked for these factories or in occupations related with the 8 factories. My mother was one of them, and she worked for an affiliated middle school as a teacher. After parents retired, their children continued their job. I had heard so many stories about replacing their parents’ job upon graduation from high school. People lived quietly.

The sky in winter was always gloomy due to serious air pollution caused by the eight factories which consumed tons of coal everyday. The dark smog cylinder rising everywhere still remains unforgettable in my mind. Everyday life was the same. I escaped this dull, uncolored life by reading. Reading was the only activity with which I felt fascinated. Every school day, I dashed to the school library, reading for several hours. In most cases, the elementary and
secondary education was so ritualized and obsessive that knowledge of the outside world was barely acknowledged in class. However, reading at the library provided me the possibility to see the outside world, to experience different kinds of life.

Even nowadays, this scene always haunts me: I was reading quietly a newly published magazine or a book. I could smell the newly arrived magazine or book and ran to read them. Almost no teachers or students were around. It was my own space, my place. It was years ago but the place remains in my mind. This educational experience extended my vision, bringing me into a new “space” where I heard different “voices.” I aspired to try something I had never tried before. How could I achieve the goal? Maybe the only way was going to a college, a college in Beijing—the capital city of China.

Without turning back to my life in the city, I would not see the “lost” connection between me and my hometown city. This regressive moment helps me find the denied elements of the past and see how I had struggled to break free from the bondage of northeastern social boundaries.

All these reasons prompted me to pursue No. 1 unceasingly, the desire to go to college in Beijing, and something unidentifiable.

This competition served as an occasion to question where I come from, culturally and socially. Through such self-study I might recover the bridge to a lost part of “I”. By re-entering the past, I saw how I had struggled, how I had worked so hard, and then I might re-perceived the society and culture context where I had come of age, what has structured me. Autobiographical reflection offered a key to unlock complexity of my situation.
2.3.1.3 Am I a Teacher or a Student?

After the dinner in St. John’s College in UBC. The dining hall was in a total silence with burst of laughers outside in the courtyard: some talked; some played soccer; some just walked around the courtyard. Residents of the College enjoyed themselves after working all day. I went back into my world again. “Am I all right? Am I doing the right thing? Did I talk too much?” I could not help asking myself.

Why did I talk in that way during the dinner? Why did I think that what other residents said was not correct or sound? Sometimes the situation happened in the class, too. When the professor asked the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods, I immediately replied: “The qualitative research tends to…” Without waiting for other students’ comments.

I wanted to justify what I said in the classroom, make myself more trustworthy. The more I talked, the more unnatural I became. I told my past experience to another Chinese graduate student. Now she knew I was doing my second PhD; consequently, it seemed quite natural that she asked me many questions, especially about achieving a PhD. Somehow I forgot that I am still a student. “Am I not very experienced?” I outlined to her the whole process, detailed the challenges she might face, emphasizing strategies that can be adopted to overcome difficulties.

Why did I tell her that I had a doctoral degree already? Why did I think that I needed to demonstrate myself on that occasion? With a doctoral degree, does it mean that I am more knowledgeable or competent than she is? Similar situations have occurred several times since I enrolled in this second doctoral program.

I can see that this has led to that; in that circumstance I chose that, I rejected this alternative; I affiliated with those people, then left them for these, that this field intrigued me intellectually, then that one; I worked on this problem, then that one…I
see there is a coherence. Not necessarily a logical one, but a lived one, a felt one.

The point of coherence is the biography as it is lived….The predominant question is:
what has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience? (Pinar &
Grumet, 1976, p. 52)

How did I identify myself at that moment? Did the environment affect me? Was it related to the
“audience”—those with whom I was talking? I realized my identification with being a teacher on
these occasions. Sometimes I deemed myself a teacher, and naturally I consider I may deserve
more respect since I functioned as a teacher. Why should a teacher gain more respect or sustain a
dominant role? Why did I feel unhappy when I did not receive the desired comment? This
reminds me of Chinese learning culture. To my surprise, I can so easily identify the influences of
Chinese learning and teaching culture on me. How does Chinese culture view teachers? The
traditional Chinese model of teaching is one of an empty-vessel or pint pot (Maley, 1982). Such
a model is essentially mimetic or epistemic in that it is characterized by the transmission of
knowledge principally through an imitative and repetitive process (Paine, 1992; Tang & Absalon,
1998). Teaching methods are largely expository and the teaching process is teacher-dominated
(Biggs, 1996). The teacher is supposed to be dominant during the whole teaching process. The
teacher interprets, analyzes and elaborates on these points for the students, helps them connect
new points of knowledge with old knowledge, and imparts a carefully sequenced and optimally
mediated amount of knowledge for the students to memorize, repeat, and understand (Hu, 2002).

Due to the perceived roles mentioned above, it is understandable that teachers tend not to
embrace students challenging their authority over knowledge. It can be regarded as humiliating if
teachers fail to answer students’ questions. It is a common belief that a teacher must assume a
directive role, having the sole prerogative in deciding what to teach and exerting complete
control over the class all the time (Tang & Absalom, 1998). This is to make class events fully predictable, guaranteeing the smooth delivery of carefully planned contents. To keep in tune with the transmission model of teaching, students should maintain a high level of receptiveness, wholeheartedly embracing the knowledge from their teacher or found in books. They are expected to respect and cooperate with their teacher (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) and not to challenge the transmitted knowledge or present their own ideas until they have mastered sufficient knowledge to make informed judgments (Brick, 1991). The teacher is the one, or the only one in class to talk and interpret. Accordingly, they deserve respect. That is why I felt uncomfortable about being treated the way in which people challenged me. It seems that I need not care too much whether I look like a teacher or a student. Teachers and students can be reciprocally related. No matter what role I might be deemed, it could be an opportunity to reconsider my situatedness.

2.3.2 Understanding My Cultural Background

A Westernized Chinese? – A Double Alienated Journey

Who am I? Taubman (1992) remembers turning to his mother—a teacher herself—for advice about teaching. As a beginning step, she suggested that he stand in front of their hallway mirror, practicing what he would do in front of his classes during the first weeks of school. Identity as a unified me congeals during the mirror stage in seeking oneself in the face of the other. “The ‘I’ comes to form in the presence and reflection of another, identity is inextricably linked to someone else. There is no private ‘I’” (Taubman, 1995, p. 232).

I am in-between Chinese and western culture. I am a Chinese in others’ eyes, but I consider myself as embodying both cultures. I am moving between the two poles. As Taubman (1995)
identifies his way to midpoint, he terms a “dialectic…whose endpoints must be attended to but not submitted to” (p. 232).

As a Chinese woman who had come to the United States to study curriculum theory, Wang Hongyu studies herself by studying Confucius, Foucault, and Kristeva. She had left home: her nation, her parents. But she found that her home had become strange: “going back home does not bring me home, but has turned my mother into a stranger. I have become a stranger to myself too” (Wang, 2004, p. 7). Therefore, Wang invokes the conception of “third space,” wherein one travels beyond the current forms of life. It is the third space that opens when the stranger calls one out of oneself, when the stranger inside oneself emerges, enabling one to move away from home toward a destination not yet known. Wang describes a journey as both a return home and to a foreign land (Pinar, 2011, p. 107). According to Wang Hongyu (2004), “the more I probed, the more I was amazed by how much we Chinese are still embedded in this tradition, no matter how many times during the last one hundred years we have witnessed anti-Confucianism (p. 55). Will it happen to me? How has Confucius culture affected me? In what ways? Does anything that I do conflict with the culture I am supposed to belong to?

It was a cozy night. We were talking around a table, a “Chinese table” around which 10 Chinese students sat side by side. Suddenly, a Chinese student said, “Do you want to hear a joke?” “Please…” We laughed. He began, “Once there was a man who told a funny joke.” After he finished, a person said, “You can say that again.” Then he retold the story….This is the joke. Finished.” No one laughed. We gazed at each other. I know the funny place was that “you can say that again” is slang and it means “I agree” or “It sounds fun.” But many Chinese, as second language learners may understand the phrase literally. That was why many of them did not understand and for them the joke was not funny at all. I looked at the one who had just told the
joke, thinking if I needed to tell the reason. When I was about to tell, I stopped and hesitated.

“Should I tell? Will it mean that I am flaunting? A little bit of a show off? There is a professor from Peking University sitting here… No. I should keep silent. It is not a time to show myself.” I decided to keep silent. After a while, the speaker told us the reason. Everyone felt relieved. Every conversation resumed, back to the previous state. But my mind seemed to get out of the place. Why did I have these thoughts?

When some questions or situations make you conscious of where are you from, I think these are culturally sensitive moments. With the story, I begin to examine myself consciously; this examination is informed by, mainly, my studying experiences in Hong Kong, America and Canada.

Why would I have those thoughts when being with other Chinese residents? I was so hesitant about telling them the truth. How do I view the relation with others? How do I view myself among other Chinese? Is it subduing to collectivism, is the self placed within the collectivist ideology?

Ren (often translated as benevolence), the most important ethical principle in Confucianism, is recognized widely for its emphasis on the care of the others (Yu, 2013). According to some commentators, the Confucian relational self lies under/ in human relationship, constituted by nothing more than the sum of roles he or she assumes in various relationships, and it changes as relationship changes (Yu, 2013). In Confucian cultures, the self is what Ho (1993) calls the relational self, which is intensely aware of the social presence of other human beings. The appearance of others in the phenomenal world is integral to the emergence of selfhood; that is, self and others are conjointly differentiated from the phenomenal world to form the self-in-
relation-with-others. Ho (1993) uses the term relational identity to refer to identity defined by a person’s significant social relationships.

According to Sun (1991), the Chinese, “perceive an individual largely as a 'body' (shen or shenti) to be made whole by the exchange of 'hearts' (xin) between two such ‘bodies’” (p. 1). In this sense, a Chinese individual, far from being a distinct and separate individual, is conceivable largely in the continuum of ‘two persons’. It means no separate individual for a Chinese individual or there is no individual in Chinese culture. “Ideally, the Chinese ‘individual’, inhibited from unattenuated ‘self-actualization’ and thus rendered inert, is galvanized into action by its duty towards the Significant Other” (p. 5). The Significant Other can be always seen in the Chinese individual.

Sun (1991) argues that “the emotive nature of Chinese ‘conscience’ renders it more tractable to concerns for 'face' or shame, oftentimes leading to the compromising of rational self-interest or one's principle” (p. 4). In the above situation, it seems that I exchanged my self-image or self-interest (in order not be disliked by other Chinese) with the “truth” that I wanted to tell. “Enveloped by heart, a Chinese individual at times finds himself 'not the master of his own body' (shen bu you ji)” (p. 4).

The self in Confucianism is a subdued self. It is conditioned to respond to perceptions, not of its own needs and aspirations, but of social requirements and obligations. Incongruence between the inner private self and the outer public self is likely to be present (Ho, 1993). Confucianism tends to produce people who view behavior in terms of whether it meets or fails to meet some external moral or social criteria—and not in terms of individual needs, sentiments, or volition. That is, people who tend to be moralistic, not psychologically minded, Ho further argues.
Sun (1991) argues that Confucianism is the philosophy par excellence of the 'Two': “This worldly oriented (Confucianism), it seeks transcendence in the movement away from one's own body towards another. In such activity, the imperative is living up to one's own part in a reciprocal relation” (p. 4). Such activity was traditionally codified in the five cardinal pairs of reciprocity like 'lord-subject,' 'father-son' etc., which shows the more deep-lying, long-lasting binary thrust in the Chinese view of the human condition. “Marxist China has continued the same thrust in the effacement of individuality in a collective matrix. Ideology might be faltering now, but the need of modern-day Chinese to 'settle their bodies' in the matrix of family is more real than ever” (Sun, p. 4). Sun contends that the Chinese concept of the individual, from the Confucian to the Maoist, perceives man as totally malleable by society or the state. The Chinese notion of 'transcendence' is the horizontal movement of feelings from a single body to a greater number of bodies, so that 'individual' impulses are developed into social concordance (Sun, 1991).

*The Great Learning* describes the ethical development of a person in stages beginning with the rectification of his “xin,” so that his “shen” will be cultivated, and proceeds from there to unify his family, to harmonize his nation, and eventually to pacify All-under-Heaven (Sun, 1991, p. 13). The goal of self-cultivation is to lead one’s life in accordance with the way of Heaven. It is not meant to make a person a unique individual, but to make one an ideal person (Sun, 1991). Confucius culture establishes the path for the individual to follow.

The issue of cultural difference has never been so crucial since I had the experience of studying abroad. For four years I studied at the University of Hong Kong for my doctoral study; now I am doing my second PhD at the University of British Columbia. The experience in Hong Kong afforded me the opportunity to examine from where I come and signalled the start of the
journey of struggle with the two cultural claims on myself (culture of Mainland China and Hong Kong), which I may not have been very well aware of at the very beginning. I came to realize the cultural difference between the two places: where I had been brought up and where I was living and studying during the period. For some particular issue, they are just opposite. The difference of the two cultures provides the opportunity of considering the conflicting aspects of the two cultures, and the uniqueness of the two cultures. Biocultural identities imply the coexistence of two different cultures but it is problematic if conflicts and contradictions between the two cultures are not addressed in generative rather than solvable ways (Young, 1998). By constantly engaging myself in various questions: I seem to estrange myself from both cultures. These questions are: How do these two cultures manifest themselves in myself? How should I react or respond while situating this bicultural environment, psychologically and behaviorally? What are the moments that critically shock me? How have my thought processes evolved during the process? Am I embracing the two cultures? In what way? As noted, Wang Hongyu (2004) proposes a concept of a third space that may fit for this situation:

The contradictory nature of differences between Chinese and Western cultures constantly challenges me to reconcile these differences into a creative site where new subjectivities can emerge. What we need is embracing both cultures through a third space of mutual transformation enables us to approach the issues of self, relationship, and difference in a new way. (p. 16)

Wang contends that a third space embodies both cultures at the same time, honoring the otherness of each and encouraging passages and interactions between them. How the two othernesses interact will be interesting. It is manifested through one’s thinking and choice. Can they really “talk with each other”? It is through the “oneself” that the two cultures mediate and
accommodate. When the two cultures find passage into the “oneself”, one may begin to engage in the “rethinking” of the two cultures. One may think the origin, the history or how this particular aspect of the culture has been shaped. Or, one may see that “different cultural layers of the self shift, intersect, and constantly reform” (Wang, 2004, p. 16). Naturally, as one perceives the difference, he or she may behave in accordance with a culture with another culture being considered in mind. The visible reaction may only represent a choice. One may act upon one culture on one occasion while on another on a different occasion. This shift signifies the complexity of living with two cultures internalized within. The space where I was and where I am physically manifests the influences of two cultures in terms of language usage, ways of thinking, knowledge systems being employed and so on. I am between these cultures, in ongoing and shifting relation with each.

2.3.3 Understanding the New Research Paradigm

What is Currere? – Struggle for a Different Research Paradigm

Another misty day in February. The class was about to start. “Would I participate and speak well?” I murmured. As one of the classmates sat beside me, my wandering thought came back. “How is your writing? I asked. “Yea, I just finished.” I looked around the classroom, and I found most of them had taken their seat already.

It was a class I took in the second term of my studies at UBC. I had been deeply confused and perplexed by the class discussion. It was unexpected. I did not anticipate the situation. I was not a beginner. I finished the first doctorate at the University of Hong Kong and I published the dissertation. However, I found I was indeed a beginner in this class. It seemed that the knowledge I learned before was null though I did know qualitative research, case study, various
research methods and so on… But why did I feel numb in the class? Spontaneously, I had been both surprised and excited, intrigued by something that is fundamentally different. I wanted to be inspired. I was mentally activated, triggered, but I failed to orient myself. I was amazed by these thoughts, challenged by them, which are not behavioral, observable, but ontologically, exist. This is a new perspective, new thoughts, new ways of looking at ourselves and the world. It (autobiography) describes ontological shifts within temporal and spatial structure. It is a path along which I begin to walk, to reflect, to converse with myself. It seemed that I walked along a path that brought me a feeling of surprise, excitement, and anticipation of inspiration.

They talked about storytelling (autobiography) again. Why are personal stories concerned with curriculum? What is currere? How does it address the contribution of academic study to the understanding of our life history? What is research? Research should be like the one I did before for my first doctoral study. Can story-telling be a research method? And then what is the difference between research and the novel? These questions have puzzled me since the first month I enrolled in the program. I was eager to know:

Research methodology has evolved to enable students to study their biographies and practices. If we can extend this idea to the murky world of identity, and provide spaces for student teachers to rethink how their constructions of the teacher make for lived experience, then I think students…will be better able to politically theorize about the terrible problem of knowing thyself…Students may come to understand knowing thyself as a construction and eventually, as a socially empowering occasion.

(Grumet, 1975, p. 43)

The research paradigm is concerned with the way the world is viewed and understood. As argued by Aoki (2001):
What seems to be needed in curriculum inquiry, is general recognition of the epistemological limit-situation in which curriculum research is encased. Accordingly, we need to seek out new orientation that allows us to free ourselves of the tunnel vision effect of mono-dimensionality. (cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 94)

I followed the tradition of empirical research and I derived my understanding through cases, interviews, observations and so on. The research was directed toward others, toward the outside. However, practice in reality is a complex discipline, closely concerned with one’s choice and action. The theory-\textit{currere} seems to be different, which is directed toward the inside.

As argued by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995), Grumet cited \textit{currere} as a method and theory of curriculum which escapes the epistemological traps of mainstream social science and educational research. Rather than working to quantify behaviors to describe their surface interaction or to establish causality, \textit{currere} seeks to describe what the individual subject himself or herself makes of these behaviors (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 414). As one of the theoretical foundations for \textit{currere}, phenomenology tends to reject both rationalism and in which the bottom line of reality is logic and empiricism as elaborated in twentieth century mainstream social science for this mathematical representation in statistics fails to account for the world as experienced (Pinar et al., 1995). As further pointed out by Pinar. et al. (1995), \textit{currere} shares phenomenology’s interest in describing immediate, pre-conceptual experience, making use of the phenomenological processes of distancing and bracketing required in doing so. Grumet (1976) provides an explanation:

Unlike mainstream educational research which focuses upon the end products of the processes of consciousness as described by Husserl, those end products we call concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations we, in accumulative fashion,
call knowledge. Currere seeks to slide underneath these end products and structures to the pre-conceptual experience that is their foundation. Currere is designed to act as the phenomenological epoche, slackening the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice. (p. 41)

*Currere* helps us find the hidden “truth” and brings the truth to our attention by going beyond the end products such as concepts, abstraction and so on. *Currere* emphasizes the individual experience of the curriculum:

In contrast to the conventional empirical-analytic paradigm of educational research, *currere* returns to the experience of the individual, searching for those qualities which disqualify them for consideration in the mainstream behavioral sciences: its idiosyncratic history, its pre-conceptual and lived foundations, its contextual dependency, and its capacity for freedom and intelligence in choice and action.

(Pinar et al., 1995, p. 415)

Through *currere*, the researcher attempts a phenomenological description of both subject and object, requiring knowledge of self as knower of the world, tracing the complex path from pre-conceptual experience to formal intellection (Pinar, et al. 1995, p. 415). *Currere* points to a lived path along which we better understand how we have evolved throughout the process. *Currere* as autobiographical self-report communicates the individual’s lived experience as it is socially located, politically positioned, and discursively formed, while working to succumb to none of these structurings.
Summary

My autobiography is organized around three themes: search for understanding my self-growth, cultural background, and research paradigm. Through presenting these moments, memories, and stories, I have achieved a deeper understanding about myself and my subjectivity. The first theme is about the search for self-growth, which involves three stories and corresponding analysis and synthesis; the second theme is about the search for cultural understanding with one story and analysis presented; the third theme is about the search for understanding research paradigm with one story and analysis discussed.

2.3.4 Discussion—Some Thoughts on My Autobiography

I am in between: a teacher and student, being home and alienated, being Chinese and a foreigner, both mother and daughter (I am a daughter but sometimes think like my mother). It seems that I always move between two extremes, two roles, or two cultures, or two modes of understanding research. These extremes might all be issues related to my “authentic self,” if from different angles. These different pairs (aspects) work to help me understand myself better. Being a teacher makes sense when comparing to being a student; being Chinese makes sense when comparing to being a foreigner. Teachers do not exist isolated from students. Consequently, any concept or name implies a relationship and suggests another concept as its counterpart. In other words, when we look at something, we unconsciously link it to its counterpart. For example, when we describe something as red or good, we are implicitly comparing them to their opposite counterparts. In Chinese philosophy, yin and yang (also, yin-yang or yin yang) describes how opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world. The yin and yang give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.
Similarly, teachers do not make any sense if not relating themselves to students. They are interconnected, yet in seemingly “contradictory” positions. In Chinese culture, *Yin and Yang* are two important concepts. Everything has both *yin and yang* aspects (for instance, shadow cannot exist without light). *Yin and Yang* can be deemed as complementary forces that interact to form a dynamic system. This dynamic system is not just assembled parts, but might be a new place where new forces can be formed. This could be the reason why I have been in between for so many things, such as between student and teacher, and being home yet alienated. When something establishes itself, it naturally denies something else and implies the opposite embedded naturally. The *Yin and Yang* sides or conflicting sides characterize the whole process. In my case, constant change places me in between the “new” and the “old”: the current and the past contradict each other. The evolving process is dynamic and not static, with contradictions and harmonies representing a unity in multiplicity.

It also reminds me of the Chinese traditional brush painting. As one of the most important styles, Freehand style – *Shuimo*（水墨）– is loosely termed as “watercolor” or “brush” painting. The Chinese character "shui" means water and "mo" means ink. This style is also referred to as "xie yi"（寫意）or freehand style. The ink-and-wash landscape is characterized as vivid brushwork and varying degrees of intensity of ink that can express the artist's conception of nature, his or her own emotions, and individuality. This style seeks to capture the essence of the subject rather than the details of its appearance. Landscape painters, for example, frequently go outdoors and observe nature, then come back to a studio to paint what they have experienced. Many landscape paintings use empty spaces to represent light or clouds.

The most sustained and integral theory on Chinese painting is embodied in the idea that form is only a means to express spirit and vitality (Zhang, 2002). Essentially, painters as early as
the fifth century, “realized the importance of capturing the spirit of nature, rather than just copying it. In painting a man or woman, the artist should bring forth his or her likeness: in painting animals, trees, or flowers, he should attempt to capture their characteristics or moving implications” (Zhang, 2002, p. 5). In order to paint successfully, the painter must observe and understand his subject. “The artists sought a likeness in the unlikeness, more specifically they wanted to go beyond superficial identical resemblance and create an image that was unique to the artist and captured how the artist’s character, mood, and emotion affected the way in which a subject was seen” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 3). One may think of it as the image that a person has when he or she looks at a scene or subject, his or her interpretation and how he or she personally internalizes and reveals the character of the subject. The purpose of these painters, particularly when painting subjects from nature, was to try to integrate themselves with the subjects and achieve a sort of harmony with nature. This idea of going beyond the images allowed painters to express their inner emotions, spiritual thinking, and show a unique self (Reynolds, 2009).

Chinese painting is meant to pursue and exhibit the “spirit” of the scene. These paintings convey the ideal, pursuit, and understanding of the painters. Similarly, while writing my autobiography, I also seek to convey the “spirit” of scenes as I lived them. I might neglect or miss some details but I aspire to capture the “essence” or “real quality” of the past experience. Writing an autobiography is meant to convey something that is spirited, transcending factual details and highlight important understanding. In addition, these different shades of ink interact to present the beauty or spirit of the real life, resembling the different stories told in my autobiography as they interact and overlap in some way.
Chapter 3: Attunement

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I described how academic knowledge contributes to my self-understanding during writing autobiographically. Derived from my own autobiography, I propose the concept of attunement, a concept which captures the essentials of how I explore self-understanding through *currere*. Attunement was originally proposed by Heidegger, translated from “*Befindlichkeit*”. According to Demuth (2012), it is a spatial metaphor of mood. In German language the term “*finden,*” which is the etymological root of “*Befindlichkeit*”, refers to the verb “find” and so “*Befindlichkeit*” means something like “to be situated”. Delancy (2014) argues that for Heidegger, attunement is a way that human beings (*Dasein*) always find themselves. These attunements are not presentations of the human being (*Dasein*), but rather fundamental structural features of *Dasein*. Demuth (2012) understood “*Befindlichkeit*” as a hermeneutical approach: each seeing is determined by our background and our approach. In this dissertation, attunement is employed to describe an educational theory of learning, which does not have the same meaning as proposed by Heidegger. I will express my experience of attunement at the conclusion of this chapter. Heidegger’s conception of attunement informs my own, but not completely, as I will indicate.

Describing my own life history (autobiography) provided a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing. In a phrase, I became more open to myself. I term this attunement. Attunement allows a new or different way of understanding, way of thinking, or perspective. All of these understandings point to a different dimension, as if I were repositioned within something unknown. In fact, attunement may “provide the vehicle wherein the everydayness of life can be
lived with reasonable comfort and reasonable freedom from anxiety and unpredictability” (Huebner, 1999, p. 345). Attunement is spatially, temporally, situationally, subjectively contingent; and it is historically, culturally, and socially constrained. It is subjectively perceived; sometimes it appears to be vague, or to diminish under certain circumstances. To be more specific, for me attunement emphasizes how one’s learning can take place in a subjective sense of intellectual labour striving for deeper understanding. Currere is committed to depicting how academic knowledge contributes to self-understanding. Attunement emphasizes how even informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside the classroom) can contribute to self-understanding. I use the term – informal form of study – to describe this particular form of study – attunement. This study focuses on this informal form of study that takes place outside the classroom instead of providing a review of formal and informal learning. This informal form of study, which emerges from my own autobiography, refers to study that takes place within a person’s life. In such an autobiographical theory of education, learning becomes situated not only in the school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labor. Attunement refers to the learning guided and experienced by oneself subjectively. Attuned, it may happen anywhere at any moment.

This chapter has two sections. In the first I describe the two aspects of attunement: contingency and sensitivity; in the second, I summarize my sense of the concept of attunement.

3.1 Two aspects of Attunement—Contingency and Sensitivity

This attunement involves two aspects: contingency and sensitivity. These two aspects are not totally separated, but might many times overlap. Contingency refers to the relatively stable
aspect of attunement; sensitivity refers to the unstable aspect of attunement. In the following, I will provide a detailed description of the two aspects.

3.1.1 Contingency

I provide a definition of contingency here, based on my own autobiography. This definition of contingency extracts theoretical support from the theory of contingency in leadership and the definition of situation in Phenomenology. Fiedler (1967) proposes the theory of contingency to address the issue of leadership in management. According to Fiedler (1967), there is no best way to organize a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is contingent (dependent) upon the internal and external situation. It is also related to the concept of situation, which is originally from phenomenology. The concept of situation denotes those elements of a setting which are organized by the intentionality of the individual or group.

Informed by the two concepts, contingency refers to internal and external elements of one’s experience from one’s particular point of view. In other words, one’s experience is contingent upon internal and external elements and the combination of elements varies, depending on specific situations. These elements constitute the particularity of experience, including certain situationally specific factors such as the spatial, temporal, cultural, and so on. Contingency denotes the “particularity” identified from one’s own perspective. Contingency defines certain aspects of things; they are constraining, too. It provides and constrains. It defines and conditions what may happen. It is a combination of all situational circumstances, what is given in one’s lived situation.

Contingency is similar to the objective side of one’s life (reality). Contingency involves internal and external elements. Internal element refers to the way I subjectively think about my
experience, for example, when I described my own story, the way I described it and what I focus on shows the internal element of my experience from my own particular point of view; external element refers to the social and cultural condition that can be seen from my autobiography. Contingency explains how diverse objective reality can be for different people. People may look at the stories in my autobiography differently. In my dissertation, contingency is particularity.

Contingency describes internal and external aspects of events and experience. In a sense, it is both objective and subjective. It might overlap with the concept of situation, as I have shown above. However, contingency tends to be more detailed, specifying a series of factors. Contingency is also informed by a conceptual approach and knowledge as well as by one’s social, economic, and cultural locations.

3.1.2 Sensitivity

The second aspect is sensitivity, which emphasizes the unstable side of one’s experience. This unstableness refers to the uncertain or individual-specific aspect that may vary in light of different perspectives taken. Heidegger equates attunement with sensitivity, as he understands attunement as a mental optic, which make things visible, through “unlocking” their phenomenality (Demuth, 2012). Each seeing is determined by our background and our conceptual approach. “To be in certain attunement means that we have sensibility to see some aspects of things, or that we are capable of understanding things in a certain way. In this way, we can –‘unlock’– things as phenomena so that we can grasp them” (Demuth, 2012. p. 15). Sensitivity helps us see different aspects of things or understand things differently and helps achieve heightened understanding. It is one, albeit central, medium of attunement.
The concept of boundary

In order to understand sensitivity, I propose the concept of boundary, which refers to one’s perception and understanding level (conceptual level). It mainly means how one applies one’s way of thinking to different issues or experiences. I summarize two characteristics of boundary.

First, boundary defines and limits what one currently knows and understands. In this sense, it is akin to the concept of ontology. According to Pinar (1975), ontology denotes being, including human being as the gestalt of the physical, emotional, and mental dimensions. One’s ontological being is more than the totality of these aspects. Pinar (1975) also mentions the “more” as beyond the three aspects: physical, emotional, and mental. He acknowledges that the intellectually underdeveloped can potentially benefit by working with those who are more developed. He transfers this idea to two interrelated undertakings: learnedness and intellectual development. “When the exclusive aim is learnedness in the sense of amassing information, the process is primarily technical, and may not involve a transmission of energy in the same sense that occurs when the aim is intellectual development” (p. 101). However, the provision of information and its interrelatedness, can also be an offering of an élan vital from one to the other, especially when the mentor is emotionally involved with the information. Moreover, he points out that “when one’s aim is intellectual development, one is able to glimpse underneath the manifest behavior to the pre-and unconscious dimension of inter-activity” (p. 102). One shows a higher level of élan vital in the area described/analyzed when conceptually and emotionally engaged. Therefore, as argued by Pinar (1975), in such an instance, we can see that “how one’s ontological level enables one to see certain levels, and then use the discursive mind to describe and analyze what it is one sees in certain areas from one’s ontological perspective” (p. 102).

Pinar (1975) uses the example of student and teacher: “to see what his teacher sees in such a case,
and not just mirror his teacher’s language, the student must enter commensurate ontological level” (p. 102). This process is likened to the transfusion of *élan vital*. This boundary focuses on intellectual aspect of being. Boundary is inseparable from limit. Limit here denotes that one becomes aware of the difficulties and challenges that one is facing: one reaches one’s limit, if only for the time being.

Second, the concept of boundary mainly emphasizes an intellectual aspect and is content-specific. One may demonstrate different levels of understanding regarding different issues due to previous experience and knowledge. Hence, one may have in-depth understanding in philosophy, but have limited understanding in music. However, the understanding acquired from certain issues or subjects can contribute to understanding other issues or subjects. For example, one’s understanding on philosophy will definitely contribute to the understanding of educational issues. This synergistic potential does not only happen within the realm of intellect. As discussed previously, one’s ontological level mainly involves three aspects: physical, mental, and emotional. These three can also contribute to each other. As argued by Fung (1937), not to be affected by sorrow or joy, is to have transformed emotion by means of reason (p. 237). Sense can help transform emotion: one can reduce the feeling of sadness (or negative feeling) if one can know more. As Spinoza argues, if there are persons of (true) knowledge, who understand the reality of the universe, and who know that the way in which things evolve is inevitable, they will be unmoved by whatever they may meet (cited in Fung, 1937, p. 237). They will not be bound by emotion. One need not feel sad or depressed no matter what is encountered. Fung (1937) also uses an example:

A sudden gust of wind blows down a roof tile so that it hits a small child and a mature man on their heads. The child will feel intense anger against the tile, whereas
the man’s emotion will not be stirred, and for this very reason, his pain will be actually less. This is because the man will understand that the falling of the tile is a physical phenomenon, and therefore he will not be affected by sorrow or joy. (Feng, 1937, p. 237)

_Zhuangzi_, an ancient Chinese philosopher, argues that we have reason to transform our emotions. There is a story in _Zhuangzi_ that describes how _Zhuangzi_ responded when his wife died:

When she first died, how could I help not being affected? But then on examining the matter, I saw that in the Beginning she has originally been lifeless. And not only lifeless, but she had originally lacked all substance. During this first state of confused chaos, there came a change which resulted in substance. This substance changed to assume forms. The form changed and became alive. And it has changed again to reach death. In this it has been like the passing of the four seasons, spring, autumn, winter and summer. And while she is thus lying asleep in the Great House (the universe), for me to go about weeping and wailing, would be to show myself ignorant of Fate. Therefore I refrain. (Zhuangzi, pp.223-224, cited in Fung, 1937)

_Zhuangzi_ understands life and death from what he imagines to be the perspective of the universe; he can therefore ease his sadness about his wife’s death. This knowledge reduces the negative feeling of loss; it demonstrates the transformation of emotion by means of reason. Intellectual development can contribute to emotional development.
The Characteristics of Sensitivity

First, sensitivity means openness to a new idea, or to a new perspective. Being open means allowing more possibilities to emerge. Openness embraces the unknown, including alterity. Being open means being receptive, open to various thoughts, particularly when being exposed to these thoughts. Openness makes one more ready for study and reflection. One can be more readily informed by study and reflection which may proceed unpredictably. By being more receptive and open, the meaning of the experience may emerge as one becomes more ready for new thoughts and possibilities. Being open and more receptive allows the unfolding of thoughts in which various thoughts or discourses interact, considering possible ways of thinking.

Second, sensitivity is characterized by engagement in terms of how one interacts with the world outside. It is enacted through how one has accepted or rejected opinions, or negotiated with ideas and events. One is actually engaging in a lifelong, complicated conversation. Under certain circumstances, one may not need to act but to contemplate: conceive and understand different ways of thinking, be more aware of their differences, and be more reflective of how these human thoughts have evolved, with horizons widened and insights gained. One can be more aware of which thought or discourse tends to be more dominant. Discern-ability implies that one can know how one has evolved, what thoughts or thinking patterns have impacted one’s development. The ability to discern shows how one navigates among various thoughts and discourses and how one finds more meaningful interpretations, as I demonstrated in my own autobiography in which I identify how my subjectivity has been structured by various thoughts. One is able to discern what these thoughts are actually are when engaged in thinking.

Third, sensitivity can render a sense of mystery to learning, for how understanding – through attunement – can be achieved tends to be uncertain without a protocol to follow. The
learning process is not quantified or proceduralized. Uncertainty gives a sense of mystery to sensitivity, which locates the learning process within what transcends human control and understanding. Uncertainty creates more space for one to explore.

Fourth, one’s sensitivity is content-specific, which means that one might be sensitive to certain things or certain aspects of things only. Multi-intelligence theory might be useful to illustrate why sensitivity is content-specific. The theory of multiple intelligences challenges the idea of a single IQ, where human beings have one central "computer" wherein intelligence is housed and can be quantified. Howard Gardner (1993) contends that there are multiple types of human intelligence, each representing different ways of processing information. For example, verbal-linguistic intelligence refers to an individual's ability to analyze information and produce work that involves oral and written language, such as speeches, books, and emails; logical-mathematical intelligence describes the ability to develop equations and proofs, make calculations, and solve abstract problems; interpersonal intelligence reflects an ability to recognize and understand other people's moods, desires, motivations, and intentions; intrapersonal intelligence refers to people's ability to recognize and assess those same characteristics within themselves. This theory shows how one’s intelligence demonstrates different level at multi-aspects of one’s intelligence.

One’s sensitivity regarding one aspect can grow as one accumulates relevant knowledge or experiences. Sensitivity here mainly refers to the intellectual dimension of human being, emotional and psychological aspects being excluded though it is difficult to distinguish one from another. Here I want to propose the concept of structured sensitivity, which means that sensitivity can be understood in smaller specific aspects or units pointing to various aspects of world. This structured sensitivity may not be structured by eight aspects of multiple intelligence
proposed by Gardner, but can be understood as different aspects that various academic disciplines represent. Structured sensitivity can be categorized according to different standards or rules. Under certain circumstances, sensitivity can be further detailed as perceived by individual. It may have a different structure for each individual. This structured sensitivity is to further describe what one’s sensitivity may involve.

How sensitivity can be enhanced?

What becomes accessible depends upon one’s sensitivity. Attunement makes it possible for things to appear, to “matter” to an individual. Heidegger believes we encounter the world through our concerned engagement with things, so this means that for us to even have a world, we must be attuned – things must come into view, become welcoming or frightening, exciting or boring, calming or infuriating, sometimes both at once. If particularities – persons, objects, events, ideas – didn’t matter, we would not bother to notice them, and we would have no direct interaction with them. This statement seems to mostly focus on the emotional aspect, but it includes what make things accessible to us intellectually. In both cases sensitivity tends to be subjective. But how can one reach, through sensitivity, certain understandings, or enhance one’s understandings? Sensitivity can be enhanced by knowledge, experience, understanding and “awakening inwardness.” Knowledge here mainly refers to formal types of knowledge gained from academic study. Understanding tends to be more situated, and it can be acquired by the individual subject from his or her life experience, as well as from formal study. To be noted, understanding sometimes cannot be explicitly articulated. Our understanding of being is manifested in our "comportment towards beings" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 16). Comportment is activity, action, or behaviour. Thus, the understanding that we have of the Being can be
manifested in our acting with them. Understanding need not be explicit, nor able to be articulated conceptually. It is often embodied in know-how.

Sensitivity is, then, not only informed by knowledge, conceptual approaches, and experiences, but also by awakening inwardness which mainly refers to the way one learns from, reflects on, and reacts to events. This awakening inwardness exists independently of other aspects. It is not identical with knowledge or experience, but informed by each continuously. This “awakening inwardness” evolves gradually as one learns more, and is grounded in a continuing sense of self – a certain synthesis that could contain certain beliefs or sense of mission – that guides how one thinks and reflects. It can be concretized into the following aspects, but not limited to them: understanding that each gestalt is created by a human being, and may undergo constant change; being open to different way of thinking; being aware that all what we have attended to, contemplated, and explored demonstrates the trajectory of self-evolving, embodying the interaction of the public and the private, the self and the society, and so on.

Certain scholarly discussions might be related to this concept of awakening inwardness. Contemplative inquiry proposed by Ergas (2016) deserves attention. Contemplative practices include “the many ways human beings have found across cultures and across time to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness” (Roth, 2008, p. 19). “East-Asian wisdom traditions and Western monotheistic religions have been among the richest sources for these practices that include diverse forms of meditation and yoga, philosophical practices rendered in Hadot's (1995) terms as ‘spiritual exercises’ and many others” (Ergas, 2016, p. 24). As argued by Ergas (2016), these practices are now being applied within academia as methods of inquiry. It is also associated with the concept of subjectivity. As pointed out by Roth (2008), human subjectivity is the source of a human being’s conceptual activities and products:
Human subjectivity is the source for all the conceptual models we develop to explain the underlying structures of the world in the physical sciences and the underlying structures of consciousness in the cognitive sciences. Thus despite all the principles of experimental science that attempt to establish objective standards for research they all in the last analysis, are derived by human beings, and therefore they are grounded in human subjectivity. (p. 221)

Subjectivity might be the deepest structure – or medium – of human being. According to Pinar (2010, p. 3), “by subjectivity, I mean the inner life, the lived sense of self, non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented – that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen, those circumstances of everyday life, those residues of trauma and of fantasy, from which one reconstructs a life” (p. 3). Subjectivity, then, refers to the inner life, the process of becoming, which can be ongoing if one is in fact "becoming" all the time. I suggest that subjectivity entails beliefs, thinking, commitments, desires, feelings that may not always be nameable (such as something between feeling and desire) but focus the site of experience. Such lived experience and its reconstruction – i.e. educational experience – constitute the uniqueness of a person, which distinguishes a person from others, from what one was. For me, the concept of “awakening inwardness” might be narrower than that of subjectivity. While one is growing, one develops a complex “inwardness” that is unique and yet comprehensive; it underlies one’s thinking and behavior. This inwardness can be informed by experience and academic study, but it also exists isolated from one’s experience and conceptual knowledge. It is something that one has evolved (and vice versa), a state of subjectivity consistently working in and through self. This inwardness can be manifested through one’s way of thinking, one’s reflections on experience, crystallized perhaps in a sense of mission, but not limited to these. Awakening inwardness tends to take
scattered forms: it is rarely a systematic congregation or set of ideas since the sense of mission may not have systematic representation. It is a state that can trigger one’s deep thinking, awaken one’s underlying consciousness, and engage one socially and culturally. It allows one to think and reflect. In this sense, inwardness is similar to contemplative practice. But contemplative practice tends to be closely associated with the practical way that can help people contemplate. This concept – awakening inwardness – essentially involves two aspects: reflection and anticipation. Being reflective means that one identifies something that one may not be aware of and engages oneself in reconstructive thinking, thus leading to meaningful action; being anticipative means that one looks forwards to something greater than what is, which one transcends.

This process might be akin to what Pinar discusses about how one can raise one’s ontological level. Pinar (1975) argues that studying currere can be deemed as the way to elevate or reach certain ontological levels. He describes how he makes use of other’s work to assist himself to articulate his own issues and concerns. As Pinar (1975) explains: “Searching for conceptual tools to excavate existential experience, I returned to Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, read seriously for the first time Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, returned to Jung and Freud again” (p. 106). Based on his own experience, Pinar (1975) realizes that:

In a fundamental way, the use I can make of my academic studies, complementary to their study for their own sake, to heighten my understanding of self, of the possible meanings of my life, and of others. And I find that this understanding can be of a sort that, contiguous with it, is what I experience as a raising of ontological level. (p. 106)
Pinar identifies “this understanding” with the raising of ontological level which is a heightened consciousness and understanding. Thus, “the method of currere, regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical in procedure, is a systematic attempt to reveal, using Erikson’s phrase, individual life history and historical moment” (Pinar, 1975, p. 106). Pinar uses it to raise his ontological level. Curriculum as conversation is no conveyor belt. “It is a matter of attunement, an auditory rather than visual conception, in which the sound of music—for Aoki (1997, p. 367), jazz specifically—being improvised is an apt example” (Pinar, 2012, p. 190). Heightened understanding also can be achieved under certain radical circumstances. Fishbane (2008) asks a question: how can one respond more fully to each occurrence? He argues that the fissures or unexpected events that disrupt routines (birth, death, love, tragedy) can awaken the human to the “other of more exceeding depths and heights” (p. 113). Literature, art, and music can also serve this function, because each pierces the veil of everyday life and language, allowing a glimpse of the transcendent (pp. 23-32). This transcendence might be a form of heightened understandings.

Metaphorically speaking, how sensitivity can be fostered or improved might be akin to spring rain moistening the earth. Spring rain (water) moisturizes soil and provides essentials for seeds to grow. This metaphor seems to illuminate the dynamics of how sensitivity can be fostered; sensitivity is fostered or improved though a secret and sacred process, the dynamics of which may not be observable, but can be felt and identified later by consequences: plants appear. If one is porous, one can be more sensitive, like a sponge absorbing water. I just emphasize one trait of the sponge—absorbing water. This porousness can expand one’s knowledge system: more comprehensive; more responsive to the outside world. It echoes the concept of structural sensitivity, which means that sensitivity can be conceptualized as threaded through smaller
aspects or units attuned to various aspects of the world. Each structural aspect does not exist
totally isolated from other aspects, but rather they can mutually inform one another. Recall that
Fung argues that as one gains more knowledge, one can better control one’s feelings. Intellectual
development fosters emotional development.

3.2 What is Attunement?

3.2.1 Attunement is Something In-between

Attunement supports a search for meaning. “The search for meaning is a question of
diving below the surface and finding the deeper underlying and intentional meanings that are
being born, first in the relationship between subject and phenomenon, but in research also in
inter-subjective relationships” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). Meaning does not exist without the
subject, and spontaneously, it is not self-evidently or even readily present. Merleau-Ponty (1968)
understands meaning as something that is intertwined in “the flesh of the world” (p. 83), and
from his epistemology Dahlberg (2006) argues that the researcher, as well as other subjects
involved in the research, ‘embodies’, or ‘gives body to’ the phenomenon. Meaning depends on
how the subject views and understands, and what the subject makes of one’s experience. Hence,
meaning is disclosed by the in-between that takes place between “I” and my experience literally.
Meaning lies in this in-between.

Meaning can be infinite, often contextual: first, meaning emerges in relation to “events” of
the lifeworld, and when the lifeworld changes, meaning changes as well (Dahlberg, 2006);
second, different people may find different meaning in light of different cultural backgrounds,
social standing and personal experiences; third, for the particular individual, meaning regarding
the same event can keep changing, if one remains open. In a certain sense, attunement occurs
within the in between, an interplay of determinacy (certain aspects that do not change relatively)
and indeterminacy (certain aspects that always change). Attunement is never fully determinable. Meaning is also intra-subjective but also inter-subjective: in the experience of the world as available not only to oneself, but also to others, there is a bridge between the personal and the shared, the self and the others. Such inter-subjectivity provides ground for people to understand each other. Lispari (2014) positions “listening” as central. Listening creates a dwelling space to receive the alterity of other and let it resonate. “To listen is to welcome the other inside, but as an other, as a guest, as a not-me (Lispari, 2014, p. 186).” This makes understanding each other possible. During the process of searching for meaning, many meanings might emerge. How can one find the essence (true meaning)? Dahlberg (2006) describes the process in which one works with different meanings:

Searching for the essence, that most invariant structure of meanings for an actual context, we typically work with the different meanings that are present in the descriptions. We try to discover a pattern of meanings that partly is made up by differences and similarities among these meanings…This dynamic work up of the lifeworld descriptions supports the seeing of the pattern of meanings, and thus the essence. (p. 14)

Various meanings may emerge in a more complex way. How can one find essence? What is the difference between meaning and essence? Essence here, according to Dahlberg, denotes the most invariant structure of meaning or true meaning in a general sense. Dahlberg (2006) also addresses the essence as a pattern of meaning which seems useful to understand the issue of true meaning. In this dissertation essence, pattern of meaning, and true meaning are interchangeable.

The search for meaning is fluid, unpredictable, which can be spontaneous or long term. How can one determine that one has found the true meaning? Ergas’ discussion of a spiritual
research paradigm might be relevant to this issue. Ergas (2016) proposes the concept of spiritual research paradigm which “relies on a knowing apparatus that is beyond reason and sense” (p. 24). He employs a resonance principle to assess the quality and rigor of a spiritual research paradigm, which refers to a principle in which research is evaluated “by the extent to which it inspirits the reader/listener; by the extent to which it touches the individual’s own spirit and compels him or her to commit to further unfolding of spirit and life-meaning” (p. 24). This insight might be akin to the search for meaning in this dissertation. The resonance principle here denotes that one conceives the “meaning” acquired that reflects or represents what one has experienced and can best explain that experience, thus making one evoked, inspired, or activate one’s inner world. As a result, one feels intellectually relieved or emotionally peaceful. For example, when one experiences something unexpected, one may feel sad or uncomfortable. One may feel relieved or gain a certain degree of comfort by referring to a new way of thinking. The new way of thinking or understanding might help one re-adjust the relationships among self, others and the world or reposition self among the magnitude of the world; therefore, it brings forth a sense of inner strength, peace, harmony, and connectedness. “It is a comfort that cannot be anticipated, a peace that passeth all” (Huebner, p.403).

One's personal understanding is not judged by the other, but rather by if it can invoke us emotionally and intellectually (in this dissertation it may refer to intellectual aspect). Attunement thus becomes a movement or a site in which people participate in the consciousness or act of awakening ourselves, accessing ourselves, engaging ourselves in “moreness,” thus becoming inspired. That attunement can be a process or a site means that one can acquire understanding immediately or later after constant thinking. It seems related with how sensitivity works.
How can this attunement avoid becoming a self-centered imagination, or self-indulgence? In addition to resonance, it also requires listening. The concept of listening proposed by Lipari seems to be helpful in understanding this issue. For Lipari (2014), “attunement is not timely in the mechanical sense of efficiency or serendipity, or as a well-timed shot into the goal, timely as an intervention in the future ‘just in time’. It is the tangle of a braided nonlinear moment choosing us – speakings and listenings – as we move rhythmically together in harmonically attuned, responsive movement” (p. 214). Attunement discussed by Lipari is akin to the concept of attunement in this dissertation due to its emphasis on harmonious responsiveness and sensitivity. Lipari (2014) argues that both speaking and listening in the attunement are associated with ethical response: “speaking is certainly a crucial aspect of the ethical response, and yet so is listening—paying attention, being mindful, patiently aware” (p. 174). Further, Lipari demonstrates how listening is associated with ethics and discovers how virtue may arise from listening. First, listening may bring another self to presence: “When we relinquish control and our attempts to master other people, listening engenders something like quickening. Quickening, like listening, entails the recognition of another self, the startling presence of another being, a not-self” (p. 176). Listening allows one to hear different voices inside oneself and to tolerate our own contradictory intentions and convictions. Second, listening may bring others to presence: “As an enactment of ethics, listening, like quickening, brings a recognition of an unknown other to whom we are bound and about whom we feel care and concern” (p. 176). Listening takes us beyond the self and out into the realm of otherness through heeding to other’s voices. As Noddings (2002) argues, “we are not attempting to transform the world, but we are allowing ourselves to be transformed. This openness to letting ourselves to be transformed leads to ethical response” (p. 184).
3.2.2 Attunement is Self-revelation

As I learned by writing my autobiography, attunement reveals oneself: What matters to me? How have I allowed myself to be transformed by different ideas? What social and cultural determinations have I been wrestling with for so long? As Heidegger (1995) had already made explicit in *Being and Time*, “Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves disposed in such and such a way” (p. 67). One finds oneself through attunement. As a fundamental structural features of Dasein (Being), attunement “discovers Dasein in its throwness” (Heidegger, 1962, p.175). This throwness is the revealing or unfolding of self as being in the world. Attunement engages one in this unfolding process, which may involve various sub-processes regarding various issues, often requiring decentering. When one tries to keep record of these unfoldings, one is able to see how one has evolved. Thoughts have unfolded, revealing who one is. It is also a process that allows for new forms of revealing that transform the self. It is a new form of revealing that can transform oneself, and move one on to different understandings. Attunement leads to subjective reconstruction. It is not about a search for a final, static self, but rather to discover how one has evolved: something that remains constant or enable a lifetime view.

3.2.3 Attunement Shows How One Tries to Relate Oneself to the World and Understand the World

Attunement emphasizes how informal study contributes to self-understanding. This autobiographical research articulates my life as an international student grappling with my own life history, my present preoccupations, my dreams of the future, both continuous with the present and those unprecedented in the past. The complex roles of institutional structures,
political and policy agendas, teaching protocols and educational theories are threaded through
the subjective experience of the individual person – myself, articulated autobiographically.

While writing autobiographically, I believe I achieved deepened self-understanding. It happened
within my subjective sense of study, of sustained intellectual labor. To generalize, this
attunement shows how one takes the initiative to relate oneself to the world through engaging in
conversations:

In which interlocutors are speaking not only among themselves but to those not
present, not only to historical figures and unnamed people and places they may be
studying, but to politicians and parents alive and dead, not to mention to the selves
they have been, are in the process of becoming, and someday may become. (Pinar,
2011, p. 41)

During the process, one may accept, refute, or otherwise interrogate ideas that human beings
have generated (in conversation with these ideas and thoughts). In such an autobiographical
theory of education, learning becomes situated in not only school-subject and specific prior
knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of study. In addition, through this learning process,
one can discover a whole world in oneself finally. When one turns to oneself, everything changes.
This special attentiveness brings what is hidden to the surface and makes the existing more vivid,
illuminating experience and making one more ready for self-reflective thinking. Consequently,
one is more able to move through one’s particularity into more shared aspects of human being.
This sense of common ground – disclosed through difference – constitutes the fundamental
aspects of the world as human being. The world shows itself in front of one as one initiates the
engagement with the world. It is as if the world manifests itself in front of myself in particular
often personal ways (other ways also exist). In other words, it is as if the whole world unfolds
through seeking to understand oneself. The relating to the world’s phenomena reveals the level of understanding of oneself. This is why attunement is the very precondition for understanding the self. For any individual, there might exist specific ways of attuning oneself to the world: different unfoldings as shown in autobiographical writing. We are always involved in the world, usually in situations we do not create or control.

Attunement opens up the world to us (Kuperus, 2007), making the inner world, but also the world outside, accessible. Attunement is like a mental optic, which allows one to see. Therefore, attunement is what allows inner work (Cohen, 2007) to commence. Attunement (sensitivity) is a precondition of inner work. For me, without sensitivity informed by knowledge and conceptual approaches, one cannot initiate inner work. Inner work stresses the subjective side of the individual; however, this attunement stresses the reciprocity of subjectivity and objectivity. Attunement is sensitivity centered, with a phenomenological ground, emphasizing how one develops one’s awakening inwardness. Through writing autobiographically, I begin to realize the inner world, the inner self that I may not notice before. Attunement allows me to understand more about the world. Through being attuned, one can see the world from a deepened perspective, allowing one to see more about the world.

3.2.4 Attunement Shapes and is Shaped by the World

Through attunement, one acquires heightened consciousness or in-depth understanding. So attuned, one is more able to understand the world and change oneself. Consequently, in specific and small ways one may transform the world. Attunement prepares one intellectually to shape the world. Attunement is also shaped by the world. As I mentioned previously, attunement is spatially, temporally, situationally, subjectively contingent, historically, culturally, and socially
constrained. Attunement is born out of the world; however, it transcends what the world provides us and situates us, which leads to social and self reconstruction.

Summary

This chapter illuminates the concept of attunement. Attunement emphasizes how informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside classrooms) contributes to self-understanding. This theory suggests that learning occurs not only in and out of classrooms but always within a person’s life. In such a theory of education, learning becomes situated in not only school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labor.
Chapter 4: Are There Affinities between Ancient Chinese Philosophical Thought and Currere?

Introduction

In this chapter I address the affinities between ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the concept of currere. The ancient Chinese philosophical thought that will be discussed refers mainly to that advanced by Wang Yangming, Mencius, and Lao Tzu. This thought includes pure knowing (Liangzhi), investigation of mind/heart (Gexin), and voidness. Pure knowing means “innate knowledge,” or “intuitive moral knowledge,” and the concept originally comes from Mencius. Investigation of mind/heart means one should consult one’s own heart to understand the truth. Wang Yangming (1963) argues that as every living thing is a manifestation of Principle (Li), one does not need to look outside of oneself in order to understand Principle (and therefore morality); one should consult one’s own mind/heart, wherein Principle presumably lies. Voidness (or nothingness), proposed by Lao Tzu, perceives the value of the invisible existence of the world, and acknowledges the invisible qualities of the world.

Based on phenomenological and existential approaches, Pinar (2012) proposes the autobiographical theory of currere which is “a conception of curriculum that directs school knowledge to individual’s lived experience, experience understood as subjective and social, that is, as gendered, racialized, classed participants in understanding and living through the historical moment” (p. 195). Currere has drawn growing attention globally over the past decade. Pacheco (2009) describes currere as an important landmark in the history of Curriculum Studies (p. 2). Chinese education scholars also show interest in the study of currere. The number of references to currere has continued to grow in China (Zhang, 2003, 2004, 2015; Chen, 2009). Does currere
possess affinities with certain ancient Chinese philosophical thought? I answer affirmatively. In this chapter, I explore these affinities which include: 1) pure knowing and the pre-conceptual; 2) ge xin and working from within; and 3) voidness and invisibility. In the following sections, I explain concepts from both Chinese philosophical thought and currere and then associate them.

4.1 Pure Knowing and the Pre-conceptual

4.1.1 Pure Knowing in Chinese Philosophical Thought

In Chinese philosophical thought, “pure knowing” (Liangzhi 良知) means “innate knowledge,” or “intuitive moral knowledge.” The concept comes from Mencius who believes that it is impossible for a person to lack sympathy. For him, “if one is without the feeling of sympathy, one is not human” (Mencius, 1A:6). If one really does not feel sympathy in a specific instance, that is because he has lost his original heart. However, this “loss” is more like concealment than destruction, for the heart has not totally disappeared because, as Mencius claims, whenever one seeks it, one will find it. Love for parents and respect for one’s elders is contained in the original heart that spontaneously knows humaneness and righteousness; equally, approval and disapproval are also contained in pure knowing (Lu, 2014). As Wang Yangming (1992) says: “Pure knowing is just the emotion of approval and disapproval; approval and disapproval is just like and dislike” (p. 111).

Pure knowing inherently exists in people’s minds. Kim (2005) argues that pure knowing is characterized as follows: first, everyone possesses pure knowing, and there is no exception; second, pure knowing is inherent – it can never be lost since it is not something acquired by learning and can be acquired anytime if one seeks it; third, the character of pure knowing is intuitive. People can lose sight of pure knowing due to selfish human desire. But once one
abandons selfish human desire, the perfect power of pure knowing is restored. Lu Xiangshan (another ancient Chinese philosopher) explains:

Pure knowing lies within human beings; although some people become mired in dissolution, pure knowing still remains undiminished and enduring [within them]. … Truly, if they can turn back and seek after it, then, without needing to make a concerted effort, what is right and wrong, what is fine and foul, will become exceedingly clear, and they will decide for themselves what to like and dislike, what to pursue and what to abandon. (Cited in Tiwald and Van Norden, 2014, p. 252)

Pure knowing is, then, not scientific knowledge or comprehension and application of external ethical rules, but rather every person’s clear awareness of morals, especially through the emotion of approval and disapproval (Lu, 2014). It is moral awareness, and it arises naturally. Wang says, “To be luminous, shining, and not beclouded are manifestations of the highest good. This is the foundation of bright virtue. This is called pure knowing” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p. 163). The emotion of love is the manifestation of pure knowing as the highest good.

4.1.2 The Pre-conceptual in Currere

Pure knowing denotes moral awareness, proceeding before the conceptual (e.g., pre-conceptual). As argued by Pinar et. al. (1995), the method of currere, which stems in part from Husserlian phenomenology, also exhibits the interest in describing immediate, pre-conceptual experience. Compared to other forms of educational research, currere embraces this conceptual structure:

Unlike mainstream educational research which focuses upon the end products of the processes of consciousness as described by Husserl, those end products we call
concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations we, in accumulative fashion, call knowledge. *Currere* seeks to slide underneath these end products and structures to the pre-conceptual experience that is their foundation. (Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 415)

*Currere* is committed to describing pre-conceptual experience lying underneath those end products and structures such as concepts, abstractions, and generalizations. Pre-conceptual is, in the famous phenomenological phrase, back to “the things themselves” (cited in Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 416). As Merleau-Ponty (1962) elucidates: “To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge . . . and in relation to which [conceptual] schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learned before what a forest, a prairie or a river is” (p. ix). For him, in short, life-worldly or pre-conceptual meaning precedes philosophical or conceptual meaning. What Merleau-Ponty calls pre-conceptual is equivalent to what Wang Yangming calls pure knowing (Jung, 1963).

*Currere* acts as the phenomenological epoche “slackening the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, quoted in Grumet, 1976, p. 41). By portraying these pre-conceptual experiences, a more essential picture might be presented, and then it follows a thorough understanding of these experiences. As argued by Grumet (1976), *currere* is a phenomenological description of the subject’s present situation, one’s historical, social, physical life world (p. 33).

In order to understand the pre-conceptual in *currere*, attention to “biographic situation” is needed first. The pre-conceptual in *currere* is closely related with the concept of “biographic situation”, which points to “where I conceptually and ontologically am now” (Pinar, 1976, p. 53). As Pinar (2011) makes explicit, biographic situation invites the self-restructuring of lived meaning that follows from past situations, meaning that contains, perhaps unarticulated,
contradictions of that past and of the present as well as anticipation of possible future (p. 45). To illustrate, Pinar (1976) writes, “I take a particular question, like why am I involved in the research project I am involved in? And I record, by pen or recorder, all that occurs to me, regardless how esoteric and hence unrelated the information apparently is” (p.52). The process is both pre-conceptual and conceptual. The reason why it is both pre-conceptual (ontological) and conceptual is that both views and problems derived from the situation are inherently produced by one’s conceptual apparatus or gestalt. In phenomenology the pre-conceptual precedes language, and language (or the conceptual) is derivative from “the things themselves”, what is prior to language, being. This biographic situation acknowledges the interplay between the two dimensions – pre-conceptual and conceptual.

Also, “By moving in the past, one observes how the conceptual is only a part, however integral a part, of the biographic situation” (Pinar, 1976, p. 61). Therefore, autobiographical writing mediates between the two realms. “Writing from a biographic basis would capture the complex interplay between the two dimensions of human being, but to do so…requires taking on as it were, the role of artist and the epistemological posture of the phenomenologist” (1976, p. 55). Pinar appears to agree that all conceptualization is a manifestation of a pre-conceptual substratum but suggests that finding the relationship between pre-conceptual and conceptual could become dialectical, a sort of dynamic middle ground between a view that is “I think therefore I am” and phenomenological “I am therefore I think.” The method of phenomenology “promised clarity, a way of cutting through the thick, binding undergrowth that covers the ground of daily life to reveal a clear path” (Grumet, 1988, p. 5). This method presents a more complete and clear picture.
Pinar (1974) argues that the pre-conceptual experiential realm is usually beyond the perceptual field due to our current condition: “In fact, it becomes severed and inaccessible to our conscious selves rather early in our lives” (p. 389). This can be deleterious as students can blindly accept what they are told while disinclined to think things through thoroughly. “Given the generally rigid outer forms or outer perceptual rootedness of North American culture, and the sometimes brutal quality of that culture, one begins early to ignore messages from within, then forget that one is ignoring, so that one becomes one’s image or role” (1974, p. 389). Students accept or reject without thinking independently. They pursue what they deem right or appropriate, but sometimes fail to challenge why it is right or appropriate. As a result, the educational problem partially involves the question of returning to that gaze inward, without immediately disrupting our public, exterior lives.

**4.1.3 Affinity between Pure Knowing and the Pre-conceptual**

To conclude, the concept of pure knowing in Chinese philosophical thought has affinity with the concept of pre-conceptual in *currere* in that both precede any conceptual process and remain inherent in conceptualization. Pure knowing does not even require any conceptual knowledge (Wang, 1964). Both attend to the realm of pre-conceptual. But the concepts are different in two aspects. First, for Wang, one’s original heart (pure knowing) will be shown when one seeks it. Pure knowing tends to be “more pre-conceptual”. Comparatively, in *currere*, to enter the pre-conceptual means loosening one’s identification with the ideational. Pinar mainly uses it as a way of conducting phenomenological description. Second, these two domains of the pre-conceptual have different focuses. Pure knowing focuses on innate moral awareness,
whereas *currere* includes educational attention to social, cultural, historical, and psychological dimensions of life.

Pure knowing can be extended continuously, as Wang Yangming (1964) suggests. To extend one’s knowledge means to reach to the ultimate (*Anelect*, 19.14, Cited in Tiwald & Van Norden, 2014, p. 248). Reaching to the ultimate is extending to the ultimate; and “It is simply to extend fully the pure knowing of my own mind (Tiwald & Van Norden, p. 248). Pure knowing knows whether a thought is good or bad. Pure knowing is achieved by revealing original heart, and attained by clearing heart. Extending to pure knowing is to interrogate self in order to rectify self, whether the individual has forgotten the “original heart” or not. It is self-interrogation.

Compared with Wang Yangming’s view, Pinar’s *currere* tends to focus on an individual’s experience of curriculum, an interrogation of the individual within the educational process. Curricular claims can be comprehensive and inclusive. Grumet (1976) writes that *currere* is “what the individual does with the curriculum, his active reconstruction of his passage through its social, intellectual, physical structures” (p.111). While interrogating one’s experience of curriculum, including goals set by the curriculum, one begins to reconstruct his own curriculum. It is an “autobiographical process of reflection and analysis in which one recalls his educational experience and examine it” (Grumet, 1976, p.111). *Currere* seeks to see more deeply and clearly; it is a carefully-devised, and temporally-situated strategy. Engaging pure knowing removes evils, whereas *currere* suggests that one can only become conscious of evil. To sum up, both represent a process, a process for improvement and rectification.
4.2  *Ge xin*® and Working from Within

4.2.1  *Ge Xin* Proposed by Wang Yangming (Investigation of mind/heart)

The concept of *ge xin* is closely related with that of *ge wu*. To understand *ge xin*, we need to understand the concept of *ge wu*. Zhu Xi, a very famous Chinese philosopher, argues that *ge* means “arrive at,” and *wu* refers to things and affairs; for Zhu Xi, *ge wu* means arriving at the pattern that resides in things and affairs (Shun, 2011). Wang Yangming tends to interpret it differently. For Wang, *ge wu* refers to the process of correcting the problematic activities of the heart/mind, and it follows from this interpretation that there is no thing (*wu*) outside the heart/mind for it to correct (*ge*) (Shun, 2011). In this article I call it *ge xin* in which *xin* means mind/heart. *Ge xin* refers to investigation (rectification) of mind/heart. Wang puts much greater emphasis on directly eliminating the problematic elements of the mind/heart and downplays the kind of inquiry highlighted by Zhu Xi characterized by investigation of affairs (Shun, 2011, p. 102).

A recorded episode (Wang, 1963) reveals that the attempt by Wang Yangming to discover the truth in external things (e.g., bamboos) was a total failure. Unlike what Zhu Xi (a Chinese Confucian philosopher) suggests, truth cannot be found in external things. One day Wang suddenly discovered that the “investigation of things” (*ge wu* 格物) did not mean the investigation of every bamboo, blade of grass, leaf, or branch of a tree. Instead, truth is to be found in consciousness (as intentionality) and its activities. Wang concluded that *Ge wu* really means *ge xin* (“rectification of mind/heart”):

> You know the defects of devoting oneself to external things and neglecting the internal, and becoming broad but lack essentials. Why are these defects? What I mean by the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to extend the
innate knowledge of my mind to each and every thing. The innate knowledge of my mind is the same as the Principle of Nature. When the Principle of Nature in the innate knowledge of my mind is extended to all things, all things will attain their principle. To extend the innate knowledge of my mind is the matter of extension of knowledge, and for all things to attain their principle is the matter of the investigation of things. In these mind and principle are combined into one. As the mind and principle are combined into one, then all my humble opinions which I have just expressed and my theory that Chu His arrived at his final conclusions late in his life can be understood without discussion. (Wang, 1963, 2:8b-10a)

Wang Yangming argues that as every living thing is a manifestation of Principle, one does not need to look outside of oneself in order to understand Principle (and therefore morality). This means that one should consult one’s own heart (or mind) wherein Principle surely resides. Kim (2005) argues that the most apparent and significant implication of xin ji li (mind is principle) is the change of the locus of li from the external world (and the mind) to the mind. Since Principle is the basis of human nature, then it follows that anyone who understands his or her true nature understands the Principle of the universe. Kim (2005) holds that “Wang’s distinction between the mind in itself (xin zhi benti) and the so-called human mind (ren xin) provides one with a standard with which to distinguish between the normative state and the actual state of the self” (2005, p. 3). For Wang, the “mind in itself” means the original state of the mind, which retains the perfect faculty of moral judgment. The “human mind” denotes the state of the mind “obscured” by selfish human desires, and thus does not realize the perfect faculty of moral judgment. As a result, one is expected to strive to recover the mind in itself since the immediate state of the mind often maintains at the level of the human mind. The only difference between the mind in itself and the
human mind is whether or not the mind is clouded by selfish desire. The difference between human mind and the mind in itself might be akin to what Tiwald and Van Norden (2014) argue about the virtuous and the vicious. Tiwald and Van Norden (2014) contend that Wang believes that the difference between the virtuous and the vicious is that the former recognize their minds form one body with everything else, while the latter, “because of the space between their own physical form and those of others, regard themselves as separate” (p. 241). According to Kim (2005), our current state of mind is able to return to its original state simply by removing selfish desires. Contemplation, which Wang Yangming had practiced throughout his life, and which he frequently engaged in, was seen as a means to remove selfish desires.

4.2.2 Working from Within

This Ge xin is similar to the concept of working from within proposed by Pinar in the sense that they both address turning inward. In his paper “Working from Within,” Pinar (1972) quotes the abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock to suggest that teachers and students might work from inner sources of insight and imagination: “Like some modern painters, my students and I have come to feel that we rarely need to refer to subject matter outside ourselves. We work from a different source. We work from within” (p. 331).

In “Sanity, Madness and the School,” Pinar (1975) argues that schooling contributes to the loss of self via modeling and dependence on teachers. Pinar (1975) argues that schooling numbs children to their own experience in that “the voices inside are systematically ignored, dismissed, or refuted by others. Almost inevitably, the child learns to ignore, dismiss, or refute the message from within” (p. 372). It can be seen that the sheer impossibility of seclusion, of quiet in the school, forces children to ignore themselves and eventually to empty themselves out (Pinar,
As a result, children become wary of solitude, often drawn away by social conformity. Pinar (1975) quotes Jung to highlight the importance of listening to the message of the self: the process of individualization as the slow imperceptible process of psychic growth depends on “the extent to which it develops appears to be subject to the extent to which the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the self” (p. 372). Moreover, Pinar points out that the cognitive stress of schooling tends to make children think rather than feel. Therefore, one should listen to his or her inner message before and after thinking. As argued by Von Franz:

In order to bring the individuation process into reality, one must surrender consciously to the power of the unconscious, instead of thinking in terms of what one should do, or what is generally thought right, or what usually happens. One must simply listen, in order to learn what the inner totality—the self—wants one do here and now in a particular situation. (cited in Pinar, 1975, p. 373)

Pinar (1975) also notices the issue of role-playing, “If one becomes one’s role, then one cannot become oneself. One achieves thingness, but not genuine being” (1975, p. 387). Then Pinar (1975) raises the matter of multiple roles:

If I am this in that situation with these people and that in this situation with these people, and so on, then which self or selves is legitimate? Or, as Michael Novak has observed, probably prior to the general question “Who am I?” is “Whose am I?” Who, under what circumstance and in what ways, influences my behavior, my thoughts, my moods? Why do these particular causal relationships exist? If much of all of these personality is in fact conditioned and, while “mine”, not me, how might I begin to discover who, in fact, I am? How might one conceptualize this process of
discovery, this coming to self-awareness, and communicate to others such as conceptualization? (p. 387)

To further this point, Pinar (1975) asks that “how is one to remember? How is one to begin to focus one’s attention on oneself, in a noncritical, even non-evaluative way, so that one illuminates this inner world” (p. 388)? In order to answer this question, inspired by Jung, Pinar (1975) describes two forms of thinking: the free-associative and the directed. First, one renders one’s own educational experience into words, using the free-associative form of minding. Second, one employs one’s critical faculties to “understand what principles and patterns have been operative in one’s educational life, hence achieving a more profound understanding of one’s own educational experience, as well as illuminating parts of the inner world and deepening one’s self understanding generally” (1975, p. 389). By identifying the working principles and patterns in one’s educational experience, one can understand one’s educational experience profoundly. In so doing, Pinar (1975) contends that “one can focus one’s entire attention on oneself in a non-evaluative way and this free-associating can bring to the surface latent emotions and intelllections, hence making more accessible the lebenswelt, the pre-conceptual” (pp. 389-390). This free association provides a passage to the pre-conceptual through bringing latent emotions and intelllections to light.

Free association helps one see something under the surface or capture something beyond the realm of consciousness. This enables one to gain greater access to one’s current lived experience. One can become conscious of something missed before, bring what is latent into consciousness. As Pinar (1975) argues, “The movement toward greater awareness of the present should make the researcher more existential in his lifetime, more detached from current roles and emotions, and more able to recognize the origin of those roles and selves and to form those
public expressions, i.e., his personality, according to his wishes” (p. 390). Being more existential means becoming more detached from the current situation and more reflective about multiple roles and selves. This is major moment or phase of the method of currere. It is not the entire method, as these are also analytic and progressive steps. By employing this method, Pinar (1975) contends that:

The analyst of educational experience or the educational experientialist attempts to discover what factors are operative in educational experience, what relations among what factors under what circumstances, and finally, what fundamental structures describe or explain the educative process. In a sense, these structures would represent the last stop in the realm of the conceptual, the most fundamental level of analysis possible before entering the pre-conceptual, the lebenswelt ineffable. (p. 392)

This analysis of educational experience involves, then, “working from within”. The method enables the understanding of educational experience.

4.2.3 Affinity between Gexin and Working from Within

Gexin (investigation of the mind/heart) resonates, I suggest, with “working from within.” Both Wang and Pinar address the issue of turning inward. Initiating a gaze toward the inner world can be understood as “removing selfish desires” in pure knowing in Wang’s thought and accessing “the pre-conceptual” in currere. Both processes enable one to think in solitude, to reflect on, thus being more sensitive to the external, more detached from the current situation, and more able to recognize the origins of different situations. In addition, as argued by Pinar (1975), “If it is a matter of bringing out what is there already, and hence one form of what might legitimately be termed education, what is the nature of educational experience” (p. 387). This
statement is akin to the Wang Yangming’s view that the Principle already exists in the mind and one can get it if one seeks it. In addition, this is also similar to the following verse in *Tao Te Ching*:

To pursue learning, one increases daily
To pursue Tao one decreases daily –
Decrease and again decrease, until one arrives at not doing.
Not nothing and yet nothing is not done.

Especially, *Tao Te Ching* distinguishes between learning in general and cultivating or pursuing *Tao* – the ultimate truth. To pursue learning is to acquire more knowledge daily, while to pursue *Tao* is to decrease doing until one reaches the point of not doing. It is emptying oneself day-by-day (clearing selfish desires, which is similar to Wang Yangming’s thought), and following the natural way, until everything can be done by itself. Education essentially helps us follow what surfaces naturally, emptying of one’s desire for action and knowledge, rather than guiding learners to store up knowledge for themselves. *Tao* implies following what the heart says, spontaneously and willingly. In other words, *Tao Te Ching proposes a non-doer*. Pure knowing refers to innate knowledge that is originally contained in the human heart. To follow the heart in pursuing *Tao* is similar to the pursuit of truth from inside (heart) in pure knowing since pure knowing originally exists in the human heart (mind), and humans do not need to seek it from outside. As a whole, both *Ge xin* and “working from within” make the “inward turn.”

The major difference between Wang and Pinar is that they have a different focus. Wang solely addresses the moral aspect, as *currere* mainly focuses on cognitive or intellectual life. Wang suggests that principle originally exists in the mind, and the human being does not need to seek from outside. For Wang, the turning inward means going back to the “original heart” where
the heavenly principle exists itself, a moral awareness that everyone is destined to possess. Extending to pure knowing means the constant effort of exertion necessary to purify one’s heart/mind of selfish desires. Through it we can transcend ourselves (Yao, 1963). Mind/heart is the source of perfection and the instrument for improvement. As argued by Wang (1964):

The human being is understood to possess innate knowledge of the good [which] need not be sought outside. If what emanates from innate knowledge is not obstructed by selfish ideas, the result will be like the saying 'If a man gives full development to his feeling of commiserations, his humanity (ren) will be more than he can ever put into practice'. However, the ordinary man is not free from the obstruction of selfish ideas. He therefore requires the effort of the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things in order to overcome selfish ideas and restore principle. Then the mind's faculty of innate knowledge will no longer be obstructed but will be able to penetrate and operate everywhere. One's knowledge will then be extended. With knowledge extended, one's will becomes sincere. (I:8, 15)

This knowledge refers to moral knowledge though Wang does not deny empirical knowledge. For Pinar (1975), currere mainly attends to cognitive or intellectual life: “The medium of movement in this method is to be primarily cognitive, or intellectual. This is not to say emotional dimensions are to be excluded; they, along with other dimensions of educational experience, will be rendered verbally, edited through the intellect” (p. 389). Currere focuses on the “the broad outlines of past, present, and future, the nature of our experience, and specially our educational experience, that is the way we can understand our present in the way that allows us to move on, more learned, more evolved than before” (Pinar, 1976, p. 63). It is intellectually
oriented and helps a person to understand more, thus enable one to become more intellectually developed. The method of currere “illuminates the larger inner world of which domain assumptions are a part” (p. 389). Pinar (1976) also points out that as one travels inward, one is able to see more of others, “I do know that as I travel inward, I tend to be freed from it, and hence more sensitive and receptive to what is external. It is as if because I can see more of self in its multidimensional manifestations, I am also able to see more of others” (p. 62). For Pinar, the process helps one recover the ignored or neglected self, to illuminate the inner world, thus gaining a deeper understanding of one’s educational experience. In other words, currere is in service of understanding how academic study contributes to one’s understanding of life history.

4.3 Lao Tzu’s Voidness and Invisibility in Currere

4.3.1 Lao Tzu’s Voidness

The void remains one of the great themes of Taoist thought. In chapter 5 of Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu describes that the space between the Heaven and Earth is like a bellows. It is empty, but gives a supply that never fails; when it is in motion, it never stops producing. Lao Tzu also directs to see the voided part of a jar, within which water can be held:

With a wall all around
A clay bowl is moulded;
But the use of the bowl
Will depend on the part
Of the bowl that is void.
Cut out windows and doors
In the house as you build
But the use of the house
Will depend on the space
In the wall that is void.

Lao Tzu points out that it is where we perceive nothing (in the void – *wu*) that true efficacy lies, even though people always think that they benefit from perceptible things (the visible). The absence of perceptible qualities characterizes the *Tao* (Kaltenmark, 1969). Lao Tzu sees the invisible, perceiving the invisible qualities of the world. Song (2006) relates voidness in *Tao Te Ching* to education and highlights the value of nothing:

What we value in our education is “something,” the bigger and larger it is the better it is. We are only able to see “being” or “something,” which has name and form and is tangible. We see wheels, vessels, houses, and objects in the picture. We are not able to see the existence of “nothing” in the hub, in the pot and in the room which makes the “something” useful. In the *Tao Te Ching* “nothing” is nameless, formless, and intangible, but makes the thing of functional worth. What is of genuine worth and brings real satisfaction is “Nothing.” “Nothing” gives power and energy to “something.” However, “nothing “makes no impression on others and appears “disgraceful” like an “Uncarved Block.” It is very easy for “nothing” to be alienated or “left-out” in society. (p. 5)

In education we might also see and value the existence and utility of “nothing,” even though it does not have a name or form. No curriculum can ensure how students and teachers view or understand the curriculum, or on what occasions and in what way the curriculum speaks
to them; however, all of those can occur during the process, in either a manifested or hidden way.

The following verse in *Tao De Ching* also addresses this issue:

*Always: being desireless, one sees the hidden essentials.*

*Always: having desires, one sees only what is sought.*

Song (2006) uses this instance (being desireless and having desire) to explain whether education should be goal-oriented or not. He argues that when teachers set specific and clear objectives, they may actually prevent learners from real learning. “It may prevent them from seeing hidden essentials and ultimate reality. It may remain only superficial teaching and learning” (Song, 2006, p. 5). When there is no goal prescribed, it allows more possibilities to emerge. The generally expected outcome may only be a part of the whole; the unexpected may help students achieve more in-depth understanding or something beyond current thinking; maybe we can call it transcendence. The prescribed goals may limit students to further explore by confining students’ attention to certain aspects. The so-called goals come from the current conceptual framework, lying underneath certain epistemological propositions; and it is not free of certain paradigm, yet defined by limitations, boldly speaking. In short, the goals can direct processes, but also limit them. This no-goal can be understood as “voidness” in Lao Tzu’s idea, which allows students to see more possibilities. This voidness allows one to see the value of “invisible,” which is akin to a concept in *currere*, namely, invisibility.

#### 4.3.2 Invisibility in *Currere*

The curriculum enterprise, at bottom, is not simply a technical, up-front, visible, manipulative enterprise performed by experts, be they teachers, planners, or politicians. Rather, all those manifest activities are eidetic: they are visible
expressions of an invisible life which makes them possible. (Pinar, et. al., 1995, p. 421)

Visible aspects of the curriculum such as goals or learning outcome tend to become dominant, and the invisible – for example, how students experience the curriculum – goes unnoticed or hidden. Autio (2016) notices that education space is colonized by “the growing importance of principles such as outcome control, competence orientation and external assessment” and associates neoliberalism with this phenomenon. According to Autio (2016), neoliberalism reduces all spheres of human action to the economy. Therefore, corporate logic as educational rule leads to the emphasis on learning outcomes and “a sheer aggregate of instrumental skills and competences” (Autio, in press). Neoliberalism also, as argued by Autio (2016), intensified the detrimental grip of instrumentalism which is manifested in the relation between teaching and learning “as a cause-effect one that is supposed to legitimize the focus on product and outcomes of learning as an index of effective teaching” (p. 12). Instrumentalism explicitly and consciously ignores the issues of inner worlds of subjectivity on its agendas of theory and practice with its preference of behaviorist-cognitivist methodologies that obstruct dealing with invisible yet significant worlds of individual subjects (Autio, 2016, p. 15). As summarized by Pinar (2011):

Autio claims [American Herbartianism] reduced the complexity of education to proceduralism and instrumentality, rationalizing sequence that, in the US context, became behavioralized…Autio suggested that bureaucratic-administrative control became restated, in the United States, as the prediction of behavior. (p.185)

These invisible aspects underlie the visible, making the visible existence. Pinar makes us
aware of the issue – to notice the unnoticed. The educational process is to be reconsidered as a process inseparable from individual experience; education is not only about objectives, outcomes, implementation, or evaluation. As argued by Pinar, *currere* recontextualizes curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation that highlights the individual’s experience.

Curriculum concerns students. Traditional curriculum theory seems to ignore the individuals’ experience of curriculum as pointed out by Pinar et. al. (1995): “in its preoccupation with the public and the visible, with design, sequencing, implementation, evaluation, and its preoccupation with curricular materials, the curriculum field ignored the individual’s experience of those materials” (p. 415).

With a standard or a goal prescribed, the educational process still can be very complex, non-linear, and non-logical. Students may hold different attitudes toward their teachers, their interest in contents may differ due to their various backgrounds, and their study may lead to learning outcomes quite different from the intended goal. Teachers also face similar complexities. They vary by class background, experience, and gender, all of which can contribute to the complexity. The objective and implementation system seems to take students and teachers for granted, putting them in a situation where they are largely controlled and manipulated. As a matter of fact, teacher’s role should be creative and transformative (Autio, 2016). Autio (2016) also points out teachers’ important role in educational change or reform: “if teachers are distracted by external measures of accountability, control and surveillance, their disenchantment and disengagement threatens to leave change and reform a hollow rhetoric” (p. 13). However, does it suggest that these aspects related with curriculum are unimportant?

Pinar (1974) argues further, “It is not that the public world – curriculum, instruction, objectives-becomes unimportant; it is that to further comprehend their roles in the educational
process we must take our eyes off them for a time, and begin a lengthy, systematic search for our inner experience” (p. 3). Currere is the individual’s experience in an educational context. The product of currere is the autobiography of what students call their own educational experience (Pinar et. al., 2004, p. 24-30). Currere focuses on an individual biography, forsaking general structures to discover the path of experience that has led a particular person to a specific choice, place, and cognitive style. Soare (2009) argues that it is to reunite elements that students considered relevant. Hence, educational experience can mean something completely different for each student. Finally, Soare (2009) says that “While these discourses are to be analyzed, interests and various lacks often hidden from the normal course of experience will come to the surface” (p. 653). Therefore, one can direct his or her process of development by “bringing the structure of experience to awareness” (Grumet, 1976, p. 115) and thus one becomes more aware of how one chooses to order and interpret experience.

4.3.3 Affinity between Voidness and Invisibility

The notion of Lao Tzu’s voidness or no action (wuwei) is akin to that of invisibility in currere. Both Lao-tzu’ voidness and invisibility in currere help us see the invisible, identify the invisible, thus making the individual experience important and illuminating the invisible. They both make invisible a visible existence. Lao Tzu’s thought emphasizes the importance of the voided part, which uses metaphors to make it explicit. Pinar mainly highlights the hidden essentials in curriculum, and also associates it with the analysis of educational experience that attempts to discover what factors are operative in educational experience (Pinar, 1974).
Conclusion

The Chinese and European philosophical ideas are compared and studied not with any intention of judging which is necessarily right and which is necessarily wrong, but simply with the interest of finding what the one is in terms of the other. It is expected that before long we will see that the European philosophical ideas will be supplemented with the Chinese intuition and experience, and the Chinese philosophical ideas will be clarified by the European logic and clear thinking. - Fung Yulan (Cited in Jung, 1965, p. 612)

Here I juxtaposed and examined three aspects of ancient Chinese philosophical thought and Pinar’s currere that seem to resonate. They both acknowledge the “reciprocity of the subjectivity and objectivity in the dynamic constitution of human knowledge” (Grumet, 1976, p. 36). Currere focuses on how the human subject understands his or her situation, his or her past, and the current situation (a reconstruction of the passage) and learns from past experience, and thus through understanding oneself, one is able to see more of others and to reconsider his or her situations; whereas Wang Yangming believes that there is no principle external to mind/heart and one should consult one’s own mind/heart, wherein Principle surely resides, for anyone who understands his or her true nature understands the Principle of the universe. They both attend to the pre-conceptual realm, adopt the turning inward attitude, and notice the unnoticed.

The two ideas are different in some ways. For example, pure knowing and currere – these two domains of the pre-conceptual have different focuses. Pure knowing focuses on innate moral awareness, whereas currere includes educational attention to social, cultural, historical, and psychologically dimensions of life. This difference shows that Chinese Confucius education places a premium on moral aspects (Fang, 2001). Moral judgments, as argued by Autio (2016),
which remain outside the methodological grasp of behaviorism and cognitive theories, is at the core of transformative education. This chapter examines meaningful connections (e.g., consistency, continuity, inconsistency) between currere and Chinese philosophical thought, showing convergence of two theories though they are from different cultural context (Dey, 1999; Mathison, 1988; Lo, 2014). This study directs us to not only understand the convergence of Wang Yangming’s idea and currere, but also to widen the horizon of our vision to the spirit in which intellectual thinking is carried out in search of the truth: “which shuns much of the traditional speculative conundrums and chimera of abstraction in the name of humanity” (Jung, 1965, p. 636). This study may improve the level of objectivity of currere; and I argue certain thoughts tend to transcend the boundary between the East and the West. The association of the two thoughts further illustrates the value of currere, suggests a more international understanding of currere, and hear in a different key the soundness of currere.

Notes:

1. Husserl elaborates the notion of 'phenomenological epoché'. Through the systematic procedure of 'phenomenological reduction', one is thought to be able to suspend judgment regarding the general or naive philosophical belief in the existence of the external world, and thus examine phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness.

2. Ge xin means investigation of mind, proposed by Wang Yangming (an ancient Chinese philosopher). He interpret ge wu (investigation of things) as ge xin (investigation of mind/heart). James Miller argues that Wang Yangming sets the stage for the present day emphasis on Confucianism as moral and spiritual self-cultivation.
Chapter 5: Understanding Curriculum as Spiritual Text

Introduction

This chapter describes how curriculum scholars’ concepts, especially currere, can contribute to the understanding of spirituality. It involves two sections: first I define what spirituality is, and then I discuss how curriculum scholars address spirituality in their research, emphasizing Pinar’s currere. As argued by Pinar (2015), the method of currere is an educational method in service of understanding, and, as such, provides an educational tool to examine the spiritual potential of study. Among my questions are: What does this spiritual potential of study mean? How has currere contributed to the understanding of this spiritual potential? How has other curriculum scholars’ work addressed the issue? In this essay I will attempt to provide answers to these questions.

5.1 The Concept of Spirituality

In order to clarify the meaning of spirituality, I will draw a distinction between religion and spiritual. Spiritual is often associated with religion, but Huebner (1999) suggests that “the talk of the spirit and the spiritual in education need not be God talk, even though the tradition wherein spiritual is used most frequently is religious education. Rather the talk is about lived reality, about experience and the possibility of experiencing” (p. 377). The spiritual can be another sphere of being unacknowledged in curriculum scholarship in the West, in part perhaps due to the empirical and materialistic disposition of mainstream social science. Huebner (1999) associates spirituality with Zen Buddhism and transcendental meditation which acknowledge the supra-sensory potential of human being. Tanyi (2002) contends that spirituality involves human beings’ search for meaning in life, while religion involves institutions structured by rituals and
practices affirming a higher power or God. It seems that spirituality refers to a dimension of life less recognized by scholars, whereas religion denotes a system comprising religious values, rituals, and practices.

There is extensive literature on the concept of spirituality. Scholars define spirituality in different ways. Alexander (2003) argues that recognizing the spiritual dimension is central to constructing a life worth living. Huebner (1999) emphasizes the spiritual dimension of existence as something more than the material, the sensory, and the quantitative. Fitzgerald (1997) and Walsh (1999) argue that spirituality mainly refers to an individual’s search for meaning in life: wholeness, peace, individuality, and harmony; Goddard (1995, 2000) defines it as an energizing force that propels individuals to reach their optimal potential. Coward (1996) associates spirituality with self-transcendence, and he describes it as reaching beyond personal boundaries and attaining a wider perspective in order to find meaning in life’s experience. Palmer (1998) refers to spirituality as “the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work” (p. 5). Spirituality may support feeling whole or complete and it is often a unifying or connecting force (Baker, 2003, p. 51). Wringe (2002) incorporates the sense of self into the spiritual dimension by promoting a view of self in relation to others. Tanyi (2002) seems to provide the definition from a more holistic perspective:

Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and
emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence.

(p. 506)

Various studies have shown that self-transcendence, connectedness, belief, inner strength, meaning and purpose in life are all associated with the concept of spirituality (Tanyi, 2002). These elements need not be totally separate; they may overlap one another in light of certain situations.

5.2 Is There a Spiritual Dimension of Education?

There seems to be an increasing interest in the religious in scholarly research in humanities and social sciences, including in education (Wexler & Hotam, 2015). The idea that education has (or should have) a spiritual dimension is now the subject of increased attention from philosophers as well as educational theorists, policy makers, and practitioners (Carr & Haldane, 2003). In his analysis of the British Education Reform Act (1988) that endorsed the idea of school curricula promoting the spiritual development in students, Wringe (2002) raises the question: “whether an area of thought, feeling and discourse can be identified which can meaningfully be described as spirituality and whether the development of this potential realm of experience can legitimately form part of education in the contemporary world, particularly in the national education system of a modern, liberal, pluralistic democracy?” (p. 158). The spiritual is not necessarily a separate category alongside the personal and moral in education, as each of these dimensions may contain certain spiritual overtone (Wringe, 2002).

A parallel statement can be found in Huebner’s work: spirituality infuses everything in education (Huebner, 1999). As argued by Wringe (2002), “whatever its overlaps or incompatibilities with other areas of development, there is an element in the human condition which can informatively be referred to as spiritual, is intellectually and professionally acceptable
in a modern educational context and cannot be exhaustively analyzed away in other terms” (p. 160). Other scholars also have addressed the “spiritual” issue differently. Apple (1995) points out that there are realities (for him a sociocultural world) outside of education to which educators must pay attention and address through their work for the sake of children. In view of the realities such as the denial of human rights and destruction of environments, Apple (1995) argues that “educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of these realities… is in danger of losing its soul” (p. 81). Therefore, it seems to be imperative to identify what education can be connected to understanding these realities. Relatedly perhaps, Pinar and Huebner question the technical and instrumental language of the curriculum (such as the externalized curriculum) and turn to a more existential, phenomenological, and social language. They suggest that the technocratic side of education is devoid of the spiritual (Koetting & Combs, 2005).

As indicated in the scholarship just reviewed, then, the concept of spirituality involves the search for meaning and purpose in life, connectedness, inner strength, transcendence, and so on. It seems that not much literature addresses the spirituality of education directly. For this study, I select three constructs of spirituality to examine how they have been addressed in currere and other scholarly work; these constructs are the search for deeper meaning, sense of self, and transcendence. The investigation of the conceptions of spirituality claims the inner coherence among the three constructs. I will attempt to explicate the coherence in the following. For me, transcendence refers to the “goal” or the end, and it is what the spirituality of education is committed for. Search for deeper meaning refers to the “content”—how spirituality manifests itself in education, mainly through the criticism of externalized curriculum as I will indicate in
the latter part. Sense of self denotes the underlying force that drives one to explore, and to understand.

5.2.1 The Search for Deeper Meaning and Purpose of Life

As argued by Canda (1988), the central dynamic of spirituality is the person’s search for a sense of meaning and purpose, which comes from an innate impulse and need. This search for deeper meaning has been represented in many curriculum scholars’ work (Koetting and Combs, 2005), mainly manifested through criticism of the externalized curriculum and pursuit for a curriculum that addresses the deeper dimensions of life and meaning. This seems to be the content of spirituality of education; being aware of these problems with curriculum signals the start of the search for deeper meaning.

Many scholars criticize an exclusively externalized curriculum. Koetting and Combs (2005) define an externalized curriculum as a curriculum concerned with appropriating information. Iannone and Obenauf (1999) describe it as a fragmented curriculum that emphasizes memorization, views the teacher as controller, and adopts normative testing as a standard. Wringe (2002) comments on the curriculum as focusing on the external:

Education as we currently have it is often presented as essentially concerned with externals, with gradable and above all observable integrative skills, competencies and dispositions, which will enable individuals to become employable, performative and generally acceptable future citizens. In this endeavor the life of the spirit would seem to have little part to play. (p. 169)

Jardine (2012) also points out that “such systems are bent on the belief that if we only select the right standardized procedures, enacted the right institutional structures, get the right funding, forms and assessment regimes, and so on, teachers’ and students’ future will be finally
secured and assured and peace will reign” (p. 3). However, many schools are thrown into “the trenches” (Jardine, 2012, p. 3). Freire (1973) argues that the task of the teacher is to “fill the students with the content of his narration—content which is detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (p. 71). He suggests in such schools the task of the student is to “receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1973, p. 72). Students are turned into “receptacles to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 1973, p. 72). This externalized curriculum focuses people’ attention, and traps people in the “observable and measureable” aspects of reality. This externalized curriculum is akin to an evaluation tool that highlights certain aspects while ignoring the other.

As noted earlier, Apple (1995) connects the search for deeper meaning with noticing that “there are realities (a sociocultural world) outside of education to which educators must pay attention and address through their work for the sake of children” (p. 81). These realities are, as described by Apple (1995):

The denial of basic human rights, the destruction of the environment, the deadly conditions under which people (barely) survive, the lack of a meaningful future for the thousands of children I noted in my story,… [this] is a reality that millions of people experience in their bodies everyday. Educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of these realities… is in danger of losing its soul. The lives of our children demand no less. (p. 81)

These realities that have been neglected point to deeper dimensions of life such as meaning of life. Smith (2014) points out the multidimensional nature of reality:

The Buddha began his life as a young prince, having everything of a material nature that he might desire, yet he knew intuitively that this could not possibly encompass
the full range of human possibility, so he felt compelled to leave his environs and embark on a long search for the deeper truth of things. The purported failures of public schooling might have something to do with this understanding of delusion. If educational theory and practice cannot articulate this multidimensional nature of reality, celebrating only successes of a culturally parochial kind, schools become places of suffocating oppression, both for successful students and for those less so. (p. 41)

However, they are not yet directly and profoundly addressed by the present curriculum. Apple contends that ignoring these realities makes educational work lifeless. Koetting and Combs (2005) claim that the curriculum that fails to understand the deeper dimension of life tends to be technocratic, since “This type of curriculum does not involve students with the sociocultural world, nor does it address what is good for society” (p. 6). It does not engage students and teachers in the search for deeper meanings – for instance – authenticity in their work in schools or in their lives outside of school. This curriculum or school practice fails to connect with more powerful understanding. However, the manner in which the school curriculum can address these realities deserves further investigation.

Pinar (2012) suggests that “standardization and accountability signify rhetorical means by which study has come to connote test preparation, not self-cultivation or social democracy” (p. 44). Students have become consumers of educational services, he argues, “not subjectively existing individuals struggling to understand themselves in the world through the curriculum they study” (p. 44). According to Pinar (1975), the method of currere is “a strategy devised to disclose this lived experience, so that we may see more of it and see more clearly” (p. 33). Pinar’s (1976) curriculum concept (Currere), he believes, can help students see more, and see more
clearly, thus encouraging students to search the “deeper structure of my being” (p. 54). Moreover, the purpose of education is not just knowledge acquisition. “The educational process may have much to do with the acquisition of information and the development of usable (and sellable) skills, it also has to do with the cultivation of self-knowledge, of wisdom” (Pinar, 1976, p. 25). Hence, “the educational point of the public school curriculum is understanding, understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, process of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which live, in which other have lived, and in which our descendant will someday live” (Pinar, 2012, p.190). Currere shows a genuine search for deeper meaning, a search he inherited from Dwayne Huebner. Koetting and Combs (2005) argue that Huebner’s essay “Poetry and Politics of Curriculum” points out the instrumental and technical inclination of the curriculum and disconnection between teachers’ work and the sociocultural context: “Huebner’s ideas were not encapsulated in the language of spirituality; however, the splits and fractures he identified, the disconnect between the practice and the lived experience of teachers’ work, suggests a social orientation identified in current discussions of spirituality” (p. 88). Seemingly, the lack of spirituality leads to these splits and disconnection identified by Huebner. Therefore, as discussed by Koetting and Combs (2005), the need for individuals to turn inward in the search for meaning and a more authentic self tends to be the major appeal in curriculum.

5.2.2 The Sense of Self

Martin and Barresi (2006) trace the history of western conceptions of soul and self from the ancient Greeks to the present. Starting in Ancient Greece, the concept of self emerged as immaterial and immortal. This immaterial, rational soul became the focal concept of self, and bodily resurrection was secondary to it. The rise of individualism in the 18th and 19th century led
to a new “science” of consciousness that continued the focus on self as individual mind (Barresi, 2006). Until the first half of the 20th century, the search for the real self sustained in existential psychology as well as in analytic philosophy, whereas in the second half of the century, the focus shifted from a unitary and real self to multiple fictional or conceptual selves, and from mental selves to embodied and social selves owing to influences from multiple theoretical realms, including post-structuralist and post-modernist views, narrative approaches, and developmental psychology (Martin & Barresi, 2006). It might not be possible to offer a definition of self due to its various historical origins and theoretical perspectives but, rather, a general understanding of the evolving process. As argued by Barresi (2006), “The main difficulty for the future development of theories of self is that there exists in the current literature numerous notions and theories of self that appear mutually exclusive and cannot be resolved into a single central idea of self” (p. 3). This review provides a general understanding of the concept of self; in the following, I will explore how curriculum scholars address the issue in their works.

Wringe (2002) writes explicitly that there are three aspects deemed as the spiritual dimension in education, one of which is the sense of self. Wringe (2002) argues:

The concern for spirituality does not only involve the purpose or meaning of life, but also the right or best way of spending one’s life and appropriate attitudes and conduct in relation to other people, other creatures, the natural world and objects natural or humanly created beauty. Such a growing awareness of the universe and its magnitude, of the natural world and its antiquity, intricacy, beauty and fragility, of other people, their achievements, strivings and sufferings is scarcely separate from a view of oneself in relation to others. (p. 39)
The view of self in relation to others influences how people understand others and the world, and vice versa, a deepened understanding of the world (such as its complexity and instability) will also influence the view of self. This makes a sense of self a significant issue (interchangeably with a view of self to others). Wringe (2002) summarizes the sense of self as a process of self-examination, confession, growing awareness of one’s obligations and shortcomings, strengths and weaknesses. Central to sense of self is self-examination or reflection and lack of self-examination may lead to some outcomes incompatible with the goal of society. Wringe (2002) further argues that, “those who behave crassly in pursuit of worldly ambition or material interest may seem to lack such a perspective on themselves and the limited significance of their own desires, for it would be surprising if the development of such a perspective did not have some effect upon such outcomes as the individual’s engagement in anti-social conduct, lax complicity in prevailing mores or, ultimately, the condition of society” (p. 162). The pursuit of worldly ambition or material interest may have a negative effect on individuals’ engagement in society since they focus their entire attention on the material pursuit. The outcome might not be predictable, but there could exist a certain connection between the material pursuit and socially undesired outcomes. Therefore, according to Wringe (2002), reflection may help change the situation:

Such reflections are neither the process nor the conclusions of mere scientific or moral reasoning but may help to ground the underlying commitment upon which moral reasoning is founded, providing a backdrop of wisdom, detachments and unassuming consciousness of self which can, however, scarcely leave unaffected the way in which our everyday material concerns are played out. (p. 163)
Presumably such reflection will have an effect on how one engages in social or cultural activities; how one understands ethical and scientific questions; how one responds to certain issues; how one views and pursues success; how one positions oneself within this changing society, socially, culturally and politically. It seems that the sense of self is fundamental because it plays a vital role in other dimensions of spirituality. For individuals, this sense of self provides underlying and ongoing support for judgment, decision-making and further exploration.

Pinar, Miller, and Grumet’s work tends to be connected to a sense of self. As argued by Eisner (1985), all experience is the product of both the features of the world and the biography of the individual. It is not exceptional to curriculum. One of Pinar’s major contributions in curriculum study is the autobiographical way of inquiry. The field of curriculum, as pointed out by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995, p. 519), has forgotten the individual: “in its preoccupation with the public and the visible, with design, sequencing, implementation, evaluation, and in its preoccupation with curricular materials, the curriculum field ignored the individual’s experience of those material” (p. 519). In order to address this problem, Pinar (1976) emphasizes the importance of shifting the ontological center from exterior to interior:

How could this work of self understanding and evolution be continued in a socially useful and publicly educative way? I answered that what is necessary is a method of working one that, like psychoanalysis, invites systematic self-perusal, but like meditative disciplines I have used, works in an experiential way to shift the ontological center from exterior to interior. At the same time the method must help further the cognitive development of those employing it, and give understanding of educational experience in its political, social, and psycho-social dimensions. (p. 14)
This shift is to further comprehend the roles of curriculum, instruction, objectives (e.g. the externals) in the educational process and begets a lengthy and systematic search for inner experience by taking our eyes off these roles of curriculum for a time (Pinar, 1974). Therefore, “the educational process may have much to do with the acquisition of information and the development of usable (and sellable) skills, it also has to do with the cultivation of self-knowledge, of wisdom” (Pinar, 1976, p. 25). For Pinar, Pacheco (2009) summarizes:

Education should not be considered as application of knowledge onto the body of a student and as material set in stone, and it is a study of how individuals attach, displace, forget, and disengage knowledge; learning is crafted from a curious set of relations: the self’s relation to its own otherness and the self’s relation to the other’s otherness. (p. 8)

It is a lived path, through which one with his/her personal characteristics engages in constant reconfiguration of what one has learned; it is a lived process in which the external factors and the internal attributes interact.

To comprehend Pinar’s work, one needs first to understand the two fundamental concepts, the self and the other (Pacheco, 2009). Pacheco (2009) asked Pinar about the limits of the self. He says:

Subjective Studies don’t replace Social Studies, they only refocus them. And, as you pointed out, there are cultural constraints; the “self” is, in many ways, structured by society, by history, by culture, but it is also true that subjective beings, through their own imagination and their “self” knowledge also contribute to history and politics and culture and they help reconfigure it, and so, it seems to me, it’s a very useful
focus and to the point, the “self”, but it’s not the exclusive focus of my curriculum
theory, of course. (p. 11)

The sense of self is an important concept for Pinar’s currere. In contrast to Wringe’s work,
Pinar’s sense of self has its own focus grounded in the phenomenology. For phenomenologists,
knowledge of the world calls for knowledge of the self, as argued by Grumet (1975):

The writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty describe existence as
being-in-the-world. They recognize the existence of the world without explaining its
facticity and accept our experience of it without first establishing its causality. The
natural and social sciences that attempt explanations of that causality are to them
merely second-order expressions of the Lebenswelt, the world of lived experience.
Thus, for the phenomenologist, knowledge of the world requires knowledge of self-as
knower of the world. (p. 39)

This shows the importance of the concept of self in phenomenology. Husserl calls the
suspension of belief phenomenological reduction and claims that when pursued to the end, it
revealed the indubitable existence of a transcendental ego (Martin & Barresi, 2006). The
transcendental ego is not accessible to empirical observation but only to phenomenological
description. For Heidegger, the aim was to disclose what it means to be a human being. “The
basic problem, in his view, is that the essential truth about ourselves has been covered by
millennia of cultural and linguistic accretions” (Martin & Barresi, 2006, p. 233). In other words,
handred intellectual conventions and theories and our routinized habits of thinking and acting
have made us unintelligible. His project was to remove these obscuring things so that human
existence could show itself (Martin & Barresi, 2006). It seems that the self is to be found in un-
concealment. Heidegger reconceptualizes the self as a dynamic system of interrelationships of
meanings or signification. Martin and Barresi (2006) suggest that Heidegger recognizes “humans as embedded in a dynamic system of relationships, called being in the world, which affords the only true access that we have to ourselves” (p. 234). Sartre (1960) contends that the unity of consciousness is achieved via the objects of experience and via the temporal structure of experience:

...it is certain that phenomenology does not need to appeal to any such unifying and individualizing I…The object is transcendent to the consciousness which grasps it, and it is in the object that the unity of the consciousness is found…It is consciousness which unifies itself, concretely, by a play of "transversal" intentionalities which are concrete and real retentions of past consciousness. Thus, consciousness refers perpetually to itself. (pp. 38-39)

To sum up, as Barresi (2006) points out, “Phenomenologists following Husserl have focused on the stream of consciousness, and have analyzed how the self might be a logically necessary notion to account for unity of the stream, or how the self gets constituted by interconnected thoughts within the stream and appears as content within it” (Barresi, 2006). Unity of stream makes the notion of self possible.

For Pinar, the sense of self, deeply embedded throughout the four steps of currere, goes far beyond self-examination discussed by Wringe, consistent with the concept of self in phenomenology. Pinar’s currere views self as a complex webbed situatedness, as pointed by Grumet (1975):

And if the world were experienced in discretely organized units by persons who could isolate emotional responses from intellectual ones, past from present, present from future, I from me, me from us, programmed instruction, behavioral objectives
and other products of the "divide and conquer" approach to learning might be justified. They are not; further depersonalization and fragmentation of human experience distorts it and estranges us not only from each other but from ourselves as well. (p. 9)

Pinar’s currere is to recover one’s past and reveal one’s volition through reflection. As argued by Pinar (1976), “Our ambition is to provide a place and a process of reflection that can, for a few moments, withdraw from engagement when engagement is most intense” (p. 77). Phenomenological reflection is a species of ordinary reflection. “To reflect means, in a general way, to think; but to reflect is more than to think. To reflect is to take a mental step backwards, to consider something in its broader context, to see how it is related to other things, what its nature and place in the world are” (Meacham, 2010, p. 2). As discussed previously, Wringe proposes sense of self in terms of self in relation to others. For Pinar, it involves not only a self to other relationship, but also a self to self (self’s otherness) relationship. Also it is about how to foster one’s ability to learn from past experiences. Most important, Pinar’s sense of self is grounded in phenomenology, which is different from Wringe. Pinar’s idea on sense of self is akin to Wringe’s in the sense that they place self at the core of discussion, use self as the site of exploration, and consider values related with self.

5.2.3 Transcendence (Moreness)

Huebner (1999) understands spirit as “moreness” (p. 404) or transcendence. Huebner cites the definition of spirit in the Oxford Dictionary as referring to the animating or vital principle in human beings; that which gives life to physical organism, in contrast to purely material elements. The expression “that a person has spirit” suggests that one has gone beyond the forms and norms of everyday life that might pull one down. As Huebner (1999) further points out, “It indicates
that life is more, or can be more, than the form in which it is currently lived” (p. 343). “This going beyond, this moreness of life, this transcendent dimension is the usual meaning of spirit and spiritual” (Huebner, 1999, p. 344). Huebner emphasizes the spiritual dimension of existence as something more than the material, the sensory, and the quantitative. “To speak of the spirit and the spiritual is not to speak of something other than humankind, merely more than humankind as it is lived and known” (p. 343). It is to go beyond what it is lived and known, but still originates from current living and knowing. There is more than we know, can know, and will ever know (Huebner, 1999). To make it concrete, Huebner gives some examples to illustrate what moreness can bring to people:

It is moreness that takes us by surprise when we are at the edge and end of our knowing. There is comfort in the moreness that takes over in our weakness, our ignorance, at our limits or end. One knows of that presence, that moreness, when known resources fail and somehow we go beyond what we were and are and become something different, somehow new. It is this very moreness, that can be identified with the spirit and the spiritual. (p. 389)

Spirit is that which transcends the known, the expected, even the ego. This moreness (transcendence) seems to help extend our faculties to see, to hear and to feel, going beyond the current, and consequently, newness or otherness emerges. As Huebner (1999) argues, spirit refers to “the possible and the unimagined—to the possibility of new ways, new knowledge, new relationships, and new awareness” (p. 365). These new ways, new understandings, new relationships seem to point to something beyond the current. For Huebner, education is possible due to transcendence:
Spirituality involves engagement with the transcendent and this is what education is all about. Education is the lure of the transcendent—that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other. Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures. Education is the protest against present forms that may be reformed and transformed. Education is the consciousness that we live in time, pulled by the inexorable otherness that brings judgement and hope to the forms of life which are but vessels of the present experience. (p. 360)

The otherness, the moreness, and the transcendent are demonstrated in creativity (Huebner, 1999). “To ‘have spirit’ is to be in touch with forces or aspects of life that make possible something new and give hope and expectations” (Huebner, 1999, p. 356). It is about newness. It denotes having a different view of people, of our educational provisions, of what we do and say (Huebner, 1999). Huebner exemplifies the “moreness”; moreness can be found new relationships, new understanding, new forms of power or control produced by histories, stories, myths, and poetry in religion. Huebner (1999) further explicates that how spirit can be manifested:

It is manifested through love and the waiting expectation that accompanies love. It overcomes us, as judgment, in our doubts, and in the uncomfortable looks of those with whom we disagree, particularly those with whom we disagree religiously. One whose imagination acknowledges that moreness can be said to dwell faithfully in the world. (p. 403)

Huebner (1999) also describes that the spiritual is not necessarily contained, nor even acknowledged, in the ways that we presently know and live in this world (p. 406). Curriculum should allow the spiritual to “show” or “function” (p. 409). Traditional curriculum concerns—namely the goal of education, the social and political structures of education, curriculum content,
teaching and evaluation become different when education permits “the spiritual” to show. Moreover, curriculum that acknowledges the spiritual shows other problems and tasks more clearly, such as moral and spiritual values, and the need for spiritual or religious discipline for the teacher. Spirituality infuses everything in the world; when newness emerges, spirituality works.

Akin to Huebner, Phenix (1971) argues that “the term transcendent refers to the experience of limitless going beyond any given state or realization of being” (p. 423). He also highlights going beyond limit as the essential character of the transcendent. Forshay (1991) uses spiritual experience and transcendent experience interchangeably. He argues that mathematics plays a role of awakening the experience of transcendence among students and describes how mathematics often has a transforming effect on how students think. Derived from his personal experience, he maintains that the transcendent or spiritual experience involves two basic elements: the experience of dread or awe or fearfulness (later, wonder) and the experience of connectedness with something greater than what immediately appears.

For Forshay (1991), the connectedness is equated with “moreness” in Huebner’s sense. He cites the theologian’s claim that the transcendent experience is latent in everyone and it can be awakened in us. Therefore, transcendent experience refers to “a sudden awareness of the connection between what is immediately apparent and a vastly large sphere of being. This awareness may be evoked – called out” (p. 283). Forshay (1991) contends that this awareness is consistent with Maslow’s work – “an illumination, a revelation, an insight that may lead to the cognition of being” (p. 283). This experience can only be “incited, induced and aroused,” or in Maslow’s term, “triggered.” The concept of transcendent is a state of mind, purely felt.
Forshay (1991) argues that mathematics greatly helps trigger the experience of transcendence among students. He identifies seven examples with which he illustrates how mathematics has had a transforming influence on the way in which human beings think. “In each case, these ideas serve as historical milestones that split mathematics history, in the sense that math was one way before each of them, and another afterwards” (Forshay, 1991, p. 289). I will cite one example to illustrate:

Zero and negative numbers. The invention of zero, which took place at about the same time in China, India, and by the Mayans, was in Western civilization a part of the invention of Arabic numerals. It spread to Baghdad by AD 700, and then very slowly into Europe, not being universal until the 15th century. Once one has the concept of zero, it immediately becomes inviting to go up from it and down from it, into positive and negative numbers. To imagine zero, we had to get rid of the idea that counting always involves something, or some things. We have to toy with the idea (expounded much later by Cantor and others) that nothing is something. We must at least think of the distinction (again, made much later) between nothing and nothingness. (Forshay, 1991, p. 290)

This experience with mathematics allows students to consider questions they never considered before and consequently transcend certain boundaries of previous way of thinking about mathematic problems. Some scholars also mention that one way of rising above mundane everyday concerns and immediate practicalities of material advantage and worldly ambition may be through raising fundamental or big questions. “Though these questions do not relate to our
immediate everyday concerns, the answer we give to them may profoundly affect our perceptions of ourselves and others, of life and the world, our long term commitments and consequently the general pattern of our actions and the course of our lives” (Stump & Murray, 1999, p. 162). These questions go beyond everydayness and invite students and teachers to ponder more deeply. They can be perceived as a practical way of experiencing transcendence.

**Conclusion**

I examine how the three selected constructs of spirituality are addressed by curriculum scholars’ work, especially Pinar’s *currere*. The investigation shows how curriculum scholars’ work is connected to the three constructs of spirituality, and then demonstrates how their work exhibits the pursuit of spirituality. Understanding curriculum as spiritual means that curriculum helps students identify the “moreness” – the qualitative, the non-sensory, the non-material – beyond the transmission of knowledge. Through addressing issues or realities that may be ignored, curriculum directs us to attend to the transcendent dimension of current life. I term it spirituality of education.

This spirituality of education is twofold. In terms of its content, spirituality is a search for deeper layers of meaning, similar to a process of meaning making; in terms of its “end”, it is the “moreness” that can transcend the usual, the form, the norm of everyday life; it can be understood as new perspective and new awareness; it points to the deeper layer of life, and meaning, related to love, respect, and a sense of belonging, an “unimagined possibility” that allows a participation in the deeper hidden dimensions of life; it is attuned connection with new understanding of the relation to self, other, and the world; it is updated thoughts, that is different
from previous, from the old, from the usual, from the accepted, going beyond the “constraints,”
or the fixed structure. As a result, it brings inner peace and strength to the heart.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Juxtaposing currere with elements of ancient Chinese philosophical thought informing a cosmopolitan concept of spirituality, I seek to articulate how I have engaged in my own subjective reconstruction. In this dissertation I aspired to describe how my subjectivity has been reconstructed through autobiography and academic study, toward a coherent self capable of sustained, critical, and creative engagement with the world (Pinar, 2009, p. 62). The final review of this dissertation will be divided into four sections: 1) summary; 2) theoretical contribution of the research; 3) limitations; and 4) future research.

6.1 Summary

All the chapters are focused on the concept of currere. The first chapter explains why I employ the autobiographical method of currere to explore my life and study in Canada. The second chapter provides an example of how I used the method of currere to acquire self-understanding. The third chapter emphasizes the concept of attunement that emerged from my own autobiographical research, described in the second chapter. The fourth and fifth chapters document how my subjectivity has been informed by academic study.

This dissertation adopts a manuscript-based format. I employ the concept of subjective reconstruction proposed by Pinar to connect all the chapters. Recall that, according to Pinar, subjective reconstruction is informed by autobiography and academic studies. This dissertation portrays how I engaged in this reconstructive process, enabled through the study of the theory and practice of currere. Informed by the theory of currere, I wrote my own autobiography, and then I studied the resonance between currere and ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the
study of spirituality of education. This dissertation offers a vivid example of how my subjectivity has been reconstructed through autobiography and academic studies. It also shows “where I conceptually and ontologically am now” (Pinar, 1976, p. 53). This process of subjective reconstruction is characterized by attunement. The concept of attunement emerges from own life history: not only addressing the process of writing autobiographically but also that of writing theoretical papers. Attunement here refers to how one’s learning can take place in a subjective intellectual labour striving for deeper understanding, as I outlined in the Chapter 3. While writing my autobiography and theoretical papers, I have come to realize how I have been searching for deeper understanding of self, which required me to study the resonance between currere and ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the spirituality of education.

Writing autobiographically and theoretically are not, finally, two separate processes; they are mutually intertwined. Writing autobiographically allowed me to present the world as I experienced it, not obscuring that experience by representing it mathematically in statistics. I have come to realize my experience is also temporally and spatially layered: how I have been influenced by various discourses, the influence of institutional structures, political and policy agendas, teaching protocols. I have come to realize this layered dimension of lived experience as I articulated that experience autobiographically. It seems that I dwell within and among these relationships. This view of self-in-relationship acknowledges our essential connections to others, recognizes interdependence in relationships, and discloses continuity and difference (Plumwood, 1998). Instead of quantifying behaviours or outlining interaction on the surface, I described how I interpreted my thoughts and behaviours, why I have made this or that decision, what scholarly thought with which I have been grappling.
When I turned to myself, it seemed everything changed. This attentiveness to my lived experience brought what was hidden to the surface and made the existing more vivid, illuminating experience, identifying concerns and questions, and making myself more ready for self-reflective engagement with ideas. I felt able to move through my particularity into more shared aspects of human being. This sense of common ground – disclosed through difference – constitutes the fundamental aspects of the world as a human being. It is as if the world manifests itself in front of myself in particular, often personal ways. In other words, it is as if the whole world unfolds through seeking to understand oneself. As a result, such seeking directly led me to sustained reflection on certain educational issues: What does education mean for an individual person? Does education mean knowledge, or spiritual wisdom? What can I learn from my educational experience? How should I, a Chinese woman studying in the West, view education? What and whose knowledge, and under what conditions, can speak to me? How can currere attune me to answers, however provisional? Provoked by these questions, I addressed the issue of spirituality of education, which for me became associated with the connection of currere to ancient Chinese philosophical thought. Through writing autobiographically, I come to realize that in order to understand the world, I need to understand myself first of all—self-understanding becomes a passage into the world.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

First, I have contributed to the scholarly effort to understand currere – now institutionalized in a journal and an annual conference – by proposing the concept of Chinese currere. There is now a “black currere” (Baszile, 2016) testimony to the currere’s encouragement to seek understanding from within the specificity of one’s identity, political
positioning, and cultural formation. In this study I articulates my lived experience as an international student grappling with my own life history, my present preoccupations, my dreams of future, both continuous and novel, even unprecedented. The complex roles of institutional structures, political and policy agendas, teaching protocols and educational theories are threaded through the subjective experience of the individual personal – myself, as articulated autobiographically. Derived from my subject position – a Chinese woman who has studied in Beijing and Hong Kong, studying now in Vancouver, I hope to contribute to the uniqueness of Chinese cosmopolitan theory of curriculum as experienced. My research contribution can be summarized as the initial formulation of a Chinese currere.

Second, central to the concept of Chinese currere is the concept of attunement. Attunement incorporates traces of ancient Chinese philosophical thought as it manifests itself in my life writing and reflection on the writing. For example, I addressed that how attunement allows one to understand the world through understanding oneself. This resonates with what Wang Yangming (1965), who says every living thing is a manifestation of the Principle. One need not seek outside but to seek within oneself. In keeping with currere, attunement also emphasizes how even informal forms of study (for example, learning that takes place outside the classroom) can contribute to self-understanding. While learning occurs not only in but also out of classrooms, it always takes place within a person’s life. In such an autobiographical theory of education learning becomes situated not only in the school-subject and specific prior knowledge, but also in one’s subjective sense of intellectual labor. Attunement affirms how learning can happen within an individual while acknowledging the institutional directives, social and cultural influences embedded in life and study experience. Attunement emphasizes how one’s learning can take place in a subjective sense of intellectual labour striving for deeper understanding.
Attunement refers to the learning experienced subjectively and spiritually. Attuned learning may happen anywhere at any moment. Attunement seems to incorporate and emphasize more spiritual elements of experience that might encourage not only self-understanding but certain wisdom. Attunement works through contingency and sensitivity. Contingency constitutes the particularity of experience, including certain situationally specific dimensions, among them the spatial, temporal, cultural, social, and so on. Contingency denotes the “particularity” identified from one’s own perspective. Sensitivity seems to be the experiential optic, allowing us to see different aspects of things or understand things differently, helping us to achieve heightened understanding. Sensitivity can be enhanced by academic knowledge, lived experience, spiritual understanding, and subjectivity (awakening inwardness). Being attuned means that all past experience, knowledge, and understanding work spontaneously.

While attunement may provide the method of Chinese *currere*, juxtaposing West and East provides the content. Third, then, this study associates ancient Chinese thought with *currere* to help me articulate – and work through – the issues I face as student, teacher, and Chinese woman in Canada. The study provides an example of how subjectivity can be reconstructed by academic knowledge and experience. This study provides an understanding of subjectivity from both East and West to articulate my life and study in Canada.

Fourth, this study provides a spiritual understanding of curriculum, especially expressed as *currere*. *Currere* is not limited to spiritual dimensions, but this dissertation research focused on this aspect. Understanding curriculum as spiritual means that curriculum help students identify the “moreness” – the qualititative, the non-sensory, the non-material – beyond the transmission of knowledge. Through addressing issues or realities that may be ignored, *currere* can direct us to attend to the transcendent dimension of current life. This, I suggest, is the spirituality of
education. This spirituality of education is twofold. In terms of its content, spirituality is a search for deeper layers of meaning, similar to a process of meaning making; in terms of its “end”, it is the “moreness” that can transcend the usual, the visible form, the expected norm of everyday life; it can be understood as new perspective and new awareness; it points to the deeper layer of life, and meaning, related with love, respect, and sense of belonging, an “unimagined possibility” that allows a participation in the deeper hidden dimensions of life; it is attuned connection with new understanding of the relation to self, other and the world; it is updated thoughts, that is different from previous, from the old, from the usual, from the accepted, going beyond the “constraints”, or the fixed structure. As a result, it can bring inner peace and strength to the heart.

Fifth, this dissertation provides a study of the affinities between ancient Chinese philosophical thought and the concept of currere which includes: 1) pure knowing and pre-conceptual; 2) ge xin and working from within; and 3) voidness and invisibility. The ancient Chinese philosophical thought that was discussed was that advanced by Wang Yangming, Mencius, and Lao Tzu. This thought includes pure knowing (Liangzhi), ge xin (investigation of mind/heart) and voidness. Pure knowing means “innate knowledge,” or “intuitive moral knowledge”, and the concept originally comes from Mencius. Ge xin means the investigation of mind/heart. Wang Yangming (1963) argues that every living thing is a manifestation of Principle (Li); one does not need to look outside of oneself in order to understand Principle (and therefore morality). One should consult one’s own mind/heart, wherein Principle presumably lies. Voidness (or nothingness), proposed by Lao Tzu, perceives the value of the invisible existence of the world, and acknowledges the invisible qualities of the world. This study examines meaningful connections (e.g., consistency, continuity, inconsistency; Dey, 1999; Mathison, 1988) between currere and Chinese philosophical thought, showing convergence of two theories.
though they are from different cultural contexts (Lo, 2014). This study directs us to not only understand the convergence of ancient Chinese philosophical thought and *currere* – *and the formulation of a Chinese currere* – but it can possibly also widen the horizon of intellectual labour undertaken in search of the truth: “which shuns much of the traditional speculative conundrums and chimera of abstraction in the name of humanity” (Jung, 1965, p. 636). I suggest certain thoughts tend to transcend the boundary between the East and the West. The association of the two thoughts gains a more international understanding of *currere*, and help us hear in a different key the sound of *currere*.

### 6.3 Limitations

First, my study of self-understanding is based primarily on the work of William Pinar. There are other forms of autobiographical inquiry, among them life writing as explicated and practiced by Carl Leggo, Cynthia Chambers, and Erika Hasebe-Ludte, and narrative inquiry as proposed by Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin. As powerful and important as life writing and narrative inquiry are, *currere* encouraged me to associate academic study with intercultural experience, including attention to gender. I have made only a preliminary inquiry here, but in the future I hope to incorporate the theories of life writing and narrative inquiry referenced above in my autobiographical research.

Second, this dissertation research is limited by the particularity of my own lived experience, academic background and interests, as well as cultural identity. My past life experience and academic background may limit my perspective and focus on this autobiographical research. I may ignore or leave important themes that can be identified in others or wider group of people while writing autobiographically. Also, I still need to develop a more in-depth understanding of *currere* which can direct me to explore more deeply, compared to the current understanding.
Hopefully, this autobiographical emphasis may be a kind of complement to my focus on institutional structures, structured by sociological theory.

### 6.4 Future Research

As suggested in the last section, I will further formulate the particularities and commonalities of a Chinese *currere*, informed also by life writing and narrative inquiry. This Chinese *currere* can be further developed since it is still new. I may enrich this Chinese *currere* from a teacher’s perspective later on. I will continue to consider the spirituality of education, contributing to a more expansive sense of *currere*. My future work may focus on the exploration of the ethical dimension of *currere*, exploring how spirituality of education and *currere* together can contribute to moral development. *Currere* mainly attends to cognitive or intellectual life: “The medium of movement in this method is to be primarily cognitive, or intellectual. This is not to say emotional dimensions are to be excluded; they, along with other dimensions of educational experience, will be rendered verbally, edited through the intellect” (Pinar, 1975, p. 389). *Currere* focuses on “the broad outlines of past, present, and future, the nature of our experience, and specially our educational experience, that is the way we can understand our present in the way that allows us to move on, more learned, more evolved than before” (Pinar, 1976, p. 63). In future research, I will emphasize the spirituality of education, including *currere*’s possible contribution to our understanding of character education and moral development. How can *currere* contribute to one’s moral development? What is the ethical value of *currere*? These questions and associated questions I look forward to exploring. This is the calling of *currere*.
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