

Latinx Curriculum Theorizing

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Dedicated to my siblings—
Richard, Jr. (deceased), Kevin, Kimberlee, and Andre.
—*Theodorea Regina Berry*

Dedicated to those who embrace the brilliance of
Latinx children, families, and communities, I stand in solidarity.
—*Crystal A. Kalinec-Craig*

I dedicate this work to Latinx English Learners.
Estamos unidos en la lucha.
—*Mariela A. Rodríguez*

NINE

Currere from the Borderlands

*An Exercise in Possibilities for
Latinx Transgender Visibility*

Mario Itzel Suárez

I was born to a Mexican father and a Mexican American mother, and assigned female at birth. Eagle Pass, Texas, housed in Maverick County, was and continues to be one of the poorest counties in the state. We did not grow up with luxuries like cable television, barely had electricity, and lived in an underdeveloped subdivision with little to no proper sewage. Some might refer to such a place as a *colonia*, but I just referred to it as my home. I excelled at school and my teachers took notice, particularly in mathematics. Before I knew it, one of the school counselors was helping me apply for colleges and financial aid. I had no idea where these colleges and universities were, what the differences were between them, why there were so many, why they could not just let me go to the junior college at home, or how my family could ever afford such places. Counselors told me that I had the potential to get scholarships, so I trusted them and still applied for every place and everything I qualified for. I opted to go to The University of Texas at Austin, not because of its reputation, but because of the scholarships I received that made it easier for me to choose it. There, I graduated with a Mexican American Studies bachelor's degree and with enough mathematics to be able to get certified to teach at the high school level. The moments I have experienced throughout my life are not isolated in time. They all have had a significant effect on my growth as an educator and researcher. Some moments might have taken longer for me to understand, but nonetheless, they

contributed to my identity. As a transgender educator, and someone who advocates for the lives and education of sexual and gender minority youth, particularly those of color, I find it important to remain as visible as I can, and thus, was an openly transgender mathematics teacher when I taught at the high school level.

THE NEED FOR QUEERING EDUCATION

While the attitudes of today's students are evolving with regard to their views on gender and sexuality, that of their teachers might still be stuck in the traditional dichotomous view of gender. That is, gender has been historically thought of as just male or female. Curriculum and textbooks continue to have antiquated information about gender and sexuality and traditional/conservative views of families (Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008, pp. 170–188; Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011, pp. 39–62). In the meanwhile, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) youth continue to have negative school outcomes, on average. For example, we know that a hostile school environment and lack of administrative and parental support is associated with higher instances of assault, harassment, discrimination, higher instances of school absences, and lower academic achievement (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). That can be reversed, however, by having a supportive school environment that affirms students' gender and sexual diversity. Supportive environments can contribute to a reduction in suicidal ideations for LGBTIQ youth (Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Wagener, & Meyer, 2014, pp. 279–286). I contend that preservice teacher education must transition to methodologies that help teachers reflect on their own biases in order to best meet the needs of their students. Representation in curriculum matters, but I believe it is also true that we must have teachers who are aware of how their own education perpetuates certain views of gender and sexuality in order to empathize with a community to which they might not be a part of.

This piece draws from philosophical perspectives in queer theory and queer history, *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1999), my autobiographical reflection, in addition to learning theories in education, and reflects on how all of these have intersected at memorable points in my life as a teacher. Though this chapter is written as a recollection of thoughts from childhood up until adulthood, I weave in pieces of historical and philosophical perspectives that have influenced my personal knowledge base of teaching gender and sexuality within a high school mathematics context. The purpose of this chapter is to provide preservice and in-service teachers with an exercise in reflection via *currere* (Pinar, 2012), as a means to deconstruct their own biases about gender and gender identity. Through my own personal experience and reflection with transgender

visibility, it is my hope that preservice and in-service teachers can use *currere* as a means to deconstruct their own biases.

Informed by Schwab's love letter to education, Craig (2013) provides some suggestions as to how different practices can "foster the best-loved self," (p. 267) that is, be the best and capable person they can be for their students. In effecting change through preservice teacher education, Craig uses narratives of the lives of four different teachers' best-loved selves from different walks of life as a means to direct us to the significance the "best-loved self" has with regard to pedagogy. In all the four cases, teachers were able to incorporate what they learned in their pedagogical tool belt. Li and Logan (2017, pp. 137–156) also used narrative inquiry as a means to how a teacher's image of their best-loved self had an effect on their pedagogical knowledge-base. I suggest in this chapter that being a student of *currere* can help foster this best-loved self-image for teachers and thus contribute to the knowledge-base of teaching for gender and sexuality education.

CURRERE AS A METHODOLOGY

Developed by William Pinar, *currere* is a process of self-reflection in which the individual becomes the subject of study (Pinar, 1975a). In describing *currere*, Pinar defines it as the "study of the educational experience" (Pinar, 1975b, p. 400). Historical roots of curriculum are derived from the Latin word *currere*, meaning "to run the racecourse," and when referring to curriculum, is defined as an active process rather than a passive one (Pinar, 2012; Slattery, 2015). Pinar (2012) writes, "The method of *currere* . . . provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding" (p. 44). That is, it takes into account the psychoanalytical and the phenomenological, and makes it personal, because it is in our personal journeys that we draw from and construct curriculum. The movies we saw as children, the teachers we had, the places we have been, the books we have read, are all part of our educational journey. We cannot understand teachers and teaching according to Pinar, until we learn to study ourselves and learn from ourselves, or "become students of ourselves" (Pinar, 1975b, p. 412). All these represent our own "knowledge of *currere*" (Pinar, 1975b, p. 402). It is also important to note that if "political analyses" or "anthropological analyses" are not at the root of *currere*, "then we have fallen away from our task, from ourselves . . ." (Pinar, 1975b, p. 406). Pinar then expands:

This [*currere*], simply enough, involves remembering one's first experience associated with school, and free associating about those early experiences. The task this strategy involves is recording a chronology of associations, beginning with earliest events and continuing to the

present. In both free associative techniques, the aim is to free associate as much as one can, allowing oneself to fall into past experience, to record this experience with as little editing as possible. . . . When sufficient data has accumulated (and the question of when may well be left to the investigator) the analysis begins. . . . But here is the expectation. A sort of model (it's not completely applicable) is the textual analysis practiced by students of imaginative literature. . . . Depending on the nature of the data examined (it might be a series of associations in regard to a book one is reading or it might be historical material from, say, one's first years in school), the questions that guide the analytic process may be the same as or similar to the questions that prompted the free associative process initially. (Pinar, 1975b, pp. 408–409)

Pinar claims that *currere* shifts the curriculum field from a Tylerian prescriptive one and moves toward that of understanding, something that he writes the American educational system does not necessarily subscribe to (Pinar, 1975b). While Pinar cautions us in using *currere* as an instructional tool or strategy for professional development, he mentions that using it as a “sensitivity” has numerous possibilities for teachers’ and students’ transformation and self-reflection.

In this same notion, I would like to preface that my experience as a transgender man of color who was a high school mathematics teacher by trade is different from others. Therefore, my comfort level with reflecting on my experience with gender can be different than other transgender people, or different than other teachers, for that matter. When implementing a methodology as critically reflective as *currere*, it is important to be able to understand that no two experiences will ever evolve in the same manner or at the same pace. It is my hope that my autoethnographical narrative, along with *currere* will be an exercise in self-reflection for teachers that can help unpack their own particular biases or understandings about the world, and in turn, result in a much more empathetic teacher, as evident from empirical work on the best-loved self resulting from Schwab’s work notion that the best-loved self can translate into becoming an excellent teacher (Craig, 2013, pp. 261–272; Li & Logan, 2017, pp. 137–156).

Autoethnography and Currere

Autoethnography is a method of qualitative research that takes the personal and makes a contribution to studying the sociocultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Like *currere*, it is a methodology used for self-reflection, usually written in a first-person voice. It weaves the personal and the political, the personal and the cultural, the personal and the social, in a complicated web of connections, using the self as the research subject. As with other types of qualitative research methodologies, concerns of validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research when it comes to doing

work on the self comes at play. However, Ellis and Bochner point out the complicated nature of individuals’ stories and that no two lives are the same, and therefore, the reader might or might not see themselves reflected in the stories (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 733–768). However, it might give the reader an insight into a culture or subculture to which they have not been exposed to.

It would be very difficult to find another transgender man from the border that has also been a high school mathematics teacher like myself for a full study. The odds are extremely small. However, there might be some aspects about my autoethnographical account that might resonate with other transgender people or allies, or Mexican Americans from the borderlands, or with other high school mathematics teachers. The point of this is that by using my experience as an exercise in self-reflection, other teachers, particularly preservice and in-service teachers might expose themselves to *currere* and autoethnography, and thus, contribute to becoming their “best-loved self,” (Craig, 2013) thereby learning more about gender and sexuality in order to best meet the needs of their LGBTIQ students.

AN EXERCISE IN CURRERE

One of the first steps in beginning the process of *currere*, before we even embark in this journey, according to Pinar, is to begin to remember one’s own educational experience. To my surprise then, as I was sitting in one of my courses, the professor I had in one of my curriculum and instruction classes began the first class by asking us what the knowledge-base of teaching was, and tasked us with interviewing different teachers we knew concerning their very first recollections of learning something. This assignment included interviewing ourselves. It was in this moment that I tried to delve into my subconscious to pull out the first lesson I was taught as a child. As I have pointed out, I was born and raised in a small town on the Texas-Mexico border named Eagle Pass, Texas. I find it important to note my upbringing because it has been an influential part of my life schooling. I am also a man of transgender experience. That is, my gender identity does not align with the body and gender I was assigned at birth. I did not come to terms with my true identity until I was an undergraduate student in college. Part of the reason for not coming out earlier, I believe, was my lack of exposure to other transgender people living on the Texas-Mexico border. My closest experiences with people who were in some ways gender nonconforming were the drag queens my family and I would go and watch perform at “La Feria del Sol” every year in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, our Mexican sister city. I was mesmerized by the grace and humor in performance that these women had in portraying cisgender female Mexican artists like Gloria Trevi, Maria Fe-

lix, Paulina Rubio, and Selena, among many others. I was shaped by those experiences, and continue to evolve as a result of those interactions throughout my life. My hope is that in understanding some of my background, one can understand a little more about the Latinx experience as a transgender person living in the beautiful borderlands, the backdrop for some of Gloria Anzaldúa's writings.

The journey of *currere* for me does not end here. It continues as I continue to evolve, and as I continue to learn not only more about myself but my transgender siblings. I write this with a heavy heart and great awareness of the privilege afforded to me in being able to share my experience in writing and being able to live to tell my story. This is not a story that is afforded to so many of my transgender siblings, particularly transgender women of color, who are year after year the victims of an often transphobic curriculum. As the title of this chapter alludes to, this journey of *currere* for me represents an exercise in the possibilities that can arise when we transgender people are ourselves. This is not to say that my life history has been without challenges and struggles. I have had my share of hardships that I believe have been balanced by the tremendous support I have received from friends and allies. This exercise delves only into the questions that stemmed from asking myself, What is my first memory of having learned something? In this chapter, I go through the four stages of *currere*: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the syncretical moment, which are all explained in each section (Pinar, 2012). In addition, I introduce models of teaching that I engaged with within the lessons learned.

The Regressive Moment

The regressive moment of *currere* entails that the student relive their past. Pinar (2012) writes, "In the regressive step or moment I try to re-experience past 'lived' or existential experience" (p. 45). This step is what helped me re-experience my first vivid recollection of something being taught to me was when I was about 5 years old. I was playing with my older brother, and I really wanted to play with his Star Wars and G. I. Joe figurines. I was very jealous that he had them and I did not. I remember my mom saying, "*Eso es para los hombres! Las tuyas son las Barbies!*" ("That's for boys! The ones that are yours are the Barbies!"). I was confused hearing her say that. I could not understand why I could not have the boys' toys. After all, I was a boy, right? Or was I? Why did I not look like my brother? How was it that my body parts all were distinctly different? I had so many questions for my parents. However, I was never very close to my mother, as she was not one to approach us with heart-to-heart chats. My father was similar. He worked two jobs almost every day and provided for us, but he was hardly ever home. On days he was home, though, he was a joker. When it was time for me to go through puber-

ty, I did not understand what my body was going through until a talk I had with one of my maternal aunts. However, it took at least two decades from that very first lesson before I could find some answers about the feelings I was having and why my body was physically changing in ways that I did not think they should. As a cisgender female, I was growing breasts, menstruating, and the women around me wanted me to have long hair and to wear women's clothing. I wanted the complete opposite.

That memory probably marked the first time I learned that boys and girls wore different clothing, that boys and girls played with different toys, and more importantly, that boys and girls had distinctly different body parts. To be shown what a girl could do and not do, and what a boy could do and not do (or wear and not wear, for that matter) was a lesson that remained with me all throughout my adulthood. I was learning a very important lesson without being formally taught. In effect, my family engaged in a model known as concept attainment. Concept attainment represents "the search for and listing of attributes that can be used to distinguish exemplars from nonexemplars of various categories" (Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1967, p. 233). I was learning societal norms of what gender meant, and was being reproduced generationally. Without a formal education, I had a lesson in Butler's theory of performativity. Butler argues that gender is a social construction, reinforced by social structures (Butler, 2006). From the time we are born, we are assigned a sex. When friends come to the hospital to see the baby, usually a gendered name is chosen, and gendered-colored clothing and toys are bought. Television feeds into this social construction every day. Parents tell their children what they can and cannot wear, as was my case. Schools tell boys and girls that they have to compete in different sports. Females are taught to "be a lady," while boys are taught to "be a man." It is this consistent repetition that keeps reinforcing gender norms and behaviors, and in turn socially constructs gender, according to Butler.

Historical documentation has shown that definitions of masculinity and femininity and the female/male body have been as ambiguous as they continue to be in current times, as early as 1600s. McClive, Associate Professor of History at Florida State University who specializes in history of gender and sexuality, investigates three cases where the male body was put on trial in France for people who at the time were called hermaphrodites, but are described as what we now understand to be either an intersex or transgender person (McClive, 2006, pp. 45–68). Hermaphroditic genitalia were inspected in order to be judged by someone with power in the town and were deemed as either male or female. To provide a specific definition, an intersex person is someone who was born with chromosomal or physical ambiguities or abnormalities. Throughout U.S. medical history, it was common for intersex people to be surgically transformed to fit into a specific definition of gender, often the decision of the parents at the child's birth (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972). A transgender

person is someone whose gender identity does not align with the gender they were assigned at birth. McClive (2009) writes that the trials consisted of "physicians involved in examining the ambiguous bodies, lawyers acting on behalf of the defendants and interested medical practitioners and journalists who published accounts in scientific journals such as *Journal des Scavans* and the *Académie des Sciences* and in foreign lay periodicals such as the *Athenian Mercury*" (p. 47). Another famous historical case that displays the complexity of gender was that of Thomas/Thomasine Hall. Born Thomasine Hall, Thomas caused great controversy in Virginia in 1629 when Thomas would opt to use both male and female clothing at times. When asked, Thomas/Thomasine Hall would say that they were both male and female. One can imagine the stir that such a case caused at the time (Brown, 1995, pp. 171–193). These are just some examples that show that gender complexities have been alive for longer than what media and the current sociopolitical climate would make us believe.

In remembering and reliving the experience I had as a child of my first lesson in differences in gender, I lived the regressive moment of *currere*. In doing so, I was left with some questions. Among them, why was I being treated differently than my brother, and how was it that I could not play with the toys I wanted to? It was not like they had some sort of special power that only boys could understand, right?

The Progressive Moment

Pinar (2012) writes, "In the second or progressive step one looks toward what is not yet the case, what is not yet present. . . . Contemplatively, the student of *currere* imagines possible futures, including fears as well as fantasies of fulfillment" (p. 46). For me, that question that stemmed from the regressive moment when I first learned about gender helped me realize that I did not identify as what society thought about it. I did not fit the mold of what a girl should be. I also did not fit the physical mold of what a boy should look like. That is not to say, though, that the mere reason I transitioned to the male gender was because of the toys I wanted to play with. That would be overly simplistic, and gender and gender identity are much more complex. Many might think that I could have just kept my physical cisgender female body and dressed more "butch." Again, while that fits the gender expression of many cisgender females, it is a misunderstanding of the differences between gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression. However, that first lesson in societal expectations of gender resulted in what would become a long process of learning about the potential of a medical and legal gender transition, one that would not have been possible before based on the resources I lacked growing up on the border.

The more and more these doors opened for me, a new world of possibilities came to me. Though extremely risky and potentially deadly,

through thorough research, I came to realize that medicine had the ability to help my exterior presentation align with who I knew I was. Again, I feel compelled to say that this is not the case for every transgender person. Not everyone in the community opts to undergo a medical transition, and for different reasons. Some opt out of it because of a lack of financial resources, some for health reasons, and others identify as non-binary, among numerous other reasons. However, the progressive moment of *currere* left me with several questions in my quest for a further understanding of myself. Was I truly being myself, or was I just buying into the social construction of gender, as Butler writes? Why was I considering a medical and legal transition? Could I just live my life forever in the cisgender female body and gender presentation I was born into? These were all very difficult questions I came across. They had all crossed my mind as an undergraduate, but I reconsidered them again after remembering this one initial episode in playing with my brother's G-I Joes. This progressive moment in my journey through *currere* only brought about many more questions than answers. These questions, I felt, revealed something about my personal philosophy, as I do believe that gender is performative to some extent (Butler, 2006). Nonetheless, I attempted to think it through in the analytical moment.

The Analytical Moment

The analytical stage requires an analysis of both past and the present, as an "attempt to discern how the past inheres in the present and in our fantasies of the future" (Pinar, 2012, p. 46). As I consider my past and present "lives" I live and have lived, I cannot help but realize that I am currently in the analytical moment. I have come to realize that like Anzaldúa, I am an embodiment of the *hieros gamos* (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 41), a being that contains both female and male characteristics. For me, it comes in the way of having experienced life as a cisgender female, and now as a transgender male. It is this unique experience that has afforded me a very unique view of the world, and of the way that gender and sexuality are taught from the day we are born.

Anzaldúa, in her groundbreaking book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* writes,

The U.S.-Mexican border es *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (p. 25)

My experience as a transgender man of color from the Texas-Mexico border has always resonated with Anzaldúa's work in more ways than one. The very questions I had about why I was opting to medically and legally transition brought me to Anzaldúa's words. While Anzaldúa writes about physical borderlands of the Texas-Mexico border, I started to relate to those words in regard to my medical and legal transition. This "border" between genders, or what our society has constructed as a binary is indeed a wound that has not healed. It is this "border" that has resulted in the othering of transgender, gender nonconforming, gender nonbinary, and intersex individuals. I could relate her work to the physical borderlands where I lived, but also the metaphorical borderlands in which I continue to live my daily life. That is, I have been socialized as a female, and up until I was about 22 years old, I presented myself to the world as a female, and for all intents and purposes, I performed gender as a female (Butler, 2006). As a result, I have experiences in society as a female teacher that I have not had as a male prior to my transition, and vice versa after my transition. Perhaps, as Anzaldúa writes, this physical border is imposed on one's body by medical authorities in a "constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25), just as borders around nations are dependent on national authorities.

Yet other questions stemmed from this moment in *currere*. If indeed, this invisible border has been socially set up that has historically determined roles and behaviors for girls and boys and if it is in transition, what now? How does that play a part of how I have chosen to live my life? As I have mentioned, not every transgender person chooses to undergo a medical and legal gender transition for various reasons. However, I decided to because I maintained in the core of my being that that was the most authentic option for me. This brings me to the last question in *currere*, though not at the end of my journey. How do I use this knowledge and visibility as a Latinx transgender man?

The Synthetical Moment

The last step of *currere* is known as the synthetical moment and it is, as Pinar (2012) defines it, "the moment in which self-study becomes reconstructed as public service" (p. 47) and is the moment when everything comes together. Slattery refers to these moments as proleptic moments, which synthesize life events. For many teachers, particularly those who see themselves as public servants performing a public service, it is not too difficult to make the leap for public good. In the synthetical moment, I have started to realize that my visibility as a transgender man of color, though dangerous, has possibilities to change people's minds. Thus, a synthetical moment is re-lived every time I "out" myself to different people as a way of educating others about my experience as a transgender man of color. It is in remembering my first lesson with gender that has

brought me to this point. What we learn about gender as children can have a tremendous effect on us as adults. Therefore, I have made it my life's task to help in queering gender through my life's story, particularly for preservice and in-service teachers.

Anzaldúa provides us with an insight into how she perceives the new Chicana should be, as she was referring to learning about Mexican Americans' ancestral roots to indigenous cultures in relationship to our colonized European upbringing. However, I feel that it can very well be used in the context of self-reflection and *currere* with regard to gender and sexual diversity. In describing the new mestiza, Anzaldúa (1999) writes,

She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence. I'm not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground—subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestizo* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (pp. 101–102)

It is clear that for Anzaldúa, one does not have to conform to the oppressor, nor remain oppressed. It is just fine to remain open to the ambiguity that is the pain that comes from understanding our past, present, and future. While this past can be agonizing for many, it can help toward the path toward liberation, one which Anzaldúa often wrote about. Every time I am outed or out myself, I realize that I may have taken my last breath. The past, present, and future are all aligned at that moment. As the number of transgender individuals that are murdered continues to rise every year, with 26 in 2017 (Adams, 2017), my fears have been confounded by the reality. Many of us who are transgender, gender nonconforming or nonbinary, or intersex, especially people of color, remain in the land of the *atravesados* (Anzaldúa 1999, 25), often not by choice. Continuing to teach gender as a binary construct has some very real and negative implications for the future generations because it perpetuates fear and biases about gender and gender roles.

Continuing the Cycle of Currere

You can see how big of an impact that first lesson about my gender assignment made on me. I continue to go through the stages of *currere* over and over again often in order to resolve that issue. Though the

objective is usually the same, the story usually represents small subsections of my life experience that help me understand how I have come up to this point.

By this part of my life story, it might seem easy to understand, then, why I opted to become a high school mathematics teacher. I enjoyed mathematics and I was good at explaining things to my friends that would ask for help, so it was a natural progression. I chose to teach at an urban high school with a large percentage of English Language Learners in Austin, Texas, not because it was one of the lowest-performing schools in the district, but because it felt just like my home. The sea of Black and Brown faces wanting to learn, stuck in a rut of high teacher turnover, provided me with the motivation. Teaching was easy compared to the daily torments of standardization. That pressure and the implications of the standardized test looming over our heads, threatening to fire us in the case that our students did not pass, was a constant reminder. Over the eight years that I was in the classroom, I came to realize that I did not just want to teach mathematics. Sure, I would teach algorithms, functions, graphing, and statistics, among other things, but I wanted to teach my students that mathematics could be an equalizer, that it was the universal language that could potentially get them out of the socioeconomic state they were in, like it had done for me. Best of all, there was something beautiful and artistic at being able to model the chaos that is nature into something as neat as an algebraic function . . . that categories and the axioms we used in mathematics that we take for granted and use so often, that seemed fixed, could potentially change as language, thoughts, humanity evolves. Part of my teaching involved chats talking about how society would not always be fair, that college was not easy, and if it were easy, everyone would have a degree. However, that did not mean it was unattainable for them.

Teaching and learning were not always mutually exclusive. Were my students learning the standards that the state said should be taught in order to pass the tests and graduate? Many did, while many students did not. I do not think that made me a worse teacher, because many of my students learned the material, though not at the pace set forth by standardized tests. Many of my students now as adults have thanked me for trying to teach them that life may be hard, and for being honest with them in telling them that college would not be easy. I asserted there would be people in their lives who would tell the students that they did not belong there, as they did to me, or that they were only in school as a result of affirmative action. I shared what I perceive as true, authentic teaching and I sensed that real learning happened. After all, I think they learned some mathematics in the process. But most of all, my students learned that mathematics could be their way out. It did not matter whether they were an English Language Learner from El Salvador, or one of my several refugees from Burma, or whether they wore an ankle bracelet and

had a probation officer. In my classroom, I treated them with the respect that each was due, and with the promise that I did not care whether they were an A+ student or not before they stepped into my classroom. If they gave it their all, I would do the rest to get them where they needed to be, even if that meant me having to stay until 7:00 p.m. and come at 7:00 a.m. every day. If they were willing to come, I would be present to help. Some would call those different learning styles, but to me, that was just being a mindful human being. Overall, I have come to learn over time that my style and perspective of teaching was additive, rather than subtractive, and that caring for my students was often expressed through my actions, not my words (Valenzuela, 1999).

I think that is why I have always been interested in mathematics and teaching at the high school level. There is something about being presented with a problem and finding any possible way to reach a solution as you can, with whatever tools you're given, which I have always told my students was an important skill that math taught them, not just "formulas." I am introverted, but inquisitive by "nature." This, interestingly enough, brings me back to my earliest recollection of being taught that boys and girls were different. As I got older, I realized that being born female-bodied and producing female hormones prevented my exterior from reflecting how I felt on the inside and who I knew myself to be. So, I started doing research and looking into ways to change my body medically to reflect the person, that genuine self. That person was not the person that society kept telling me I was. It did not feel like me, thus the more I learned about medical advances, the more excited I became. Major obstacles always remained, though. I did not have the money initially for something as large of an undertaking as this gender confirmation surgery. I am a work in progress, as we all are. It has been over 10 years since I started my transitioning journey, but the more I think about it, it will never end. As language evolves, as our minds evolve, so do we, and so does our understanding of the way we model our world mathematically. That is why I continue to teach and learn mathematics, because I know that it can help us come closer to reflecting the amazing diversity that lies in our very own backyards, and because I know that someday, I may be able to contribute to the knowledge-base of what we choose to teach, why we choose to teach it, and how we choose to teach. These are all crucial questions to ask, not just of ourselves but for our society. If we continue to teach and learn binaries, then what are we saying to our gender- and sexually diverse student population?

CONCLUSION

Meyer (2007) writes, "By developing a more critical understanding of gender, sex, sexual orientation and how these identities and experiences

are shaped and taught in schools, educators can have a profound impact on the way students learn, relate to others and behave in schools" (p. 17). This learning theory model I grew up with is known as scientific inquiry, which is a model that helps students identify solutions for problems that are presented (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015). Like scientific inquiry, my main goal in approaching teaching was to provide my students with a set of tools from which to choose, as no scenario in life really ever needs the same set of tools, for every single person. By doing this in a way that helped scaffold my students' learning and (dis)advantages that they had in life, being that it was an economically disadvantaged school, I did not realize at the time that I was incorporating the positive self-concept model (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015). I wanted all of them to succeed, and use mathematics as a tool to help get them and their families out of poverty.

As a man of transgender experience who happened to be an educator, I am proud of my journey, because it showed my students that we do not always have to fit in a box and that it is okay to live outside of the norm. As a matter of fact, that to me is the point of mathematics and scientific inquiry. Mathematics and science are not fixed disciplines. Like queer theory, they have evolved and changed to better reflect nature. Although imperfect, the more critical people are of mathematics, the more it can reflect our surroundings. Nothing changes when nothing is questioned. That is not to say that everything that mathematics does is wrong—it is just imperfect. Our own individual perspective and experiences influence how we see the world.

This chapter drew from philosophical perspectives in queer theory and queer history, my autobiographical reflection, in addition to learning theories in education, and reflected on how all of these have intersected at memorable points in my life as a teacher. By using my experience as an exercise in self-reflection and undergoing the stages of *currere* myself, my hope is that other educators might be exposed to *currere* and autoethnography in order to learn to be their "best-loved self" (Craig, 2013). Self-reflection is not an easy process, especially when interlinked with *currere* because of the deep memories and emotions. In my case, it only has brought about more questions than answers. However, it has helped me reflect on how I have educated and been educated throughout my life, and how I want to continue to educate about gender and sexual diversity. It has provided me with a greater self-awareness and cemented my perspectives on how I want to lead my life. In doing so, it has increased my awareness of issues that are relevant to my students. It is time that the lessons we learned as children about how gender works in society evolve into those that the new generation can have good memories about.

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