SELF-ENCOUNTERS AND SUBJECTIVE RECONSTRUCTION: USING COUNTER-STORIES TOWARD CREATIVE PEDAGOGY

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Teachers' Ethical Self-Encounters with Counter-stories in the Classroom:
From Implicated to Concerned Subjects
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Introduction

Within the current era of neoliberal neocolonial capitalism in North America, standardized educational practices aim to produce and reproduce status-quo ways of thinking that affirm rather than challenge dominant narratives. If, in this climate, research shows (Sharma & Sanford, 2018) teacher and administrative accountability tends to focus on the (re)production of goals, as an educator, I wonder what curricular space is left to attend to the life-worlds of students beyond outcomes and how such a space might compel creativity and action. Moreover, I am concerned about how a goal-oriented curriculum focused on transmitting "knowledge" from pre-established canons can possibly respond to immediate ethical concerns within education such as decolonization, reconciliation, and climate change. Several scholarly works (Blood, Chambers, Donald, Hasebe-Ludt, & Big Head, 2012; Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, & Sinner, 2012; Clandinin, 2019; & Tarc, 2015) within the field of curriculum studies have addressed such concerns through various methods of autobiographical and life writing.

In this milieu, Teresa Strong-Wilson's recent book *Teachers' Ethical Self-Encounters with Counter-stories in the Classroom: From Implicated to Concerned Subjects* offers an "elaborate detour" from the rage for standardization, inviting us to consider how using counter-stories within pedagogy and research might enhance ethical consciousness and contribute to subjective reconstruction. In previous work, Strong-Wilson (2006, 2007, 2008) explored white teachers' resistances to learning, pointing to the significant role stories play in contributing to the formation of subjectivities, the

tendency of stories produced and used in English Language Arts classrooms to affirm and reproduce whiteness, and the ways counter-stories can decolonize these storied formations. As such, Strong-Wilson (2007) found that for "change/decolonization" to occur, it is necessary to provide teachers with opportunities to go beyond simply including counter-stories in lessons and engage in critical memory work; such work allowed teachers to actively "produce" stories that exposed and confronted their own storied formations (p. 124).

Building upon this earlier work, Strong-Wilson (2021) argues that the dehumanizing impetus of "neoliberal movements" such as "standardization and bureaucratization" within education tend to characterize students in terms of outcomes, eroding teachers' agency and limiting their ability to affect curriculum in structural ways. In response, counter-stories can help to unsettle established structures of knowledge, as they derive from "counter-memories," which are "produced through oppression, subjugation or silencing" (p. 26) and thus, have the capacity to expand subjectivity rather than whittle it toward some bureaucratic end. Arranged into eight chapters with interwoven themes and narratives, Strong-Wilson's book stems from a multi-year research project situated in Montreal, Canada. As primary researcher, Strong-Wilson recruits a handful of teacher participants from different elementary and secondary schools in a Montreal suburb to commit to the research project, which has them choose various counter-stories to teach with in their classrooms. The teacher participants partake in workshops, reflective writing activities, and interviews, and additionally, the researcher engages in classroom observation and participation.

Teacher's Ethical Self-Encounters thus further studies teachers' experiences using counter-stories in English Language Arts classrooms, considering methods that generate resistance as well as those that compel action toward social justice. As such, Strong-Wilson's book contributes to existing research (Madden, 2019; Higgins & Madden, 2019) that attends to the use of counter-stories for decolonizing education and provides a particular focus on English Language Arts and literacy education, offering critical insights into resistances to counter-stories, their capacity to provoke change, and their contemporary pedagogical significance. Within its hermeneutical frame, the book braids together autobiographical and narrative accounts, drawing conceptual threads from: curriculum theorists Pinar and Grumet (2015, 1991), through *currere*; memory and trauma studies scholar Rothberg (2009), through multidirectional memory; and writer W.G. Sebald (1989), through indirect modes of narration. These conceptual threads effectively enhance Strong-Wilson's interdisciplinary approach toward the significance of counter-stories in English Language Arts education to decolonize thinking, providing insights into both research methods and pedagogical practices that will resonate for curriculum scholars as well as classroom teachers.

Autobiographical writing and resistance

Pinar's and Grumet's (1976) construct of *currere* provides a method to engage with the experiential dimension of curriculum through qualitative research. Etymologically deriving from the infinitive form of the Latin verb, *currere* ("to run") denotes the movement and process we partake in through study. Although general to a course of study as such, it is also particular to the experience of each person, opening the notion of curriculum to learning that occurs beyond and around state-sanctioned texts. What becomes knowledge through *currere* is thus not static and archivable but dynamic and continuously in flux. From this point of view, neither are students receptacles for "knowledge" nor educators keepers of such "knowledge." According to Pinar (1975), the method of *currere* engages in four stages "regressive— progressive— analytical— synthetical" that use writing alongside a range of personal artifacts to inquire into the formation of subjectivity through the rigorous excavation of memory, recognizing this formation as an ongoing, non-teleological process. Tied to subjective reconstruction, the notion of "self-encounter" that Strong-Wilson (2021) proffers here emerges through the subjective excavation that *currere* engages.

Strong-Wilson begins by storying the significance of autobiographical writing in her journey as a student, teacher, and researcher, which she sees as having provided a necessary step toward her ethically engaged social justice work. Arriving in the predominantly indigenous community of Bella Bella as both a recently graduated white teacher and outsider, Strong-Wilson tells us she experiences a sense of "double shock." While this shock disorients her habitual ways of thinking, it also opens space for reorientation by engaging with other ways of knowing and being. Over time, as Strong-Wilson attends to the needs of her students and their families within and beyond the classroom, she finds her subjectivity shifting and as such, begins to relate to the world from the point of view of a community member both as insider and outsider. Pedagogically, she recognizes the received curriculum as lacking and thus seeks curricula more particular and responsive to the community. Specifically, as an English Language Arts teacher, she looks for literature that will honour and resonate with her students' life worlds, while still challenging the limits of their experience in non-violent ways. Though not necessarily "canonical," Strong-Wilson finds such literature encourages students to become critically active readers and writers. These curricular beginnings of her storied life as a teacher illustrate significant points of subjective formation, encouraging both teachers and researchers to critically consider the stories that have contributed to our own subjective formations.

Autobiographical methods both resist the ethos of product-oriented study and initiate the space and context for self-encounters, wherein the individual intersects with the social (Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 9). As a method, *currere* provides opportunities to consider individual experience in relation to larger social-cultural contexts, but as Pinar (2004) offers, "provides no quick fixes" (p. 4) since what could emerge through

such research is not known in advance, and self, world, and their relations are continuously in flux. While such methods may render indeterminable results, it is precisely this sense of flux that opens the imaginative, psychic space to make possible processes of re-membering and re-storying, which engender self-encounters.

Previously, Strong-Wilson (2008) noted that stories cleave to experiences, as particular stories tend to become integral to the formation of the self and, consequently, identity. These definitive, "touchstone" stories are difficult to critically engage because they are tightly bound up with identity. As such, it is necessary that "storied formation" be "the object of *currere*, while stories are also the primary texts through which curriculum is enacted and implemented; lived experience with, through and as story constitutes the ground to be excavated" (p. 5). Further, critical engagement is necessary because it is through such engagement that we may come to not only recognize the dominant stories that contribute to the formation of subjectivity but also how such formation may restrict thinking and imagination.

In terms of teacher identity, *currere* has the capacity to erode the "lovely knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman 2003) cleaved to by placing it in tension with "difficult knowledge." As Strong-Wilson has it, "lovely knowledge" tends to resonate with nostalgic sentimentality and often produces unidirectional narratives that are disengaged from counter-stories. By contrast, "difficult knowledge" transpires from the remains of deconstructed "lovely knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, p. 766 cited in Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 56). The practice of *currere* as an autobiographical mode of writing works to illuminate assumptions and desires that underpin self-encounters. Baszile (2017) characterizes *currere* as form of "contemplative inquiry" that necessarily engages a practice of "critical self-examination," allowing and encouraging "the self to transcend itself and to connect in more authentic ways with others" by recognizing how "patterns of thinking" shape subjectivity (p.viii). For educators and researchers, such recognition becomes increasingly important if we are to engage in difficult, complicated conversations with ourselves and communities and attend in nuanced, vulnerable ways to the needs of our students and colleagues. In this vein, Pinar (2011) argues that *currere* "forefront[s] the subjective and social reconstruction decolonization demands" (p. ix cited in Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 10), as onto-epistemologies entrenched in settler colonialism cannot sufficiently respond to the injustices and violence colonial institutions have incurred and continue to perpetuate.

Juxtaposition as method: Memory and imagination

Arising from events of the past, Strong-Wilson muses that memories may exist as "phantom traces" in the sense that our relation to these events is always belated (p. 627). As we remember, we recognize that what *has been* is no longer directly accessible, but nevertheless leaves impressions. In this way, the past inflects the present, yet the present is perpetually in flux, forever reconfiguring itself. Thus, traces or impressions

become meaningful in response to the context in which they are received. As I write autobiographically, for instance, composing myself in lines, I am never able to see myself head-on, directly, in full, but rather the "who" that emerges exists in fragments, comprised of varied, inconsistent configurations. My memory, too, I find is inconsistent. What is remembered and how it is remembered is always coloured by the smells, images, place, associations that emerge through the process of remembering. As such, the truth of memory is not necessarily about recalling facts with empirical accuracy but rather emerges through the creative impetus involved in remembering. How, then, might past events be represented faithfully in ways that are critically relevant and ethically oriented in the present and toward the future?

Following queries of form and representation, Strong-Wilson turns to Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory," which refers to the non-linear temporality of memory that allows counter-histories and memories to come into relation in non-reductive and creative ways. Rather than dissecting memory to determine causal relations, "multidirectional memory" engages memory from different subject positions, which "allows us to consider the relationships between and among memories" (p. 26). Effectively complicating conversations about what we think we know, "multidirectional memory" has the capacity to bolster the aesthetical and ethical work of *currere* in the sense that it may generate polyphonic texts that undercut standardized notions of truth. In the context of her research on social justice in literature classrooms, Strong-Wilson engages multidirectional memory through the selection of counter-texts she provides for teacher-participants to use in their classrooms, as well as through the process of remembering that occurs through autobiographical accounts. This also sets up a non-reductive analytical stage by drawing from the concepts of juxtaposition and allegory.

Juxtaposing lives and the events of one's own life generates a relation between these lives that may not be recognized otherwise, since "[s]tories are brought into relation with one another and through their juxtaposition, a larger story is told" (p. 29). This "larger story" exists as a composite and does not work to digest other stories within a dominant frame. Juxtaposition is associative rather than linear and as such resists closure, leaving interpretative potential open toward the future. Alongside juxtaposition, allegory can be used to think with "periscopic narratives," which precisely refer to narratives that show various points-of-view and contexts, engendering a layered ethico-aesthetic space; as with both juxtaposition and allegory, meaning emerges through relations, in the ways different phenomena gesture toward each other.

Pinar (1975) illuminates that *currere* is allegorical because curriculum tells a double story of the subject individually and the curricular subject as such. For Strong-Wilson, two levels of signification enable the specific and the general to be brought into relation through the voice of the narrator. Expanding on Pinar's conception of

allegory, Strong-Wilson contends that like curriculum, allegory tells a "double story" and through individual subjectivities, links past, present and future (p. 22); employing juxtaposition brings diverse phenomena into relation, showing affinities that refer back to the position of the narrator. Eschewing explanation, meaning emerges imaginatively through the juxtaposition of elements rather than reductive theoretical frames. Thus, "juxtaposition entails imagination," and makes space for yet unthought possibilities to transpire. In this sense, future oriented thinking must not rely on *a priori* categories of understanding that depend on analytical thinking. In Strong-Wilson's study, as teacher participants sought "intellectual and lived bridges between self and society [...] there was no prescribed course" (p. 14) and they created new paths as throughout the process. Likewise, in the position of researcher, Strong-Wilson begins with open-ended questions that allow her to adapt to the nuances of shifting research contexts. As a source of empowerment and form of resistance, narrative could be used to counter the domination and authority of canonical discourses (Ellis & Brochner, 2000).

How can counter-stories, which necessarily challenge what we think we know, become significant to our lived experience? Strong-Wilson points to the tension Aoki (2005) evokes between the "curriculum-as-plan" and the "curriculum-as-lived-experience," highlighting the experience of the teacher as navigating between accountability to the official curriculum and the lives of students. From observations and interviews with teacher participants, Strong-Wilson surmises that whether a story is fiction or non-fiction, its affective power rests on its capacity to *feel* true. This feeling of truth, however, does not simply derive from a transcription of facts. Forms of autobiographical writing have become increasingly varied, grappling with ways to faithfully represent what has already passed, while acknowledging the narrator's position in the present. From Hirsch, Strong-Wilson borrows the term "postmemory" to refer to the effect stories of trauma can have on readers as secondary-witnesses. What is created is an "approximate structure of feeling," as the reader imagines the experience of another. As such, "postmemory is not the event itself but a response to the event, response being an event in its own right" (p. 41), enabling a continuity of remembrance that necessarily changes with context. "Postmemory" here points to the capacity of readers as secondary-witnesses to become both responsive and responsible for the testimony of another through imagination.

As counter-stories trouble official versions of events, they "have that further potential for postmemory to implicate teachers and students, those who come at a much further remove, in 'an elaborate detour that travels through once upon a time in order to reach now'" (Grumet, 2015a, p. 93 cited in Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 42). As Strong-Wilson reveals, for students to critically engage with counter-stories, it is necessary that they feel what they are reading is true, even if the facts are not verifiable. Reading memoirs as counter-stories and providing space for complicated conversations in the classroom challenges both teacher participants and their students to expand and come up against

the limits of their own subjectivities. Reckoning with these subjective limits has the capacity to reorient them within the present toward the future, imagining what could have been alongside what could be.

Subjective reconstruction through memory-work

More than a literary form, engaging autobiographically through the method of *currere* encourages one to recognize, expose, and unlearn privileged narratives that perpetuate white middle-class values and the racist practices they engender. As Pinar (1975) has it, the synthetical stage of *currere* moves the subject toward subjective reconstruction. How does autobiographical memory-work contribute to subjective reconstruction? Strong-Wilson notes that as teacher participants embark on memory-work "something [starts] moving inside them" (p. 56). Recounting and reflecting on the counter-stories they are using in the classroom, teacher participants partake in a workshop that includes writing autobiographically, sharing information about the texts they are using, and responding in various ways to counter-texts that the research team has chosen. Memory-work in the workshop is necessarily open-ended, focusing on the process of learning through detours and returns, allowing participants opportunities to identify, share, and re-cognize the "lovely knowledge" they hold close to.

Engaging in memory-work, Strong-Wilson notes, is far from neutral and tends to generate impulses toward nostalgic sentimentality. The sense of nostalgia that can arise resonates with the resistance Strong Wilson (2007, 2008) has previously found that white teachers experience when faced with challenges to their "touchstone" stories. Reflective autobiographical writing provides space for teachers to "'bring memory forward' through identifying their storied (namely, intertextual) formations, teachers can begin to reconfigure their landscapes of learning (Strong-Wilson, 2006, p. 105). Here, Strong-Wilson explores this resistance further and responding to the impulse toward nostalgic sentimentality, proposes practices of "critical nostalgia." Critiques of nostalgia conflate to generate a "caricature of nostalgia" (p. 58); and, because social justice is oriented toward the future and nostalgia is presumably about the past, "any preoccupation with the past presents an obstacle" (p. 59). However, Boym's (2001) work on critical nostalgia allows Strong-Wilson to make a distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. While restorative nostalgia relies on coherence in a move to build back better, reflective nostalgia is portrayed through fragmentation with an ironic awareness of the desire for coherence. "Subaltern memory," Strong-Wilson notes, characterizes nostalgia on different terms, because the significance in this case is to restore what was stolen and destroyed (p. 61).

Nostalgia may also be tied to a feeling of belatedness—coming late to something that could have been otherwise—and in this way, may indeed become future oriented, creatively considering other possibilities of what might have been. As part of the

excavation process that teases out resistances, nostalgia may provide exceptionally fruitful points of disruption. In Strong-Wilson's current study, selections from children's literature became key for inducing nostalgia in participants; rather than affirm a sentimentalized, coherent past, nostalgia here is harnessed to identify resonances within memories that in turn, create critical distance. Juxtaposing memories from different points of view allowed participants to both recognize gaps and consider relations between memories without the researcher's intervention. In this way, the ethical self-encounters generated by memory-work through nostalgic reflection contribute to the process of subjective reconstruction. As Pinar (2004) notes, "[t]he method of *currere* is not a matter of psychic survival, but one of subjective risk and social reconstruction, the achievement of selfhood and society in the age to come" (p. 4). The aspect of critical nostalgia emerging from juxtaposition eschews sentimental affirmations, as it brings the individual into relation with the social, using sentimentality as a reflective point of departure.

To engage in her version of subjective reconstruction, Strong-Wilson first points to the importance of juxtaposing counter-stories around difficult subject matter such as genocide and residential schools. Providing participants with a variety of texts enables a multidirectional perspective to develop and, concomitantly, has the capacity to mobilize nostalgia critically. During the research, for example, teacher participants located an object that resonated for them with a sense of lack. Strong-Wilson notes that "[p]aralleling the sense of loss tied to the teachers' objects, there was evidence of an analogous feeling accompanying the use of counter-stories" (p. 76), and this sense of loss tied to objects was employed as a tool to engage in a deconstructive process referred to as "excavation." Responding to literary texts becomes a necessary initial stage in the process of excavation as detour from and return to storied attachments both unsettles and shifts subjectivity.

Subjective excavation becomes especially significant in relation to land, particularly in the settler colonial context of this study. Through memory-work, unsurprisingly, specific places produce nostalgic affects for participants. However, a critical orientation requires them to also consider counter-stories about that land, which for Strong-Wilson, can begin with simple questions such as, "Who else lived here?" (p. 78) and "What is the story of the land?" Strong-Wilson reminds us that "[a]ttachments to land […] become entangled with larger policies—seaways, suburbs, settlement of the Canadian West—that themselves 'disappear' into nostalgic memory until their jagged borders emerge, set into juxtaposition with one another" (p. 80). As participants engage with counter-stories that trouble deep attachments, increasingly complicated conversations emerge, which allow their subjectivities to expand, holding space for other perspectives.

Within the process of subjective reconstruction, it was crucial for participants to identify resistances to counter-stories to become vulnerable and thus open to receiving

these stories. One teacher participant insightfully notes that if she cannot warm up to the counter-stories, she cannot expect that her students will (p. 84). A significant component of student engagement includes feeling these stories are meaningfully intertwined with their own lives and experiences. Beginning with autobiographical memory-work through both writing and complicated talk opens a space of and for vulnerable, critical reflection. In many cases, this means confronting "difficult knowledge" and "shattering" myths like the Canadian "peace-maker myth" that erect "lovely knowledge" (p. 85). Strong-Wilson contends that shock is necessary for shattering such myths. Nostalgia accompanies both regression and progression in the process of *currere* and "[i]dentifies a problem in curriculum with a "lack of awareness of other histories, other stories" (p. 86). In this way, counter-stories can participate in the process of decolonizing the curriculum as well as habitual ways of thinking and the "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977, p. 32 cited in Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 88) that may otherwise be taken-for-granted as common sense.

Ethical implications

The term "ethical self-encounter" for Strong-Wilson (2021) refers to an "ongoing, open and recursive relation between the self and not-self" (p. 92). This sense of recursive relation derives from the German noun *Bildung*, which following Pinar (2011), points to subject formation as a continuous process: "This inner process, which Pinar has identified as allegorical, happens through study, which is closely implicated in ethical self-encounters" (p. 94). Employing *currere* as autobiographical writing puts the subject into reflective relation with the stories they hold about the formation of their subjectivity through education (Pinar, 1975/1994). As such, "[t]eachers' encounters with the counter-stories are events that can lead to openings, detours and returns" (p. 96). These encounters need to begin with a "felt significance" (p. 96) that attracts and provokes the subject toward further investigation. Shock is one of the ways Strong-Wilson identifies as potentially generating that "felt significance," and it can be produced through juxtaposing impressions gleaned from a variety of sources that form a constellation, which then serves to present the possibility of other ways of thinking (p. 97).

As teachers and students come to texts as secondary witnesses, their "encounters are mediated through counter-stories" (p. 92). Like Sebaldian walkers, they are engaged in the slow process of attending to rather than explaining phenomena. While Sebald's narrators show interest through listening and describing visceral reactions rather than imposing explanations, their presence remains the organizing force of the narrative as "a concerned subject, who intellectually and emotionally grapples with what is being said" (p. 113). Likewise, the researcher is involved and implicated in the research while at the same time, offers the stories of others: "this presence—which is my presence—is deliberately recessed in the interest of telling of another's story—even as the telling is tentative" (p. 114). Employing a periscopic style as of narration that

shows multiple viewpoints and levels of detail allows the researcher to follow the thinking of teacher participants and remains open to possibilities that arise unexpectedly through the research process. Given the use of autobiographical memory-work, complicated conversation, and interviews as sources of qualitative data, Strong-Wilson demonstrates how research narratives do not need to correspond to a linear cause and effect trajectory. Just as teaching with counter-stories "brings the teacher back to the relation between self and not-self—to the one who is looking through the periscope," encounters in the classroom bring the researcher back to her position and "way of being there" (p. 115). In this sense, it is not only the teacher-participants and their students that are affected and moved by the research process but also the researcher, who is also, as Strong-Wilson has us see, an implicated and concerned subject.

As we recognize our implication we become implicated subjects, but Strong-Wilson's sense of subjective reconstruction does not end with this implication. Rather, she posits a way forward toward future reconciliation through transformative movement toward concerned subjects. The difference between an implicated and concerned subject is a move from an internal process of subjective deconstruction and reconstruction, which while precipitated through encounters with others is largely private. Subjects become concerned rather than only implicated through public action. In *Bringing Memory Forward*, Strong-Wilson (2008) asked "what kinds of processes could be set in motion to bring these attachments into question, but in such a way that the learner (here, the teacher) does not feel alienated and paralyzed by her "thoughtlessness" but instead moved to think and act?"

In *Teacher's Ethical Self-Encounters*, we find a subjective shift occurs as the implicated subject becomes a concerned subject. Although ethical self-encounters allow us to recognize our implication in an entangled context, this does not mean that through recognition we arrive at a final understanding. Here, Strong-Wilson contends that term "understanding" is "too glibly connected to goals and outcomes" (p. 132) and premised on the romantic notion that it is possible to know an object or other in its entirety. Such a point of view would necessitate the production of a teleological narrative structure, hermetically sealed from further possibilities. Recognition, here, also moves beyond its ordinary conceptualizations as a type of identification; rather, Strong-Wilson puts Ricoeur's "course of recognition" and Pinar's *currere* into relation, as both underscore recognition as "a *process* or *movement*" that is inherently open-ended. Conceiving of recognition in this way allows Strong-Wilson to further put it into relation with reciprocity and the potlatch: "something given in symbolic recognition of the important act of witnessing" (p. 138). In a neoliberal capitalist frame, such gifting "provokes a rupture" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 237 cited in Strong-Wilson, 2021, p. 138), as it generates a relation that is not based on exchange value. Instead, the ethical position of one who receives is recognizing the gift given on its own terms.

Counter-stories and English Language Arts Education

Strong-Wilson's book would be of interest to both English Language Arts educators and curriculum scholars in several ways. Significant for Strong-Wilson's research, as well as pedagogy and research ethics in general, *witnessing* even if secondary involves recognizing the reality of the other, which always eludes direct representation. Before standing in solidarity with others, Strong-Wilson argues, we need to recognize our implication in structures of violence, which may correspond with a significant rupture within our habitual ways of thinking. By harnessing this sense of rupture, the shock counter-stories can generate has us pay attention to what exists beyond habituated lines of thought. While the implication for Strong-Wilson is that shock disturbs our sense of what we consider true and has us come up against "difficult knowledge," it is necessary to incite the work of subjective reconstruction. More than attention, "[r]econstruction implies the actual work to be done—memory-work and critical nostalgia; the pedagogical working-through of a difficult subject matter; the ethical addressing of a preoccupation or concern" (p. 150). Beyond recognizing implication, concerned subjects must be conscious of their belatedness and positions as secondary witnesses, yet continue to actively cultivate the critical attention that moves them to act.

Strong-Wilson is thus making a strong case for educators and scholars to examine the stories we tell ourselves and how these affect our ability to respond to others. I find her insight that auto/biographical methods apply to not only writing but also listening, reading, teaching, and researching particularly compelling. Excavating past experience though autobiographical modes of writing such as *currere*, for example, allows me to attend critically to the formation of my subjectivity within historical contexts that I can recognize as relational, and in turn, enables me to cultivate attention to the experience of others so that I might better respond to their particularity. In my understanding, this attention opens an ethical space where past and existing relations can be acknowledged and reconfigured and the future is not predicated and determined by what has been.

Using counter-stories further has the capacity to unsettle received knowledge by bringing to light other modes of interpretation and understanding. Decolonizing education exists in the present continuous and its trajectory must be open because it is without precedent. Through my position as a white Canadian researcher and educator, I am hardly exempt from examining how I came to be living as an uninvited guest in this place called amiskwaci-wâskahikan, situated within Treaty 6 territory, which for centuries has been a place of gathering for the many indigenous groups who traversed and cared for this land. I am thus implicated in the work of "re-storying" and "unsettling" myths of settler benevolence (Regan, 2010). Counter-stories help expose the elusive foundation upon which such familiar canonical knowledge has been situated.

As I turn from the familiar narratives that were produced and reproduced throughout my education to compose other narratives and attend to those of others, I must reckon with the ways structures of knowledge I learned to hold close have shaped my subjectivity and sense of possibility as a subject; through this reckoning, I find my perception of the past and my relation to it shifts and will continue to shift in ways that I cannot predict. More importantly, in terms of English Language Arts education, this reckoning encourages me to create space for counter-stories in the classroom through both literature selections and opportunities for expression such as complicated conversation and open-ended autobiographical writing. For educators interested in using counter-stories in the classroom, Strong-Wilson's book provides storied examples, while attending to aspects of learning that critically engage teachers and students in ways that can cause them to shift from implicated to concerned subjects. Though we can curate spaces that engage multiple ways of knowing and understanding, as Strong-Wilson's research shows, we cannot orchestrate what occurs..

Stepping away from models of predictability has become increasingly important for me as an educator, because "[t]eachers scramble to acquire standardized 'scientifically proven' instructional strategies that can be applied to classroom situations that have already been preordained by others, without contemplating the effects upon the students as distinctive cultural and emotional beings" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 111). Aside from the complexity of 21st century classrooms, teaching toward decolonization and reconciliation requires reparative practice that moves beyond formal gestures to engage difficult knowledge, which is inherently intimate and unsettling (Tarc, 2015).

Autobiographical writing, and in particular *currere*, enables teachers to critically and creatively engage with lived experience as a process of knowledge making through subjective reconstruction. According to Kanu and Glor, "*currere* provides teachers with the capacity to gain voice, as individuals, within or even against the system" and thus, "[b]y examining why/how they are not individuals in the system, but are assumed to be broad categories of technicians meant to implement others' prescribed changes, teachers can find their voice" (p. 112). This voice derives from what Clandinin (2019) terms "personal practical knowledge"—knowledge that is traditionally situated outside of academic archives but crucial for responding to the vicissitudes of student needs and educational life. For teachers and students, as well as researchers, connecting subject matter to lived experience and becoming concerned subjects whose power to act is not diminished by the curriculum but expanded can lead to learning becoming creative, re-storying education.

Concluding remarks

The mode of subjective reconstruction Pinar (1975, 2011) envisages through *currere* has implications not simply for how we come to understand subject formation but also for

ethical engagement with the world. Implicit through the stages of *currere* is that the past, present, and future are tethered in the sense that how we are storying our lives opens or forecloses possibility in the present and toward the future. Although it is crucial for Pinar that ethical engagement begin with self-study, the impetus of *currere* extends both inward and outward, necessarily orienting toward social justice concerns. Strong-Wilson's work follows from this concern toward social justice in education that begins with an excavation of one's own subject formation, bringing memory forward through autobiographical, reflective writing—"events shift as writing carries them into new contexts" (Strong-Wilson, 2008, pp. 3-4). Throughout *Teacher's Ethical Self-Encounters*, Strong-Wilson stories the ways teacher-participants and students become increasingly engaged in social justice topics when they find opportunities to connect counter-stories to their lives.

Attending to subjective reconstruction, as Tarc (2005) points out, is important because the dominant narratives that make up the literary canon are overwhelmingly white, male, and Western, In a cyclical movement, such narratives contribute to the formation of subjectivities that affirm or accede to their dominance and that of the structural power they represent. Thus, reconstruction first requires the subjective excavation that ruptures habitual modes of thinking. As she has before (2018), Strong-Wilson here uses juxtaposition as a method to permit such rupture, allowing participants to make meaning from setting their own storied lives alongside the stories of others, particularly those counter-stories that contest common-sense versions of history. Returning back to the self from "detours involving hearing others' stories in relation to one's own" is precisely "the ethico-aesthetic of the periscope" (p. 31) as we see our storied lives and memories refracted at different angles though the stories of others.

Beginning with autobiography is already a detour from a goal-oriented neoliberal curricular practice that is entrenched in values of standardization, individualism, and competition. Juxtaposing stories with counter-stories in the space of formal education subverts these values and has the capacity to make space for *becoming* in relation with others that is at once disorienting and charged with creative possibility. As Ellis and Brochner (2000) contend, "we live within the tensions constituted by our memories of the past and anticipations of the future" (p. 746)—thus through this subversive tension, action becomes possible.

With the method of *currere*, Pinar (1975, 2011) acknowledges a literary, storied self whose subjective formation is never quite finished. Acknowledging our relations to ourselves and others is an ongoing process to which Strong-Wilson returns in order to highlight the ethical responsibilities we have toward ourselves and our communities as educators. Excavating memory and reconstructing subjectivity through ethical self-encounters can reveal the stories that become curriculum (both within and outside of educational institutions) and inform the formation of

subjectivity, which in turn, allows us to recognize the ways in which we are implicated in perpetuating structures of violence.

Such recognition, Strong-Wilson contends, has the capacity to shift implicated subjects toward concerned subjects, a turn that promotes future-oriented social justice curriculum. As *Teacher's Ethical Self-Encounters* demonstrates, counter-stories are integral to recognition as they simultaneously "tell a story" and "reflect on its inception, creation, form of representation, authorship, and audience" (p. 109). Although Strong-Wilson's study is situated within the context of secondary English Language Arts education, engaging counter-stories through juxtaposition and reflective, creative methods has implications beyond this context for pedagogical practice, teacher education, and curriculum research. As methods of juxtaposition and indirect narration resist the reduction of storied lives to conceptual categories, Strong-Wilson offers a non-violent approach to coexistence in curriculum research, opening space for responsive ways of becoming and acting as concerned subjects to emerge.

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