Tension and Possibility: Navigating Experiences in Graduate Studies Through A/r/tographic Currere

by

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an artful act of resistance. Combining autoethnography, a/r/tography, and the method of currere to form an *a/r/tographic currere*, this work gathers narrative experiences in graduate studies. What is revealed are deep tensions in identity that are closely tied to experiences in schooling. Separated into four main parts, this thesis flows through visual and textu(r)al fragments to analyze and reflect on the past, present, and future. Fragments are analyzed through Biesta's three functions of education (qualification, socialization, and subjectification) and synthesized toward a wider discussion of how living and learning in a knowledge economy has affected our educational experiences but our academic/teacher/researcher identities as well. To conclude, this thesis calls for deep reflection and action on the systems in which we learn, teach, and research and resistance of the consumerist relationship to education.

Keywords: a/r/tography; currere; curriculum studies; identity; knowledge economy

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis consists of original work of which I have authored. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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A/r/tist Statement

This thesis is an a/r/tful act of resistance. I encourage you to consider embracing an energy of wandering, incompleteness, and excess (Hayot, 2014; Irwin et al., 2008; McDonald & Trettien, 2018; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005) as you navigate through these pages. This work exists in places of tension and possibility (Aoki, 1983; 2005/1986; 2005/1987a; 2005/1993) along a journey that is far from complete. As an **a/r/t**ist, I have come to live and work at the complex intersections of **A**rtist, ~~aspiring~~ **T**eacher (see *Note 3*) and *(budding)* **R**esearcher (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005).

The illustrations and text in this thesis rebel against varying notions of aesthetics, and pressure

Note 1:
McDonald & Trettien (2018) on Hayot (2014): Passion & Excess in Academic Writing

"For Hayot, these stylistic excesses occur when an author's passion for her subject becomes so overwhelming that it can no longer be expressed plainly. The kinetic energy of these gyrations recalls the dynamism of the wall; one may glimpse its digressiveness in the meandering aside, its piecemeal architecture in the sentence fragment, or its vaulting span in the photo quote. These snags in intelligibility are not evidence of an elitist desire to exclude but are precisely the moments in which the decorous surface of a text cracks open to offer a glimpse of the tangled expanses beneath. To experience them as such, the reader must sacrifice her grip on a text's argument and allow herself to be swept up in the muddy momentum of its dance. Caught amidst a piece's movements, the reader trades intellectual insight for precarious intimacy, the ungraspable streaming of one into

to conform to such aesthetics, that I've often found in academic research writing. Of all the books and articles that have crossed my path, much of them were rife with jargon and decorative language, or distant and systematic in their approach to communicating with their readers. In scholarly research, aesthetics and decoration are often abundant, arbitrary, overlooked, or worse, frowned upon (Hayot, 2014; McDonald & Trettien, 2018). Readers can interpret ornamental uses of language as excessive or unnecessary and similarly criticize academic jargon for its pretentiousness and inaccessibility.

Traditional constructions of thesis or dissertation are often devoid of aesthetics entirely. Instead, the thesis process aims toward an enculturation into research and academia that prizes seriousness and methodological procedure in lieu of creativity (Hayot, 2014). By doing this it reinforces dominant research paradigms that often prize objectivity over subjectivity (Ratner, 2002). *However*, deviations from standard modes of scholarly writing or lapses in simplicity and explicitness often reveal rare flashes of excitement and passion that would otherwise remain hidden (See *Note 1*) (McDonald & Trettien, 2018). As part of my rebellion against the traditional conceptions of the thesis, research, and academic writing, I have leaned into these moments of excess to fuel and guide my work.

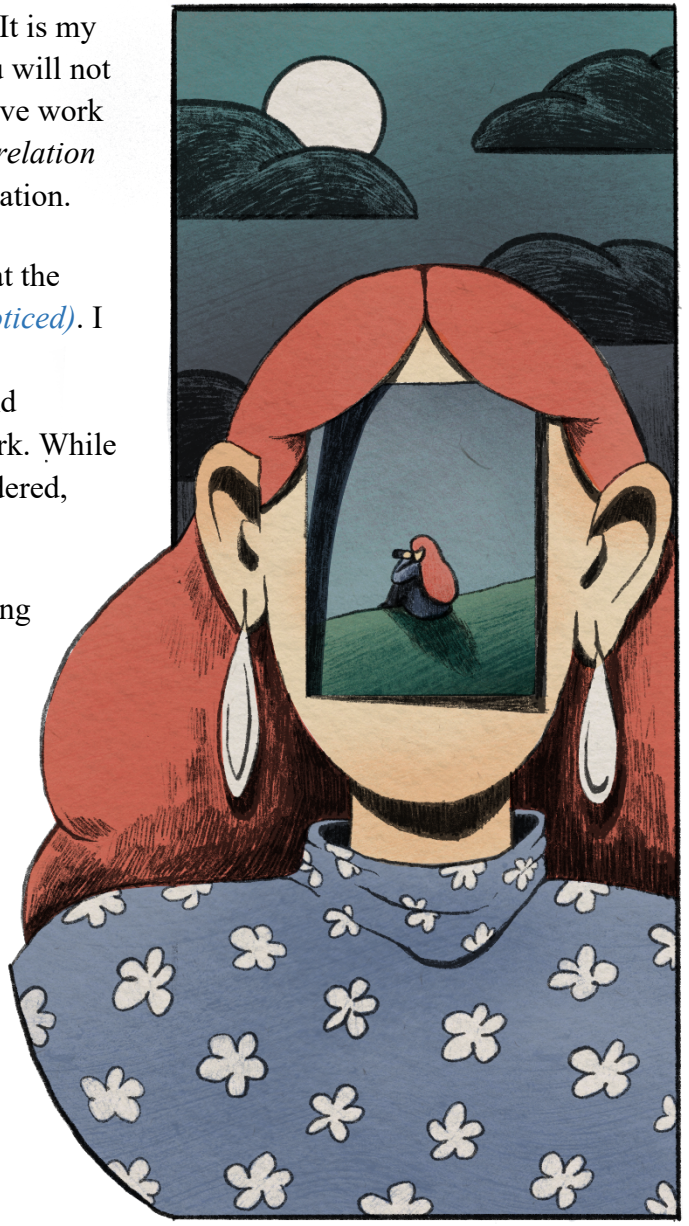
Throughout my journey in graduate studies, I would occasionally turn to art making as a meditative practice where I could digest and make meaning of all the information and ideas that I discovered *(—though that relationship was rocky to start)*. Moments where my thoughts escaped words, or I didn't have the language to describe what I was thinking, my first instinct would always be to draw. Page after page of scribbles later turned into full illustrations through recursive periods of reflection. As my understandings were changing, so too were the ideas underscoring my art. In this sense, the visual and textu(r)al renderings (a combination of text and texture) I am presenting here share space in a semantic ebb and flow, pushing and pulling one another across the pages, opening spaces for you to construct your own understandings and meanings, as I have.

The visual and textu(r)al elements in this work do not exist as decoration. It is my intention that neither art nor text describe or decorate the other. In this I mean you will not find lists or descriptions of figures, nor will I formally explain any of the illustrative work that is presented alongside my writing. It is my intention that art and text exist *in relation* to one another through processes that open spaces for interpretation and contemplation.

Further departing from the typical thesis construction, I must warn you that the overarching structure of this work is not traditional *(as you might have already noticed)*. I do not have a formal literature review or discussion section. I take liberties with formatting, such as landscape-oriented pages, interjecting and tangential notes, and various changes in typography. There are unresolved threads of tension in my work. While this may generate anticipation or even frustration, I promise I left them to be pondered, and will gather all the loose ends in the latter half of this work.

For the first half, however, I will invite you to get tangled in my overlapping processes of discovery and (re)negotiation. Through an evolving and weaving reflection, I not only attempt to analyze and connect literature to my experiences but, I leverage artmaking and narrative in search of meaning and place within the (virtual) halls of the academe. Therefore, to me, this is more than an exercise in qualitative research. It is an active and nuanced account of *(academic)* identity formation and transformation.

As we progress, themes surrounding identity, power, and agency gradually un/fold (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), or emerge and intertwine, before I make them explicit in my discussion. It is reflection *on* reflection, *in* reflection. It is a journey of be(com)ing, the synthesis of being and becoming (Barnett, 2004) that, upon reflection, culminates to our lived experience (Aoki, 1983).



Over much wrestling with concepts of what it means to be scholarly, or at the very least live and learn in academic spaces, my artful reflection and analysis on past and future has created an opportunity to reveal much more than a simple self-analysis. Rather, it opens a gateway for me to assess critically the present, and its effects. From smaller implications surrounding myself and my community, to the academic environment that I am studying in, all the way to larger sociocultural and systemic implications. At the intersections of my emerging artist, teaching, and research identities, I weave art, theory, scholarship, and lived curriculum (Aoki, 1983; 1993/2005) in such a way that visually and textu(r)ally illustrates my journey in all its mundanity and complexity as I continue to navigate and forge new meanings and understandings.

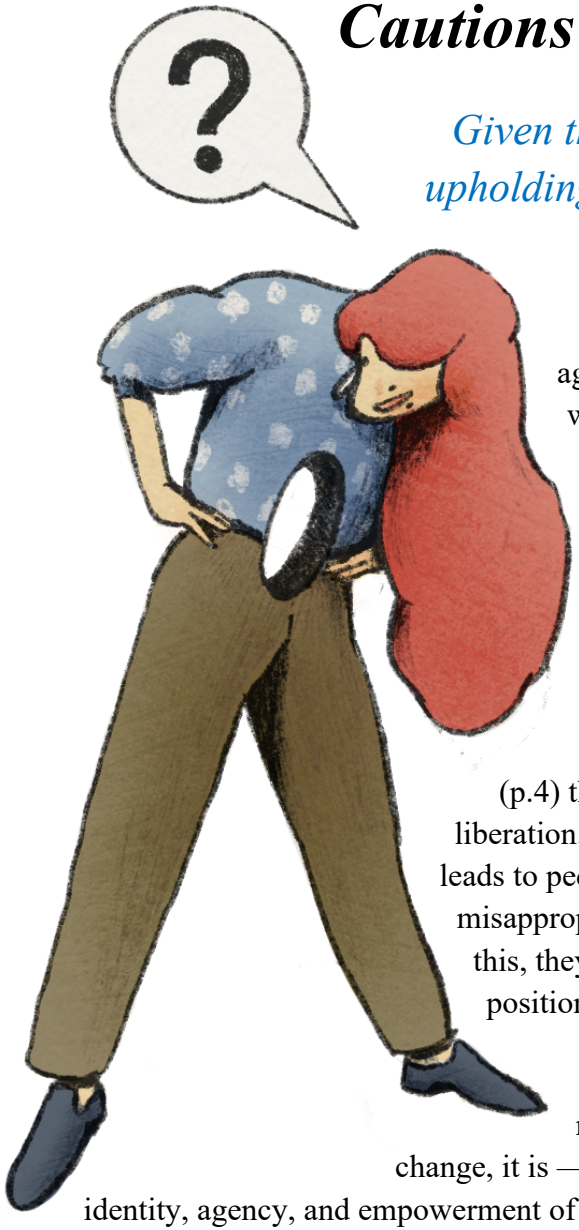
To illustrate this unfolding of ideas, I am presenting this thesis as a selection of contiguous visual and textual *fragments.* I separate these fragments into four main sections based on Pinar's (1975/2015a) method of *currere*: regressive (past), progressive (future), analytical (present) and synthetical (discussion).

Within these four sections, I draw from the methodologies of autoethnography (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Wall, 2008) and a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). Combined, I hope to open spaces for public and shared negotiation and meaning making, across time and social/culture context through interwoven scholarship, art, and story as integral parts of the inquiry process.

For the final two sections of this work, the analytical and synthetical (Pinar, 1975/2015a), I first analyze my narratives using Biesta's (2009; 2016; 2020) three contiguous domains of purpose for education: education as qualification, education as socialization, and education as subjectification. Later, I take a wider lens to critically discuss the social, cultural, and political implications of my analysis. Before all that, however, I will start by outlining some cautions and conditions, as well as a deeper outline

of the methods I have negotiated through pursuing self-study, hoping to provide some considerations and initial groundwork for my process.

Cautions & Conditions



Given the risks of narcissism and navel-gazing, and much larger risks of upholding oppressive structures, how then does one meaningfully engage in self-study and self-reflective practices?

Because of the autobiographical nature of this work, I am familiar with warnings against 'navel-gazing'. Taking part in and especially teaching self-reflective practices when exploring identity requires a great depth and breadth of understanding in order to avoid egotism (Brett, 2013; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Maton, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 2017). Pinar and colleagues (1995) describe perceptions of self-study in education as potentially less valid or thorough than other forms of research. They add that critics often view self-study as messy, overly romanticized, or even superficial. Therefore, brushing it off as superfluous no matter the consideration taken to avoid 'navel-gazing' (Brett, 2013; Allen-Collinson, 2013).

In teaching and learning, Macedo (1997) warns of a "middle-class narcissism" (p.4) that can occur in the sharing of experiences in education under the guise of Freirean liberation. For educators, this inaction towards criticality or larger cultural and political analysis leads to pedagogy embedded in false generosity (Freire, 2005; Macedo, 1997), whereby educators misappropriate and romanticize the mere activity of sharing of experiences as liberatory. Within this, they are able to situate themselves as liberators without risking their power or privileged positions (Macedo, 1997).

Continuing his warning, Macedo (1997) argues that when sharing personal narratives without further reflection, criticality, or resulting praxis towards social change, it is — *at best* — reduced to therapy. At worst, however, it undermines the development of identity, agency, and empowerment of an oppressed group by blocking the use of voice to assess and dismantle oppressive

structures (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Freire, 2005). This results in comfortable yet uncritical spaces for acknowledging and validating experiences, but little else. It is a lip service that evades culpability by avoiding the formation of larger critical dialogues that would develop into an empowering social praxis (Macedo, 1997).

In education, Macedo (1997) proposes a Freirean *anti-method pedagogy* as a problem-posing pedagogy to support critically reflective dialogues that deepen agency and empower social and political action. Within this, the pedagogical motives for sharing and reflecting on personal narratives exist beyond a reductionist view of pedagogy as mere teaching methods, classroom activities (See Note 2), or means of transferring knowledge (Giroux, 2020; Macedo; 1997). Rather, it is aimed toward developing a liberatory praxis that disrupts the status quo by "[rejecting] the mechanization of intellectualism" (Macedo, 1997, p.8) and developing transformative understandings of social and political contexts. For some education researchers, moreover, these practices go even further beyond research as container for inquiry, questioning, and critical dialogue. Rather, these practices extend into the real world (or classroom) through collaborative action research (Swadener et al., 2009).

NOTE 2:
Distinction: *Activity vs. Experience* in Curriculum Reconceptualization

In Grummet and Pinar's book *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1976/2015), Pinar (1976/2015c) makes the distinction between educational experience and educational activity in his reconceptualization of curriculum as *currere*. Typically, when discussing or categorizing educational experience, one is referring to learning experiences that arise from lessons, projects, tests, and readings that are assigned by the teacher. However, for Pinar these 'experiences' are merely educational activities. Educational experience within *currere* takes on a broader new meaning. Stretching beyond the classroom, *currere* redefines educational experience to include all of life's experiences, the encompassed and embodied lived experience, that is not limited to what is done in a classroom, but includes the thoughtful, sensory, and emotional.

Macedo's (1997) rejection, like post-structuralist research *(including a/r/tography and currere)*, seeks to dismantle how the world structures knowledge and power. Specifically, a/r/tography is a relational inquiry that centres on interdisciplinary processes and renderings over rigid parameters of method(ology) (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005). It centres on continuously participating in and inquiring about the world through writing and art-making in all its forms. Which *(in a strong post-structuralist tradition)* calls into question systems of knowledge and power that dictate what is valid in research or credible ways of knowing.

Sure, while Leggo (2008), a prominent late a/r/tographic scholar, would agree that autobiographical writing is egotistical and self-serving, he maintains that is essential for understanding ourselves in relation to others and our environment. Moreso, he maintains we cannot separate the personal from the professional (Leggo, 2008). We inescapably embed our personal lives in every other aspect of our lives (Leggo, 2008; Palmer, 2007). Therefore, Leggo (2008) and others (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Bochner, 2017) who point to

the potential of self-reflective work not only for the personal professional betterment of self *(and others, through published self-study)*. Moreover, they call for the leveraging of self-reflective work for developing rich contextual understandings of self in relation to larger social and cultural structures (see *Note 6*). In this, the autobiographical work becomes a work of meaningful transformation and connection. It is the personal made public (Bochner, 2017; Leggo, 2008) through ongoing praxis that is seeking to become aware of, resist, and disrupt how one is complicit in maintaining systems of oppression (Boler & Zembylas, 2005).

But how does this discussion on navel-gazing and self-reflective work connect to method(ologies)?

And what are method(ologies)?

Moving Toward Method(ologies)

Taking into consideration the cautions and conditions I have outlined for undertaking autobiographical work, alongside the flexible approach to research through a/r/tography's artistic inquiry (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005), I have included this section intending to illustrate the intersecting of the paths, methods, methodologies, and tools I will use in this work. While originally searching for a singular path for conducting educational research, I felt an overwhelming choice paralysis. Not only were there a wide variety of relevant qualitative methods available to choose from, but many of them felt interrelated. The more I learned of the methods and methodologies that fit under the qualitative research umbrella, the more I refined my thoughts and strategies for inquiry. Highlighting the interconnected methods and methodologies that impacted my work is the term *method(ologies)*— the combination of the terms methods and methodologies. I do this to frame the philosophical positions that are inextricably linked to the tools (or methods) that I use in my research (Bryman, 2008).

I do not want to entirely contradict Macedo's (1997) urgency for the adoption of an anti-method pedagogy. But I also resist siloing my research to one singular model or presentation by purposefully adopting congruent method(ologies) *(an intersection of methods and methodologies).* I found that the consideration of multiple overlapping and interconnected paths opened space for inquiry for me that isn't constrained by rules or templates, but rather concepts. My multiple paths allow me to construct research opportunities through both

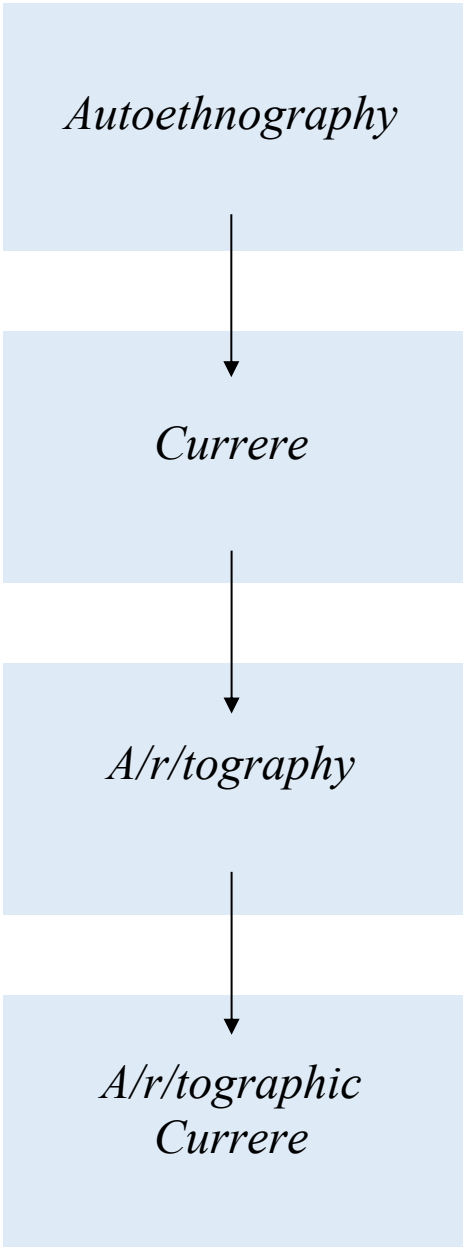
narrative and artistic media. Through these multiple modalities I can push boundaries of the traditional conceptualization of the thesis while remaining authentic and open to how I inquire into, navigate, and construct meaning in the world.

What has resulted is an interwoven method(ology) that was gradually charted throughout this thesis journey.

I started with *Autoethnography* (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Wall, 2008). The method(ology) foregrounded my initial attempt at leveraging narrative experience to contribute to critical pedagogical discussion through a collaboration with my peers (see Gerbrandt et al., 2021).

Wanting to continue reflective self-study for this thesis, I turned back to the autobiographical and phenomenological (Pinar et al., 1995) method of *Currere* (Pinar, 1975/2015a, 2015b); a method that was first introduced to me during my course work through an article by Kanu and Glor (2006). The pair positioned the method as a valuable tool for teachers to embark on a path towards Said's (1996, as cited in Kanu & Glor, 2006) concept of amateur intellectualism. Their discussion drew me to the method as a means for teachers *(including myself as a student)*, to generate a practice of continuously questioning, learning, and reflecting on my educational experiences and the world around me.

However, my engagement in these reflective practices resulted in tension between my artist and academic identities, or as Aoki (2005/1986; 2005/1987a; 2005/1993) would have had it, tension between my planned and lived curriculum. Aoki (1983) views spaces of tension as possibility and opportunity to make meaning and connect with the world in an exceptionally human way. Wanting to take into consideration the more existential and ontological consideration of the artists' relationship to living, creating, and being in the world (Martland, 1970) and the tensions that acomany it, I discovered *A/r/tography* (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019 Springgay et al., 2005). An



a/r/tography is a method(ology) that encapsulates aesthetic, multiple, relational, and rhizomatic (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2006; LeBlanc et al., 2015) ways of researching and being in the world considering intersecting identities in art, research, and teaching.

NOTE 3:
Can I call myself a teacher?

I contextualize my identity in my grad studies as an artist, *student*, researcher. Given the artist, teacher, researcher intersections of a/r/tography, I wonder, does this make me unqualified? Is it wrong to identify with the identity of an educator if I have yet to lead a course? I mean, sure; I have experience being a teaching assistant and mentor and do my best to share my knowledge and experiences with those who ask or listen but, I've never facilitated a classroom or held a lecture.

Who is a teacher? What is a teacher? How is a teacher? When is a teacher? Why is a teacher?

Something that put my mind at ease as I was wrestling between my place in the arts and education world was a distinction made by Irwin and colleagues (2008) for a/r/tography:

"Education in the context of a/r/tography is broadly conceived to mean any contexts concerned with learning, understanding, and interpretation. […] Artists are […] committed to acts of creation, transformation, and resistance. […] Educators engaged in a/r/tography need not be K-12 educators, nor educators within higher education, but they need to be committed to educational engagement that is rooted in learning and learning communities through ongoing living inquiry" (p.xxv)

All of which led me to this approach, which allows for what I loosely refer to as an *a/r/tographic currere*. An artful living inquiry (Springgay et al., 2005) into the self that expands in its critical analysis and discussion to broader contexts through the lens of artful inquiry on educational experience. In the following subsections, I will elaborate on each method(ology) that I have mentioned above alongside concepts and ideas I have picked up along the way. Concluding this section, I will illustrate how I have connected these strategies and thoughts and outline a roadmap of what will follow.

Autoethnographic Foundations

Autoethnography is a biographical form of inquiry that exists at the intersection of personal experience and its social and cultural context (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Wall, 2008). Holman Jones and colleagues (2013) distinguish autoethnography from more general autobiographical writing as a practice of social and cultural critique and discussion through the narration of personal experience. It is vulnerable. It is the personal made public to forge connections with others that resist distance as objectivity in research tradition (Bochner, 2017). When constructing an autoethnography, Ellis (1999) states that it "depends on where along the continuum of art and science you want to locate yourself" (p.673). This means that your intentions dictate the structure of your autoethnography. However, Holman Jones and colleagues (2013) note, no matter the form of your autoethnographic work, it must contribute to a wider scholarly conversation.

While Ellis (1999) encourages flexibility in autoethnographic work, she argues researchers must take special consideration surrounding their relationship with their research. In ethnographic research, for example, a researcher must have an awareness of their preconceptions and implicit biases and their potential influence on their judgments and analyses (Bochner, 2017). Therefore, for ethnographers and autoethnographers alike, we cannot remove the researcher from their research (Adams et al., 2017; Bochner, 2017; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Wall, 2008). Similar to Leggo (2008) who remarked on the inseparability of the personal and professional for a/r/tography this view of the researcher's relations to their work disrupts assumptions about researcher and research as neutral (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Further, it rejects the use of distance from research to signify a (virtuous) position of objectivity, intellectual rigour, or legitimacy (Adams et al., 2017; Aoki, 1991).

In an increasingly technocentric world, Dunn and Myers (2020) argue that autoethnographic work must also take into consideration the ubiquity of technology in everyday life. In a method they call digital autoethnography, the researcher examines social-relational experiences in both physical and virtual spaces, as well as encouraging modern autoethnographers to include the various media that are presented and interacted with as a part of the cultural context of that environment.

Further expanding on the nuances of autoethnography, Reed-Danahay (2017) emphasizes the use of a critically reflexive lens when examining the self in relation to oppressive systems. Known as critical autoethnography, the method seeks to spark critical dialogues toward social change (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Reed-Danahay, 2017). In critical autoethnographic work, the researcher shifts perspective to one that disrupts the dichotomy of self and other by taking into considerations the individual and social experiences of the researcher in broader social contexts. In education, this approach presents an opportunity to take a critical eye toward academic institutions as places of power toward exposing inequities and injustices that may otherwise be overlooked.

Combined, critical autoethnography (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Reed-Danahay, 2017) and digital autoethnography (Dunn & Myers, 2020) synthesize to become a critical/digital autoethnography that considers a critical perspective of the self in relation to the not only the physical world, but the conditions and qualities of our interwoven virtual world as well.

The Role of the Artist in A/r/tist: Two Considerations from T.R. Martland (1970)

As an artist, I am drawn to writings that consider the philosophical conditions or motivations of authors and artists creating and engaging with the world through their work. While more recent articles (see Dunn & Myers, 2020) have pushed me to consider the implications of my digitally created artistic and written work, I am always pleasantly surprised to feel connected to older works. Over a half-century ago, Martland (1970) presented two consecutive and connected theses regarding artists and their craft. His position on the existential condition of the artist, I feel, still holds true not only for me but for a lot of creators today.

Martland's (1970) first thesis argued that the artist's work is not a product, but a performative act of being *in* and *negotiating* the world. Within this, the role of the artist and their work is not to produce representations of existing phenomena, it is to provoke and evoke through active participation. It is to poke and prod at the usual to see it and make it new. In this, the artist breathes new life and meaning into the old, mundane, and taken for granted. Seen frequently in methods of play between artist and audience, the artist pushes (sometimes ever so slightly) against convention. As the artist pushes convention, meanings and understandings are unsettled and renegotiated.

NOTE 4:
Deep Desires for the New and Deep Disdain for Completion

"… altering something or taking something out, that's a way of starting new. But, not in a good way. It only leads to more trouble, More problems, more work. No, you want to start clear, with a clean canvas, and a bright new shining idea or vision or whatever you call the thing." (Cary, 1958, as cited Martland, 1970, p.174)

This resistance to the finite, to the close or the end, and fascination with the new. The possibilities of the art rest in its incompleteness for the artist, at the precipice of crescendo or pinnacle, or completion. It is the boundless wonder that accompanies a fear of the dark.

I feel this in my affinity for what I call *shiny objects*, and the temptation to burst into the new, the novel, the unknown, and leave before the product is complete, or at the least taxing dread completing it, or at the most taxing working on it in perpetuity at the brink of completion indefinitely.

Following his first thesis, Martland (1970) argued that within this performative art, reflects the existential *angst* of the artist. Because the artist works in finite spaces, conceiving, creating, and completing works, they exist in a space that calls attention to the finite condition of their existence (see *Note 4*). However, while the artists' angst is about death and endings, it's just as much about life and beginnings. The angst positions the artist's pursuit as restlessly searching and desiring the new. It's a condition that exchanges completeness for fascination with the ever evolving new, not yet, and uncharted. With performative art there is a feeling that once something is complete, it's already outdated because the recursive relationship between the artists and the world never stops growing.

Martland's (1970) conceptualization of art and the artist embodies, prior to their conceptions, many of the processes and renderings of a/r/tography. Although I will discuss a/r/tographic processes in depth in the following subsection, the recursive interplay between artist, art, and world shows creative practices and engagements in *excess, living inquiry, reverberations, and openings* (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). It is the shared condition of the a/r/tographer and the artist to exist passionately in the spaces between known and unknown. It is the wanting to challenge and push boundaries of the mundane, taken for granted, and structures of the status quo (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005). For myself, it feels like the itch in the back of my mind that pushes me to gather and understand rules and conventions in order to bend and break them (see *Note 6*).

Embodiment through A/r/tography

A/r/tography is an art-based research methodology and form of representing a recursive artful living inquiry that exists at the intersection of the artist, teacher (see *Note 3*), and researcher identities (or a/r/tist identities) (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019 Springgay et al., 2005). Rooted in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy of difference, a/r/tography draws from metaphorical conceptualizations of the rhizome (Gough, 2015; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg; 2019). The rhizome, which is a complex tangled root-like system with no inherent beginning or end, represents concepts of interconnectivity and multiplicity in a/r/tography (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). The metaphor of the rhizome and its lack of linearity disrupts perceptions of time and boundaries associated with linear logic (Irwin et al., 2006) in exchange for one that is more circular. Therefore, emphasising recursive flow, movement, and plurality in thinking (Gough, 2007; Stewart, 2007) over cut and dry answers or solutions.

Within its rhizomatic nature (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Irwin et al., 2006), a/r/tography can be a relational, embodied, and interwoven practice of knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) that seeks to disrupt binary and logical ways of thinking in favour of an in-between space that dances in and draws from the intersection of multiple ideas rather than resting in one idea or the other (Irwin, 2004; Schultz & Legg, 2019).

Although the perception that disruption is inherently negative or creates problems, in a Deleuzean and Guattarian sense, the problems that arise don't necessarily need decisive action. Roy (2003) further elaborates that "a true problem, according to Deleuze, is never fully solved, but persists despite solutions in the infinite play of desire, thereby retaining its problematicity" (p.3). Engaging

with problems in an experimental, recursive, and meditative ways can become paths to expanding the horizons of possibility from multiple perspectives. In a similar sense, through this lens we can celebrate difference as a path to grow and investigate tension and discomfort (Aoki, 2005/1986; Roy, 2003). In these spaces of discord, possibilities arise rhizomatically *(like knotted roots with seemingly no pattern)* towards a practice of theorizing educational experience and phenomena that is interdependent on an inquiry and analysis through both the arts (poetry, narrative, painting, photography, music, performance, etc.) and academic writing (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013).

In teaching and learning, a handful of scholars have applied the metaphor of the rhizome to their research through the metaphor's active form — *rhizoactivity* (Gough, 2007; 2009; Roy, 2003; Stewart, 2015). For instance, Stewart (2015) created the autobiographical method of *Rhizocurrere* for a rhizoactive approach to curriculum inquiry that aims to shift how we engage with pedagogical and curricular ideals. For Gough (2007; 2008), this meant the creation of 'narrative experiments' meant to promote rhizoactivity through play in writing to disrupt the way we think about science education. For Roy (2003), the application of rhizoactivity meant starting a conceptual shift in new teachers to perceive concepts of difference as constructive and full of possibilities. Through this work, he prompted new teachers to explore experiences and identity with conceptual tools that helped to loosen the grip of preconceived norms associated with their position as educators. Collectively, their research (Gough, 2007; 2008; Roy, 2003; Stewart, 2015) emphasize the importance of fluidity, flexibility, and openness when challenging the way we think and reflect about education systems and teaching and learning writ large.

In a/r/tography, the sharing of an a/r/tistic living inquiry through art and text is a practice of being open to engaging with multiple rhizomatic perspectives while resisting absolutisms (Irwin, 2004; Springgay et al., 2005). At the intersections between known and unknown, similarity and difference, self and other, cycles of meaning making, and (re)imagination, this form of rhizomatic inquiry can feel quite dizzying.

After all, a rhizome is literally a tangle of tubers growing in all directions with no sense of linearity, beginning or end (Irwin et al., 2006, Irwin, 2013; LeBlanc et al. 2015; Schultz et al., 2020).

Yet, in doing so, there is the possibility to forge new connections and "construct new knowledge, rather than merely propagate the old" (Alverman, 2000, p. 117, as cited by Irwin et al., 2006).

Similar to autoethnography (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Wall, 2008), a/r/tography is vocal in its challenging of the research tradition. However, it goes farther in its disruption by exchanging standardization and methodological constraints for a radical fluidity that allows inquiry to shift dynamically and grow across disciplines (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). As a result, there are no distinct parameters or methods for a/r/tographic research. Instead, a series of conceptual and connected processes known as *renderings* define a/r/tography (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005). These renderings include *contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess* (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005).

- *Contiguity* refers to the representation of relational qualities in a/r/tography that border and interact with one another. We see this in the relations between artist, teacher, and researcher identities and how they may overlap and blur (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). In the same sense, knowing (theoria), making (poesis), and doing (praxis) are also contiguous practices that open in-between spaces of inquiry. Linked to the metaphorical and metonymic quality of métissage, a/r/tography frequently makes use of hyphens, brackets, and slashes to represent the interactions between concepts in order to obscure meanings or disturb the rigidity of their dichotomy (Irwin, 2013). For me, contiguity is represented in the way I eb and flow through the realms of art and science *(attempting to challenge my siloing of them)*.

- *Living Inquiry* represents a process of continuous engagement in the world. It is an embodiment of perpetual and recursive interrogation and the creation of meaning (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). A/r/tographic living inquiry recognizes the transformative and agentic power of engaging with narrative experience, art, and scholarship. Within this, renderings of living inquiry represent a sharing, analysis, and reflection on understandings as they emerge through art and text. Living inquiry favours interrogation, interpretation, and the contextualizing of theoretical ideas over constructing an argument in scholarly work (Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

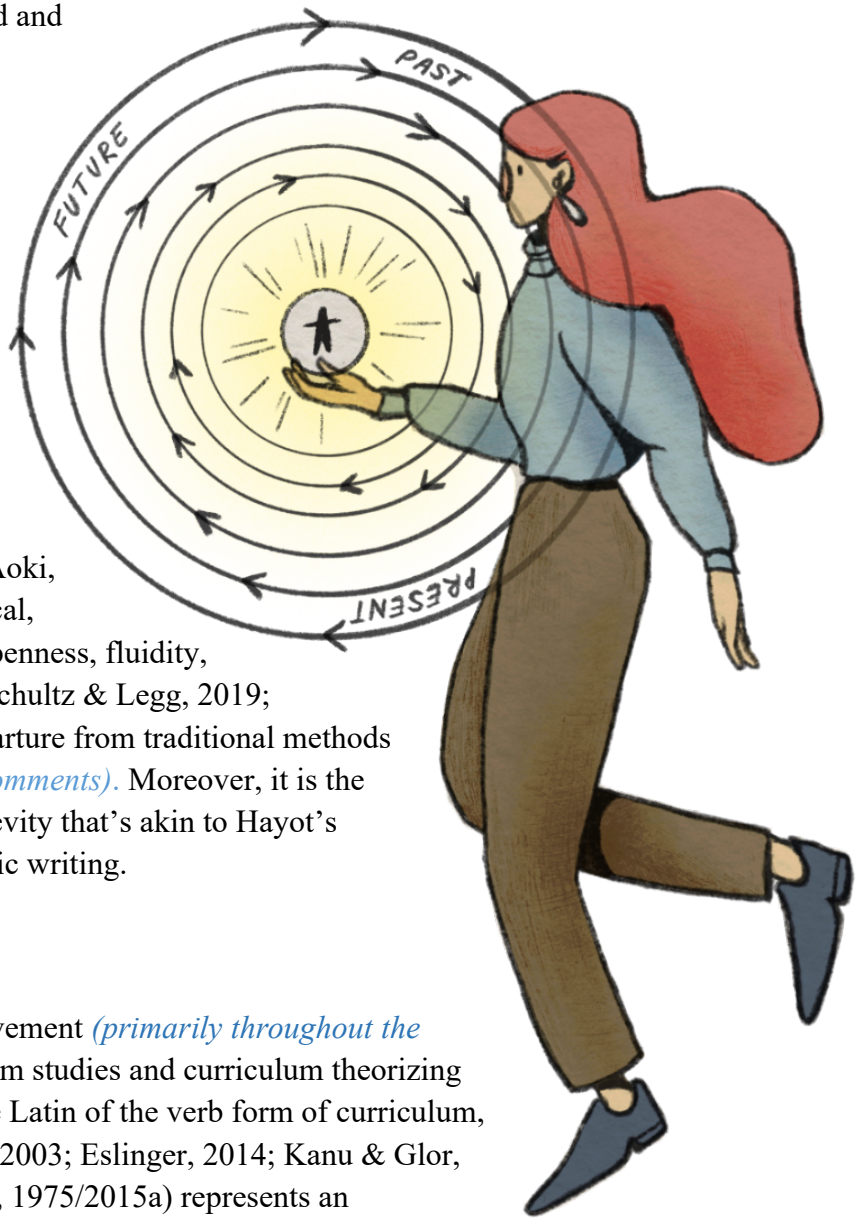
- *Metaphor/Metonymy* relates to the use of signifiers in the disruptions that arise during the meaning-making process (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). Metaphor represents a doubling of meaning through a substitution of signifiers (Springgay et al., 2005). Whereas metonymy represents the displacement of meaning between subjects and objects (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). As mentioned previously, when discussing *contiguity*, we can frequently see this through the use of forward slashes, dashed, and round brackets to disrupt or fragment word meanings (Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). For example, a/r/tography is the contiguous intersection of artist, teacher, researcher, be(com)ing the synthesis of being and becoming (Barnett, 2004), and method(ologies) highlights the philosophical embeddedness of the tools I am using to conduct my research. Using metaphor/metonymy exists in places of possibility and tension (Aoki, 2005/1986), reveal varying perceptions and connections while challenging the boundaries of taken-for-granted or established meanings (Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005).

- *Openings* refer to the 'in between,' or third spaces in that are formed a/r/tography that exist through sensory, evocative, and artistic ways of knowing that can transcend writing and language (Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). Schultz and Legg (2019) note that openings do not always bring clarity or understanding, rather, they represent places of rupture, discomfort, and unraveling. Openings are generative spaces that contradict, resist, and weave knowledge (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Springgay and colleagues (2005) compare openings to the metaphor of cuts or holes in fabric where inquiry becomes a space of "seeking understanding by continuing to un/ravel and to stitch back in response" (p.905). For me, the fabric in this metaphor represents what we know in all its functionality, wear and tear, and flexibility and the unraveling and mending of holes is our inquiry, meaning making, and change in perception. Openings are not problems to solve or obstacles to overcome, they are opportunities and invitations for conversation and exploration (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005).

- *Reverberations* refer to the varying movements in a/r/tography that dynamically echo, shift, and shake understandings (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). A/r/tographic reverberations in research are part of what makes it a *living inquiry* (Springgay et al., 2005). They represent the energy behind moments of discord and misalignment between knowledge and expression, forming the movements in the meaning-making process that tear *openings*. Generating a restless momentum that pushes recursive movements forward (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). For me this is seen in scholarly, written, and visual themes that are touched on recursively through this work. They

are *reverberating* through this work as they have reverberated and impacted how I perceive my experiences and the world.

- *Excess* refers to a meaning-making process that rejects the traditional institutional and formal demands of what makes 'acceptable' research (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). It is a manifestation of the chaos and lawlessness in the research process (Schultz & Legg, 2019). When represented in a/r/tographical research, *excess* becomes subversive towards hierarchies of knowledge and legitimacy. Excess represents a visceral and intellectual wrestling with a (de/re)construction of spaces of complexity, possibility and tension that is further disruptive through its challenging of traditional modes of scholarship (Aoki, 1991; 2005/1987a). It calls into question the phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological tradition, in exchange for openness, fluidity, be(com)ing, and transformation (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005). For me this is represented in my departure from traditional methods and formatting and tangential tendency to write notes *(and comments)*. Moreover, it is the moments when I get lost in obscurity, complexity, or lack brevity that's akin to Hayot's (2014) exploration of the manifestation of passion in academic writing.



Structure through Currere

Currere originated during the curriculum reconceptualist movement *(primarily throughout the 1970s and 80s)*. Namely, currere, pushed the boundaries of curriculum studies and curriculum theorizing (Adams & Buffington-Adams, 2020). The term *Currere* signifies the Latin of the verb form of curriculum, meaning to run the course, or life and lived experience (Egan, 1978; 2003; Eslinger, 2014; Kanu & Glor, 2006; Pinar, 1975/2015a; Smith, 2013). As a method, *currere* (Pinar, 1975/2015a) represents an

NOTE 5:
Pinar (2004) on Curriculum Studies and *Currere*: A Call to Action in Three Quotes

Calls in the curriculum reconceptualist movement like these below from Pinar (2004) beckon *(to me)* to resist and transform the pressure to codify the education system as "factory" or "business" by asking why things are the way they are in order to disrupt and complicate them. Cited from Pinar's (2004) book *What is Curriculum Theory?* I highlight three quotes (two from the beginning of the book and one from the end) to highlight ideas that have deeply affected how I view education and curriculum.

"Within our profession, we must repudiate those professional organizations and those legislative actions by government […] destroy the very possibility of education by misconstruing it as a "business." While we struggle as intellectuals reconstructing the private and public spheres of curriculum and teaching in schools, we must, especially among ourselves, keep hope alive. We can recapture the curriculum, someday. Without reclaiming our academic—intellectual freedom—we cannot teach. Without intellectual freedom, education ends; students are indoctrinated, forced to learn what the test-makers declare to be important." (p.10)

"The hegemony of visuality accompanies the ahistorical presentism and political passivity of the American culture of narcissism. Without the lived sense of temporality the method of currere encourages, we are consigned to the social surface, and what we see is what we get. When we listen to the past we become attuned to the future. Then we can understand the present, which we can reconstruct. Subjective and social reconstruction is our professional obligation as educators in this nightmarish moment of anti-intellectualism and political subjugation. Alone and together, let us participate in complicated conversation with ourselves and with colleagues worldwide. Let us construct an increasingly sophisticated and auditory field of education, one worthy of those schoolteachers and students who, each day, nearly everywhere on the globe, labor to understand themselves and the world they inhabit. May our "complicated conversation" complicate theirs—and yours." (pp.257-258)

"Such a "complicated conversation" illustrates a curriculum in which academic knowledge, subjectivity, and society are inextricably linked. It is this link, this promise of education for our private-and-public lives as Americans, which curriculum theory elaborates. If we persist in our cause […] schools will no longer be knowledge-and-skill factories, not academic businesses but schools: sites of education for creativity, erudition, and interdisciplinary intellectuality. Someday—if we remember the past, study the future, analyze, then mobilize in, the present—education will permit the progressive pursuit of "new modes of life, eroticism, and social relations." For you, let this someday begin today." (p.11)

autobiographical form of reflection where the person engaging in *currere* performs an inquiry into their lived experiences within institutional structures, both inside and beyond classroom walls (Baszile, 2015; Grumet, 1976/2015a; Grumet 1976/2015b; Kanu & Glor, 2006; Pinar 1975/2015a, Pinar et al., 1995). It is the consideration of lived experience as curricula. *Currere* is a method of searching amongst the complex interrelations between lived experience, schooling, knowledge, and meaning making (Baszile, 2015; Grumet, 2015b; Pinar, 2004). Most importantly *currere* is "what the individual does with the curriculum, his active reconstruction of his passage through its social, intellectual, physical structures." (Grumet, 1967, as cited by Pinar, 2004, p.58).

Functionally, the method of *currere* was intended to be adopted as a recursive and ongoing practice (Kanu & Glor, 2006; Pinar, 1975/2015a). It takes narrative experiences as data so that participants may hold their lives, their lived curriculum, at arm's length in order to explore and see their lives from new perspectives (Pinar et al., 1995). Like a/r/tographic in-between spaces (Springgay et al., 2005), *currere* positions this 'arm's length'

space as a place of both tension and action between the known and not yet known (Pinar, 1975/2015a). And, like Ellis' (1999) positioning of the researcher autoethnography, Pinar (1975/2015a) situates *currere* as being in the realms of both art and science. Pinar argues that besides a strict phenomenological approach to reporting events, researchers must also take an artistic approach as to not lose the sensory and emotional aspects of their experience. Employing *currere* is a complex process of seeking momentum toward *(self)* and *(curriculum)* transformation. This process is accomplished through the narrating, analyzing, and unpacking of personal educational experiences across time, and then the contextualizing of educational experiences in their larger social, political, and cultural contexts.

Structurally, the method of *currere* comprises four parts (Pinar, 1975/2015a): *Regressive, Progressive, Analytical, and Synthetical.*

i. The regressive portion of *currere* focuses on a narrative telling of the past as an observer, not as an interpreter. The aim of this portion is to capture snapshots of the past until you *(I)* arrive at the present, taking special consideration of not only major events but wandering thoughts, feelings, sensations, and minor details (Pinar, 1975/2015a);
ii. The progressive portion takes multiple recursive looks at the future. Whether toward professional or scholarly pursuits, you *(I am)* are meant to chart your *(my)* desires and interests with free association and imagination (Pinar, 1975/2015a);
iii. The analytical portion of *currere* describes and analyzes the present as it is and as the past and future have influenced it. It is a response to the snapshots taken during the regressive and progressive portions. As well as a section to step back from your *(my)* past and future to view their underlying themes and connections to your *(my)* present in a new light or through a different lens (Pinar, 1975/2015a);
iv. The synthetical portion brings all parts together to find larger meanings and shorten the distance between your *(my)* internal and external self. It is a synthesis and critical discussion of the present *in the present*, how your *(my)* environment and educational experiences have shaped your understandings, and a culmination of what you have learned (Pinar, 1975/2015a).

...So how does this all fit together?

The Metaphor of the Atlas: A Road Map

While reading *Atlas of AI* (Crawford, 2021), I had a moment. Crawford's use of an atlas metaphor to convey the expansive and interconnected impacta of AI articulated something that has been at the tip of my tongue for a long time.

Earlier in my introduction, I told you I would present this work as a series of *fragments*. This stemmed originally from an effort to illustrate the way my thoughts circled and sprawled to make connection— a momentum that I liken to the sporadic non-linear sprawl of rhizoactivity (Gough, 2007; 2008; Roy, 2003; Stewart, 2015).

The rhizomatic metaphor helps us to visualize inquiry as tangles of tubers growing in all directions (Irwin et al., 2006, Irwin, 2013; LeBlanc et al. 2015; Schultz et al., 2020). Yet, through this work of inquiry, I have also grown to consider the inquiry process much more cartographically. On a map, roads, rivers, and land overlap and intersect each other. There is no universal beginning or ending. Rather, it is relative to the paths we navigate. It is as if I am imposing a scientific structure, a chartable, digestible order, to the tangled, overlapping *(sometimes overwhelming),* quality of the rhizome. I am breaking my thoughts and experiences into fragments to be arranged and rearranged again.

Crawford (2021) describes an atlas, an assemblage of parts at different scopes and levels of detail that, much like autoethnography (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017), a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008), and *currere* (Eslinger, 2014; Kanu & Glor, 2006; Pinar, 1975/2015a; Smith, 2013), straddle the lines between art and science. Straddling the lines means to inform *(science)*, find different paths *(science and art)*, and see things in a new creative light *(art)* (Crawford, 2021).

There is a circle of shared influence between Atlas of AI, a/r/tography, and rhizocurrere. Georges Didi-Huberman, a prolific French scholar, was one of many who inspired the use of the atlas for Crawford (2021). Likewise, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari *(—rhizomes!)* inspired Didi-Huberman (De Cauwer & Smith, 2018). Who, in turn, influenced the work of Irwin and colleague's a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005), and methodological mashups like Stewart's (2015) *Rhizocurrere*, which adapts Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical work and Pinar's (1975/2015a) method of *currere* to reimagine how we view relationships in curriculum inquiry. *(It all links together!)*

Didi-Huberman (2011, as cited by De Cauwer & Smith, 2018) made use of the atlas metaphor to illustrate the perpetual motion of connections found in tangential and fragmented ideas (De Cauwer & Smith, 2018); something Didi-Huberman referred to as a constantly evolving "knowledge-in-motion" (p.5). In this way, the atlas becomes a space for juxtaposition. It requires both observation and imagination. *(Empiricism and emotion).* Much like the process of contiguity and openings in a/r/tography (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005), image and text in the atlas serve as contextual anchors for exploration (De Cauwer & Smith, 2018). And, as it is with Martland's (1970) existential condition of the artist, that exploration fuels our passion and curiosity for even more exploration. It is not about revealing universal truths, results, or conclusions like those found in traditional research paradigms (Winter, 2009). Rather, it is a sparking of recursive movement, like that of *currere* (Pinar, 1975/2015a), where we generate momentum through capturing and (re)arranging images and artifacts of our world so that we may see them more clearly (De Cauwer & Smith, 2018).

Using these ideas, I map out the path we will take:

Following the intended structure of currere (Pinar, 1975/2015a), the body of this thesis has four parts: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and synthetical. Much like the atlas (Crawford, 2021; De Cauwer & Smith, 2018), each part will contain a series of juxtaposed visual and textu(r)al fragments. These fragments are not necessarily directly linked, nor do they follow an exact chronology. However, they represent a process of actively negotiating understanding a knowing-in-motion (De Cauwer & Smith, 2018) through drawing and writing.

1.

In the first regressive portion, I take a fluid approach to presenting experiences during my graduate studies, weaving in relevant literature. I allow myself to get sidetracked and allow my wandering thoughts to dictate each fragment's direction and location.

2.

In the second progressive portion, I allow my anxieties, angst (Martland, 1970), and imagination to run as I negotiate and form fragmented images of my future. Here, I attempt to let ideas flow freely while allowing for trips and hang-ups to remain transparent.

3.

In the third analytical portion, I look at the present. I discuss both my narrative experiences and future imaginings through the lens of Biesta's (2009; 2016; 2020) three domains of education: education as *qualification*, *socialization*, and *subjectification*. This branching analysis represents an opportunity to gather all the renderings thus far to view them through three separate but overlapping lenses, making space for themes to emerge.

4.

In the final synthetical portion, I will take a step back to bring my past, present, and future fragments into the same frame. Using wider more critical lens, I take my narratives and analysis attempt to extract larger their context through themes of power, identity, and agency. I look at how living and learning in a knowledge economy is shaping education today and how we may resist certain aspects of it.

Part 1: The Regressive

Regressive Fragment #1: Applying to Grad School

One requirement for the application process for my Master of Education program (before I transferred to the Master of Arts in Education program) was to write a statement of purpose. Sent into a reflective spiral, I began a deep dive into the reasons I *deserved* to enrol — *or* ***did I deserve to enrol?*** I was sure at the time that I considered myself a devoted, lifelong learner. I knew I had an interest in teaching post-secondary visual arts, but I also knew that my *(somewhat meta)* curiosity and tension (Aoki, 2005;1986) surrounding education and schooling expanded far beyond meeting a qualification to get a job. After all, if I was only driven to gain a master's degree so I could teach art at the post-secondary level, I could have easily applied to a Master of Fine Arts, or any other number of visual arts graduate degree programs offered in my area. And, I had a vague idea of all the structures *(though I have been proven wrong before)* and requirements of an academic visual arts degree —the evaluation format, studio setting critiques— *and* I had the portfolio for it.

Did I deserve to enrol? Over the course of my undergraduate degree, I had undertaken projects that related to the field of education. I've illustrated books in response to changes in Ontario's sexual education curriculum (Ontario Ministry

of Education and Training, 1998). I've worked to construct instructional handbooks for various software ranging from pixel art to video game design, and I've studied specimens in the archives of the Royal Ontario Museum to create ornithological illustrations and infographics. Even though with each new education project I adored the opportunity to pivot into new concepts and areas of study in order to learn and share my understandings visually for my application I suddenly doubted the strength or relevance of ***my*** education endeavours. Were they even education? I Had an internal fight to prevent myself from labeling these projects as superficial and inadequate. Were my illustrations and book an inadequate attempt at education? Was I being superficial and self-indulgent?

Upon further reflection, however, I saw glimpses through my doubts. There had to be something bigger behind my experiences. My love and excitement for learning and the sharing of that learning had to mean something in the realm of education. As I wrote, I haphazardly attempted to link my artistic practices to the educational experiences that helped shape me as an individual. I remember landing on and attempting to articulate two integral points:

1. Through my career and formal training in Illustration, I have developed a *visual language* to understand and synthesize information, ideas, and feelings. My artistic work ***fuels*** my sense of *wonder* because it creates an avenue for me to engage *visually* with my curiosities and work collaboratively with the passions and interests of others. It is a practice that is in constant development and ***always*** has room for growth.
2. *Although I did not always have a great relationship with schooling*, a handful of educators (most of whom were art teachers) played pivotal roles throughout my life in the development of my *creativity*, sense of *agency* behind my work, and *love of learning.* They were the people who generously mentored and nurtured my ambitions by bending *(and sometimes brea/king)* the rules and boundaries of the school and classroom, supporting my journey through ***successes*** and ***failures***. Moreso, I knew *I wanted to be that person for others.*

Supporting these two points, what I came to realize was an underlying belief that creative and artistic work strengthened the connection between myself and my subject and therefore somehow solidified a drive to learn, a drive to pursue more of those meaningful connections. With no formal educational language or knowledge of pedagogical theory, all I knew was that I, to put it bluntly, wanted to learn about learning. There was a part of me that desperately wanted to learn about what drives curiosity, passion, and wonder.

What were the pedagogies, or strategies, or mentalities of the educators that enabled me to feel moments of freedom and excitement during my schooling?

I raced to scour the internet looking for *something* in educational research that I could connect to how I was feeling, but my understanding of academic language and lack of access to research databases put up hurdles. As I dove deeper into my rabbit hole, I explored incredible ideas for teaching and learning through play, video games, and artmaking, but nothing stood out as ***the*** answer. I could feel the unscratched itch of much larger existential uncertainties looming.

Regressive Fragment #1.1: Anxious Progressive Imaginings

Months after applying, having not heard a word from the university, I accepted that this degree, as if some form of fate or destiny, wasn't for me. I was happy to be a cook for the time being. I was good at it, and I could build my freelance illustration career on the side. However, through an uncanny twist, I checked my email on my lunch break one calm summer afternoon to read:

"Hello Katelin,

Your conditional offer of admission for our Fall intake to the MEDUC program has expired.
Please visit the admission portal to accept/decline your offer of admission by Friday, July 5th If you do not respond or do not accept/decline, your offer of admission will be rescinded…"

"My *WHAT?!*"

I shouted, sitting out back at the restaurant.

I scrambled in disbelief, trying to log in to the student portal and accept my offer while screaming in excitement and panic at my coworkers.

My thoughts and energy were rapidly pivoting into what I imagined my transition from in-person undergraduate to online graduate studies to be. My imagination *(or maybe anxiety)* was spiralling. On the calmer and more practical side, the thought of exchanging a long morning commute to be a cook for a quick trip to my computer to be a student sounded very appealing. I wasn't too concerned with the possible technological learning curve I might experience. My exposure and experiences adapting to various tech brands and their software and equipment during my undergraduate years left me with a sense of confidence that I could overcome any technological issues I encountered *(maybe a bit too confident in hindsight)*. However, on the less calm side, I felt exhilarated to have narrowly sidestepped rejection but so incredibly anxious at the thought of what was to come. To transition from immersive communal studio spaces to an exclusively online space, I feared that the environment I would enter would be impersonal or distant. I mean, how was I supposed to make friends? *(Do people even make friends in grad school?)*

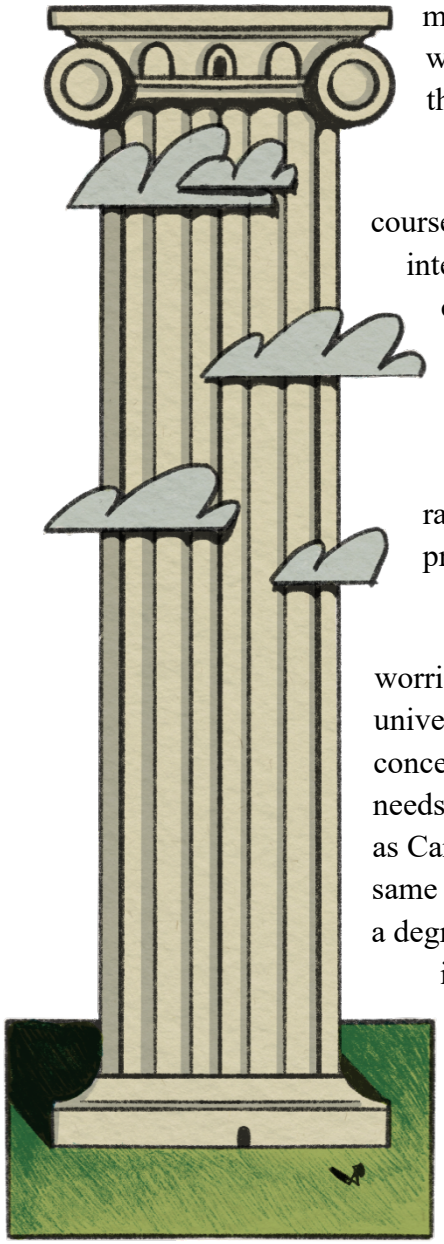
Prior to enrolling in master's studies, my only engagement with any form of online learning had been through asynchronous courses. These courses felt dreary and cumbersome. Delivered weekly in digital packets, course content populated my browser window in bland grey lines that expanded into bland grey boxes for each week's module. Every week: A fifty-slide power point marked with the week number, a .PDF article to read, and A link to a discussion board with three generalized questions. To the right, tiny calendar ticks slated the module due dates. Each tick representing a short task that you completed in either total solitude or with minimal interaction with a friend *(if you were lucky enough to enrol in the class with a friend)*. Even though the required discussion forum postings in my online courses technically counted as a social class activity, they felt empty, faceless, and emotionless. Any *supposed* discussion that was *supposed* to happen in these forums felt much more like reading summaries of course

1.1.1.1 NOTE 6:

Learning the Rules to Break Them: A half thought

They taught me as an artist to learn the rules so that you can break them. In the arts, this occurs through initially building a strong foundational understanding of technique and design. **You** break and bend the rules strategically and sometimes brazenly to communicate ideas, make statements, or carve out a space for **yourself** outside of the norm as you experiment and develop **your** style. **You** learn to push boundaries, forge new ways of creating, seeing and engaging in the world that helps to create meaning and connect with **others**. In this sense, perhaps this way of thinking has slowly become to seep into other aspects of **my** life. So why not then learn the rules in academia and scholarship to challenge them?

I can't help but sense an air of secrecy and mysterious ascendancy underlying the academe. Shrouding this aura are intricate and seemingly endless lines of bureaucratic red tape, financial barriers, with research traditions that gatekeep knowledge and legitimacy, and more (Adams et al., 2017; Aoki, 1991). As it is in life, you must play the game and follow the rules in order to win… oh, and be able to afford it, too… if you're privileged enough to pay to play.



material than any sort of engaging meaningful discussion of ideas. Even the dull and monotonous way course materials were presented made it feel like I didn't even have a teacher. The more I thought about these socially sterile courses, the more fearful I became.

Zembylas (2008) points to the risk of feeling distant in virtual learning environments due to the course design that lacks opportunity for social interactions. When there is little opportunity for social interaction, students can potentially feel a compromised sense of connection to their (learning) community. As a result, students will not receive needed support to mediate feelings of fear, stress, and isolation they may feel in the online learning environment (Henritius et al., 2018; Phirangee & Malec, 2017; Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas et al., 2008).

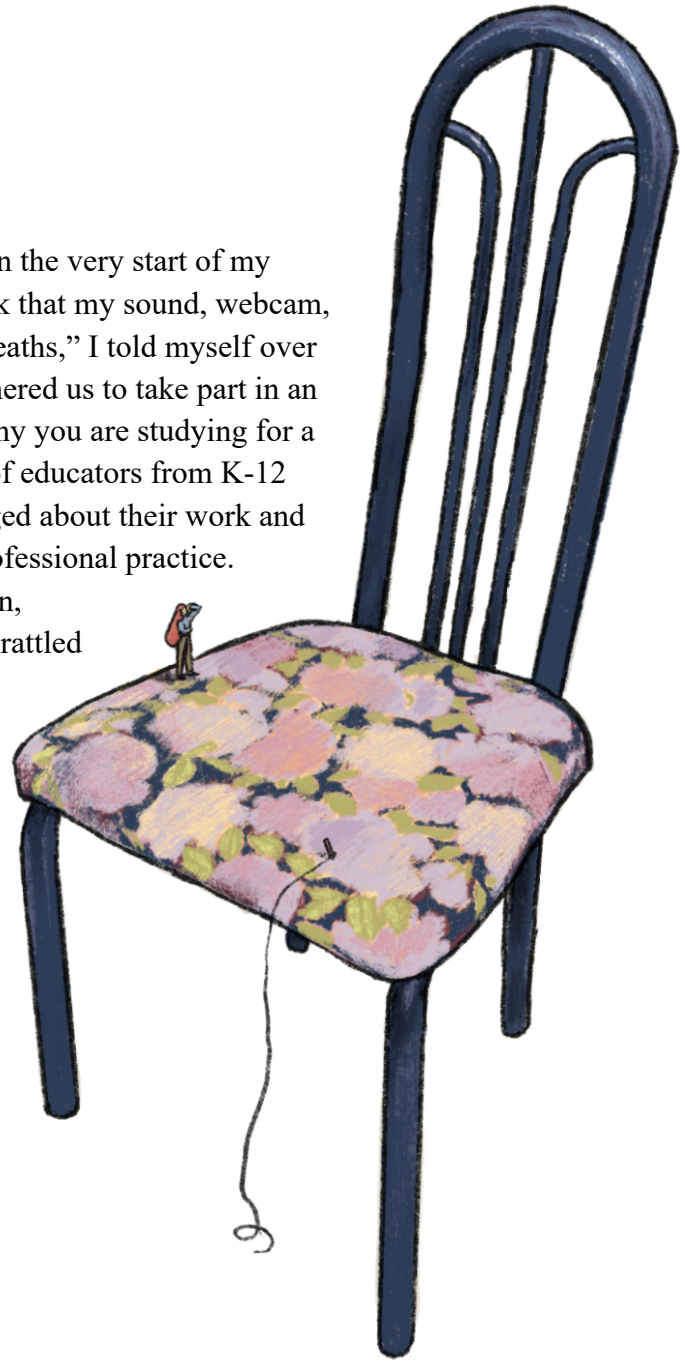
Yes, the social distance in my previous online courses was exceptionally disengaging for me. My rather bleak experiences with asynchronous online learning became my frame of reference as I prepared myself for the upcoming fall semester.

Alongside my fears and trepidations surrounding the "social state" of my future online studies, I worried tirelessly about the cultural shift I would have to make in transitioning from a college to a university climate. My undergraduate program was housed in an Ontario college. Traditional Canadian conceptions of the college were vocational and purpose built to meet the economic, labour, and industry needs of their locale (Dennison, 2006; Hogan & Trotter, 2013). They were not held to the same standards as Canadian universities, nor did they have the same academic freedom, therefore they did not hold the same credibility (Flemming & Lee, 2009). I attended what could be considered "hybrid" college, as it is a degree granting college and although the lines between universities and colleges have blurred with the introduction of university colleges, my colleges' identity felt more centered on vocation over presenting as or mimicking the intellectual rigor (or academic prestige) as its university counter parts. *(That is, at least from what I could gather in the visual arts wing).*

Not only did the historic distinction between Canadian universities as places of scholarship and colleges as places of vocation (Dennison, 2006; Hogan & Trotter, 2013) fuel the overall intimidating air of prestige I gathered for universities, I had grown incredibly comfortable and

confident in my undergraduate program. And I loved the resulting artist life I was building because of it. The idea of starting anew without knowing what to expect was, *as expected*, angst-inducing. Combined perceptions of the serious monolithic ivory tower and bland, heartless online courses filled me with a type of academic homesickness. I worried that the university graduate studies world that I was about to enter wouldn't embrace the same spirit of relaxed and supportive community, creative freedom, risk-taking, and enthusiastic inquiry that I became so accustomed to in my college-level visual arts setting. I worried that I would be seen as unqualified, undeserving, or under-intellectual.

Regressive Fragment #2: A Journey Begins?



Within a few short months September had arrived, and I was embarking on the very start of my graduate journey. Nestled snugly at my dining room table, I clicked to triple check that my sound, webcam, and microphone were in working order and entered the classroom. "Take deep breaths," I told myself over and over. As each class began, the professors would welcome us warmly and gathered us to take part in an icebreaker. Each time: name, occupation, number of courses you've taken, and why you are studying for a master's degree in education. Slowly but surely and in sequence, a diverse body of educators from K-12 teachers, to administrators, and college instructors confidently and proudly divulged about their work and schools, their concrete career advancement goals, and their desire to better the professional practice. Among the groups of educators were people who affiliated with military education, medical education, and other specialized post-secondary fields. Many people just rattled off acronyms for their teaching and accreditations.

OCT, *GF-something*, Maybe *LQ*? I don't know…acronyms… references and just overall language use went straight over my head. New words and terms were whizzing by faster than I could google them. I felt intimidated. Watching myself in my webcam, I could see myself shrink. I could never hold a candle to these people. *They were education people, and who was I?* Being so overwhelmed, all I could muster was a mumble each time my turn came around. As quickly as possible, I would say something to the effect of:

"Hi my name is Katelin, I'm a freelance illustrator, this is my first semester, I'm taking three courses, and I… I want to learn about learning?"

And without fail, there were always a few students who stared back at me with confused looks. Or at least it felt that way, it was difficult to see everyone clearly through the screen. Something made my statement awkward whether it was what I said, the way I said it, or my nerves. My statement was technically true. I was not a teacher. It was my first semester. I was taking three courses. I wanted to "learn about learning." Yet somehow — much like my attempt at a statement of purpose — my answer never felt like the *right* answer. Class after class, my nerves and awkwardness remained. I was projecting my own insecurities about my past and my role as an artist onto my peers and the courses I was taking. I was fuelling my rapid decline into impostor (Hawley, 2019) syndrome.

Paralyzed is a word I became quite familiar with when attempting to explain to my friends and family *(outside of the confines of digital classroom spaces)* about my experiences in graduate school. Not knowing how to act in or react to my new surroundings, I developed an *(uncharacteristic)* shyness. My shyness led to me recoiling away from engagement with all of my online peers. In my classes I was surrounded by dozens of strangers who spoke so eloquently and professionally about their ideas and studies and work as educators. I felt as though I had nothing of note to contribute. After all, I was just an art kid. I was not an academic nor was I a teacher. I barely understood what anyone was talking about and, worse, I was too afraid to let anyone know. I didn't want anyone to expose me for being so far behind. So, I began spending my nights desperately trying to catch up in secret.

When I finally spoke or contributed in class, I found it extremely difficult to assess how my discussion contributions and myself as an individual were being received. The constraints of the online classroom were, as forewarned (Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas et al., 2008), distant, isolating, and disengaging. In an online room with over a dozen people, I found that screens, tech, and internet connectivity issues distorted microphones and webcam videos — if we even turned them on at all. In the studio spaces of my undergraduate program at least I could read the room for expression and body language. But through the screen, expression and body

language became lost in tiny, pixelated containers. I was extremely vulnerable and felt fraudulent with each contribution in the online classroom.

How are you supposed to read the room if there is no room?

Who do I have to become to fit in and do well here?

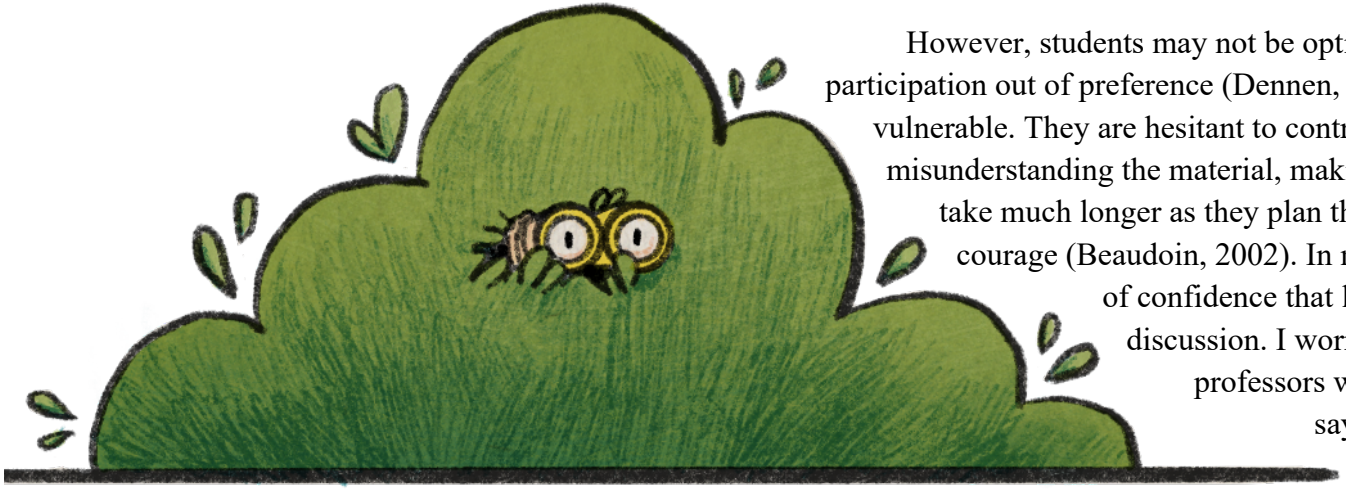
Besides my woes over the technical side of the classroom space, I felt a great sense of loss and isolation from the structure of assessment. Not that I disliked writing and working in groups, or was I opposed to the grading schema, but I missed the structure of recursive critique and revision during my undergraduate degree. I was not used to learning or working in this type of space. The space felt alien to me. I felt I had transitioned from a model of growth through assessment to a model of assessment that was closed and individual, exchanged only between myself and whatever was written in response by a professor. I went from working in public studio spaces that afforded repeated formal and informal opportunities for feedback, with periods of editing and development before submission, to a private linear model that prized working and submitting assignments in the dark before any form of a check in or assessment. In my visual arts coursework, we existed in spaces of cyclical constructive critique. Rarely was there ever a project that wasn't discussed and reworked through multiple iterations with instructors (and other students) before final submission. My peers and I would readily seek and give feedback on each other's work without hesitation or reservation. The culture of making an error or misstep was no big deal in this environment. If anything, it was a chance to better your practice and polish your pieces.

Being new to graduate studies, and at the time unable to find a single person I would even be comfortable showing my work to, I felt like I didn't have any option other than to submit my work in isolation. This prompted an undulating, deep-seated, paralyzing worry about failure that spiralled around deadlines like a vortex. And when I got feedback, I did not always know how to implement that feedback constructively across a diverse body of activities and assignments. At that point even the thought of sharing my work had so quickly devolved into an exceptionally vulnerable experience. My once eager to share and receive feedback approach became deeply private, directly countering my previous relationship with assessment, further severing my artist identity from my academic one.

Regressive Fragment #2.1: Lurking

Increasing feelings of exposure and vulnerability led to a notable absence in my online discussion participation in both synchronous and asynchronous online assignments. My self-imposed absence kept my feelings of inadequacy and isolation snowballing. I regularly thought to myself that I wasn't good enough or didn't know enough to engage meaningfully with my peers' thoughts and ideas. However, while I wasn't directly engaging with the content posted or actively joining discussions about course material, I was doing my best to absorb as much of their discussion as possible. I was in a constant whirlwind of writing pages upon pages of notes, knee-deep in class wiki tabs, documenting and expanding my understanding through the understandings and experiences of my peers. I was performing a practice Dennen (2008) refers to as peripheral participation.

Peripheral Participation, also known as *pedagogical lurking* (Dennen, 2008) can represent an auto-didactic form of learning. Dennen drew parallels between lurkers and the quiet or disinterested students in class, suggesting that the lurker remains silent but diligently observant to meet their pedagogical needs through internal dialogues rather than external dialogues. Beaudoin (2002) suggests that such lurking practices may show a more autonomous reflective learner that is less dependent on validating interactions with others. However, many instructors dislike the practice of lurking because it generates less material to assess for grading and positions the student as a *freeloader* who benefits from the contributions of others without contributing themselves (Dennen, 2008).



However, students may not be opting into peripheral participation out of preference (Dennen, 2008). Rather, students feel vulnerable. They are hesitant to contribute out of fear of misunderstanding the material, making the discussion process take much longer as they plan their responses and build their courage (Beaudoin, 2002). In my experience, it was my lack of confidence that led me to shy away from class discussion. I worried that I, my peers, and professors would look down on me for saying the wrong thing.

Regressive Fragment #2.2: Reflection, Connection, & Vulnerability

During my pedagogical lurkings (Beaudoin, 2002; Dennen, 2008), I gradually started picking up on a new language and its mannerisms. In learning about reflection and taking part in many reflective activities (see Note 7), although my attempts were admittedly superficial, I still tried to unpack specific thoughts and feelings surrounding my professional and academic practices. At first, I focused on attempting to insert myself into models of reflection. For example, Schon's model of reflection (Davies, 2012; Schon, 1992) which spoke of a reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, felt easy to connect and apply to my creative process as an artist.

Reflection-on-action, which is the process of reflection after an experience (Davies, 2012; Schon, 1992), felt like a breeze. As an artist, I was constantly reflecting on and growing from feedback and earlier work. I used to gather all my illustrations, sketches, and ideas monthly to eke out the ways I wanted to improve and the ideas I wanted to explore. Yet, academically, I felt this process to be much more difficult. I didn't entirely know how to apply feedback, and I certainly felt overwhelmed when I tried.

As for reflection-in-action (Davies, 2012; Schon, 1992) in my studies, I felt even more lost. The process, which I interpreted as using knowledge from your experiences to think and act on your feet and effectively troubleshoot, felt impossible. While I was getting good at googling things at breakneck speeds, I could barely muster a few words when asked a question in class, let alone think snappy enough to problem solve or hold an argument.

1.1.1.2 NOTE 7:

Larrivee (2000) on the Process of Critical Reflection

In her article, Larrivee (2000) advocates for a *critical reflection* of the many layers of internal lenses and belief systems that frame and impact how we process, react to, and make meaning of daily life.

She explains we mediate and interpret our present through internal filters (Larrivee, 2000). These filters form from our experience, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, feelings, mood, personal agendas, and aspirations (fig. 1, p.300). Not only do they affect how we act and respond to situations at any moment, but over time, they influence our core philosophies, practices, and decision-making strategies. Yet, despite their influence, many of these filters remain unquestioned.

Larrivee (2000) argues we need to be evaluating our filters so we can gain a better understanding of how our internal framework influences our external actions and responses. Some of our behaviours may be contrary to our core beliefs, and some elements in our filters or beliefs may impede better behaviour and decision making. The purpose of this evaluation, while potentially uncomfortable, opens spaces to shift our perspectives *and* better our actions.

To accomplish this, Larrivee (2000) proposes a three-stage cyclical model for critical reflection: examination, struggle and discomfort, and perceptual shift. This model accounts for stages of questioning and challenging, but positions periods of disruption and even fear as essential before shifts and changes occur.

A quote I adore from her reads, "[b]ecoming a reflective practitioner means perpetually growing and expanding, opening up to a greater range of possible choices and responses" (Larrivee, 2000, p.301). But it is in cracks and fissures of discomfort where newer, better things emerge.

However, as an artist, the troubleshooting mentality fit well within my creative process. While drawing, I could think on my toes, pivot when needed, make informed decisions, and problem solve in a way that felt natural.

So, why did it not feel natural in university?

Continuing my coursework, I learned of Gibb's Reflective Cycle (see Davies, 2012; Husebo et al., 2015) which resonated with me in the beginning as a reflective model that, while rigid, incorporated personal feelings. Being as distressed as I was, I felt curious about other models of reflection that might help me unpack all the unpleasantness that I was feeling so that I could excel in my studies. I didn't want to feel so paralyzed anymore.

I embarked down a small rabbit hole to see what I could find. What I found was my first personally pivotal article I had read along my graduate journey; an article by Larrivee (2000) and her intricate conceptualization on becoming a critically reflective teacher (see *Note 7*).

Through Larrivee (2000), I started generating an increased awareness of my own experiences and belief systems. More importantly, however, I learned that the discomfort I was feeling was a part of the growth process. Not only was I just beginning my graduate school journey, but I was adjusting to a new environment and way of studying that was challenging my perception of university education entirely. Obviously, I knew that my college undergraduate experiences would differ from where I was then. But what I didn't expect was that maybe my preconceptions of graduate studies were wrong. Maybe I didn't need to shy away entirely. Maybe I should take risks, speak up, and be vulnerable. Although much easier said than done, I ever so slowly started to open up by lending my skill as an artist for presentations and group projects. Gradually, as a result, connections with my peers formed as I embraced the vulnerability of putting myself out there.

The very first time I was able to form a connection with one of my peers was through a shared writing exercise. Individually, we were told to write about our intent behind studying education to identify potential research interests (*Okay, no problem*). Afterward, however, we had to pair off and exchange essays with a peer for feedback (*—Oh no).*

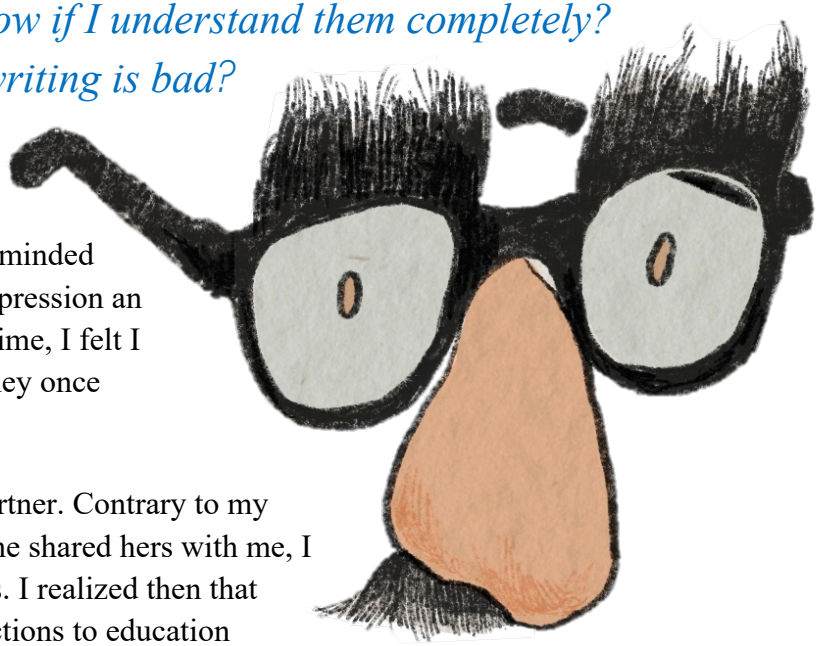
Given that this was one of only a handful of official writing assignments that I had to do so far, I nearly disintegrated when I heard I had to share my work with anybody at all, let alone a peer. This was way outside of my comfort zone. I couldn't skate by on

using my artistic abilities to feel as though I was making a valuable contribution. I felt vulnerable and already had enough anxiety to deal with submitting my work to begin with.

What if my interests are not valid?

How do I defend my interests if I don't even know if I understand them completely?

Or Worse—What if they think my writing is bad?



Upon revisiting my initial statement of intent from my program application for inspiration, the memories of all the caring educators over the course of my school years came flooding back. It reminded me of the joy I found in creativity and learning, and the meaningful impression an educator can have on the lives of their students. And although, at that time, I felt I had lost some of the original enthusiastic curiosity and ambition that they once nurtured in me, I couldn't ignore the gravity of their impact.

Taking a risk, I shared these statements with my assignment partner. Contrary to my doubts, she was so warmly receptive to my experience and ideas. As she shared hers with me, I noticed her interests were also deeply connected to her life experiences. I realized then that through this practice of sharing we were affirming our personal connections to education and helping each other share it more clearly. Not only was this a vulnerable moment for me, but it was also one for her. Much more than a probe for research interests, we were sharing impassioned testaments to why we wanted to be here and the positive change we wanted to make in the lives of others.

While this was a step in the right direction for me coming out of my shell, it was more so my very first sign of the vulnerable and highly personal background—the story—behind a person's passion and drive for the field. This pivotal moment, though small compared to most, became a starting point for being transparent about my thoughts and feelings. Yet it was still hard to resist falling into the background again after this experience.

To prepare for presentations, more often than not, I used my skills as an illustrator to develop aesthetically pleasing presentations. Originally based on my perception that I had nothing of value to give beyond PowerPoint and video design, I treated my work as a type of apologetic gesture or a token of appreciation to my peers for "allowing" me into their group. Despite my growing connections and confidence, I still secretly felt like a *fraud* who had accidentally made it into the program. At least I could count on having my design work to hide behind, I thought.

What I didn't expect, however, was how much the design work would help me in developing a strong understanding of course materials. This direct and creative engagement felt meaningful and familiar. Little by little, I felt ever so slightly more connected, engaged, and confident. However, the reality was the semester was ending soon, and all the discussion and participation requirements were looming menacingly over my head.

In the spirit of risk taking, and in the realization that it was much too late in the semester to recover, I made the bold decision to forego the discussion board requirements for working on one of my class's co-created wiki sites. It was similar enough, right? *(Not really).* For the final assignment and presentation for the course, I came clean, hoping my subversion of requirements wouldn't earn me a failing grade. Taking my skills as an illustrator into account for the final presentation *(and being too shy to speak in front of the class),* I reflected on my learning journey throughout the semester with a hand illustrated and animated video. Barely able to present a preamble on the video because of nerves, I quickly pasted my video link into the chat and waited for an impossibly long five minutes *watching the faces of everyone as they watched*. Through the video, I lightheartedly exposed my failures, barriers, and shortcomings to the class. In that, I admitted to all my freeloading on discussion boards, student study group notes, and pedagogical lurking (Dennen, 2008). I explained the disjuncture that I felt between my artist and academic self and discussed how all of my woes had amounted to an unbearable impostor syndrome (Hawley, 2019). Coming clean about

1.1.1.3 NOTE 8:

The Other Response to Impostor Syndrome…

When I mentioned that much of the class responded positively, I meant it. However, there was one outlier. Over private class chat, one of my peers confronted me and explained how they didn't understand how I could feel the way I did. After all, I was "meant to be in the program" because "***they*** *accepted me into the program"*. Caught up in my angst, I admit I didn't understand the response of that student. They thought I was being childish or melodramatic.

Yet, looking back on the comment now, even though I do still struggle with feeling like an impostor (Hawley, 2019), I know the comment was not entirely wrong and maybe even a little right. When I look at where I was, I really see how much I've grown and come into my own. But, like, who has ever had the luxury of never feeling like an impostor?! Is that real? How to I tap into that mysterious magic?

my fears of being exposed as fraudulent and incompetent by all my incredibly bright and insightful peers, and how it led me to be less involved and more observant over the past fourteen weeks.

As we returned after watching, much of the class chimed in through the chat function with the same warmth as my writing partner from earlier in the semester. Messages of support, appreciation, and shared sentiments peppered the screen *(mostly—see Note 8)* as I let out a sigh of relief. I realized then—sitting alone in my home—that I wasn't alone, or at the very least, wasn't experiencing these feelings in isolation.

Regressive Fragment #3: Curriculum Studies, COVID-19, & Community

As excited as I was to be finally making some headway through sharing part of myself with my peers, my attempts to capture and analyze my experiences still felt *off*. My sense of place in this program was unstable. Some days I felt like I was actively present and making substantial progress, but those moments were fleeting. It seemed like I was taking two steps forward and one step back again. Still progressing, but not as fast as I had hoped. After all, my understandings of academic and educational language were still in their infancy *(—and still growing)*. Yet I could feel my approach to my coursework and drive to study diverging. The way I positioned myself changed.

Now, instead of being an artist first, I was "not a teacher" and "just a student" first. Further separating myself not only from my passion and profession, but from most of my peer group as well. I attempted to stop apologizing for my lack of formal experience by framing myself as someone with a different perspective. I thought that perhaps a fresh set of eyes might be useful for classroom and pedagogical issues. Much to my chagrin, however, this usually looked like asking derailing questions or making a directionless point before willingly stepping aside for better equipped people to lead discussion. After all, I thought, I was *only* a student and *only* had my dated experience from public schooling and very niche experience from my college arts undergrad.

… At least I could still use my art for presentations.

I knew from my earlier reflective work on my research interests and statement of purpose that the lenses in which I screened and filtered my present experiences, as Larrivee (2000) explained (see *Note 7*), were at one point more dominated by my identity and experiences as an artist above anything else. After all, I had never felt as though I built any sort of academic identity. Public school didn't count, too much time had passed. My experiences as an artist and in college arts education were the only experiences I had to fall back on before entering my graduate studies, but they felt so detached from what I was experiencing and learning. Nonetheless, their impact heavily shaped my ideas and understandings about education as I entered graduate studies but felt frustratingly useless as I attempted to navigate this new virtual academic space.

Through Larrivee's (2000) screening model, I could acknowledge that my *past experiences* in the arts and growing as a professional illustrator heavily affected my *beliefs, assumptions, and expectations* surrounding higher education. Although I couldn't articulate how in any meaningful detail, I could recognize that it was contributing to changes in my *feelings and mood* by causing heavy bouts of fear and uncertainty, and that uncertainty was affecting my *behaviour*.

My focus on the stark contrast between my previous studio-based college experiences and my new virtual university experiences became the catalyst that consistently exposed and highlighted the deficiencies I had compared to my peers. I was quiet, cautious, and vigilant because of my overwhelmed demeanour. My peers appeared to be effortlessly articulate in both their writing and the way they spoke. And while I was confident in my ability to make a ***wicked awesome*** presentation, I couldn't shake the feeling that it didn't matter.

Who cares, right?

I was becoming increasingly indifferent toward my artist identity. It wasn't pertinent. Incompatible. I felt as though I could better spend my time catching up on literature, language, and writing skills I needed to do well. Save art making for my spare time.

I could feel my intimate connection to artmaking slowly drifting away from me becoming more like a practical tool than a vehicle for exploration and discovery. Yet, although it felt dimmed, that drive to explore never left. Perhaps it was shifting.

In feeling moments while studying, I would feel tiny sparks of understanding in my clutches. Sparks that propelled me further. The more I read, the more I fanned the embers. What emerged was that dazzling curiosity and excitement that, while an unusual experience for me in this program, still felt familiar. I knew this feeling well. I just didn't recognize it as well without it being tied to any creative outlet.

Although still confused about my relationship between art and schooling, a heavy fog felt like it was lifting. Gradually, I gave in to the curious sparks I was feeling and began allowing myself to run with them. I worked slowly but diligently to cease hiding from the feelings of struggle, inner conflict, uncertainty, and chaos (Larrivee, 2000), that stifled my engagement with my work and my peers. Although, through reflection, I might not have made the best decision to sever my artist self from my academic self, it certainly made things easier. As I entered my second semester, running with my curious sparks made way for me to build momentum toward a practice I came to know and love as *rabbit-holing*, a feverous and tangential embrace of curiosity.

Regressive Fragment #3.1: Down the Rabbit Hole?

The term *rabbit holes,* or *rabbit-holing,* is a term I came to use frequently, starting in my second semester. Often, it would be a precursor *(or warning)* to my friends and family who dared to lend an ear after a gripping article sent me on a night of vaulting from reference list to reference list. My racing anticipation to share and discuss my excitement usually materialized as rants and raves, tripping over my words while grinning from ear to ear. During class, however, it often felt like something I had to apologize for. I was prone to rambling *(still am)* and would often lose my train of thought *while* I was talking. A point of embarrassment after commandeering the discussion floor only to ramble with such intensity that I would not have the slightest idea of anything I had just said. Leaving the impression that

I had gotten distracted, or lost my way, irresponsibly departing from the intended points of study.

The analogy of "rabbit hole" is from Lewis Carroll's (1865) book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The term provokes images of being transported to magical, curious, dangerous, and strange new worlds (Mahon & O'Neill, 2020; Schulz, 2015). Mahon and O'Neill (2020) make use of *Rabbit Holes* alongside the additional Lewis Carroll analogy of seeing *Through the Looking Glass* (1872) when discussing the concept of reflection. In this, they (Mahon & O'Neill, 2020) argue we enter a space of questioning and uncertainty, not only towards our environment, but ourselves, as a way to be critical and become aware of bias. Within this reflective and uncertain space, however, access to virtual realms in this technology-heavy digital age has shifted the analogy additionally into the realms of unintentional and deep distraction, that may not hold any value (Schulz, 2015). Schulz (2015) points to the meandering and meaningless deep dives numerous people get caught off guard by while browsing the web. One moment you're searching for a simple recipe, next it's three hours later and you're playing in a fractal geometry simulation *(true story)*. Like Schulz, Rose (2013) positions distraction as an inevitable condition of working, reading, and writing online and on screen. Although she doesn't use the term *rabbit holes,* she notes that as we acquire access to increasingly larger networks of information and media (i.e., social media, search engines, online libraries and databases, wikis, etc.) our capacity to be present and reflective diminishes. She argues that the rapid pace by which we attempt to consume multiple streams of media simultaneously is like "drinking out of a fire hose" (p.86) that makes it nearly impossible for the calm and slowness she declares as essential for reflection.

In combining meanings from Rose's (2013) technological information and media fire hose analogy and the rabbit hole analogy from Schulz (2015), I immediately think of a phenomenon, or at least the bad habit *(shared by myself and a lot my peers)* where we keep a ridiculously excessive amount of browser windows and tabs open. Whether it is a relatively ubiquitous experience or exclusive to contemporary academic study and writing, in the first semester of my studies this habit developed out of necessity over distraction. Over three-hour class times, tabs and windows populated my desktop as I rapidly googled anything and everything to avoid exposing my ignorance and inexperience *(—even everyday words I knew).*

However, over time, this practice shifted into a skill that, while taking an immense toll on my computer, helped me in the beginning of my academic journey. First, it helped me develop an invaluable troubleshooting and problem-solving skill. If there were answers, options, or resources online, I became able to find them in a snap. Second, that rapid searching technique caused academic-centred rabbit holes to explode in depth and scale. During my second semester, I got into the habit of keeping tens if not hundreds of tabs and windows open across all my devices, so as to not lose ties with any train of thought. Countless novel terminologies,

methodologies, philosophies, studies, and theories ignited this exponential and interwoven branches of discovery and inquiry that spanned across devices and cloud networks. Group discussions in virtual classrooms, conversations on WhatsApp, or even promotional emails from sites like academia.edu or research gate provoked races to read and learn and consume as much information as possible. Ideas and connections would explode and crackle in my mind like fireworks. I would *(and still do)* frequently proclaim that my brain was *buzzing.* It was exhilarating.

The progression of these prolonged sessions of intensity were slow until they finally took off. My first explosive shift stemmed from learning about curriculum studies in my second term, specifically *what* curriculum was. Embarrassingly, I'll admit, I had a limited understanding of curriculum and reduced it to the large and dusty binders of government prescribed teaching guidelines and lesson plans that lined the bookshelves of classrooms past and present *(though, they probably have PDF copies now).* No more than a policy document, or an outline of what to learn and when.

Although I wasn't technically wrong, what I learned, however, was that curriculum was so much more. Amatullah and colleagues (2021) affirm that curricula in schools typically represent the learning goals for specific groups, and how to measure if those goals are being met. However, that only accounts for the *explicit* curriculum. The *implicit, extracurricular*, and *null* curricula are equally impactful in schooling because they represent what we learn outside of prescribed teaching. Whether it isn't obvious or hidden, in the case of *implicit* curriculum, or flat out omitted in the case of *null* curriculum, it nonetheless impacts what we come to know and learn through schooling. Taking it one step further, Egan (1978; 2003) argues that curriculum is more than just its educational contents, the "*what"* of what we learn. Curriculum is also not limited to the confines of the classroom walls. Curriculum is a vessel for *what* and *how* we learn *over time* and over the course of our lives. Therefore, curriculum isn't just schooling, it's our experiences, our life's journey (Egan, 1978; 2003; Grumet, 1976/2015a; Macedo, 1997).

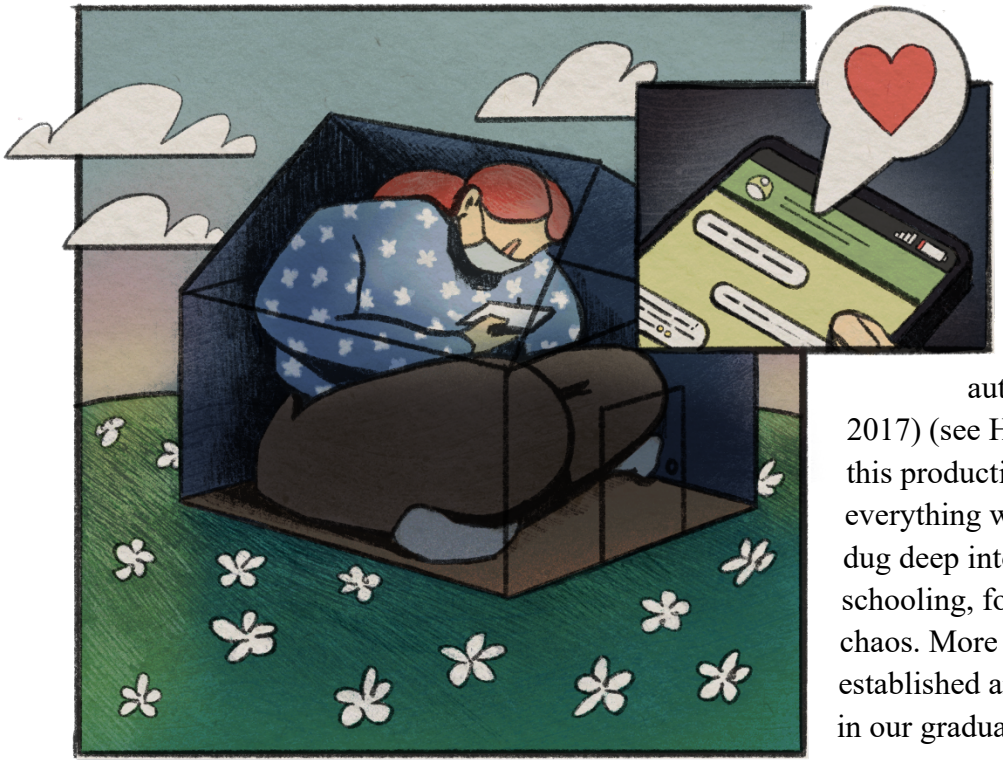
Could this be what I hoped to find? — The missing piece?

A path to explore my relationship to education and schooling?

A place where my experiences were relevant?

Regressive Fragment #3.2: Critical Comforts in a Time of Upheaval and Uncertainty

Near the end of my second semester, what felt like the unimaginable happened. The COVID-19 pandemic had sent the world into lockdown, consequently grinding everyday life to a halt. Fortunately for my professional and academic life, the lockdown wasn't all too physically disruptive. I primarily worked from home and studied online. However, that wasn't the case for my peers, the majority of whom fell somewhere on the educator continuum working in K-12 schools. An extended March break rapidly devolved into uncertainty as lockdowns separated them from their classrooms, their students, and their livelihoods. As time passed, the quality and quantity of official announcements from government and schools devolved into pseudo-supportive rhetoric. Broad sweeping statements such as "we're all in this together!" and "soon we can return to normal!" echoed alongside the nightly clanging of pots and pans for essential workers. A nightly ritual that we quickly adopted in absence of routine. Over time, *back to normal* became *new-normal*. Meaning that before we could even recognize it, we had begun to pivot.



As May rolled around, a group of us from the previous semester congregated for a directed studies course to take a reflective turn on technology in teaching and learning during a pandemic. From social media to teaching and learning online and everything in-between we gathered twice weekly to confront what was unfolding and how it was affecting students and educators alike.

With the goal of producing two collaborative autoethnographies (Chang, 2013; Chang et al., 2016; Lapadat, 2017) (see Hudson et al., 2021; Gerbrandt et al., 2021 for the products of this production), we embarked on documenting our meetings. As everything was spiralling into disarray at the hands of the pandemic, we dug deep into our various identities and relationships to education and schooling, focusing each of our unique lenses toward making sense of the chaos. More so, however, we mobilized our privileged membership to an established and undisrupted online community of educators to create space in our graduate studies for us to unpack and support one another. For all of

us, navigating the real storm that was shaking the foundation of the education system as we saw it was no unchallenging feat. But we couldn't ignore what we were witnessing. The pandemic was shining a light on the cracks of an institution we had grown so comfortable in.

Because I lacked experience as both a K-12 and post-secondary educator, I was engaged with my peers through an outsider's perspective. However, instead of feeling like an impostor (Hawley, 2019) as I normally would, I was in a space where I could be open about my thoughts and ideas. We were all cramped into a space that was forcing us to re-evaluate everything we knew.

Nobody knew what was going on, so what did it matter if I didn't either?

Listening to their experiences over time, I got comfortable asking questions. Given the unprecedented circumstances, and how familiar we were with one another, it didn't seem to matter what we did or where we came from. Though much of the group lived and worked in Ontario, we stretched across the provinces and even internationally and across professions. We valued all perspectives because we needed them. *(It was all hands-on deck!)* The group quickly became tight knit, exchanging our ideas and strategies from not only our cities or districts but directly from our experiences. From what I could gather, what we were experiencing shared a lot of common threads.

Notably, within the earlier stages of our meetings, my peers spoke of dilemmas of uncertainty that placed them, as educators, between what I can only call a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they jumped back and forth from no pressure to immense pressure from school boards and administrators to focus only on the essentials. Assessment was primary, as were concerns surrounding attendance, academic integrity, engagement during the pivot to virtual learning. On the other hand, however, they wanted to put the support of their students' well-being first. After all, the students were not immune to the catastrophic disruptions that the pandemic was causing to daily life. Yet, what they wanted for their students and what the governing bodies wanted for the students felt contradictory.

All too often, we would succumb to venting our frustration with school board and government decisions that seemed to be more concerned with optics over transparency and decisiveness. Worse even, my classmates would discover news and announcements regarding the incoming changes to the classroom at the same time as the general public, through the news or twitter or even group chats. Yet, they got the brunt of the flak from all sides because they were on the front lines of education.

How were they supposed to support their students and satisfy all the rest of the stakeholders if they didn't have all the information they needed?

The social networks that developed in an effort to stay informed became a quintessential facet of daily life. Outside of class, we, too, would connect within networks of group chats. As we promptly circulated and assessed any morsel of information or rumour, every tweet, every press release and live streamed COVID update and announcement.

As the pivot to virtual learning began, so did pressures for educators to follow new strict learning requirements. The fight for student engagement online accompanied a stripped curriculum that prioritized primarily literacy and math. Administrative concerns over grades, hitting achievement learning outcomes, and concerns over cheating in virtual tests and exams, for example, took precedent above all else, dismissing wider implications of the role of an educator. Things like test proctoring and mediating technical difficulties overshadowed the nurturing and caring aspects of teaching.

I remember at the height of these discussions, one of my teacher peers confiding to the group how they felt like they must choose between being a good teacher and being a good employee. However, feelings like these weren't new. Some peers shared how educator disenfranchisement and disempowerment in the classroom were prevalent long before the pandemic. Only now it felt more painful and was more visible. Worse even, as graduate students who were actively challenging their practices, positive change felt impossibly out of reach.

This choice between teacher and employee is what we came to know, both light heartedly and painfully deep, as the existential condition of *despair* (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019). The Kierkegaardian notion of *despair* stems from a philosophical condition of being unable to reconcile or negotiate contradicting polarities of the self (Zimmerman, 2019). It is a paradox. And for us as a group, this paradox was between want and need. Ideals versus obligation and tradition were manifesting as a *despair of necessity* (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019). The understanding and naming of *despair* through our discussions allowed us to label an internal feeling we knew all too well. The teacher versus employee dichotomy represented the polarizing opposition that pitted what my peers felt they *should* do as educators against what they *needed* to do as employees in their respective schools.

In the context of teaching, McKnight (2009) discusses how administrative factors and institutional requirements limit the potential, agency, and power an educator needs to make critical and lasting changes to their pedagogical practices. Even if educators develop a critical awareness of the systemic issues that hinder or limit their pedagogical practices, there is no space in the confines of the institution of schooling to take meaningful or transformative action. McKnight argues that this condition typically presents two

paths to educators: either abandon their careers or succumb to the "institutional, technocratic rule-based demands that are presented as the exclusive ethical actions" (p.501). No wonder why numerous classmates felt exhausted and powerless. The pandemic upended schooling. *Everything was in ruins!* And instead of working with teachers to meet their students' needs, they tightened their restrictions and requirements *(and I'm not talking about masks and social distancing).* Would this disruption not be an ideal opportunity to overhaul, or even take a critical look at our approaches to education?

"If a tornado rips through your town, you don't build it back exactly as it was. You build it back newer and better!", I would say.

Though a very privileged and idealized take on the situation, I understood the necessity of pivoting into a survival mode of sorts so that the school year could continue. But the pandemic was a shining light on many *(—SO MANY!)* overlapping cracks in the foundation of education that were already there. It was maddening to think that rather than rethinking or adjusting anything, governments and school boards touted a return to the classroom that would be as close as possible to how it was before. A bleak sentiment for those of us who were already in the depths of *despair*, and the countless educators across Canada who were facing higher rates of burnout, stress, and pessimism (Collier & Burke, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020).

Luckily, however, rather than relying on cynicism or resilience—or leaving the field entirely—McKnight (2009) offers a third option. To circumvent the disparaging draw to either quit or submit to institutional demands, McKnight suggests the undertaking of a reflexive practice known as *passionate inwardness*, whereby we leverage our despair as motivation and a path toward embracing a theoretical and critical pedagogical existence for the betterment of schools and students.

In the directed studies course, we eventually split into two groups. Each group embarked on writing a collaborative autoethnography while using our discussion recordings and shared experiences during the time of this course as data. For my group's paper (see Gerbrandt et al., 2020) we chose the telling of our journey from despair to hope. We remarked that "as educators and agents in systems of public education we were recognizing how public education stifles reflexivity" (p.6). However, mobilizing in support of one another to forge a virtual space of critical dialogue became critical to alleviating or at least softening our *despair* (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019). Without the use of virtual tools to connect and share, we would not have been in a place that would prioritize such rigorous critical dialogue. This opportunity helped us bridge the gap between the literature and our experiences collaboratively. Together, we forged a space that was as much academically supportive as it was supportive of our collective wellbeing. It was a space where we could be attentive to each other's emotional needs and process what we were experiencing through

open-ended scholarly discussion. This led to our attempt at practicing collaborative *passionate inwardness* (McKnight, 2009) in our writing group, which in turn enabled us to point our supportive community up and out of the pit of despair toward a path of growth and transformation. As we attempted to reclaim, negotiate, and (re)construct our identities as educators, we began to see light at the end of the tunnel. There was hope and possibility in the idea of a *new normal* (Gerbrandt et al., 2020).

Regressive Fragment #4: Research, Reading, Writing, & Rants.

Though the pandemic still lingers, I cannot stress enough how much I love a *good* virtual book club or zoom group discussion. After the summer, I had spent amongst a community of my peers in the throes of deep discussion and reflection on technology and education during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Hudson et al., 2021; Gerbrandt et al., 2021), I had not realized how much I would miss it. Communal scholarly discussion and interactions were no longer scary. Instead, they became exhilarating.

Having just started my thesis and still very much engaging in rabbit roles, I finally made noticeable headway in tearing down the walls and barricades I had built way back at the start of this journey. Having the memories of my uneasy and paralyzing beginnings in the program, I couldn't believe that I would ever come to miss engaging in group discussion. *(Although my friends and mentors in the program now can't believe there was ever a time where I was shy or quiet).* I longed for the excitement and tension that erupted through our dialogues. The challenging of ideas, theories, and interpretations, no matter the subject. Although the longing didn't last long. Through inquiry groups and books groups, I got my wish. What arose was the forging of many small communities of discussion and, as a result, the continued expansion of a solid virtual network of peers.

Although I have participated in many book groups, the most notable one was a group that formed while reading Freire's (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Over ten weeks, we met to discuss our thoughts, ideas, and interpretations of what we were

reading. Although we got together formally, more often than not, discussion broke out through spontaneous calls and text conversations that went on late into the night. As a group, we were all from various walks of life. There was me, a freelance illustrator, there was a kindergarten teacher, a college instructor who taught in an early childhood education (ECE) program, and occasionally a welcomed fourth member who was a practicing ECE. Though I can see similarities between our obvious shared position as students, most of the group shared a common connection to early years teachings. However, the experiences and interests we brought to the virtual table varied wildly.

Although we were supposed to enter book group meetings with an agenda and predetermined discussion ideas, we abandoned all structures, allowing our discussion to unfold naturally and shift fluidly. Because of this, as any person can imagine, we frequently got stuck in divulging the throes of our work weeks, including the issues arising in my peers' day-to-day professional teaching practice. While it sounds like we might have sat around for hours on end chit chatting, it never stayed in the realms of small talk. What emerged was the development of a space where we came to engage critically with ideas presented in Freire's work through the lenses of our teaching and learning experiences.

Similar to the notions of despair (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019) that arose during group discussion and research at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our group became fixated on the *'good teacher'* versus *'good employee'* dilemma. We grappled with an idea that educators might exist in the middle of a hegemonic system of oppression Freire (2005), and that the very institution of schooling is a complex system that wields and enacts a lot of power (Giroux, 2020). Freire (2005) remarks that "any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (p.55).

Upon considering this, we discussed how their role as educators placed them in a complex *in between space* stuck between adhering to the demands of their schools and meeting the needs of their students. Educators hold privileged positions as possessors of power over students, but not so far as they are of an elite and super powerful class, but still enough that educators can be oppressive (Macedo, 1997).

Are teachers not being pressured to objectify their students and mechanize their teaching if institutions require them to meet increasing assessment demands with increasingly larger class

sizes? At the same time, aren't educators pressured to succumb to adopting the role of the oppressive subject-object disposition toward teaching (Freire, 2005)?

In Freire's (2005) banking model of education the teacher holds the role of a central subject position. Through this position, educators impart their objects of knowledge to their students through rote or un-signified methods. This position of *student-as-object* and *teacher-as-subject* not only positions the students as an empty vessel, that disregards the knowledge, cultures, and ideas they bring to the classroom, but positions the success of the teacher on how well they can fill that receptacle. The more quiet, attentive, and compliant students become the 'good' students. The more 'good' the students are, the easier students will be ready to consume information passively. The better the students absorb and recite the information presented, the more we will view the teacher as a 'good' teacher.

So, what is really being learned? Is it just the course material?
Or is it also an underhanded hidden curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995) regarding authority and passive acceptance of models of authority?

As we discussed in our group, such rigid models of rote docility felt scarce in contemporary play-based learning in kindergarten classrooms. Or were they? In that fall, the race back to classrooms following school closures during the pandemic illuminated some differences in how students were behaving and socializing in the classroom. Our group fell into a contemplative space surrounding these new behaviours, acknowledging that the young children returning to the classroom were not the same as they once were. Not only had most of the children spent their first experiences of schooling at home and online, but in the youngest of cases, they have spent much of their *lives* at home and online. Some members remarked how the lack of socialization for young kids may have negative implications for their (re)integration into the classroom environment. Moreover, the additional COVID-19 policies and restrictions that were in place to protect the health and safety of the learning environment compounded these behavioural concerns because classrooms were becoming more rigid. So then, children potentially coming to school with additional needs for adapting to schooling and developing social skills might face additional hurdles that could have been avoided if it were not for the pandemic.

Questions arose, such as how are you supposed to force small kids to stay socially distant? How are you supposed to enforce mask wearing? Or expect them to sit quietly at desks? Isn't that counter to all the play that they are meant to be having? *(To be clear, I am not against health and safety restrictions implemented during the pandemic, I'm just questioning the ones that were implemented.)*

Although we agreed pandemic restrictions were important for maintaining a safe learning environment, we questioned the method behind what contributed to so much madness. From what we concluded, you simply can't, and nor should you expect such docility or obedience from early years students.

What I came to learn is that despite our group's mutual and relaxed expectations for classroom behaviour, there were, in fact, very rigid behavioural demands placed upon them as educators that they were required to enforce. I learned that if they cannot meet those demands, they face criticisms or even reprimanded for not having 'control' over their students. Worse even, not only did administrators and teachers pressure other teachers to rule their class with an iron fist, but they could not get any support or accommodation to make up for the diverse amount of need or stricter classroom demands.

What this felt like to me was that teachers are pinned between unrealistic expectations and unmet needs.

But at what cost to the students?

The older they become, the higher the expectations are for the students to become the passive members of the classroom, then society.

As educators, what are we meant to do?
Is it just meant to be the same disparaging 'good teacher' or 'good employee' dilemma that has continued to plague the discussion groups I take part in?
A dilemma that won't stop until all the 'good' employees become 'good' employees?
Or until all the 'good' teachers leave?

Our discussions regarding Freire (2005), led to a new layer of understanding. As we continued to unpack classroom conditions and necessities, we discussed how the lack of accommodations and new requirements that were directly imposed on educators seemed

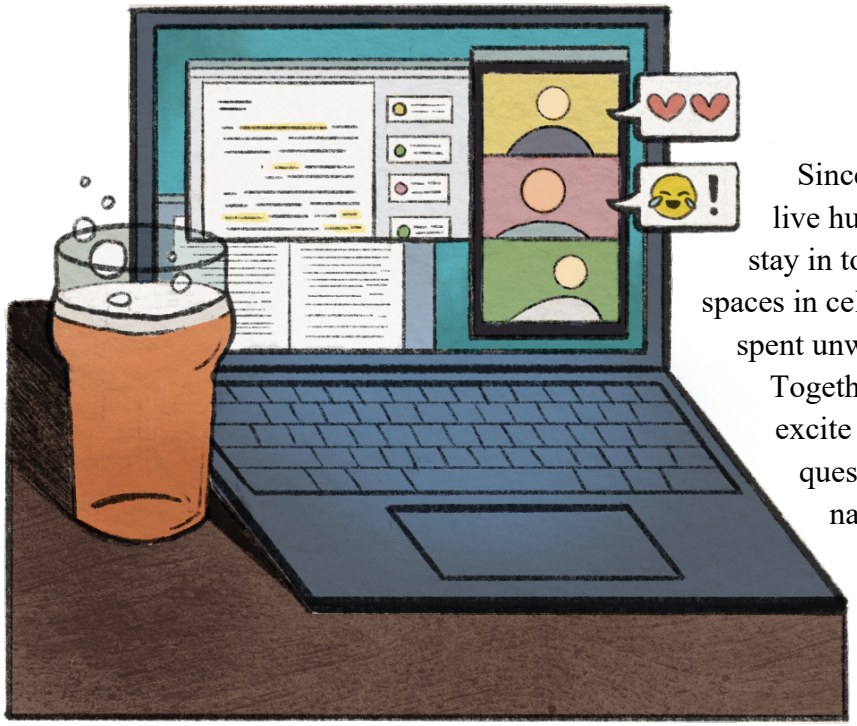
to expedite the adoption of more authoritative approaches to teaching and classroom management. This felt discouraging to me, but I understood how it could be preferable for educators to just do what they needed to do to survive the school year. After all, from what I have seen, the pandemic has not only exhausted educators, but pushed them to their limits.

On the opposite end of the education chronology, we discussed implications for teaching and learning in post-secondary education, given the shift to online course work because of the pandemic. My group members discussed their roles as part time and non-tenured post-secondary faculty. Though they felt just as passionate about their careers as their job-secure colleagues, they felt under more pressure to comply with the institutional demands of their respective colleges and universities so as to not risk their jobs. Yet, as class sizes grow, and workload increases, so too does the distance between teacher and learner. Freire (2005) argues that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (p.58). Not only does this seem to require excitement in learning that bell hooks (1994) points to as transgressive in the academe, but it undoubtedly requires the time and resources that my part-time faculty peers are no longer afforded.

We discussed how educational environments constructed in this way render teacher-learner relationships impersonal and near impossible (Jones, 2016). Jones explained "teachers find themselves in a leadership role that is hard to manage. They desire and are expected to build warm relationships with students but are also charged with controlling them, to ensure that students behave as they are told and do the work they are assigned" (p.438). Consequently, the potential to create spaces of inventive and excited engagement diminishes. We concluded that instruction, especially at the higher education level, is being reduced to systems of efficiency. Readings and assignments are predetermined and presented at the beginning of the semester with tight schedules, information packed lessons, multiple menial activities, and procedural rubrics for assessment. While it made me shudder at the thought, in reality, countless students seemed to prefer it that way. Freire (2005) shares that the "ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking" (p.63). Sadly, in the face of growing class sizes, teachers are cornered into choosing between meeting tight grading deadlines or working overtime to engage meaningfully with their students and their work.

"Does wanting it to be different even matter?" we asked each other in a downward cynical turn,

…"It has to".



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Since the book group ended, we still try to keep in touch. Although we live hundreds of kilometers apart from one another, we make a point to stay in touch when we can. In this, we hold validating and accommodating spaces in celebration and support of one another, with the occasional evening spent unwinding and reviewing each other's work over an *'adult beverage.'* Together, we rant and rave over the good and bad, the papers that overly excite us, and new findings in our work. We come to each other with questions and in times of stress and uncertainty to help each other navigate work and school. Most importantly, however, we demystify the seriousness of graduate studies and research work. We allow ourselves to have fun and give ourselves grace for not knowing, and more generally, being human. It is a rare and appreciated ray of sunshine in an otherwise (partially) clouded landscape for having the privilege of connecting our lives to our academic work.

Regressive Fragment #4.1: Research Experience: Toward a Counter-cultural Community of Care

Another ray of sunshine stemmed from my work as a research assistant over the course of my studies. This privileged position afforded me with not only the insight into the mechanisms and process in various facets of scholarly work, but it provided me with an opportunity to become familiar with two integral concepts I hold while navigating academic settings: *Counterspaces* (Case & Hunter, 2012; Lane, 2016; Ong et al., 2017; Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021; Solórzano et al. 2000) and Nodding's *Feminist Ethics of Care* (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013).

Case and Hunter's (2012) counterspace framework position counterspaces as sites of local community support that promote adaptive responding to oppression. Adaptive responding, they explain, is a process that comprises two distinct functions. First, there is adaptive responding toward self-protection, and second toward self-enhancement. In their proposed conceptual framework for

counterspaces, Case and Hunter argue that adaptive responding is achieved through three distinct processes: narrative identity work, acts of resistance, and direct relational transactions.

1.1.1.4 NOTE #9:
I Can't Speak STEM

In the process of co-authoring the conference paper, I hit a wall. Having regained some steadier footing since the start of my studies and becoming a research assistant, I felt as though the ground had washed away from under my feet. Why? Because, while I had just gotten comfortable exploring ideas in an education field setting and speaking to an education field audience. I now had to make the abrupt leap to writing and speaking to a STEM field audience. While I wasn't sure what that would entail, all my preconceived notions and all the discussions that pointed to cold, impersonal, and competitive climates came crashing down on me all at once. What resulted was my creation of a mountain out of a molehill. Two or three paragraphs of initial writing turned into weeks of lamenting and teary-eyed stares at a blank screen. Wading through tears in front of my researcher peers; I metaphorically plopped right back into my kitchen chair, alone, and so desperately convinced that I had no right to a voice in this place. I was convinced that all these fantastic scientists, engineers, and technologists would either dismiss or outright reject what we had to say because I just didn't know how to speak their language.

Was it a fear of rejection or doing something new for the first time? Was it a fear of being perceived as frivolous? Or denied the permission and validation I needed to see the work we were doing as validating? Was I afraid of contrarians or critics? It was a short form submission and a small presentation.

I wasn't alone. I was surrounded by a group of people who believed in the work we were doing and were growing alongside me. And you know what? The presentation went great, and we were invited to expand on our paper. Before I even started writing I got so hung up on the potential lack of humanity that I failed to recognize any potential for humanity. I felt like I lost the race before I even started. "How ridiculous and silly," I think to myself now, but it's real. It's real, and it comes from somewhere both inside and outside of ourselves.

i. *Narrative Identity Work* encompasses the personal experiences, stories, and perspectives and beliefs that are found and (re)constructed in any counterspace. Within these, three types of narratives are formed, maintained, and negotiated toward support and well-being of group members. The first are oppression narratives, which entail shared experiences in processing oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. Second, involves resistance narratives, which entail shared experiences in (envisioning or) overcoming oppression alongside a rejection of dominant oppressive narratives. Last is reimagined personal narratives, which entails an individual reconstruction of self in rejection of dominant oppressive narratives and a rejection of influences that perpetuating stereotypes and oppressive internalized ideologies (Case & Hunter, 2012);

ii. *Acts of Resistance* encompasses behaviours that validate their intersectional identities, especially if those behaviours are often invalidated or frowned upon by dominant groups (i.e. culturally relevant or gender affirming behaviours). Within this, group members can also take part in critical discussion and act out their various narratives in a manner that helps them feel good or is celebratory, and identity affirming (Case & Hunter, 2012);

iii. *Direct Relational Transactions* encompass the social-based modes of transmission toward narrative creation, resistance, and respite from oppressive spaces that support well-being.

> Emerging from relational transactions, meaningful others offer a privileged and complex understanding, validation, and capacity to uplift community members through the creation of a space where shared experiences and perspectives are leveraged to support well-being and offer guidance while navigating discriminatory environments (Case & Hunter, 2012).

In our work (Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021) we connected Case and Hunter's (2012) conceptual framework of counterspaces to Noddings' Feminist Ethics of Care (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012, 2013). We (Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021) did this work to advocate for the use of counterspaces as relational caring environments that aid in mitigating harm and to support Women's STEM identity development.

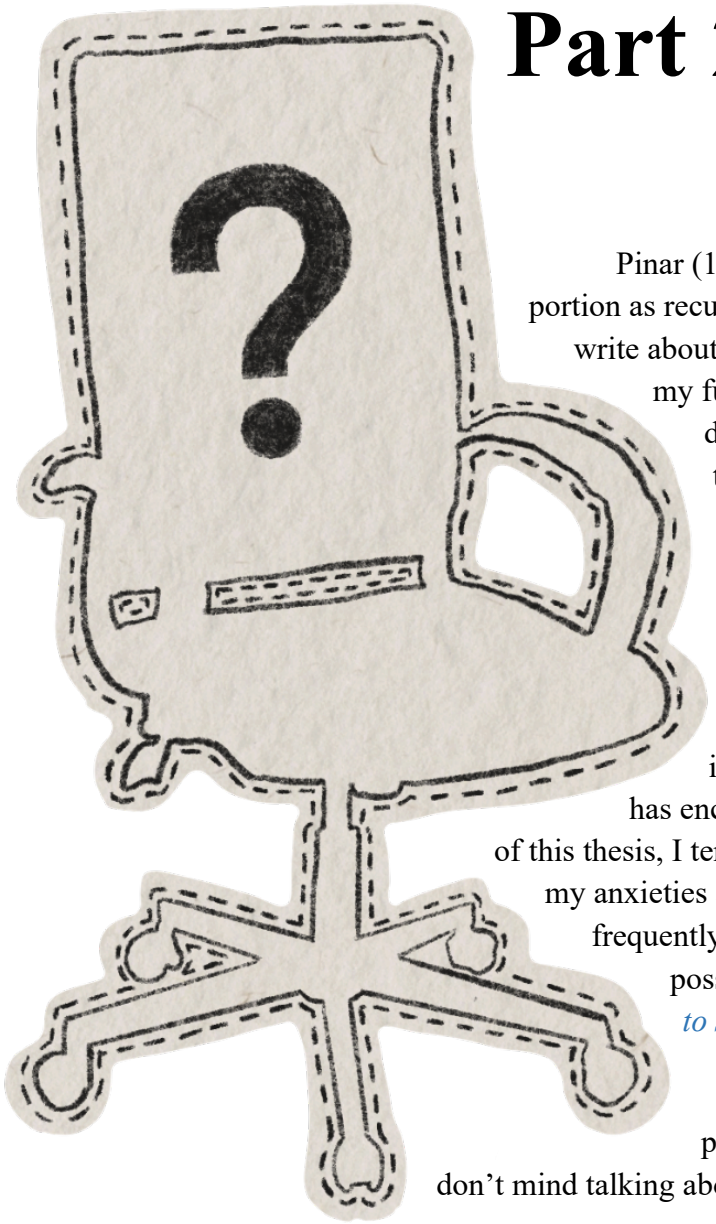
It felt just as daunting as it did exhilarating to join a force that continues to call attention to major overarching issues across technology and engineering educational climates. I consistently wondered if environments of care, support, and inclusion are really as radical or countercultural in specific disciplines, yet the research I've read and the stories I have heard have told me otherwise.

Community, according to Palmer (1987; 1992) and supported by Giroux (2020), is thwarted by a paradigm and way of knowing in higher education that is defined by objectivism, individualism, and competition. However, there are alternative ways of knowing that can be leveraged as movements in order to see things differently. This can create a shift in how we know that rejects the objectivist's perspective toward a new perception of knowledge, learning, and scholarship as relational, passionate, and communal. In this, Palmer (1987) argues that community becomes not only a means to bring people together, but an ideal that promotes connected and relational ways of knowing that incorporate the self, others, and the world.

In a similar line of thought that aims at countering the objectivist and individualist perspective, Gilligan (1993) proposes the feminine perspective of care as countering force to more traditional and masculine justice perspectives (Calhoun, 2013; McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006 Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021). Although severely criticized for being sewn along gender biases and binaries (Hankivsky, 2014; Hassan; 2008; Noddings, 2013), neither the ethic of care or ethic of justice perspective are monolithic. They present ethical and moral orientations (Calhoun, 2013) where the Gilligan (1993) argues that a 'feminine' perspective on morality and ethics calls "for both sexes [to recognize] the importance throughout life of the connection between self and other, the universality of the need for compassion and care" (p.98). Expanding on this, we can come to understand care as a contextual ethics outside of gender that, acknowledges while acknowledging it roots in traditional conceptions of femininity and motherhood, counters the justice-centered ethics that push universality and power, towards more responsive communal and nuanced approaches (McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006; Noddings, 2013).

Nodding's Ethics of Care is rooted is an ethical and moral ideal of attentiveness, responsiveness, and connection through reciprocity (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013). Care, in this sense, is inherently relational and built through modeling and participating in caring relations (Noddings, 2013). Noddings (2012) asserted that an ethic of care is built through a lifetime of experiencing care and caring for others, though it extends beyond the warm feelings that arise when we conceive them. Rather, the ethics of care hinges on the formation of caring relational roles. Known as carer and cared for, these roles strive toward nurturing conditions where caring relations can thrive and the best in others can emerge (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2013). To take on an ethic of care then means leverage one's natural inclination towards caring as a motivational force toward a moral obligation to care for others (Noddings, 2013). In higher education, this sort of ethical and epistemological shift could spark waves of change towards individual reclamation, creating communities that support and nurture the belonging and specific needs of the members, while also mobilizing public discourses and cultural reform (Palmer, 1992).

Part 2: The Progressive



Pinar (1975/2015a) urges those who practice *currere* to approach the progressive portion as recursively as possible. In this, he encourages the writer (me) to sit down and write about my future recursively to distill a more concrete essence of what I imagine my future will hold. Pinar suggests that this requires the writer (me) to let go of doubts and allow for the mind to flow freely; leaning heavily on imagination to guide thoughts as they wander through potential futures. In this, I can see how past and present are permeating my ideals for the future (Pinar, 2004).

While simple enough on paper,. I feel uneasiness and reservation. Having had people accuse me of being an idealist on multiple occasions, *(and coming to half-heartedly embrace the term)* I have pushed myself to take an approach to envisioning the future as more present-grounded and incremental. It is a slower approach than usual, much like Pinar (1975/2015a) has encouraged me to do. As you might have gathered from the regressive portion of this thesis, I tend to spiral when considering possibilities of my own future. For example, my anxieties associated with starting and adjusting to graduate studies. But just as frequently as I spiral at the thought of the future, I find myself entertaining possibilities for my future with great enthusiasm and reckless abandon. *(That is to say, in moments of passion and excitement I like to get ahead of myself.)*

I am all too frequently confronted by questions surrounding five-year plans, career goals, or something to the effect of family planning. Yet, while I don't mind talking about these things on my own terms, I am usually hesitant to answer these

questions the way I want to, often answering in ways that are exceptionally vague, placative, or predictably aligned with my current course.

Rationally? I understand that the people in my life asking these questions are not asking from a place of judgement *(usually)*. It is mostly a conversational ritual between me and family members and mentors. I know that it's healthy to have goals to work towards, events and milestones to look forward to, and some level of security through planning. Yet, I can't help but feel as though, no matter the future(s) I imagine and relay, I am closing doors and crossing off many infinite paths if I try to speak with any absolute certainty. Don't get me wrong, I love getting excited about plans and potential futures for myself. It is in the *telling* of—whether written or verbal—that makes me uneasy and removes me from feeling present. Although I'm not exactly sure how to unpack this feeling, I find it comparable to holding on to a birthday candle wish with devout secrecy in fear that my wish will not come true, because

Realistically? I do not know what the future holds. As a person I am open to pivoting and shifting rapidly, and I acknowledge that I am incredibly privileged in my position to do so. I have a supportive partner. I work remotely with relatively flexible schedule. I do not have the responsibility associated with being a parent or guardian. My cat is self-sufficient. The idea of sticking to or relying on a set and specific plan, even in imagination, provokes more insecurity than security. Frankly, focusing on the general linearity and finitude of time makes me queasy.

While Martland (1970) might equate this to my *artistic angst*, due to my supposed existential and ontological resistance of fixed boundaries of time. Palmer (1987) would probably describe how I'm feeling as somewhere in between integrity and a "*trained* schizophrenia" (p.22) because of my first instinct *(despite my lamenting)* to recite very generalized and traditional or predictable life courses. The hopeful and predictable responses of 'getting a prestigious education, starting a career, having a family, etc.', he argues, are a product of being taught ways of knowing and seeing the world that is divorced from the self and exist in a realm of "some objectivist's fantasy" (p.22). He continues:

> "They have also been formed in the habit of experimental manipulation. These students believe they can take pieces of the world and carve out for themselves a niche of private sanity in the midst of public calamity. That is nothing more than the ethical outcome of the objectivism in which they have been formed or, deformed. ***It is a failure to recognize their own implication with society's fate.***" (pp. 22, 24, emphasis added)

Lasch (1984, as cited by Pinar, 2004) equated the tendency for people to retreat into themselves and away from the world as a form of narcissism and self-minimization that defers blame through full complicity with whatever bureaucratic or other institutional structure governs how they conduct their lives. Or—as Lasch described it— "a shell of protective irony" (Lasch, 1978, p. 27 as cited by Pinar, 2004, p.3). Meaning that as people retreat to their private spheres when surviving the present public sphere becomes too much, they are hiding from their biographical and historical past *and* future. Ultimately, this implies that our inward retreats have the potential to allow the chaos and harm happening around them to perpetuate itself due to inaction and a refusal to address the significance of our lives within our social and cultural contexts (Pinar, 2004). *(A playing-along if you will.)*

So, is my lamenting and discomfort about the future a detrimental narcissistic retreat?

...or is it okay because I am questioning my disposition toward the future?

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Further complicating my queasiness toward the future is that this currere, my autobiography, is both humanist and post-structuralist reconstruction which muddies perceptions of linear time all together (Usher, 1998). Usher argues that we can never recapture our biographical pasts as they were, in concrete or objective form. Instead, there are only constructions or representations of lived time, that are simultaneous representations of our pasts, presents, and futures. Our narratives and autobiographical constructions, therefore, become convoluted knots that feel impossible to untangle. The past and future are inseparably tied to a present that is constantly in flux. And it ensnares me in the middle of it all.

Not to mention, knowing the relation of self to environmental, institutional, social, and cultural contexts, as I contemplate the future, how much of it is my own?
How much of it is prescribed or imposed?
So what then of a future that is not my own?
Or a future that is my own, but it is bleak or disparaging?

(—I'm spiralling again, hold on.)

In building one's capacity to engage with possible futures, Sools and Mooren (2012) discuss a more optimistic *(and less spirally)* approach to visualizing the future, that I feel is better suited to the calm Pinar (1975/2015a) encourages when carrying out the progressive portion of a currere.

Known as *narrative futuring* in psychology, Sools and Mooren (2012) argue that going through the motions of visualizing your future can be a process of building imaginative and narrative capacities. Similarities can be found between narrative futuring and Case and Hunter's (2012) narrative identity work, where both practices are intended to build resilience, while also encouraging goal setting and managing anticipation toward change, and managing responses to crises (Sools & Mooren, 2012). Sools (2020) suggests that narrative futuring can be a contemplative space that provides both meaning and hope. Through integrating creativity in narrative futuring, authors take on a pedagogy of possibility, opening themselves to fluid and flexible ways of engaging with the various circumstances or ideas they have about their life.

Amendment:

I did not, in fact, keep my self grounded.

While in the following section, I *do* invite you to two progressive vignettes in the context of my scholarly journey, I will be ***commenting*** and ***editing*** my regressive fragments to better ground them in currere. My two fragments originally resided in two places. One from my imagined position at the beginning of this part of my journey and one from where I am much later in my journey.

However, rather than anchoring my future imaginings to myself and my (academic) past in a way that builds on the regressive portion of this work, I have accomplished something superficial.

Was it my resistance to imagining the future that caused this? Possibly. But where does that resistance come from?

It is through these edits that I hope to poke at and bring forward ideas surrounding two different tensions between my arts and academic selves in hopes to resolve them as opposed to siloing them.

~~Keeping this in mind as I work to keep myself grounded~~ *(deep breaths)*, ~~in the following section, I invite you to two progressive vignettes in the context of my scholarly journey. One from my imaginedposition at the beginning of this part of my journey and one from where I am much later in my journey.~~

Progressive Fragment #1: Futures Past

As previously mentioned in my regressions, I entered my studies in education with an intention of becoming a post-secondary art teacher. Specifically, I saw myself getting the qualifications required in order to return as a teacher in my undergraduate illustration program. In my mind I see that the life painting studio props still hold the same musty smells, and the skylights are still leaking as rain clouds soften the otherwise dynamic natural light. I can visualize the sun setting over the evening classes and hear the student's groans as darkness blankets their subject. I am watching everyone as they shift back and forth from their palettes in intense moments of contemplation or gather in small groups to take off for a much-needed coffee break. I can smell the ink, and varnish, and dust as ream after ream of paper as projects accumulate over the semester in a flurry of experimentation and accomplishment over weeks of painstaking labour. I feel as though I can conjure my future excitement and pride for graduating cohorts during their last exhibition.

While I like to believe that this sentiment is enough of a connection to education, I can't help but be drawn back to much earlier fears surrounding my start in graduate studies.

I fear *(that I might fear)* either losing access to or compromising my relationship to art as I have experienced it through art-education by entering non-art education spaces. Therefore, I what? Want to reproduce them? ~~(Is this a vocational versus scholarly argument?)~~

I hold to my sentiment here but there is an underlying fear from this romanticization that casts a long dark shadow. I'm curious as to what distinguishes the tie I have to that space. Is this tie contributing to my resistance of unifying my arts and academic identities?

On the one hand I could argue that my arts identity is an academic identity because it is so closely tied to my educational history. On the other hand, however, it is my teaching identity that is tied to my artist identity. It is the tension between my teaching and research identities that need to be resolved.

To this day, I see this as not only a possible path, but a likely one. Although, Oleson and Hora (2013) would argue that the assumption that post-secondary educators teach the way their mentors and teachers taught is a superficial myth, I imagine a future where I can become *like* my past teachers and mentors, like those who have helped mold me into who I am today. They are my inspiration. They are the reason that I am still making art and being creative. I want to be *that* educator. The educator who has the power to indulge the curiosities and creative ventures of burgeoning illustrators. Or the educator who creates spaces of refuge and rest if the rigors of the program become draining. Perhaps I will be even a step ladder of sorts, helping students overcome and navigate institutional structures and systems as they throw up barriers.

I am inspired to realize creative visions, foster a community of tinkering, and making, and exploring. Nurturing a space that honours multiple ways of seeing, engaging, representing, and (re)envisioning the world. I feel driven toward being a mentor or a pillar of support that can actively prepare ***MY*** students for the trials and tribulations of certain creative industries and ventures. It is a position, I feel, that would allow me to nurture spaces of non-knowing and risk-taking as energizing and full of possibility. Making spaces of challenge and tension feel less like a series of dark chasms, and more like openings (Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005).

Am I not afforded that in the spaces I am in now? What power does a perception of a space hold over the reality of a space?

I am inclined to connect this to my experience writing for a STEM audience—which at the time very much felt like a dark chasm—but where did that come from? Was it the perception of STEM or STEM identity that I feel runs so counter to my artist identity? Was it that I feared, after building up my ability to student in education, that I would revert back to not knowing how to student once I entered a STEM space?

However, I feel I can only imagine this so vividly because I have experienced it. While this is in line with Sools' (2020) suggestion that it is much easier to envision a near future in more vivid detail, I feel an underlying hesitancy and fear that this is me showing my naivete.

As time passes, I see this path as a romanticized perception of a potential future and likely, therefore, a dangerous one. It all feels too good to be true, even as an exercise in imagination. Maybe all I want is to re-enter a space where I felt most comfortable—the most myself and at home. A view of teaching and learning seen through the rosiest of rose-coloured glasses. *(Don't ~~meet~~ become your heroes then, right?)*

Progressive Fragment #2: Futures Present

In my current position I imagine a much less romantic, though otherwise still meaningful, future. I will finish my master's thesis, graduate, and… then what? I intend to teach in some capacity and, at some point, to enrol in a curriculum study related doctoral program. However, this is where my future descends into branching and converging complexity. Given that my professional practices and interests are prone to rapid pivots, rabbit holes, and collaborative deep dives, I can envision many realms and traceable threads of possibility. The privileged research experiences I have had illuminate the frequent unfolding of topics and questions both during and after the research process. I have the potential to examine data in different contexts and allow publications to emerge from any number of patterns, allowing more questions to emerge from those. New and connected questions lead to more grant applications, which lead to more data, more discussion, more patterns, more publications, more questions, and so on. It is an overwhelming network of infinite possibilities should I choose to pursue research alongside teaching.

My academic interests live heavily in the realm of curriculum studies, philosophy, critical pedagogy, sociology, and narrative inquiry. My creative interests live heavily in art-based inquiry as a way of mediating subjective experience, multimedia modes of expression, communication through illustration and design, with the added interest of creating spaces for creative and artistic exploration. Although I can't at this point name exactly what my PhD dissertation would entail, or the places I will end up teaching (between visual arts or education), I am sure of two things:

First, I will continue to engage in and practice of critical reflection and narrative/artistic self-study.

Second, I will continue to grow, take part in, and contribute to communities of practice that challenge and push boundaries. In terms of study, I foresee my research shifting from inward to outward. By that I mean, I want to branch out from using my experiences in my research toward a more collaborative style of research that examines the narratives and perspectives of shared experiences in contemporary academic environments. Whether that's specific to post-secondary education, arts education, or education in general; I want to engage in discussion with others in order to better understand the scope of academic institutional cultures and the subversive countercultures that are formed both within and against them.

The Joining & Crafting of 2 Stories: An Amendment

What has risen in these two progressive fragments are a deep tensions between myself as an artist, teacher, and researcher. Wrestling with the lines between art and science *(once again)*, I hope to elaborate on these two paths.

In the original body of this fragment, I said that "there is a high likelihood that neither of the above two fragmented possibilities will ever come to fruition." While my original meaning was intended to convey that I'm sure that, given my combined tendency to pivot wildly and follow my curiosities, I will most likely end up somewhere that I hadn't planned for, but I would be content. Yet, once again there is a underlying fear that permeates this section.

Is it a retreat? A distancing?

Is the fear caused ***by*** these tensions between identities? Or is fear ***causing*** these tensions in the first place?

My artist identity is heavily rooted in my arts-education experience. My perception and construction of my teaching identity is heavily rooted in my artist identity and arts-education experiences. Where things become disrupted, and my pathways seem to diverge resides in the (de/re)construction of my student identity as I shifted into graduate studies. This disruption resulted in what feels like at times is a separate student/teaching identity that is rooted in research and science.

But there is possibility—*there is a path*—where these futures and these identities converge. I am just right at the start of it.

Progressive Fragment #2.1: Futures ~~Sensible~~ Blended

~~Honestly, while I can envision futures closely linked to the very things that I am doing and studying today, I would like to mention again that I prefer to take a fluid approach to my future. I can see myself being just as happy working in a greenhouse surrounded by plants as I would be if I jump right into teaching post-secondary art. I know what I *want* to do at this very moment, but I also try to allow what I want to change and grow as my needs evolve. Therefore, allowing my current work, the challenges I face, and the opportunities that are presented to me mold and shape my future path with as little resistance as possible.~~

~~Though this fragment is quite small, I want to take this space to acknowledge that there is a high likelihood that neither of the above two fragmented possibilities will ever come to fruition. But I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing, nor that I should give up on either of those paths. It simply means that I ended up somewhere just as meaningful. Whether that means I leave the field of art or education entirely and enter something that is adjacent, like an 'alternative academic' career, entertaining the ideas of these futures gives me hope and inspires me to pursue whatever I may come to find meaningful in life. And I will fight tooth and nail to not let one narrow ambition blind me from the multiple wonderful experiences I might miss otherwise.~~

NOTE 10:

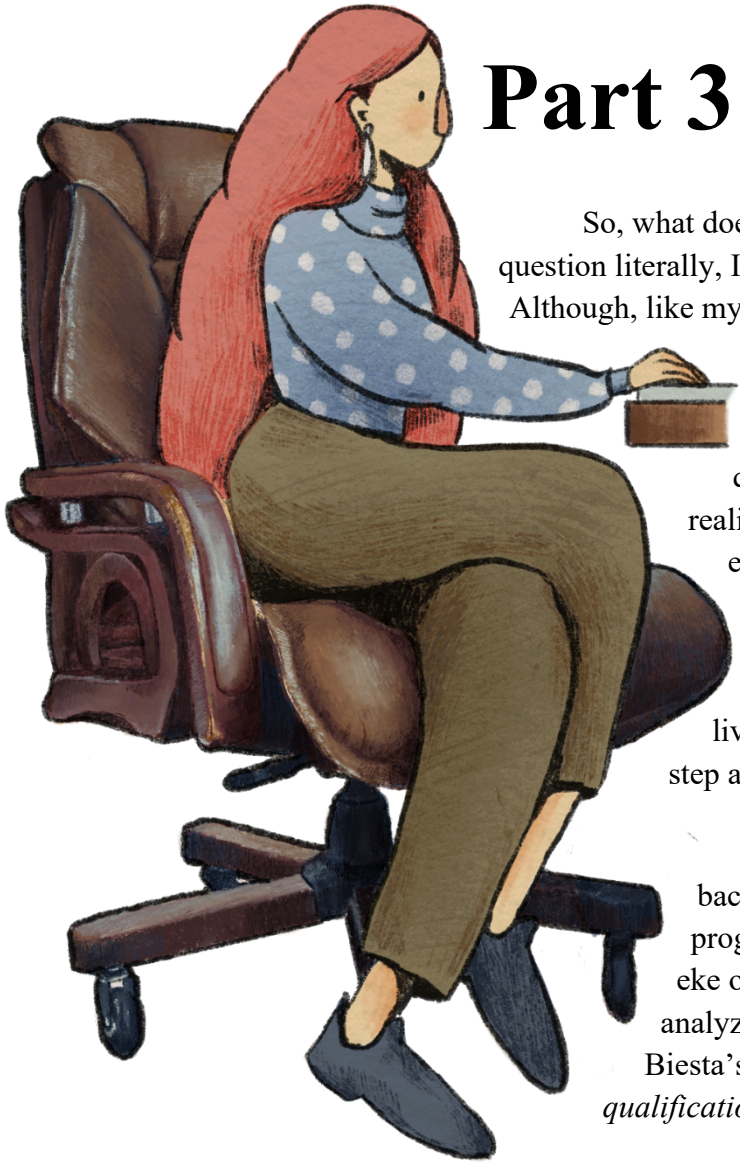
Outlandish Imaginings: A Micro Regressive Fragment & Futures Future

During my time in this program in the little pockets of community that I have found, I will admit there are two fantasies I have concocted that I may or may not have tried to get anyone in on. The first is that I have a pact with at least one of my peers to one day do a TED Talk. What that would entail exactly, I have no clue. But the dream is there. The second is that I would love to start an interdisciplinary podcast where I, or I and my friends, interview people to *demystify* their various fields and professions.

So often in the online realms of social media, certain professions and even academic fields hold idealized and mystic abstract forms. What I find these Mystic abstract forms accomplish is that they create a perception or image of the field or space that has pre-constructed meanings and therefore shapes how we act in and enter these spaces. Consequently, we internalize warped perceptions of what it means to be an artist or a teacher, or a "whatever" profession, and allow it to guide our expectations, actions, and judgments of those roles. For example, Pinterest boards, Instagram posts, TikToks, and studio/classroom blogs that present a perfect aesthetic existence in either field of teaching and art that don't reflect the lived (and often very messy) reality of what it means to be an artist or a teacher. In fact, many people feel guilt or shame for not being able to meet the "unmessy" expectations or feel blindsided when they enter these realms because their perceptions do not match the reality.

To clarify, I don't want to do this because I think people don't understand that social media is a façade to some degree, but I would love to create a platform for people to share their experiences in hopes to *chip away at the façade* and offer insight to those who may be curious about the lived realities a specific profession and potentially some comfort to those who may go though something that isn't glamourous or gory enough to be talked about online.

Higher education is not immune to this mystification either. Mixed perceptions of the esteemed and intellectual ivory tower can present a rigid façade of an image and set (presumed) expectations for what it means to be intellectual, scholarly, or even in its plainest form—"*smart"*. Yet, this façade doesn't reflect what I, nor my peers, have experienced in school. It's much more human and messier, as is everything else. And I want to talk about it.



Part 3: Analytical

So, what does this— past and future—mean for the present? Well, to take this question literally, I am in relatively the same spot as when I started. I am at my desk. Although, like myself, it has grown and changed over this portion of my journey. For example, I have upgraded my desk chair a few times thanks to some old roommates, hand-me-downs, and a friendly neighbour's spring cleaning. While I recognize that this literal interpretation of the question leaves little in the realm of substance for analysis, the realization that so much can change without dramatic shifts or cataclysmic events reveals to me that there is value in questioning the mundane (Dunn & Myers, 2020). There is substance behind questioning subtle shifts. And a lot to be seen behind the ways in which the institutions, systems, and norms we take part in everyday influence and propel our lives forward (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Reed-Danahay, 2017)—one small step at a time.

The analytical portion of currere is an opportunity to take a step back and respond to the snapshots taken during the regressive and progressive portions (Pinar, 1975/2015a). In order to do this, I am going to eke out overlapping and connected themes of identity, agency, and power by analyzing and situating my regressive and progressive fragments through Biesta's (2009; 2016; 2020) three domains or functions of education: *qualification, socialization, and subjectification.*

So, what are they? Why are they important? And how does it connect and support this analytical portion?

The WHAT: Biesta's three domains of education (*qualification, socialization, and subjectification)* encompass three overlapping *purposes* or *functions* of education. Education as *qualification* is the function of education—the function of teaching and learning—for transmitting and gaining necessary skills and understandings. Education as *socialization* refers to how schooling functions to integrate students into social, cultural, and professional institutional norms. While educators, schools, and policy writers sometimes intentionally do this through explicit curriculum guidelines and classroom activities (i.e. teaching citizenship) (Biesta, 2009; 2016; Franch, 2019), it is also often carried out in unspoken ways. For example, the process of *socialization* can play a role in identity formation through how students form relationships and *identify* with the world around them (Biesta 2016; 2020b). As well as the implicit assumptions gained through the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1971; Biesta, 2020; Giroux & Penna, 1979) in the classroom that influences student values, social behaviours, and relationships to people in power.

While the first two domains of education (Biesta 2009; 2016; 2020) function largely to support and prepare students to lead well-adjusted lives within societies' established norms, what is often missing is how education affects students as individuals *separate* from those norms. This is the third function of education known as *subjectification*. According to Biesta, we can understand *subjectification* as a function that opposes *socialization*, although the two functions need not always be conflicting. Where *socialization* is identifying *within* existing norms and practices, subjectification is tied to freedom, emancipation, and (in)action; how an individual exists *independent* of larger norms and structures. As Biesta put it, subjectivity "is about how I exist as the subject of my own life, not as the object of what other people want from me" (Biesta, 2020, p.93). The function of education as *subjectification,* therefore*,* becomes a part of being and living critically not just *in* the world but as an active participant *of* the world.

The WHY: None of the three domains are inherently good or bad, but for better or worse, they are interwoven. For the better, there is the possibility for harmony between qualification, socialization, and subjectification. For worse, however, there is potential for discord, tension, and conflict between the domains. Qualification and socialization often take precedence over subjectification (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020; Franch, 2019). Yet, education without subjectification is education without risk. According to Biesta (2016; 2020) the *beautiful risk* of education lives in the subjectification over the *(arguably much safer)* objectification of students. What is beautiful is that taking risks allows students to explore, interact freely with new ideas, and generate new understandings. What is risky is that

the effort involves time and creating spaces for making mistakes. This stands in stark contrast to creating spaces that strive only for correct answers or immediate and concrete understandings. While building skills and a strong understanding of curricular material is important, Biesta (2020) argues that when there is no risk—no room for students to form their own understandings or meanings as individuals—"education becomes nothing but perfect reproduction and thus turns into indoctrination" (p.103). This means that while education as *qualification* and *socialization* serves the important role of giving students the power to exist and find success in the wider world around them, it only serves to perpetuate the orders and norms of the world around them. However, *subjectification* gives students the power and direction toward challenging the world, opening possibilities for resisting changing the wider world around them.

The HOW: Connecting my regressive and progressive fragments to the three domains of education (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020) allows me to take a step away from these fragments in order to see them… in all their moments of tension and harmony… in a different but still interconnected light, something Aoki (2005/1987b) described as living in a space that honours both identity and difference. While Biesta largely uses these three domains to discuss education from the perspective of teaching, I am approaching it from the perspective of a student and *(imposter)* educator. I have illuminated themes over much wrestling with concepts of what it means to be scholarly or, at the very least, live and learn in academic spaces. From the start of my journey in online graduate studies to its now and nearing end, the three functions of education (Biesta 2009; 2016; 2020) have undoubtedly affected who I am and how I interact with the world around me in both moments of discordant conflict and in moments of harmonious balance. Leveraging my perspective as a student without formal classroom teaching experiences (like many of my peers) offers a lens through which I can see and interact with ideas and experiences of teaching and learning that are uninfluenced by the qualification, socialization, and subjectification that accompanies formal teacher education or years of experience teaching in higher education.

Experiences that have led to the development of invaluable communities of practice have supported me, at the very least, to not be entirely disillusioned or disparaged by the requirements and conditions of post-secondary education. While I often lean into the feelings of hope and unbridled optimism that this provides, yet my despair (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019) still lingers. Dichotomies of possibility and necessity persist amongst my battles between schooling (see *Note 11*) and education and the way myself and my peers go about our personal and professional lives. Behaviours such as playing the role of the perfect employee and studenting (Biesta, 2017; Fenstermacher, 1986; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013), become tempting ways to game the system (Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) or passively comply with requirements (McKnight, 2009) in ways that prioritize achievement while minimizing risk.

Why even consider *subjectification* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020) as a valuable function of education when *qualification* and *socialization* feel like safer and easier options?

In this temptation, I find that despair (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman 2019) still permeates how I question and engage in the world. Yet, the tensions that this despair or dread produce is becoming to feel less like a series of dark chasms, and more like openings (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987a; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005)—markers or alarm bells that beckon from within to investigate and explore; opportunities to take risks that would challenge me as an individual through meaningful and critical engagement with the world; and, risks that provoke me to call into question the status quo and demands of our institutions and take action (McKnight, 2009).

NOTE 11:
Education vs. Schooling

Although, the distinction between "education" and "schooling" has pretty much permeated nearly all that I have read, the distinction wasn't made apparent to me until I read Rose's (2013) *On Reflection.* On the dichotomy, she quotes Maxine Green:

"We are interested in education here, not schooling. We are interested in openings, in unexplored possibilities, not in the predictable, or the quantifiable, not in what is through of as social control. For us, education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meaning, and learning to learn." (Green, 2001, p.7, as cited in Rose, 2013, p.99)

In line with *currere* (Pinar, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c) and conceptions of education as *life journey* (Grumet, 1976/2015a; Macedo, 1997), the distinction between education and schooling when framed this way speaks to education as processes and embodied way of engaging in and being with the world that is counter to generalized and traditional forms of schooling. Green's statement, at least to me, speaks volumes on what *schooling* lacks, and speaks volumes to my intense and darting curiosities, my rabbit-holing, and a whole relationship to learning that was not gained *in schooling*, but acquired through moments of *freedom from schooling*.

This kind of beckoning, for me, calls for an inquiry into the (lesser cared-for emotional) and sensory experience; it feels like an opportunity to shed light on the preconceptual (Pinar, 1975/2015a), and take part in a search for a language to describe the not yet known or understood. Its openings invite us to interrupt our understandings and identities in order to bring ourselves into our world. Biesta (2020) argued that *subjectification* should not be the ultimate goal of education and we should also not consider subjectification a process of becoming. I would argue that *subjectification* is however, at the core of *be(com)ing*. *Subjectification* is what interrupts and encompasses becoming with being (*BE*com*ING*). This subjective action—the interruption—is what separates training or schooling (see *Note 11)* from education (Biesta, 2020). Education, therefore, is undeniably multidimensional and intersubjective (Biesta, 2016). Meaning that *qualification, socialization, and subjectification* play an equally large role in shaping who we are in relation with the world around us.

Analytical Fragment #1: Schooling as Qualification

Out of the three domains of education as outlined by Biesta (2009; 2016; 2020), the purpose of qualification, he argues, is considered the most common and logically assumed function of schooling. Education as *qualification* is associated with the purpose of acquiring knowledge, practical skills, and certifications. This is done through structured forms of teaching and learning that hinge on transmission and acquisition (Biesta, 2009; 2016). Although Biesta did not necessarily outline qualification as a motivating force toward seeking or pursuing education, I believe that taking into consideration the term *purpose* to mean function as much as motive adds a meaningful layer in my interpretation that accounts for the complexities I've experienced and witnessed at the intersection of being both an educator and a graduate student. In this sense, I shift between person-centred and institutional lenses in order to poke at the relationship between ambition and intention juxtaposed with the demands and requirements that often accompany the *qualifying* function of education. After all, education may have a set of defined reasons and intentions for doing things but in higher education, students do too.

This can be seen in my intentions to start a career in post-secondary education, as well as my recent intentions to pursue a PhD. This Master's degree is a necessary qualification needed to pursue either of those paths. However, despite qualification being a purpose for my continuation of studies, it did not feel as though it was my sole motivator. After all, as I mentioned during the regressive portion (see *Regressive Fragment #1*), I could have just pursued a Master of Fine Arts degree if all I wanted was to pursue post-secondary art teaching. It would have been less of a leap in terms of my existing qualifications, background knowledge, and skillset as well because I would be staying closer to my original field of study.

Before I started my journey toward a master's education my concerns nestled themselves deeply within doubts regarding my purpose and legitimacy (Adams et al., 2017; Aoki, 1991) in entering the field of education. While I knew, to some extent, that I needed a graduate degree if I wanted to teach at the post-secondary level, I realized I had a wider, muddier, more personal connection to education that I wanted to explore. However, upon starting my degree I felt a profound sense of isolation and disconnect from my peers. I felt this because I had not yet learned the necessary language and background knowledge needed to meaningfully participate (Freeman, 2002). I felt as though I lacked the correct context, relationships, and experiences in teaching that Freeman outlines is so critical for teachers in education or learning spaces. I felt as though I was not *qualified.* Consequently, I saw no possible entry point to relate to my peers' lived experiences as educators. Early on in my journey, this manifested as pedagogical lurking (Beaudoin, 2002; Dennen, 2008) and the beginning of a battle with impostor syndrome (Hawley, 2019).

While different from my intentions, *qualification* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020) also seemed to be a driving purpose for my peers. Many of them, as I found out early on, were working toward a Master's in Education to advance their existing careers, boost their salaries, or improve their professional/pedagogical practices. This typically felt like a resounding interest in tools and techniques they could bring into their classrooms. Even as the pandemic was tossing the education system writ large into disarray (See *Regressive Fragment #3.2*), we were meeting regularly to discuss ideas and strategies. While a lot of that work was very personal and reflective, *qualification* still came into play as we exchanged the invaluable *knowledge* and *skills* we had learned in hopes of lessening the distress and uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

While Biesta (2016) contends that qualification is not the exclusive purpose of schooling, he discloses that "some […] argue that it is the only thing that should matter in schools" (p.128). *(—Which would explain the very strange looks I would receive when I hesitantly introduced myself during ice breakers).* However, if qualification should be the only thing that matters in schooling—its only function—we are disregarding not only the implicit things that are learned through education (socialization) but also disregarding how what is being taught and learned is impacting how students view themselves as individuals.

So, what does that mean for how we perceive competency or skill?
Would a person then, need to be accredited to have value in the workforce (or in society)?
Do specific qualifications or fields hold more value than others?
How does this impact teachers' approach to their teaching?
How does this impact students' orientation towards learning?

Roberts (1998) points towards the commodification of higher education and a subsequent shift in teacher-student relations to one of product providers and consumers. In this, education becomes much less about risk, as Biesta (2016) would have it, and more about efficient, cost-effective, and convenient modes of certification. As a result, higher education students, who are already privileged enough to pay to attend a post-secondary institution, expect a good value for their dollars spent (Noble, 2002; Roberts, 1998). Consequently, educational environments are shifting toward spaces "where knowledge as product, performance and commodity is favoured over knowledge as insight, appreciation and understanding" (Robertson & Bond, 2005, p.511).

However, these market-driven dispositions toward education as a commodity are not exclusive to higher education. Biesta (2016) himself often refers to policy-driven pedagogical practices that take the risk of failure or deviation out of education. Through this removal of risk, classrooms create an objectified view of teachers, students, and education itself as assembly lines of inputted materials and outputted products in the form of positive assessments, acquired certifications, meeting specific quotas or milestones, and successful development of skills. What this has led to, I feel is a hidden curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995) that teaches *studenting* (Biesta, 2017; Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) or how to be a student over anything else.

Biesta (2017) seemingly contends that *studenting* and teaching *studenting* is a valuable tool for overcoming learnification—the naturalization of learning (Biesta, 2016)— through teaching skills and knowledge acquisition practices. *Studenting* after all, generally encompasses the behaviours associated with the role of being a student. Students learn how to study and engage with classroom activities in a way that runs complimentary to how their teachers are teaching. And teachers are teaching in such a way that intend to lead students toward to high achievement and mastery of content, or 'learning' (Fenstermacher, 1986; Goldin, 2010). While in theory student participating in *studenting* would be considered a 'good student', what Biesta (2017) seemingly glosses over, is the less glamorous flip side of *studenting*. Even Fenstermacher (1997, as cited in Goldin, 2010) seemed to have a change in perspective when it comes to *studenting* where, rather than contribute to learning, an education system that prioritizes achievement is consequently gamifying (Liljedahl & Allan, 2013; Pinar, 2004) the role of the student. This then leads to the student "playing school" (Pinar, 2004, p.240) in ways that are perhaps detached from any subjective meanings. Liljedahl and Allan (2013) argue that when it comes to learning spaces where success is incentivized and measured through grading "there is a certain rationality to (students') actions [...] such as minimisation of effort, economy of action, bounded rationality (Simon, 1955), loss aversion, and risk aversion" (p.7) for students. In this way students can undermine learning goals and teacher intentions while still technically *playing by the rules*.

What this looked like for me was the adjustment and acclimation I had to make in the early stages of this journey—although it wasn't always smooth sailing. I could argue that my distress at the hands of my unfamiliarity with the assignment and assessment structure was, in many ways, associated with me not knowing how to *student* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) in this space. My asking "Who do I have to become to fit in and do well here?" leaned more towards not knowing the *rules of the game* of graduate studies or university learning more generally. This generated a *good student* dilemma, or *student versus learner dilemma* (Fenstermacher, 2006). This was a practice of risk aversion (Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) for me, where I felt I had to remove parts of my inner self or hide my thoughts, feelings, and struggles in order to maintain the *good student* illusion. An illusion, whose maintenance felt much more like superficial *box-ticking* as opposed to meaningfully engaging with content and discussion.

Prior to the start of my journey, we can see this *box-ticking* represented in my experiences with asynchronous online learning before I had enrolled in (synchronous) online graduate studies. These courses felt dreary and cumbersome. Delivered weekly in digital packets, course content populated my browser window in bland grey lines that expanded into bland grey boxes for each week's module. Rather, I felt isolated (Zembylas, 2008) and as though *there was no room* for those parts of my inner self and no space for meaningful social interaction. There was no risk as (Biesta, 2016). The courses felt more concerned with efficiencies, cost-effectiveness, and convenience. Yet, consequently, there was a despairing gap between the mechanistic demands of the courses and meaningful, agentic, and engaging arts courses that I had come to know over the course of my undergraduate studies. It is a hint at the *'good student' dilemma* and *despair of necessity* (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019) whereby I had to choose to *student* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) and abide by the rules and class procedures *(no matter how dreary)* or drop the courses (and their accompanying credits) in hopes of finding something more engaging.

In the earlier stages of my journey, rather than longing for risky spaces, I avoided risk as much as I could. I spent a lot of my time hiding and lurking (Dennen, 2008). This risk averse behaviour ran counter to my love of risk-encouraging space in art and art education (s*ee Regressive Fragment #1.1, 2.2, Progressive Fragment #1)*. When I did finally take a 'risk' it was only due to the consequences of my own actions. Having avoided completing discussion postings for so long, when I "came clean", in one of my final assignments about my 'subversion' of requirements, that subversion wasn't rooted so much in transgression (Biesta, 2016) but more so in atonement and vulnerability for having not played by the rules.

Combining the contradictory nature, the way I engaged with risk were my experiences *rabbit holing* (*see Regressive Fragment 3.1*). At first, I leveraged the practice as a tool to supplement my pedagogical lurking (Dennen, 2008) and as a means to 'catch up', learn the language, context, and rules (Freeman, 2002), and learn how to *student* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) in this new online academic space. However, the practice evolved into something much more engaging and exciting. Rather than going down rabbit holes as a means of qualification and training (Biesta, 2020b) that were driven by my fears and anxieties, the rabbit holes turned into fast paced forays of curiosity with no concern for how it would or would advance my qualification and training.

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I'll reiterate two of my questions from earlier, how does a focus on qualification impact students' orientation towards learning? And how does this impact teachers' approach to their teaching? Whether it be a drive to student *studenting* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) or a *despairing* (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019) compliance to the increasingly

mechanized forms of modern education, the prioritization *qualification* (Biesta, 2016), when considered on its own, leaves much to be examined into the way it affects how carry out our day to day lives.

Analytical Fragment #2: Schooling as Socialization

While I previously touched on the hidden curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995) and its promotion of *studenting* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013), I acknowledge that the hidden curriculum is equally associated with *socialization* as it is *qualification* (2009; 2016; 2020). Accompanying and consequently linked to *qualification* as the supposedly 'primary' purpose of education, according to Biesta, is the domain of *socialization*. By *socialization,* Biesta refers to the purpose of education toward becoming "part of existing social, political, professional, and so on 'orders'" (Biesta, 2016, p.60). In this, he suggests that *socialization* is the location where we construct our identities. The function of schools is therefore to aid in students' connection to integration with larger systems, ideas, and cultures. Schools then become locations for social and societal cohesion, and the classroom, campus, and schoolyard become a primary environment where identity is formed and negotiated (Biesta, 2016; 2020).

However, Buckingham (2008) contends that the notion of identity is perhaps not so cut and dried. Instead, it is quite murky and paradoxical. On the one hand, people use identifiers to signify individuality and difference. Yet, they are also used to signify similarity and associations or memberships in specific categories or groups. Complicating this further is the notion that individuals do not always have control over their intersecting and multiple identities (Biesta, 2020; Buckingham, 2008). In part, this is because of various personal and biographical qualities, however, we do not always have control of our identities. Rather, our identities are conditional and defined by those around us (Buckingham, 2008).

The conceptualization of education as a site with the purpose of socialization (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020) is not as innocuous as simply providing cultural and social contexts whereby students can associate themselves. Nor does it explicitly acknowledge the critical importance of power

Note 12:
No Socialization = No Belonging?

Although I'm not sure if this is what Biesta (2009; 2016; 2020) intended to mean, but my identifying as an outsider in the early portion of my studies and my desires to interact in educational discourse left me *longing* for the time when I would finally feel *socialized* into the program and university level academics. Or at the very least, that I would adjust to keeping my head down long enough to fast-track my degree. It felt as if I were in high school, ready to reinvent myself in order to fit in. I quickly attempted to put all my existential and philosophical questions and curiosities aside in order to adopt as many of the common attitudes, perspectives, and opinions as possible. (As an irrelevant aside, what this led to was a quite profound revelation much further down the line that not all scholarly articles hold the same weight or truth, and that I was in fact allowed to disagree with or criticize them. Who knew?!) Yet, the more I did that, the more I became consumed with my own feelings of value and (il)legitimacy (re: not being exposed as an impostor who is here by mistake). I was paying more attention to my grades and being perceived as an excellent or *good* student or *good* group member over engaging with what I was learning in ways that were exciting and meaningful to me.

relations and potentially harmful cultural norms embedded in and surrounding schooling. Li (2015) warns of a loss of identity autonomy that accompanies oppressive power relations. Losing identity autonomy gives way to conformity or complicity with dominant modes of being. In the context of oppressive systems or structures, there is a risk oppressive ideologies and values will be internalized and a subsequent risk of horizontal violence—as opposed to action that challenges the system that imposed the oppressive ideologies in the first place (Freire, 2005; Li, 2015; Pinar, 1975/2015c).

Pinar (1975/2015c) equates the internalization values imposed by schooling to *madness* where students experience "an estrangement from self due to modeling" (p.13) as they become socialized to conform to the dominant ideals with little question. Pinar continues that through schooling "the child must learn, and this learning probably occurs unconsciously, that he is unacceptable as he is, and in order to be acceptable, both to himself and to others, he must be like someone else" (p.15). While schooling may impose the subconscious internalization of this *madness* over childhood and adolescence, it often permeates how we behave in adult education and professional domains just as pervasively. At its most intense, Buckingham (2008) argues from the Foucauldian perspective that at the end of the day, we have no say in who we are or how we conduct ourselves. Rather, social norms dictate how we live our lives and come to expect how others should as well. Buckingham continues to suggest that these social norms perpetuate themselves through actions of power, socialization, and self-imposed regulation of behaviours. Ensuring that people do not deviate too far from social norms and the current order is maintained.

Aside from more overarching societal manifestations of power in schooling, self-estrangement (Pinar 1975/2015c) or intentionally fracturing the self may occur in academic environments. This fracturing may be a protective or professional response to a culture of objectivity that rejects the reflective and embodied inclusion of one's identity (Palmer, 2007). I can see the self-protective process, as discussed by Palmer (2007), in my self-minimization and desperate search to 'know enough' or 'catch up' to my peers in constructing a monolithic academic identity, or at the very least an identity that would lead me toward feeling a sense of belonging and cohesion with my peers (see *Note 11*). While I was consciously aware of my multiple identities, I kept my artist identity tucked away for a long time, keeping references to it relatively superficial or functional. I felt as though any external incorporation of my artist-self would detract from my validity and legitimacy as an academic.

In academics, Palmer (2007) refers to this as the *allure of the disconnected life* that is manifested through a fear that is wrought by the powers embedded in the academe's structure and indoctrinated throughout schooling. It is a fear that "leads many children, born

with a love of learning, to hate the idea of school" (p.36) and leads educators to divorce themselves from their practice should anything go awry, "fearful that [they] are not just a bad teacher, but a bad person" (p.37).

In the latter part of this journey while working as a research assistant, I too in my own way, faced an overwhelming urge to either jump ship or give way to the rules and demands of the work I was doing (McKnight, 2009) while trying to contribute to a paper for the IEEE International Symposium on Technology and Society (ISTAS) 2021 conference (see Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021). In retrospect, the stress I was feeling stemmed not from despair (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019) but from false perceptions of what I thought I needed to be in order to succeed. Having just felt steady in my burgeoning identity as a researcher, the dread I felt writing for the conference abruptly knocked me off my feet.

This moment in time presents two interesting ideas in the realm of *socialization* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). First, was that in order for me to feel so suddenly *out of my depth*, I would have had to have been or achieved some level of comfort or meaningful *socialization* in the first place. Second, however, that means I had picked up—or been *socialized*—to assume that the culture of engineering, or STEM more generally, was somehow irreconcilably different from that of my own in education. *(It doesn't help that the research was focusing on creating countercultural spaces in STEM).* So, as a result, I felt as though I was right back to the isolated space I was in when I started; *wading through tears in front of my researcher peers; metaphorically plopped right back into my kitchen chair, alone, and so desperately convinced that I had no right to a voice in this place* (see *Note #9*). Which leads me to wonder about the connections between *socialization* and identity as they relate to how we form our perceptions and negotiate feelings of belonging and agency. *(Although I cannot take credit for those thoughts as they too have been closely tied to my experiences and the ideas and research, I have been engaging with over the latter half of my studies.)*

The same sentiment regarding how I had picked up—or been *socialized* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). —to assume that the culture of engineering ran so counter to the culture I had been enculturated into education can be applied to the fear and resistance I felt when shifting from a college arts space to an (online) university graduate space. Not only did I not feel *qualified* and subsequently I pushed myself to *(essentially)* relearn how to *student* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) in this new space, but I did not feel *socialized* either (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). It felt as though I had to (de/re)construct my identity—self-divide (Palmer, 2007) and self-estrange (Pinar, 1975/2015c)— as an artist and student in order to not feel like an impostor (Hawley, 2019).

Although it feels easier to focus on the caveats, I cannot speak only negatively about the *socialization* process (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020) in higher education. My work conducting research and speaking at conferences, mentoring, and co-authoring papers is a massive part of being *socialized* into the norms, ideals, and culture of working and researching in higher education. So, it has positively contributed to my sense of belonging and agency. And although I encountered hurdles, like my crumbling at the idea of writing for an engineering conference as mentioned above (see *Note #9*), it was otherwise a shining example of the harmony achieved between education as a process of *qualification* and *socialization* through various meaningful and engaging educational experiences.

Self-estrangement (Pinar, 2015c) and divisions of self (Palmer, 2007) as we learn it through schooling and *socialization* within schooling are not the be-all end-all condition of structured forms of education. Much like the function of *qualification* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020), *socialization* is a catalyst for my finding success and a sense of place within this academic space. At the beginning of this journey, perhaps I lacked *socialization* as much as I lacked *qualification*. And in order to pursue my ambitions to get a PhD in education and continue conducting research, I require both a strong *academic identity* (Billot, 2010; Henkle, 2005; Winter, 2009) as well as the *knowledge and skills* in order to succeed (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020).

Analytical Fragment #3: Education as Subjectification

Biesta (2009; 2016; 2020) proposes a third and final purpose of education as the domain of education as subjectification. As Biesta put it, subjectivity "is about how I exist as the subject of my own life, not as the object of what other people want from me" (Biesta, 2020, p.93). In this, education in the realm of *subjectification* serves as a site opposite of socialization—or how we operate within social norms—toward action and independence from social norms. With ties to critical pedagogy and existentialist philosophy, subjectification represents a democratic function of education. Subjectification, according to Biesta (2016) and "has to do with emancipation and freedom and with the responsibility that comes with such freedom" (p.4). A freedom and responsibility that supports and calls for transgressive resistance against oppressive norms (Biesta 2016; hooks, 1994)

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As I have arrived here, I am now questioning whether the futures I have imagined for myself through my progressive fragments are at all aligned with the objectification of my own life, the "what others want from me" that Biesta alluded to (Biesta 2020, p.93).

Are my aspirations the product of my socialization in higher education?
Am I the product of cultivation (Biesta, 2020)?
Or do my experiences and desires reflect subjectification?

Palmer (2007) would caution that my romanticizing my desire to teach art and become, in a sense, much like the teachers who taught me (see *Progressive Fragment #1*) could cause self-alienation if I tried to *mirror* how I was taught. Yet, contrary to my initial negative appraisal, Palmer argues that *reflecting* instead on what has called us to teach and all the rosy sentimentalized moments that inspired us or pushed us to grow, actually helps us lead undivided lives. Or as Biesta (2016; 2020) would have it, brings us closer to ourselves—close to *subjectness* and *(—again)* situates ourselves as a "subject of [our] own life, not as the object of what other people want from [us]" (Biesta, 2020, p.93).

From the beginning of my telling of this journey, I have been interested in the conditions that have enabled me to feel moments of freedom and excitement during my schooling both in and outside of the virtual walls of my master's program. As I mentioned in my contemplation on *Education vs. Schooling* (see *Note #11),* the positive relationship and association I had gained with learning and education was not gained in *schooling*, but through moments of *freedom from schooling.* Yet, most of those moments did in fact happen *in a school setting.* For example, how I discussed art making and art-education for me had been a source of liberating support, community, creative freedom, risk-taking, and enthusiastic inquiry. A source of engaging with ideas, new understandings, and knowledge through *embodied ways of knowing* (Barbour, 2004; 2018).

Similar to Biesta (2020) who positions subjectification as an existential paradigm through bringing our "I" into education, Barbour (2004) suggested that embodied ways of knowing come from "the existential condition of being a person" (p.229). Education cannot occur without the subject (Biesta, 2020) in as much as we gain our knowledge through the body through our lived experiences and whatever contexts, backgrounds, and feelings that may be interwoven with them (Barbour, 2018).

It was not until much later in this journey that I came toward a stronger understanding of what it meant to know things in an *embodied way* or why I associated my arts education and other educational experiences as *freeing and liberating*. These were not spaces in which I was physically *free* from school, but where I was allowed to bring my "I" (Biesta, 2020) into my education. For me this is freedom from *education* solely as *cultivation*; education without permission for *subjectification* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). After all, "only when subjectification enters the scene that we are in the domain of education, whereas when there is not a place for subjectification, we are in the domain of training" (Biesta, 2020, p.102). These were educational spaces that struck a harmony between the inseparable realms of education as *qualification, socialization,* and *subjectification* (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020); moments of *education* over *schooling*.

Freeing moments, or arguably the most *subjectifying* moments I've encountered along this journey, were the ones that were tied directly to deep reflection, vulnerability, and moments of dizzying inquiry and tension (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987a) that ultimately interrupted and challenged my understandings.

Discovering literature on care (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013) and counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Lane, 2016; Ong et al., 2017; Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021; Solórzano et al. 2000) not only challenged the lenses in which I perceived STEM education, but presented a path of possibility and hope. For myself, even having the opportunity to participate in the research process and have my voice heard was an invaluable period of harmony between *qualification, socialization, and subjectification* as I have

come to understand it (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). In the realm of *qualification,* I was able to learn and develop my skills and understanding not only on the research topic at hand, but also for the benefit of my research and writing skills. In the realm of *socialization*, I had begun to build a researcher identity for myself. And although at times it felt conflicting, it was the opportunity to come together and research as community, build a rapport with my peers as mentor and mentee, and incorporate *my voice* and on the discussion of care (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013) and counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Lane, 2016; Ong et al., 2017; Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021; Solórzano et al. 2000) that I could bring myself as *subject* (Biesta, 2016; 2020). All this aided in the construction of an *academic identity* (Billot, 2010; Henkle, 2005; Winter, 2009) for me that was integrated with the intersectional aspects of myself—instead of siloed. *(Or at least less siloed…)*

Although the research I was assisting in revolved around STEM and STEM identity, care (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013) and counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Lane, 2016; Ong et al., 2017; Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021; Solórzano et al. 2000) are not so far detached from the research I am doing here in this thesis. Echoing the unspoken importance of critical reflection on and resistance from the environments in which we live and work, care and counterspaces value and prioritize building communities that integrate multiple intersecting identities. As I mentioned previously, Palmer (1987) argues that community in this sense becomes not only a means to bring people together, but an ideal that promotes connected and relational ways of knowing that incorporate the self, others, and the world. Therefore, tearing down instead of building walls between the personal and professional, and integrating conditions that support freedom and *subjectification* (Biesta, 2016; 2020) no matter the rigidity of your environments or the dominant ways of being and knowing that govern what you are studying. Care (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 2012; 2013) and counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Lane, 2016; Ong et al., 2017; Ruttenberg-Rozen et al., 2021; Solórzano et al. 2000) present a path to hope because they cause meaningful action and resistance towards (what I feel like are) educational spaces that are *freeing.*

However, for there to be moments in which I am *'free'* implies that there are moments where I am '*not free'*. This has manifested itself throughout this journey as overwhelming tensions between my inner and outer selves. Palmer (2007) argues that "when we listen primarily for what we "ought" to be doing with our lives, we may find ourselves hounded by external expectations that can distort our identity and integrity" (p.31)—or, as Biesta (2016; 2020) would have it, distorts our *subjectness.*

Subjectification (Biesta, 2016; 2020) in education has to do with freedom through its central defining feature of (in)action—the possibility for action or inaction—or agency through the power laden relationship between teacher and student. This is accompanied by much risk, particularly the risk of resistance from students.

But what happens when students resist subjectification?
What happens if teachers resist or are pressured to resist subjectification?

Democratic and emancipatory teaching is teaching with *subjectification* in mind or bringing and keeping the "I" of the student and the "I" of the teacher at the forefront of their education (Biesta, 2020). As I have come to view it, education without subjectification is *schooling*, and consequently *erodes student agency* (Biesta; 2020; Fenstermacher, 2006). According to Biesta (2016; 2020), if a teacher is concerned with their student's freedom or *subjectification*, they must deny students the opportunity to position themselves as the object of their own education. Which, as I've come to realize throughout this journey, is much easier said than done.

Whether, this, or any of these tensions (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987a; 2005/1993) and despairing contributions manifests in succumbing unquestioningly to institutional demands in our professional lives, as suggested by McKnight (2009), or shift toward *studenting* (Fenstermacher, 1986; 2006; Goldin, 2010; Liljedahl & Allan, 2013) in our educational lives, on either ends of the spectrum we are constraining our own agency or the agency of others (Fenstermacher, 2006; McKnight, 2009) and falling away from subjectivity (Biesta, 2016; 2020) toward the allure of the disconnected life (Palmer, 2007).

So how do we resist the desire to resist?
Or—to rephrase—how do we resist the conditions through which subjectification is limited?

Part 4: Synthetical

Through these analytical fragments I have discussed my experiences and imaginings for the future through Biesta's (2009; 2016; 2020) three overlapping functions of education: education as *qualification*, education as *socialization*, and education as *subjectification*. Commonalities have emerged regarding education as a space of both freedom and despair (McKnight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2019), as they represent moments of harmony and discord between each of the three domains (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020). Particularly discord that has emerged from experiences and deep contemplation on educational environments that stifle *subjectification* and cause tensions at the intersection of identity, agency, and power.

Before I share ways in which we can circumnavigate barriers to *subjectification* (Biesta, 2020)—or resisting the desire to resist, so to speak— I wish to gather and synthesize (as the title *synthetical* suggests) all of the previous fragments. The synthetical portion of *currere* brings all parts together to find larger overarching meanings and connections that were explored through the initial three parts. In many ways this is aimed at shortening the distance between our internal and external self as much as it is a critical discussion of the context that encompasses the present and how that context impacts our experiences and understandings (Pinar, 1975/2015a). Moreover, the synthetical is a launching point toward action, change, and mobilization towards new modes of being in the world (Pinar, 2004).

It is my aim in this synthetical portion to connect all of these contiguous fragments and arrange them in such a way that I can present a final picture to you. Here I will discuss complications of (non)identity primarily through Stets and Burke (2003; Buke & Stets, 2015) and colleagues (Burke & Stryker, 2000). I will also discuss the intersections of identity, power, and dominant structures primarily through Hargreaves' (2003) discussion on the knowledge economy. These will serve as the two final fragments of this work. To conclude I will arrange the final picture through a discussion on critical pedagogy, power, agency, resistance, hope, and change. After which, I will end this work by piecing the fragments together and providing some parting thoughts.

Synthetical Fragment #1: Identity, Power, & The Academy as Unautobiographical

Besides a connection to Biesta's education as *qualification* and *socialization*— or *cultivation* (Biesta, 2020), what stood out was a familiar feeling of pressure that has told me to remove or detach ourselves from our work. A feeling that I would describe as one that lingers through academic spaces like a thick fog, distorting my view of self and others, that tells me for any work or research I do to be considered rigorous, unbiased, valid, or even taken seriously, I must remove yourself entirely from your work.

To start this discussion about academic non-identity I want to touch on the idea of tensions that arise from academic identity through the lens of identity verification (Buke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2003) and Carlone and Johnson's science identity model (2007). Through this I intend to (lightly) theorize a holistic view of academic identity that includes both students and educators, and explore how tension and discord between overlapping non-academic and academic identities can occur. In turn, I hope to illustrate how the expectations, perceptions, and values associated with having an academic identity can consequently compel us to detach ourselves from our work— or consequently adopt an *academic non-identity*.

Note 13: I can put "I" in a Paper?

Before I return to this line of thought, I can't help but think back to the myriad of times where my classmates and I were astounded to learn that we were not only allowed use "I" in a paper, but we were encouraged to do so. Yet, at the same time, I had borne witness to a number of masters level students attempt to defend their qualitative research against doubts of rigour and claims of bias from professors and audience members alike. All because they either actively participated in their research or because they had embedded their stories in the conception and creation of their thesis.

Now, I recognise that in education spaces narrative and narrative identity work (Case & Hunter, 2012), are prevalent and accepted in certain fields. I was even able to publish a collaborative autoethnography that was essentially nothing but mine and my peers' combined narratives.

And what of this thesis? I am using "I" in nearly every paragraph, backed by a network of method(ologies).

So, what did this contradiction tell me? It told me that embedding yourself or participating in any kind of public reflection in your work is only okay insofar as it is done as either a class activity or put forth sparingly in the "right" niche circles.

What does non-identity mean?
How do we get to a non-identity?
How did we conclude that universities are supposedly unautobiographical spaces?

My experiences up until this point have been discussed through Palmer's (2007) self-preserving allure of the disconnected life, Pinar's (Pinar, 1975/2015c) learned madness. All of which presumed the detachment of oneself from one's professional life whether that be in teaching, research, or learning.

The disconnect between "I" and what we do in academia arises from a culture that prizes objectivity and manipulation of the real physical world, while disregarding anything outside of that scope as 'subjective fantasy', unempirical, or irrational (Palmer, 2007). This suggests that in order to achieve validity— to hold some form of valid identity—in academia it must be siloed from other aspects of ourselves and untainted by our internal 'subjective fantasies' (Palmer, 2007). Yet, scholars (Adams et al., 2017; Allen-Collinson, 2013; Leggo, 2008) dispute the praising of objectivity and separation of personal and professional in research, suggesting that researchers and research is never neutral.

Similar to Biesta (2009; 2016; 2020) who positions identity construction as a central component of the *socialization process*, Stets and Burke (2003; Burke & Stets, 2015) and colleagues (Burke & Stryker, 2000) elaborate on Stryker's (1980/2002; as cited by Burke & Stets, 2015) theoretical framework of identity. For them, identity as a concept formed through the interaction between people and the meanings they create between social structures and orders. Meaning that identity is reliant on "the relationship between the individual and society" (Burke & Stets, 2015, p.147). In this theory, identity is both an internal subjective process as well as an external interactive process. Identity is internal because it is impacted by social structures as we internalize and find meaning both in them. Identity is external because we are actors within society and its social structures who impose meanings through social interactions. That is to say that the meanings that we attribute to our identity, whether or not they are culturally shared, impact the standards of how we behave, pushing us to act in ways that are in accordance or harmony with our identities (Burke & Stets, 2015; Stets & Carter, 2011).

However, the concept of identity is complex (Burke & Stryker, 2000). Not only is identity formed through the roles we have as individuals but also through our overlapping socio-cultural, and personal contexts (Burke & Stryker, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2005). Within our overlapping multiple identities, there is a possibility for tension and discord between an individual's multiple identities. Complexities are added when we consider how our identity is (in)validated through identity verification and non-verification processes, and tensions are compounded between internal and external meanings when how we want to behave is contradicted by how we assume or are told we ought to behave (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000; Stets & Burke 2003; 2005; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016). Therefore, identity is not solely the relationship between society and self. Instead, it is the *multiple* relationships between society, self and others.

Identity verification revolves around the confirmation of meaning by either self or others with shared standards of any given identity (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000; Stets & Burke 2003; 2005; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016). Identity verification serves different purposes across different types of identity, but consistently relies on others validating your identity in line with how you identify yourself (Trettevik & Grindal, 2016). Verification of *role identities* (i.e. student, teacher, researcher, artist, etc.) often

result in feelings of agency and achievement; a sense of belonging emerges from the verification of *social identities* (i.e. gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.); alongside a strong sense of authenticity and validation through the verification of *personal identities* (i.e. traits such as generous, funny, caring, etc.) (Burke & Stryker, 2000). However, while identity verification may boost positive emotions and wellbeing, non-verification can have detrimental, distressing and conflicting effects on a person's multiple identities especially when non-verification comes from a person in a position of power (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000).

Given that we are discussing identity in the context of teaching and learning, I would like to take a moment to connect identity and identity verification (Burke & Stryker, 2000; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016) to something more student centered—Carlone and Johnson's Science identity development model (2007). Investigating how Women of Colour persist in post-secondary science education, Carlone and Johnson (2007) position strong science identities as ones that are interdependent on competence, performance, and recognition (p.1190) as they are connected to our other intersectional identities. Competency is demonstrated through being knowledgeable and passionate about science. Performance is demonstrated through appropriate dispositions, use of science language, and actions actually doing science. Lastly, being recognized as a "science person" by self, and more importantly others (i.e. teachers or researchers).

From the perspective of identity verification Burke & Stryker, 2000; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016) a science identity is a role identity whose positive verification primarily stems from external sources through meaningful others. Through this verification students feel a sense of agency and accomplishment (Burke & Stryker, 2000; Carlone & Johnson, 2007) and a stronger connection and harmony between how their internal meanings and external structural meanings are positioning as 'scientist' (Trettevik & Grindal, 2016). However, students also feel a sense of validation and belonging because their science identity is being constructed in congruence with their personal and social identities as well (Burke & Stryker, 2000) Which, in turn, positively compounds and compels them to persist in the sciences (Carlone & Johnson, 2007).

Academic identity has been typically reserved for the discussion of the professional identity of those who work in higher education (Billot, 2010; Henkle, 2005; Winter, 2009); usually meaning professors, researchers, administrators, and scholars. In this sense academic identity is closely tied to the various roles and responsibilities associated with living and working within an academic institution (Billot, 2010). Subsequently, the conversation surrounding conflict in academic identities has been centered on the tension between traditional academic and contemporary corporate-economic values associated with what it means to live and work within higher education (Winter, 2009). However, those tensions between academic professionals do not exist in the vacuum of individuals and their workplace. I would argue that the conception of an academic identity is forged much earlier through the schooling process.

Therefore, I wish to expand the conception of academic identity to include the identities that are forged through schooling and being a student in higher education. If we extend role that competency, performance, and recognition (Carlone & Johnson, 2007) plays in identity verification (Burke & Stryker, 2000; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016), toward both students and educators alike, then we are in a position to view the larger implications of higher education as a value-laden (Winter, 2009) environment with the power to affect behaviour from all sides.

That is to say that, through networking the concept of science identity (Carlone & Johnson, 2007), as a student example, with value-laden discussions of academic identity (Winter, 2009), and identity verification more broadly (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000; Stets & Burke 2003; 2005a; Trettevik & Grindal, 2016), I believe we can build a comprehensive understanding of a contemporary academic identity that is divisive enough to create an antithetical *academic non-identity*. Given that verification and nonverification are necessarily linked to where a person resides in the social structure, identity construction and conflict are therefore inextricably linked to conceptions of power. This function of power not only acts as a gatekeeper in the verification process, as seen in the model for science identity development (Carlone & Johnson, 2007), but also as a function that either changes or perpetuates existing social orders (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000).

Theorists (Palmer, 2007; Pinar 2015c) point to tensions and conflicts between non-academic identities and academic identities insofar as it is creating what is essentially an identity of *non-identity*. This in conjunction with pressures felt by myself to divorce myself, my personal from my professional or academic lives, siloing my academic identities, stands as evidence where we might be able to generalize and claim that—yes—the academy is unautobiographical.

Even from the beginning of my journey my own academic non-identity had been simmering through mixed perceptions of what is meant to be a university graduate student alongside moments of internal and external moments of identity non-verification. But it wasn't always like this, was it? Afterall, I can't avoid my privileged position. Taken at face value, I am directly contradicting my point by the very act of doing autobiographical research and locating myself within curriculum studies. However, I would argue that this is not the norm, rather an exception or subversion of the norm.

So then, what is the 'norm'?
How are we identifying and coming to internalize these norms?

Are they coming from and being perpetuated by ourselves? Or do they come from external orders?

What is the dominant social or structural order?

Where do its powers lie?

And what effect is it having on teaching and learning and teachers and learners alike?

Synthetical Fragment #2: Personal, Cultural, & Political Implications for Education in a Knowledge Economy: The Complication of the Lifelong Learner Identity

When discussing the powers and dominant orders or norms that guide and shape our everyday life, scholars (Giroux, 2020; hooks, 1994; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Palmer, 2007; Pinar, 2004) point to social paradigms and traditions toward teaching, learning, research, economics, and society more generally. *(—Although, you could argue that there are national, regional, and institutional differences (i.e., attending a university in Ontario, Canada), the term "Western," in this case, is best suited to unpacking the overarching, macro shared qualities of these mezzo and micro settings).*

Academic identity tension can be cited as deriving from conflicting traditional academic and corporate values (Winter, 2009). From the more holistic approach to viewing academic (non)identity that I have outlined, we can see that, whether corporate or not, there are economically and socially tied norms that cause much identity tension and conflict though non-verification (Burke & Stets, 2015; Burke & Stryker, 2000). Norms that are inseparable from schooling, affecting teachers, students, researchers, and any other academic professional alike.

To start this section, I wish to frame these norms which have impacted my experiences—or teaching and learning— through Hargreaves' (2003) concept of the knowledge economy and knowledge society. Afterwards, I will take a synthesizing (yet complicating) twist, discussing Lifelong Learning through *Biesta's (2016) critique of contemporary education as learnification.*

It just so happens that my first introduction to *currere* through Kanu and Glor (2006) was also my introduction to the idea of living and learning in a *knowledge society* and *knowledge economy.* The knowledge society and knowledge economy are inherently *Western* (Sorlin & Vessuri, 2007). Hargreaves (2003) discusses how we are currently living both in a knowledge society and economy that is driven by the relentless pursuit of rapid global (technological and information) innovation and economic growth. Originating from the explosion of the information age, a knowledge society positions knowledge and information as a highly valued commodity associated with the competitive nature of innovation, growth, and globalization (Anderson, 2008; Sahlberg, 2008). Yet, such a drive for rapid change creates instability and increasingly complex challenges for adaptation. Education is central to the challenge of securing continued innovation in a knowledge society (Hargreaves, 2003; Sahlberg, 2008).

However, while the knowledge society may be premised on widespread "growth and prosperity" (Hargreaves, 2003, p.1), its success is typically reserved for a select, powerful few. This market-driven approach—or knowledge economy—reflects a corporate and self-interested race for profit and gain that is fragmenting and widens divides in the fabric of society (Hargreaves, 2003; Sorlin & Vessuri, 2007). While the knowledge society does have the potential to foster growth and prosperity for all, the self-interested drive of the knowledge economy is not without casualties. Besides creativity and culture, the key casualty is unfortunately, education. In education,

> "knowledge economies impose "soul-less standardization" that leaves some students behind by eroding curricula and pedagogies that build on the experience, language and cultural identity of these students, decreasing teachers' autonomy of judgment, undermining moral vision and social commitment in schools, and derailing the very creativity, ingenuity, and flexibility that schools are supposed to cultivate." (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p.102)

However, Hargreaves (2003) argues that education can be a setting that prepares students to adopt the creative, communal, and caring identities they need alongside their preparation for their success in a knowledge economy. I would argue that the catalyst resides in Biesta's (2016; 2020) call for *beautiful risk* in education by not allowing qualification and socialization to take precedence over subjectification (Biesta, 2009; 2016; 2020; Franch, 2019).

Synthetical Fragment #2.1: The Complication of the Lifelong Learner Identity

For the majority of my life, I have considered myself a *lifelong learner.* I always felt that this identity highlighted and spoke to my love of learning, curiosity, wonder, and propensity toward rabbit holing. However, it wasn't until I read *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2016) that the entire idea of the lifelong learner label for me was flipped on its head. That identity for me was so disrupted that, if it were not for the fact that I was reading a digital copy of this book, I might have very well thrown it out my window. While I've come to deeply reconsider Biesta's point, I feel it is important to utilize this place of disruption and interruption as a launching pad to illustrate the pervasive nature of the knowledge economy as a learning society (Hargreaves, 2003) and set up my final discussion on identity, power, and agency.

In his book, Biesta (2016) critiques the naturalization of learning, and the language of learning more generally through the learnification of education. He argues that learning is not a natural process like "breathing and digestion" (p.62). In fact, he asserts that it's not really a process at all. Rather, learning is artificial and the product of political constructions. To say you have learned or are

learning something in this case, is not a description of an experience but "normative judgements about desirable change" (p.60). The idea of learnification (Biesta, 2016), represents the shift in education discourse that puts students, or learners, at the center of teaching and learning. This contributes to the individualization of learners and learning (as opposed to education which is a more communal term), a narrowed misconception of what it means to be a teacher (i.e. facilitator, fellow learner versus person of authority), as well as the naturalization and subsequent neutralization of what it means to learn. This neutralization has no regard for the content and reason for the content that is learned, instead positioning it as an unquestionable universal "good" thing.

When Hargreaves (2003) was discussing the knowledge society in which we lived, he made the distinction that the knowledge society relies on continuous learning. This means that the world in which we live in today subsumes adult education and demands that we as individuals must become lifelong learners in order to survive, sustain, and continue to grow the world we live in (Biesta, 2016). While yes, to say you are a lifelong learner, according to Biesta (2016) is to perpetuate the idea of learning as a natural, but it also masks the political aspects associated with learning in a learning society and the function it serves to perpetuate the knowledge economy. The naturalization of learning and the idea of lifelong learning is a means to keep people unquestioningly in their place and keep the competitive cogs turning in the race for globalization and economic gain. It positions learning as something that we incessantly be doing. It is a disposition that puts the onus on the individual to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of the knowledge economy (Biesta, 2016; Hargreaves, 2003). Therefore, in the politics of learning it becomes a duty to the dominant orders and norms, learning is then closely tied to power "rather [than] something that *we* should have power over" (Biesta, 2016, p.60, emphasis in original).

To say I was fuming after reading this is an understatement. How could I be a cog in the machine if I loved learning so much? After so much wrestling and bold face attempts to separate myself and resist societal norms I land right back in its lap time and time again! I was very attached to my identity as a lifelong learner, insofar as I attributed social value to it and actively sought out people who felt the same. However, if Biesta's (2016) point had any significance, then not only would I have been a participant in contributing to the naturalization of learning, but I would be *advocating for it too!* Further complicating this Biesta writes:

> "*The pressure is, however, coming not only from the outside but also from the inside. This has to do with the very "construction" of the lifelong learner identity as a process of Foucauldian "governmentality," where individuals begin to identify with and then internalize the demand for lifelong learning. They [...] feel an internal "need" to construct and conduct themselves in this way (see, for example, Forneck and Wrana 2005; Fejes 2006; Biesta 2006c). Rather than a "treasure*

within," learning thus turns into a "pressure within," so that the politics of learning is being fed by our apparent will to learn (see Simons and Masschelein 2009)." (pp. 67-68)

Which begs the question: *do I treasure learning or am I pressured by it? (Are those feelings mutually exclusive?)*
According to Biesta (2016), lifelong learning in the knowledge economy is not a subjective process but rather one that is the product of being socialized into the heavy demands of the knowledge economy. It is a disposition that assumes that everyone can and is obligated to continuously learn their entire lives or they are shamed— or they are of little value to the knowledge economy— if they can't or won't learn. The language of learning, then, is a function of power that "tends to domesticate rather than emancipate" (p.68).

So how do we mitigate the damages of the knowledge economy?
How do we move away from despair?
How do we resist the institutional demands and societal norms in support of subjectification?
A democratic education? Emancipation, Freedom and Liberation?

For Biesta (2016), this all starts with *resistance*. Resistance through the rejection of the lifelong learner and learner identities. Pushing back on a disposition that limits subjectification, and the emancipatory potential of education. Working to reject being an agent of the knowledge economy toward a reclamation of our subjective agency.

Conclusion: Piecing Together the Fragments

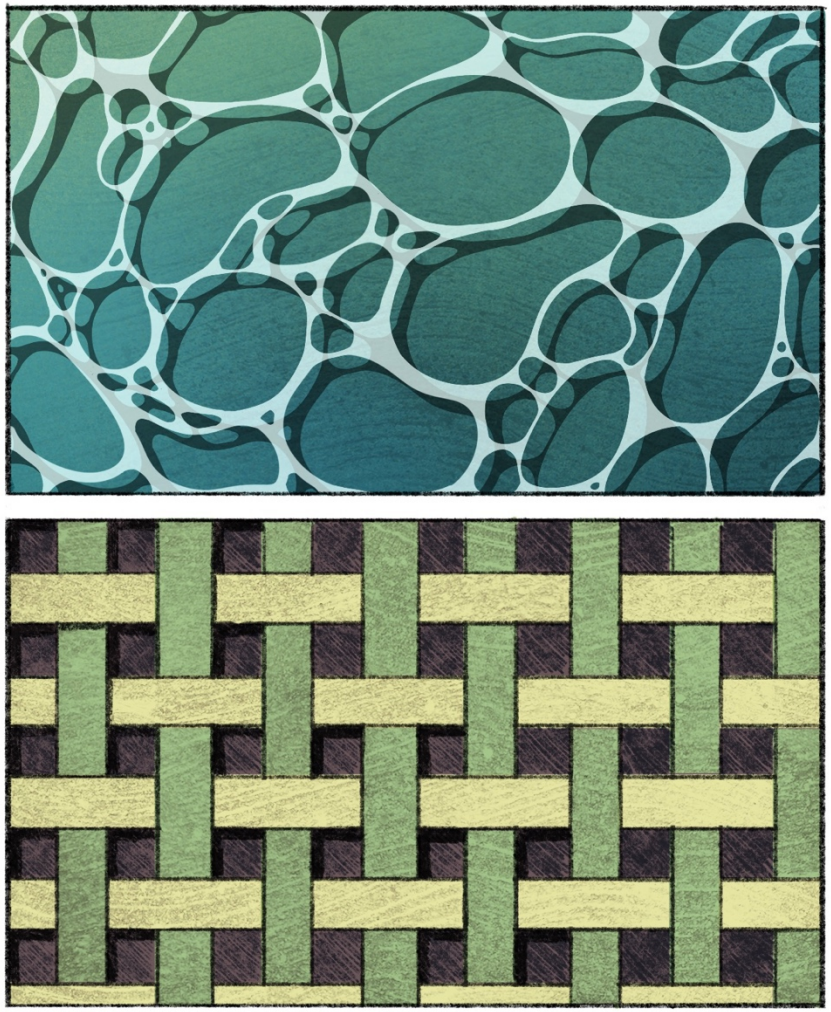
Who is an artist? Who is a teacher? Who is a researcher?
What is an artist? What is a teacher? What is a researcher?
When is an artist? When is a teacher? When is a researcher?
Where is an artist? Where is a teacher? Where is a researcher?
Why is an artist? Why is a teacher? Why is a researcher?
How is an artist? How is a teacher? How is a researcher?

This thesis, in all its wanderings, reflections on past and future, all come down to its foundation, the method(ologies) it has been centered on that support and aid in pushing the boundaries of what it means to be, what it means to live and work in academic spaces. There has been much wrestling and tension between my developing and intersecting identities as artist, educator, and academic. More often than not, there has been a dueling tension between internal and external meanings between arts, teaching, and research identities, the perceived pressures and fear surrounding legitimacy and belonging that are tied to those identities (Aoki 2005/1987b).

Whether that be a combination of artist, student, teacher, researcher or any other role that falls under the blanket of my experiences in education, my relationship to schooling and education has been shaped by the demands of my roles in my respective institutions, and my institutions have been shaped in their function by the demands of the knowledge economy (Hargreaves, 2003).

Even the concept of lifelong learning and the identity of the learner itself has been complicated for me by Biesta (2016) which has further disrupted and called into question the relationships I have with academia. All to say that, in my wading in spaces of tension I have seemingly stirred up more

tension (Aoki, 2005/1986). In academia, what has risen is my tension between my identity (Aoki, 2005/1987b) and sense of belonging to academics that exists in a space between what feels like a decision between identity and non-identity. What has unfolded to that much
of what we are told of how or who we are supposed to be comes from systems of power. In our case, power that necessitates our active participation in the competitive forward momentum of the knowledge economy—no matter what benefit or harm that may entail (Hargreaves, 2003). In turn, prescribed meanings, values and expectations associated with research, teaching, and learning—academics— in a knowledge economy may not be in harmony with how we view or what we wish for ourselves or others as researchers, teachers, and learners.



Even in this thesis, my language, formatting, and frequency of illustration shifts as I negotiate the tensions (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987a; 2005/1993) I face between art and science. My use of informal notes and mixed metaphors collide with formal signposts and academic formalities. I struggle to stay grounded and repeatedly question my own legitimacy in small attempts to posture through text that merits the accreditation of thesis or research.

Expectations associated with internal and external identity meanings can clash with any number of our intersecting identities (Biesta, 2020; Buckingham, 2008). Yet, however uncomfortable and disparaging these tensions, discords, and clashes may be, these tensions position us in unusual spaces of possibility (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987a; 2005/1993).

Why do these tensions exist? Where do they come from?

Where does this forward momentum go?

Many critical pedagogy (Biesta, 2016; Freire 2005; Giroux, 2020; Macedo, 1997) discussions I've had surrounding oppression and liberation have unavoidably touched on emancipation. Biesta (2012; 2016) argues that there are two approaches to emancipation: monological and dialogical. Monological emancipation usually comes from the outside—an outsider from the constraints of specific power structures in a setting. Being not from a traditional K-12 teaching background, I (mostly) feel free to poke at, question, more traditional or common place education roles. It reminds me of my experiences as an artist (and later my experiences with writing and editing) when we would call upon each other for a fresh set of eyes on our work. Others can see what I can't see because, to be frank, they haven't been staring at it for the past hour, day, week, month, year.

In a "monological approach, [...] emancipation is seen as a process of overcoming ideological distortions [and] operates as a process of demystification." (Biesta, 2016, p.72). While on the surface this resembles what I want to do (see Note #10) in demystifying the perfect, pristine, or prestigious worlds of various professions (such as those found in the arts and science), in reality it's not so simple. The work I want to do that proves that such professions are—for lack of a better way to phrase it— also messy and human like the professions and worlds we have come to know for ourselves. Yet, in lifting (or being the lifter) of a mask that shrouds power systems and affects our subjectivity, when we dig deeper down, is closely linked to power relations.

The monological approach, Biesta (2016) explores can be exemplified through the idea of a teacher being a liberator for their students. The teacher is in a knowledge-power position where they and the information they impart are the only avenue for students' emancipation.. This is reflected in Friere's (2005) banking model of education, whereby teachers are placed in a subject position and students and object position ready to receive their subjectness, and also an extension of Macedo's (1997) middle class narcissism, whereby educators (or others in positions of power) claim to be liberatory without risking any of their power or privilege or moving toward a critical praxis.

Dialogical emancipation, on the other hand, goes beyond the singular, outsider, liberator role to encompass a collective emancipation (Biesta, 2012; 2016). It is not having someone unmask the power systems we operate in for us but, coming together to lift the mask *together*. The dialogical approach moves beyond demystification toward transgression.

"Transgression means doing things differently in order to show—or to prove, as Foucault would say—that things can be different and that the way things are is not the way things necessarily should be" Biesta, 2016, p.74

This thesis is an a/r/tful act of resistance that boldly situates itself at the intersection of art and science, and I feel transgressing the boundaries of both. Not treating each as siloed entities, but an interwoven medium to question, unravel, and challenge the social, political, and cultural context of my experiences. It is an act of subjectivity that presents in a constant and contentious flux with (perceived) objectivity. Meaning that objectivity and subjectivity are not a binary—not an on and off switch. Rather they are in a constant dance; I am simultaneously a subject and object of my academic experiences. And I have been empowered and developed a sense of agency that draws me to subvert positivist pressures (Giroux, 2005) for objectivity, absolutisms, and linear modes of thinking.

Over the course of this work, I have posed more questions than I have answered. Yet, as I have progressed in my own way through the regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical portions of my a/r/tographic *currere* (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Pinar, 1975/2015a; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005), these fragments have come to form an intricately woven tapestry. One that is slightly tattered and full of holes, but functional, nonetheless. I am no expert weaver that's for certain, but this reflection and synthesis of my thoughts, ideas and experiences, represents a collection—an image that is formed from the varying threads on a warp that combines sketch and screen, image and text.

One of the primary contributions of this work resides in my method(ology) as I have networked currere (Pinar, 1975/2015a), a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005), and principles from autoethnography (Dunn & Myers, 2020; Ellis, 1999; Holman Jones et al., 2013; Reed-Danahay, 2017; Wall, 2008). The networking of these method(ologies) responds to their coinciding calls for researchers to situate ourselves in a flexible space between art and science, as well as acknowledge the complexity and interwovenness of our personal and professional selves. Not only do these method(ologies) all call for the incorporation of the artful, vulnerable, and evocative, but they draw on these qualities to expand on critical discussions in a way that resists and disrupts assumptions about researchers and research as necessarily distant or neutral in order to be considered valid (Allen-Collinson, 2013).

The combining of these method(ologies) amplifies the calls in currere (Pinar, 1975/2015a) and a/r/togrpahy (Irwin, 2004; Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Schultz & Legg, 2019; Springgay et al., 2005) that suggest that these autobiographical practices are recursive and lifelong. In this sense, these amplified calls together conceptualize research and reflection as ongoing processes— in a constant state of movement, openness, and flux (Stewart, 2015). Biesta (2016) argues that practices that aid and support subjectification should be continuous as there is no start or end point. It is not a problem solution pipeline, rather a constant momentum forward supported by actions "when individuals resist existing identities and identity-positions and speak on their own terms" (p.7).

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Over the course of this work, feelings of impostor syndrome, despair, and isolation have intermingled with feelings of vulnerability, hope, excitement, and belonging. Moments of care and community have served to humanize the otherwise cold and rigid assumptions I have made regarding what it means to be a teacher, research, academic, and even student. Through this virtual journey, although I never stepped foot outside my door while engaging in these spaces, a number of things have changed through countless discussions and rabbit-holes. In an exclusively online environment, I was in a position to forge connections and communities that transcended municipal, provincial and, at times, national borders. This offered a wealth of opportunities to grow and interrogate connections between life and learning through a vibrant array of varied contexts and experiences shared to me through the vulnerability and reflections of my peers.

Perceptions and understandings have been deconstructed and reconstructed. Identities have been formed and (re)negotiated. All throughout moments of tension whereby reflection gradually became a means to bridge the gaps between, personal and professional, between life and what we were learning (Aoki, 2005/1986; 2005/1987b).

What has been revealed is a discussion of identity and belonging and its deep (and at times) interrelatedness between internal and external meanings. Primarily, this has been explored through what it means to be academic—what it means to be teacher and what it means to be academic. Aoki (2005/1987b) described this style of questioning as not a means to define, after all we already have set definitions and external linguistic meanings that tell us what and academic or teacher is, but rather as a means "to be attuned to a different world, a world of being and becoming" (pp. 352-353). So I'll ask again:

Who is Teacher? Who is an Academic?

Someone who teaches? Someone who does research? Someone who is a student?
So then, how do we define teaching? How do we define academics?

What is a Teacher? What is an Academic?

Aoki (1983) alluded to a "a ritual which allows one entry into a culturally-shaped and culturally-legitimated world in which are prescriptions of years of training, certification, automatic membership in a teachers' association, apprenticeship, scrutiny and evaluation" (p.325). However, much of that seemingly ignored the lived experience of be(com)ing teacher.

Irwin and colleagues (Irwin et al., 2006) define a teacher as a person who is "committed to educational engagement that is rooted in learning and learning communities through ongoing living inquiry" (p.xxv).

So is it exclusive to work in learning communities?

When is a Teacher? When is an Academic?

Is it only after certification? Full time placement? Enrollment? Tenure?

Is it only after a specific amount of experience? Or specific set of experiences?

Where is a Teacher? Where is an Academic?

Is it exclusive to the classroom? The school? The university?

(Do colleges count?)

Or when they have an audience to teach or an audience to teachings?

Is a teacher or academic not a teacher when they are at home? Watching TV? Eating dinner?

Why is a Teacher? Why is an Academic?

Are they a product of their qualification and socialization (Biesta, 2016) into teaching and academics?

Or is it more closely aligned to internal meanings and significance? Subjectivity?

How is a Teacher? How is an Academic?

Are they actively in the classroom? The lecture hall? The research lab?

How established do they have to be, as Irwin and colleagues (2008) suggest "in learning and learning communities" (p.xxv)?

Who, What, When, Where, Why, How decides?

This disruptive form of discussion on teaching, learning, and academics presents us with a call for action. A call toward forging personal connection and responsibility not just to reflect on education, the systems we operate in, and what learning but to examine how we fit into it and how we might be able to change it (or at the very least subvert it a little and bend the rules). A call for a shift in the way we approach education, that necessitates subjectification, because education without subjectification is just schooling. And while schooling may serve an integral purpose, without subjectification, it is an uncritical one (Biesta, 2016).

This thesis presents a conversation that answers, and echoes calls to recursively re-evaluate and resist the normative structures that tell us who to be, how to act, and what comprises legitimacy or value in education. A call to dig into the tensions that arise within our identities and understandings with our bare hands. A push to investigate these tensions voraciously and incessantly, in order to explore the personal, cultural, political, and social contexts that shape us through our education. Through this we build a critical engagement in with the world that reclaims our agency and inspires us to push the boundaries;

—To do "things differently in order to show […] that things can be different and that the way things are is not the way things necessarily should be" (Biesta, 2016, p.74).

Because there is no perfect---no one, correct or perfect or normal or pristine way of being a student, researcher, teacher, professional, or any person. There is no end to search and push for subjectification, freedom, and emancipation. There is only be(com)ing, and the drive to push forward.

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