



Now *and* then, in *and* out of the classroom: Teachers learning to teach through the experiences of their living curricula



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Narrative inquiry with three teachers from different teaching contexts.
- Examines the relationships between teachers' living and teaching experiences.
- Asserts that teachers' lives are central to the learning-to-teach process.
- Implications for teacher education are considered.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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How, when, and where do teachers learn to teach? Guided by this question, this article examines the relationships between teachers' living and teaching experiences. Through narrative inquiry, it stories "curricular currents" of three teachers from different teaching contexts, noting the continuity, interaction, and place of the experiences that comprise these currents. It argues that these teachers have learned to teach through their "living curricula," across all times and places of their lives, not just classroom moments. It concludes by charging teacher education to attend closely to teachers' exploration and analysis of their lives' experiences, in and out of classrooms.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Personal beginnings

Many memorable life experiences influence who I am as a teacher: as a child, living with my middle-school-teaching mom and participating in family car trips that weaved among national parks and historic sites; as a high school student, reading Thoreau's *Walden* (1854/1981) and coaching at youth basketball camps; as a college student, pursuing a teaching certificate while my university considered closing its education department; as a pre-service teacher, studying Wiesel's *Night* (1960/1982) with eighth graders and standing in front of twelfth graders just after the World Trade Center was struck on September 11, 2001; teaching at a public high school ten miles south of Walden Pond, where Thoreau temporarily lived and some of my students swam in the summer.

These are some of the experiences significant to my growth as a teacher. While some are placed in classrooms, others are not, and they span the entirety of my life. These and many other meaningful experiences comprise my "living curriculum," a course of learning across the times and places of my life. Within my living curriculum there are "curricular currents," sequences of thematically related experiences. For example, one of my curricular currents might be named "hearing Thoreau's call." At several different points in my life, in and out of schools, (re)reading *Walden* has challenged, and prompted changes in, my living—and my teaching.

I learned to teach (and will continue to do so) from my life's experiences, through all the times of my life, in *and* out of classrooms. My teacher education program introduced me to theories of childhood and adolescence, as well as teaching philosophies and methods, and it provided me experiences teaching in classrooms, but it did not ask me to think particularly about my life experiences in relation to myself as a teacher. It was only after my program that I composed a document called "My Education as a Teacher," a personal narrative that considered how my life experiences shape(d)

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my teaching. In composing the narrative, I discovered that what happened previously was alive in me, years later and in other places, and educative to how I taught.

1.2. Rethinking the learning-to-teach process

Teachers, like all people, lead rich, complex lives (e.g., Ball & Goodson, 1985; Bullough, 2008; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014; Nias, 1989). But this lived richness and complexity, as in my experience noted above, is often kept at bay in teacher education. Clandinin (1992) writes,

Too often we look at teacher education as separate from the ongoing lives of teachers and student teachers. We pull out the years of teacher education to examine them. In so doing, we separate teacher education experiences from the pasts and futures of our student teachers' lives. We do not create spaces to acknowledge either the ways they have already written their lives prior to teacher education or to the ways they continue to live their stories in the context of teacher education. (p. 124)

What pre-service teachers *have* learned in their lives—and how, when, and where they have learned it—is often positioned to the side of what they *will* learn in a teacher education program. The emphasis tends to be on the acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge that comes from a combination of methods classes and field experiences, but this overlooks the acquisition of all forms of teaching knowledge from past, present, and future life experiences in and out of classrooms. Thus, there is a strong need to connect the personal and professional in the learning to teach process (Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009). A failure to make this connection not only oversimplifies teachers' lives, but also it can create major problems as teachers negotiate their professional identities (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Nias, 1989).

Deepening the connection between *the personal* and *the professional*, this article focuses on the fundamental relationship between a teacher's living and teaching. Working under the broad question *How, when, and where do teachers learn to teach?*, I am committed to the notion that teachers' living experiences shape their teaching experiences (Clandinin et al., 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). That is, teacher learning begins with the entirety of teachers' lives. Some experiences are more significant than others, and significance is always in process, but learning to teach is not bounded by a scripted set of courses, readings, assignments, or school-based practices. In my country (USA), this life-contextualizing idea is often unseen in a profession that is increasingly scrutinized by media, politicians, and others for its main participants supposedly lacking rigor, skill, and adequate preparation (Cody, 2011; Greenhouse, 2012; Rethinking Schools, 2010). Attempts to deemphasize the lives and work of teachers are also apparent beyond the USA (Day & Sachs, 2004; Flores, Carvalho, Ferreira, & Vilaca, 2013; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009).¹ While the particularities of places uniquely shape the contexts in which teachers work, this is a point that is not limited to a particular local or national context: the education of *all* teachers comes from the many times and places of their lives.

¹ Day and Sachs (2004), in the introduction to their edited book, consider prominent worldwide educational discourses before the authors of ensuing chapters examine the teaching contexts of specific countries from all of the major regions of the world. As editors of their book, Flores et al. (2013) reside in Portugal but they include chapters focused on the current climate of teaching from across the world, particularly from a number of scholars in Europe and North America. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) write with an international scope on teacher education, but they do so rooted in Australia.

Indeed, teachers learn to teach along the “professional learning continuum” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), which includes pre-service teacher education, induction, and professional development. However, I extend learning to teach further. The learning-to-teach process is founded on teachers' biographies (Britzman, 2003; James, 2012). It includes Lortie's (1975) “apprenticeship of observation,” which takes place for students in their many years of schooling. Central to this apprenticeship is the student's relationships with teachers (Uitto, 2012). But it also takes place outside of school, for students and teachers, through everyday living (e.g., Dalton, 2004; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). All aspects of a teacher's biography can shape a teacher's teaching.

What follows is a curriculum study. The relationship between three teachers' living and teaching is the focus, and I approach this focus through the teachers' living curricula. My methodology for studying this life-work relationship is narrative inquiry as I dwell in the “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” of each teacher's life (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). After presenting curricular currents of the teachers through poetry and story, I consider how these currents manifest in the teachers' teaching, focusing in on how the teachers' lives—now *and* then (i.e., past, present, and future), in *and* out of classrooms—influence their teaching.

2. Understanding curriculum as a flowing course of experiences

He's (2003) notion of a cross-cultural life as a river, forever meandering through, across, and in between its many landscapes, serves as a helpful entry into the major theoretical concepts at play in this study. If the entirety of a river is one's *living curriculum*, specific sections of the river are *experiences*, as each section is distinct in its particular place but connected to other sections upstream and downstream. The many flows that exist within the river and across its sections, at the surface and deep into the water, are *curricular currents*. Distinct on their own, the messy confluence of these currents comprises a life.

2.1. Living curriculum

The English word *curriculum* is derived from the Latin word of the same spelling. The Latin root of both words is *currere*, which means “to run,” and its English derivatives are words such as *current* (“running water”) and *recur* (“rerun”). A general translation of the Latin word *curriculum* is “race course,” which indicates directed, meaningful movement. Literally, a person runs a particular course.

In schools, “curriculum” frequently means a scripted course of content learning for students, what Aoki (1993/2005) terms “curriculum-as-plan” and Eisner (1985) terms the “explicit curriculum.” Yet curriculum extends far beyond the content courses of classrooms. It is not just about students; it applies to *anyone* learning in classrooms. Further, it is *everything* that is learned in classrooms, including what is lived (Aoki, 1996/2005), implicit, and null (Eisner, 1985). If classrooms are situations of learning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), curriculum is the whole of the experiences in those situations.

But curriculum is not confined to classrooms. As Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) have shown with respect to the lives of children, and Connelly and Clandinin (1988) have shown with respect to the lives of teachers, curriculum is central to living in all places, in and out of schools. And yet, curriculum is not confined to the people who inhabit classrooms. All people have a curriculum. Thus, it is a life of education—not just schooling—one's running through lived experiences, learning all the while (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). In this sense curriculum is a course of living. It is what a person learns

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