

## Teacher Knowledge and *Currere*

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### Abstract

Teacher education, be it pre-service or in-service, has been, and to a large extent continues to be, grounded on an inadequate understanding of not only what constitutes teacher knowledge but also of how that knowledge is acquired. However, conceptualizing teacher knowledge is a complex issue that touches upon understanding key phenomena such as how teachers make sense of their teaching during their teaching, as well as the way teachers' knowledge is put into practice in the classroom (Guerriero, 2014). In this exploratory paper, I re-envision teacher knowledge as teacher understanding, emphasizing teacher subjectivity at the core, characterized by historically embodied, temporally and spatially entwined, meaningfully constellated, ontological disclosure of the teacher's being in the world. Such an understanding dwells between theory and practice, the personal and social, past and present, rational thinking and feeling, feeling and imagining, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, intuitive grasp of self, students, and teaching. Then I argue that the idea of *currere* can contribute significantly to its acquisition.

### Introduction

The study of teacher knowledge remains an essential issue in the study of teacher education. However, conceptualizing teacher knowledge is a complex issue that touches upon understanding key phenomena such as how teachers make sense of their teaching during their teaching, as well as the way teachers' knowledge is put into practice in the classroom (Guerriero, 2014). In this paper, I made an explorative attempt to reconceptualize teacher knowledge as teacher understanding, an attempt that may offer alternative thinking on the problems accompanying teacher education. In this exploratory paper, I re-envision teacher knowledge as teacher understanding, emphasizing teacher subjectivity at the core, characterized by historically embodied, temporally and spatially entwined, meaningfully constellated, ontological disclosure of the teacher's being in the world. Such an understanding dwells between theory and practice, the personal and social, past and present, rational thinking and feeling, feeling and imagining, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, intuitive grasp of self, students, and teaching.

This paper comprises three sections. First, it describes and provides a critique of some of the early attempts to understand the nature of teacher knowledge. These attempts were of two types: firstly, attempts to delineate teacher knowledge into various knowledge forms or domains; and secondly, attempts to understand teacher knowledge through personal practical knowledge, as illustrated in the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1986). Second, the paper provides a detailed account of my own conceptualization of teacher knowledge, as mentioned above. The third part of the paper examines the contribution that *currere* can make to the acquisition of my conception of teacher knowledge.

Re-envisioning the concept of teacher knowledge allows a new configuration of related ideas, theories and practices, thus providing a crucial pathway to a transformative understanding of teacher education. The educational project of teacher understanding is explorative, an attempt that

may offer alternative thinking about the problems accompanying teacher education and created by inadequate understanding on key issues in teacher education. When confronted with technologization and instrumentation in teacher education, such an understanding may allow teachers to find their own ways in their teaching, building pathways between theory and practice. The renewed practice generated thereafter may lead to expected transformation in teacher education. It also invites policymakers to reconsider these issues in teacher education, providing “a lived tour” to support an extended, deepened, enlivened conversation among teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers, leading to a realm of transcendence underscoring a critical, creative and aesthetic teacher education.

### **The Concept of Teacher Knowledge**

The concept of teacher knowledge has been studied extensively. However, conceptualizing teacher knowledge is a complex issue that touches upon understanding key phenomena such as how teachers make sense of their teaching during the process of teaching, as well as the way teachers’ knowledge is put into practice in the classroom (Guerriero, 2014).

Shulman (1987) offers the concept of “the knowledge base of teaching” (p. 5) to characterize the components of knowledge domains for teachers. He identifies seven categories of knowledge bases for teaching: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of students, knowledge of educational context, and knowledge of educational outcomes. While Shulman’s general categories of the knowledge base of teaching mainly remained as a baseline knowledge categorization, scholars who have subsequently studied teacher knowledge have provided different categories of knowledge for teachers (Carlsen, 1999). Grossman (1990), for example, proposes four general areas of teacher knowledge as the cornerstones of the professional knowledge base of teaching: general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of context. Driel et al. (1998) use the concept of “teachers’ craft knowledge” emphasizing teachers’ practice. In comparison to the knowledge base proposed by Shulman, their definition of craft knowledge focuses on types of knowledge which actually guide the teachers’ behavior during classroom practice, whereas Shulman’s knowledge base encompasses every category of knowledge which may be relevant for teaching.

Goodwin (2010) incorporates the dimension of personal knowledge into this knowledge base for teaching, and she discusses five domains of teacher knowledge “that conceptualize learning about teaching as deep and broad, context specific as well as integrated” (p. 20). These knowledge domains are as follows: personal knowledge—personal stories, philosophy of teaching and self-knowledge; contextual knowledge—understanding a broader social, cultural and political context; pedagogical knowledge—content, theories, teaching methods, and curriculum development; sociological knowledge—diversity, cultural relevance, and social justice; and social knowledge—collective group process, and conflict resolution. Along a similar line, Kincheloe (2004) proposes a meta-epistemological perspective delineating the types of knowledges required in a critical complex teacher education, in which the different types of knowledges of education for teachers include, but are not limited to empirical, experiential, normative, critical, ontological, and reflective-synthetic domains. Reflective-synthetic knowledge is seen as a central dimension of teacher education through which teachers attend to “their own usage of such knowledges and the schemas they develop in this process” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 67). In summary, from Shulman to Goodwin, scholars seem to emphasize how different domains of knowledge could inform the preparation of teachers, while considering contextual, practical and personal factors.

However, solely analyzing isolated knowledge or skill components is inadequate and teachers may disagree or even resist the dogmatic nature of this “knowledge for teachers” (Fenstermacher, 1994), as this view of teacher knowledge may fail to recognize the complexity and interdependency of teachers’ thoughts and behaviors as an undivided entity (Verloop et al, 2001). In addition, these categories of teacher knowledge are not to be final, however under constant revision as shown in previous research (Karaman, 2012). Carlsen (1999) argues that those scholars who attempted to identify the various components of teacher knowledge embrace a structuralist view which conceives knowledge as static and organized and hence fails to understand how the historical and cultural aspects are interwoven with knowledge production. Thus, these models “are best viewed as a heuristic, not an immutable roadmap of any real individual’s cognitive structure” (Carlsen, 1999, p.135). Also, as pointed out by Clarke and Phelan (2017), the turn to teaching standards and the articulation of a knowledge base for teaching represents a withdrawal into a firmly modernist worldview in which instrumentalism dominates. Quoting Dunne and Pendlebury (2002), they argue that such instrumentalism marginalizes the teacher, separating knowledge from the idiosyncrasy of particular teaching situations, from the everyday experience, and from teachers who employ it. I would argue that it is the teacher who renders meaning to teaching, and integrates meaning to teaching. The fragmentation of the knowledge base for teachers inevitably leaves teachers’ subjectivity unattended. Teacher education with such a vision thus excludes ambiguity and spontaneity and aspires for standardization. With various aporias tangled up and layered in the process of teaching, teachers seem to experience teaching as a whole without distinguishing paths and ends, seeking and discovering, teaching and learning, and rational thinking and feeling. Such an organic whole features restlessly unfinished searching and resonating throughout their teaching. Thus, we may need to reconsider our current understanding of teacher knowledge.

Being dissatisfied with “the way teachers are viewed and their role conceived in the educational enterprise” (p. 9) and interrogating a research tradition they found inadequate and prejudicial in the study of teachers, Clandinin and Connelly propose the concept of personal practical knowledge that repositions its epistemological notion of what falls into the category of knowledge (Willinsky, 1989). “Personal practical knowledge,” they postulate, is “knowledge embodied and reconstructed out of the narrative of a teacher’s life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p. 490). They present a view of knowledge and theory as inhabiting in the minds of real teachers (Britzman, 1991). Clandinin (1985) describes personal practical knowledge as knowing which is entrenched within all the experiences that constitute a person’s being. Its meaning is derived from and understood in terms of a person’s experiential history, both professional and personal. For them, teacher knowledge is derived from prior and present personal experience, contingent upon various situations. As Clandinin (1992) writes:

It is knowledge that reflects the individual’s prior knowledge and acknowledges the contextual nature of that teacher’s knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge carved out of, and shaped by, situations; knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through processes of reflection. (p. 125)

It is not something objective or independent but is the totality of teachers’ experiences. It is the knowledge and beliefs of a teacher that pave the base for their own thoughts and actions in teaching. Personal practical knowledge engages teachers to reconsider past experience, to address the demands of a present situation, to look to future expectation. Clandinin (1992) points out that personal practical knowledge of teachers lies in teachers’ past experiences, present thinking and future intentions. As a result, teachers’ personal knowledge evolves throughout their professional

lives (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). As such, teachers' practical knowledge has been argued to be the tangible dynamic behind teachers' thinking and behavior (Borg, 2001).

Clandinin (1985) further argues that teachers' personal practical knowledge is to be found in practice and to be reconstructed through teachers' narratives: "Personal practical knowledge is revealed through interpretations of observed practices over time and is given biographical, personal meaning through reconstructions of the teacher's narratives of experience" (p. 363). This method of narrative inquiry focuses on the experience of the individual (Tsang, 2004). It offers teachers a way to "document narratives of their own experience as research data on their own experience" (Chambers, 2003, p. 22). As acknowledged by Miller (2005):

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

Similarly, Soto and Swadener (2005) suggest that the power of this form of inquiry lies in the potential to locate experience within complex contexts to make sense of daily-lived world reality. Personal practical knowledge has allowed scholars to juxtapose personal experience with teachers' experience; in doing so, it endorses and respects diverse voices (He, 2003).

However, Willinsky (1989) argues that personal practical knowledge may asymmetrically represent the teachers' viewpoint. For him, this personal practical knowledge stresses a shared expression of both researcher and teacher who work together in the classroom and talk and write about it afterward, to generate a narrative of some unity to capture their professional lives (Willinsky, 1989). Behind this shared expression lies a shared meaning; therefore, "Neither teacher nor researcher emerges unchanged" (Clandinin, 1985, cited in Willinsky, 1989). However, as pointed out by Willinsky (1989), the teacher's voice is kept distinct and subordinated in indented blocks or inverted commas while the research is being presented. And this voice is employed to support the researcher's interpretation and theoretical perspective, even as it is meant to "support the common understanding arrived at in the research" (Willinsky, 1989, p. 253). Thus, this personal practical knowledge seems to put the teacher in a position that is passive and regards that they do not possess the "theoretical knowledge" a researcher possesses. Moreover, Willinsky points out that the unity of narratives claimed by Connelly and Clandinin may not exist. As Connelly and Clandinin (1987) posit that their method is to seek mutual understand and reconstruct the narrative unities within the narratives of participants, "a continuum within a person's experience which renders life experience meaningful through the unity it achieves for the person" (p. 297). However, Willinsky (1989) argues that there might not exist such a narrative unity since stories may only achieve "momentary unifying coherence, a lifelikeness, and leaves much unspoken" (p. 260). It seems that they "construct" such a narrative unity that may ignore something tacit consciously and unconsciously—a gap that is subtle and complex and needs to be left open. Also, meaning may be fluid, ever-shifting as the meaning always becomes unestablished, susceptible to doubt. To construct such a unity may prohibit, as pointed out by Willinsky (1989), "a more open, if less unified, experience in the teaching of school" (p. 247). The search for "a unity" may deny the complexity and subtleness of teacher growth. For me, there might exist an "indirect continuum" that lies under the narratives, which is more open and essentially dynamic.

To sum up, this section describes and provides a critique of some of the early attempts to understand the nature of teacher knowledge. These attempts were of two types: first, attempts to delineate teacher knowledge into various knowledge forms or domains; and second, attempts to understand teacher knowledge through personal practical knowledge, as illustrated in the work of Connelly and Clandinin. However, the first attempt—knowledge base perspective—may ignore

teachers' subjectivity in pursuance of standardization, whereas the second one may fail to further capture the subtlety and complexity of teacher experience by positioning the teacher as passive and emphasizing created unity of narratives. The totality of teacher experience, which is spatially and temporally superimposed, socially and culturally informed, juxtaposes both seeking and discovering, rational thinking and feeling, imagining and contemplating, without a fixed, prescriptive structure.

### **Re-envisioning Teacher Knowledge as Teacher Understanding**

Therefore, we may need a new concept of teacher knowledge, based on the concept of teacher knowledge as reviewed. In the following, I will summarize my sense of teacher knowledge, which focuses on teacher subjectivity, characterized by an embodied, continuously reconstructed, ontological disclosure of being in the world--teacher's being, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, intuitive, aesthetic understanding of self (teacher), students, and teaching. I call it "teacher understanding," as I will indicate below.

#### **1. Teacher subjectivity at the core**

My conception of teacher knowledge centers around teachers' subjectivity. However, the teacher subjectivity might need to be addressed from within the field of curriculum theory. As posited by Phelan (2015),

In an effort to understand and remain alert to the event of subjectivity in teacher education—the possibility and impossibility of teachers' intellectual and political freedom—I have needed to find new ways of talking. I have found that questions concerning the entanglements of human agency and responsibility, society, and historical moment are best addressed from within the field of curriculum theory. (p. 4)

The concept of subjectivity has been the key concept in reconceptualist curriculum studies. What is subjectivity? According to Pinar (2009), "Subjectivity, means the inner life, the lived sense of self, non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented—that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen, those circumstances of everyday life, those residues of trauma and of fantasy, from which one reconstructs life" (p. 3). For him, subjectivity refers to the inner life, the process of becoming, which can be ongoing if one engages in "becoming" all the time. Pinar's concept of subjectivity seems to emphasize how one can evolve and transcend what one has been given. Situating her discussion within the context of standardization and instrumentalism in teacher education, Phelan (2015) turns to the concept of freedom and posits that teacher education must centralize the teacher's subjectivity, that is, "the teacher's freedom of expression, thought, and action" (p. 3). "My concern," she goes further, "lies in the manner in which the event of subjectivity is effortlessly impeded by teacher education practices and policies" (Phelan, 2015, p. 3). She associates the freedom of teachers with Agamben's concept of impotentiality. For Agamben (2011), impotentiality is the capacity to not be, "being able to not exercise one's own potentiality to actualize" (p. 43). Being capable of one's own impotentiality is "what renders human's freedom to be, to think, or to live otherwise" (Phelan, 2015, p. 30). To think impotentially means to think from the other scene. As such, freedom lies in the realization of impotentiality (Phelan, 2015). This impotentiality points to "an ontological openness to new possibilities" (Lewis, 2013, p. 9), which render teachers' freedom differently.

This impotentiality seems to capture an alternative freedom. As stated by Phelan (2015), this impotentiality is "a zone wherein the teacher is neither constrained by political powers nor resistant

to them; rather, she lives consciously suspended between what policy wants her to be and what she might yet become” (p. 30). The teacher is in-between, between to do and not to do, to decide and not to decide, to stay or to withdraw. Impotentiality enacts a being for which the given ontological construction has no concept (Jensen, 2006). And therefore, this impotentiality goes beyond the available choices. For Agamben, freedom is not about making a choice among available choices; it is about one having freedom to depart from the available choices (Jensen, 2006). Thus, impotentiality can be seen as a possible form of freedom, indicating resistance to the dominant instrumental rationality or performativity (Peim, 2016). Phelan’s sense of freedom (subjectivity) seems to emphasize a particular moment or state of teacher’s freedom (subjectivity) to counter against the instrumentalism and objectification in teacher education as they situate between the state and students. However, as suggested by Jensen (2006), impotentiality as specific form of political inactivity may not support the ultimate venture of a political act that insists on its possibility even in the face of the impossibility. This impotentiality may seem to be “inactive”. Is it possible that we can be more active as a teacher?

**Foucault’s sense of freedom.** Foucault’s sense of freedom may also provide meaningful theoretical input for the discussion of teacher subjectivity. Foucault (1985) insists that the individual is not entirely passive, and that individual resistance is always possible. As argued by Allen (2002), Foucault’s account of power offers an analysis of the historically and culturally specific conditions of possibility for subjectivity and agency in modern, Western, industrialized societies. Within the specific conditions of possibility (Allen, 2002), individuals can always “transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (Foucault, 1985, pp. 10–11). For him, we constitute ourselves by various practices or activities within constraints (powers). Thus, the practice of the self was “a means of developing an aesthetics of existence” (p. 252), and it expresses “the purposeful art of freedom” (p. 252). In comparison to the control of self, Zhao (2011) summarizes two characters of the practice of self: first, instead of being passively constituted by discourses and power-knowledge apparatuses, in practices of the self, the self actively constitutes itself; and second, the purpose of the constitution of the self is to gain freedom and self-mastery. While actively constituting oneself, one attends to or contemplates different ideas and perspectives; thus, one may actively engage with creating one’s own path instead of following a pre-determined one passively. For example, after students learn about critical thinking, they may begin to reconsider various thoughts critically instead of following without interrogation. Then, students may experience “internal struggle” between the existing thought and new perspective, which may act as an occasion leading to self-transformation. With this practice of the self (the analysis of the constitution of self), teachers may dwell in/on the limits of themselves, seeking for the possible and desirable within power constraints, interweaving the impossible into the possible, embracing other and otherness while remaining to cross the boundary. Such a “freedom” leaves us to “act within these practical systems, reacting to what others do, modifying the rules of the game, up to a certain point” (Foucault, 1984, p. 48). As summarized by Golob (2015), the human subject is free in Foucault’s sense:

The human subject is free in that the facts regarding power/knowledge, discourse, other agents etc., are never sufficient to determine what act that subject will perform (for example, although not exclusively, what act the subject will perform after having reflected). (p. 10)

Therefore, Foucauldian freedom promises, in its acceptance of the above statement, that “there is a space in which critical reflection and transformative self-determination can operate. But this is all it guarantees” (Golob, 2015, p. 19). However, Foucault does not promise that such reflection

will advance to any given direction or that things will ameliorate as desired (Golob, 2015). I would argue that reflection derived from certain renewed practice may add newness to one's thought though it still accords with established discourses, which may lead to "immanent" transcendence. For Zhao (2011), by positioning subject essentially by self-constitution conducted by oneself, Foucault implies "a priori characteristics of the subject" (p. 4). Therefore, "it remains only logical that a hidden center of the self must be behind all the different forms" (Zhao, 2011, p. 4), which makes freedom (transcendence) possible. Foucault's sense of freedom tends to be more immanently transcendent. However, such an immanent transcendence, is prior to and not contradictory to Pinar's sense of transcendence.

**Levinas' concept of subjectivity.** Levinas' subjectivity also renders a new understanding of freedom. For Biesta (2010), freedom for Levinas lies in "the question of the uniqueness of each individual human subject" (2010, p. 293), the existence of such uniqueness allowing for transcendence and spirituality (Zhao, 2015). For Levinas (1998), this uniqueness comes from one's relation to and responsibility for others and the emphasis of the encounter with the Other, which unavoidably gives rise to one's sense of responsibility towards others. While critiquing the human freedom in Western philosophy being conceived as autonomy, self-mastery and self-determination, Levinas contends that such an understanding of freedom is intertwined to an ego-centered, self-enclosing subject (Zhao, 2015). For Levinas, "Genuine human freedom presupposes moral responsibility," (p. 1) as argued by Lewis and Thornton (2022). One discovers her/his responsibility as one responds to others (Cools, 2011). Thus, to have freedom, one must exist in certain social relations to others. As stated by Levinas (2001), "The other interrupts my being, my attention to my own being and I am able to transcend my self, my ego..." (p. 43). Freedom for Levinas means that we are free of our ego's self-absorption and the prison of our nature (Zhao, 2015), for the encounter with others "initiates moral impulse in the subject" (Mahoney, 2013, p. 37), thus rendering us freedom. Thus, one transcends by way of encountering other and otherness. Self comes to shape while being deeply related to others (Levinas, 1998).

For Levinas, self stands as being responsible for the other. However, Blanchot (1986) seems to deny this self in the responsibility for the other: "The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine and causes me not to be I" (p. 13). According to Blanchot (1986), "That the other has no meaning except the infinite aid which I owe him—that he should be the unlimited call for help to which none but I can answer—does not make me irreplaceable; still less does it make me unique. But it causes me to disappear in the infinite movement of service where I am only temporarily singular and a simulacrum of unity" (p. 21). Therefore, what responds is not mine and the "I" does not speak (Cools, 2011). Clarke and Phelan (2017) point out that his work is under criticism:

These include the charge that Levinas represents an apolitical privatisation of ethics but also that his ethics reveals a masochistic vein that fails to provide sufficiently robust conceptual resources for standing up for oneself and others in the face of tyranny, abuse and persecution – for teachers this may take the form of unruly students, bullying peers, tyrannical leaders, intrusive inspectors or prescriptive policymakers. (p. 72)

Following Levinas' idea of ethics, Bauman (1993) argues that this responsibility is free from knowledge. However, when the relationship to the Other lacks the rationale and insight of knowledge, it can become very problematic (Nordtug, 2007). Such an ethics locates responsibility before freedom and thus puts the individual subject's sovereignty in question (Critchley, 2007). However, teacher subjectivity calls forth the ethical attentiveness to others and otherness, as argued by Wang and Ness (2023), with which the teacher welcomes students as a host with hospitality.

This ethical attentiveness requires teachers to understand, to embrace otherness in both students and teaching, the responsibility of being a host.

To sum up, the various concepts of subjectivity mentioned above seem to, from my point of view, emphasize transcendence. For Pinar, subjectivity is about how one can transcend what one has been given through inner work and self-becoming; for Phelan, a teacher's subjectivity lies in her/his freedom of impotentiality, a type of transcendence calling forth thinking from a different scene; for Foucault, freedom lies in daily practice of self, situating oneself in relation to others and power; for Levinas, transcendence seems to be more ethical, emphasizing breaking free of the prison of our nature. His idea of subjectivity tends to be more about ethics. However, Levinas seems to ignore the internal demand of the human being, treating human nature as a prison; one's internality (for example desire) might be also a source of inspiration and imagination. Thus, we may need a sense of ethical attentiveness to both students and teaching in which the teacher welcomes students as host with hospitality grounded on equality (Wang & Ness, 2023).

My question then arises: Where does the teacher's freedom lie during their teaching and being as teacher? Can teachers "become more than they have been conceived and conditioned to be" (Pinar, 1992, p. 232)? In what follows, I will use my teaching experience to illustrate my sense of teacher subjectivity: how the teacher can dwell within/beyond boundary and constraint as "a subjugated subject" (Pinar, 2011), a form of freedom that is both restrictive and open.

I once worked as a university instructor teaching public required courses to undergraduate students in a Chinese university. The course I taught had a set of prescribed purposes in the university syllabus. However, I had my own thought on my teaching task. But it might have been impossible to implement what I had wished due to the existing constraints. It seems that I was stuck between the prescribed teaching agenda and my own thought on my teaching. I was supposed to teach as required. Gradually I found that as a teacher, I could always select what content to teach to some degree and how to teach it (especially the way I talk and the focus I attend to in classroom), the appropriate selection of which could cultivate students' critical thinking. Some students spent much time on my course due to their personal interest and acknowledged that they had learned much. Thus, the empowerment and the constructive attitude students attained through my teaching could benefit society eventually. The following is an experience of a teacher at Fudan University in Shanghai, who encountered a situation in which she would disagree with the teaching agenda: "I also used cases from history to substitute for current situations to make an analogy, when I felt like criticizing the government and the Party" (Du, 2018, p. 1006).

What makes it possible for teachers to address the tension between prescribed teaching agenda and academic freedom either in higher education or school setting, thereby balancing the dual tasks? The idea of role split (Hu, 2005) may help to understand this issue. This role split challenges an assumption of the prescribed teaching agenda and academic freedom in an unsolvable tension, providing a new model of co-existence (Du, 2018). Teachers in Chinese universities seem to assume the two roles simultaneously, the two contradictory roles—enacting and resisting the prescribed teaching agenda in the class. On one hand, the teachers seemed to teach the required content in class, but on the other hand, they added something they deemed meaningful or practiced something different such as using the method of analogy to "enrich" the designated meaning during their teaching. These teachings enacted a being between activity and inactivity. That is, they were not in a state of full inactivity, nor full activity since they still taught certain designated content with certain "extra contents" or "means" incorporated. Though Chinese university teachers live within various constraints, this idea of role split allows teachers in Chinese universities to subtly express their true viewpoints. Though being stuck, teachers can always make changes within

various constraints, partially from the choices available, and partially beyond the choices available such as in my case. Teachers may take this as a beginning point to engage in subjective reconstruction led by autobiography and academic study. The following is a Chinese story that seems to describe how one can dwell within and beyond constraints:

Once two students asked Master *Fayun*. If one walks one step forward, one will lose something precious, if one walks one step backward, one will lose what one has learnt about the Dao. But if one just stays there without any movement, one may look stupid. How should one do? The two disciples could not figure it out; they were confused and puzzled. Finally, they turned to the master. *Fayun* answered: Don't you remember the way of "being in the middle?" One should walk one step forward, then one step backward, then two steps forward, then two steps backward. Only in this way, one can stay in the middle (translated by author).

Therefore, teachers may adjust their "inner self" to make sense of emerging situations in a different way or react differently. For example, teachers can take tension as normal and challenge as opportunity, from which they may learn and evolve.

To address the teacher's subjectivity, all the works mentioned above provide valuable conceptual sources. A teacher exists as both a teacher and a concrete human being. If we ignore the metaphysical and transcendental nature of teaching, failing to acknowledge that teachers' work is both social and personal, intellectual and ethical, material and spiritual, we may lose sight of teachers' subjectivity.

Drawing on the concepts of subjectivities mentioned above, I argue that my sense of teacher subjectivity emphasizes a freedom in/with/beyond stuckness, a site between activity and inactivity, a subtle but intricate realm of beliefs, thoughts and possible actions that constitute a specific category of freedom—I call it de-structural (indirect) freedom. It is a territory of freedom that is both restrictive and open, both fluid and stable, both contingent and transcendent, both constitutive and extrinsic, both material and spiritual, both impotential and active. It captures a particular type of freedom that the teacher can enjoy when confronted with imposed standardization and instrumentalism, characterized by non-phenomenal potentiality since every teacher can have such a freedom manifested differently under different circumstances. This de-structural freedom has "no fixed shape," contingent upon particular situations. Role-split can be one possible form of de-structural freedom. Freedom appears as the unlimited possibility of approaching the aporias, the boundary. Accordingly, the teacher dwells within/beyond boundaries and constraints with ethical attentiveness to other and otherness. It is different from impotentiality and Foucault's sense of freedom, however it incorporates both of them. Compared to impotentiality, de-structural freedom stresses how one can actively participate while certain aspects remain inactive; compared to Foucault's sense of freedom, it emphasizes transcendence in a more direct way.

This sense of subjectivity opens up transformation. For me, the term "transformation" does not assume radical change necessarily, but instead involves the gradual and ongoing reconfiguration of oneself; it equates with "cultivating our capacities to historically reconstruct one's private subjectivity in relation to our contemporary engagements with the public sphere in Pinar's sense" (Ng-A-Fook, 2015, p. 129). Therefore, Ng-A-Fook says, a teacher who lives within the worldliness of a classroom, "is to learn how to absorb, to metabolize, the new into the known, and the (historically) known into the new" (p. 129).

**How can teachers engage in subjective reconstruction?** Subjective reconstruction—inner reform—is the site of teacher development (Pinar, 2015), enabled through autobiography and academic study—various forms of study. For teachers, to experience subjective reconstruction may mean experiencing their boundary (social and cultural) within which they situate first. My

conception of attunement (2020b) may help illustrate how a teacher can engage in subjective reconstruction focusing on intellectual freedom. Teachers, therefore, acquire de-structural freedom. This freedom, I argue, might be conditioned by one's sensitivity, contingent upon situations that may provide possibilities for various forms of learnings.

The ethical teaching subject begins with engaging in the moments of difficulties and uncertainties that prompt the ethical questions within education (Butler, 2002; Britzman, 2000). It is these moments that require judgment without standard guidelines, thereby placing teachers in uncertainty, undecidability and ambiguity, and thus calls forth the ethical dimensions of teaching (Clarke & Phelan, 2017; Janzen, 2013). To address these moments, teachers need to engage in ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1984; Clarke, 2009). Clarke (2009) argues that Foucault's work in which ethics is conceived in terms of ethical self-formation provides theoretical input for understanding ethics in relation to teaching. For him, Foucault's ethics help resist the normalization and standardization practices represented by neo-liberalism, through practices of critical reflection. Also, Judith Butler argues that understanding social shaping of selves is ethical deliberation and necessary for critique:

This dispossession does not mean that we have lost the subjective ground for ethics. On the contrary, it may well be the condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which morality itself emerges. If the 'I' is not at one with moral norms, this means only that the subject must deliberate upon these norms, and that part of that deliberation will entail a critical understanding of their social genesis and meaning. In this sense ethical deliberation is bound up with the operation of critique. And critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live and appropriate a set of norms. (Butler, 2005, p. 8, cited in Clarke, 2009)

Informed by the four axes of Foucault's (1984) approach to ethical self-formation, Clarke (2009) speculates about teachers' and teacher educators' identities in terms of a) the substance of teacher identity, b) its sources of authority, c) the self-practices of teacher identity and d) the endpoint, or telos, of teacher identity. The first axis is the substance of teacher identity, and asks the following questions: "What part of my self pertains to teaching and what forms of subjectivity constitute—or what forms do I use to constitute—my teaching self?" (Clarke, 2009, p. 190). This axis addresses the forms of subjectivity contributing to our teaching selves. This substance of identity is conceived as open to ongoing learning and growth (Clarke, 2009). The second axis helps us understand what sources of authority teachers may draw upon to guide their teaching and the basis on which the teacher seeks to cultivate certain attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Authority sources legitimize the framework with which teachers' identity work could be approached; moreover, the sources vary among teachers (Gu et al, 2022). For example, teachers may believe that theory or research in teacher handbooks and curriculum guidelines help their practice and accept them as knowledge base for their teaching. The third axis refers to the techniques and practices teachers and teacher educators adopt to shape themselves as educators. The teacher can write a reflective journal or engages in different professional development to better understand themselves. The fourth axis refers to telos, which describes the ultimate endpoint, goal or purpose of teaching, and of education. The four axes portray how a teacher can engage with his or her ethical self-formation through intellectual effort. This intellectual effort is also ethical.

Clarke (2009) argues that this identity work is ethical: first, this work involves attention to how we engage in the social and ethico-political practices of teaching; secondly, it is ethical in that the freedom prompted by an awareness of the contingent and constitutive nature of our histories urges us to take responsibility for our identities; and third, it is ethical as understanding the inevitable

contingency and ambiguity of our identity opens up deeper appreciation of difference and diversity.

Foucault's ethics offers one way in which teachers and teacher educators might practice intellectual freedom through problematizing and critically interrogating the social, historical and political forces shaping their past, present, and future subjectivities (Clarke & Phelan, 2017). Through interrogating the social, historical, and political forces shaping their past, present, and future subjectivities, teachers engage in ethical self-formation (Clarke & Phelan, 2017). Teachers' reflection and engagement with social and cultural issues open up spaces for subjective reconstruction.

I argue that by writing autobiographically (*curre*), the teacher can engage in subjective reconstruction, intellectually and ethically:

It is working from within—in-between self and society—that activates our capacity to understand how we are embedded in a present from which we may also want to extricate ourselves. Through sustained academic self-study—conceived as ethical engagement with alterity—teachers engage in teacher development that encourages cosmopolitan comprehension of what appears to contain us. (Pinar, 2015, p. 179)

Using *curre*, the teacher can write his/her own story and enter a “forgotten” space where self is reconsidered and reconfigured. Writing autobiographically renders “self” access to truth about self, others and world for this writing does not take place independently of the other and others. It affords the opportunity for teachers to genuinely explore how teacher' self-formation has come into being. In the last section, I will focus on how *curre* can contribute to the acquisition of this teacher understanding.

## 2. Traits of Teacher Understanding

In the previous section, I discussed the issue of subjectivity in teacher education; in this section, I will focus on the traits of teacher understanding. Teacher understanding in this paper is characterized by historically embodied, temporally and spatially entwined, meaningfully constellated, ontological disclosure of the teacher's being in the world. Such an understanding dwells between theory and practice, the personal and social, past and present, rational thinking and feeling, feeling and imagining, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, intuitive grasp of self, students, and teaching. In the following, I will illustrate these traits in a detailed way. These traits are sometimes overlapping: the first three are concerned more about the “intellectual side” of teaching; the fourth one is concern more about the “non-intellectual side” of teaching. At the same time, these traits address both social and personal, public and private aspects of teaching and the teacher's life.

The first one is that teacher understanding is neither absolutely objective nor a completed body of knowledge and always evolves as teachers engage in various educational activities. It is threaded through teachers' ongoing expectations, prior beliefs and theories, and evolving notions about teaching, learning, teachers, and learners during the teaching process. Teachers are always in this very complicated conversation in which culture, society, and subjectivity become articulated in their participation in curriculum, teaching, and learning (Pinar, 2009). Thus, teacher understanding is an ontological disclosure of being in the world which reveals a dynamic process of how teachers subjectively engage in the webbed intricacy of educational experience. It always evolves and expands, as a teacher evolves. Essentially, teacher understanding seems to be a more thorough personal understanding of all issues involved in the various educational unfoldings. It is more than

knowledge. Instead, it seems to be an aggregation of various understandings related to teaching and learning, deeply interwoven with an understanding of oneself.

Regarding the second one, teacher understanding manifests itself in teachers' participation in educational practice. Teacher understanding dwells between the theory and the practice, the private and the public, and the past and the current, verbal and non-verbal, thought and action, a liminal space characterized by emerging conflicts, dynamic reciprocity and ever-shifting contingency. Unfolding through tensions, this understanding is to be formed and reconstructed through practice, later enacted in practice again. Mostly, it is expressed by a particular teacher through a particular life event, in which teachers observe, contemplate, or even interrogate themselves, their prior understanding. However, sometimes teacher understanding may not fully manifest itself in teacher's practice due to certain reasons, for example, a student's unpredictable resistance that fundamentally transport the teacher from one position to another; the transportation confronted presents a new chance for the teacher to learn and consider.

This focus on teacher's reflective practice is akin to the idea of *phronesis*, which can be translated as "practical wisdom," first introduced by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this work, Aristotle offers an account of the intellectual virtues, which are "distinct abilities and dispositions possessed by human beings" (Foster, 2019, p. 2). *Phronesis* (or practical wisdom) focuses on how individuals understand the particulars of a situation, in which appropriate knowledge and action is called forth. It is a form of understanding evolved over time through reflective practice based on experience, embodied in one's disposition, thought, and action. Resonating with Heidegger (1962), Malpas (2022) argues that it is "a mode of insight into one's own concrete situation; hence *phronesis* constitutes a mode of self-knowledge" (online). Similarly, Gadamer (2004) conceives this practical wisdom, as explained by Malpas (2022), "as a mode of insight that has its own rationality irreducible to any simple rule or set of rules, that cannot be directly taught, and that is always oriented to the particular case at hand" (online). To acquire this practical wisdom, my conception of attunement (Wang, 2020a) may help in some sense: "Describing my own life history (autobiography) provided a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing. In a phrase, I became more open to myself" (p. 63). Learning from past experience is what attunement offers. Derived from my conception of attunement, I want to propose the concept of educational embeddedness, relevant to how teachers operationalize their practical wisdom. In teacher's teaching, educational embeddedness emphasizes how teachers view and make sense of emerging situations, from which they perceive dissonance and disruption. It means finding the situational nuances in emerging situations that are unfamiliar and unknown, a site between resonance and dissonance, through remaining open and sensitive to teaching and students. The concept of attunement and educational embeddedness can contribute to teacher development if they remain more open to self and others. The concept of *phronesis* offers insights on how teachers can learn and grow in their teaching practice, a process between theory and practice. Teachers who engage in practice gains knowledge irreducible to any other type of knowledge or principles. For teachers, writing autobiographically might also be an important type of practice in which they record practices including thought in the classroom and beyond and make sense of these practices that beget a journey of personal theorizing.

To be noted, the fine line between knowledge and practice in the realm of teacher education, sometimes, might be obscure. Teachers gain knowledge from practice, then translate this knowledge into practice again, which happens endlessly. This understanding gained from practice seems to obscure the difference between practice and theory, making practice and theory a

“continuum,” and the fine lines between them constantly shift in the endless process of the transformation.

The third one is that teacher understanding always takes place at a certain ontological level (Pinar, 1975), contingent upon teachers’ experiential and conceptual horizon and possibilities. It is informed by teachers’ prior experience and understanding on teaching, evolved continuously throughout their lifelong journey. Gadamer’s concept of horizon lends itself a good explanation here. According to Gadamer (2013), “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth” (p. 313).

Envisioned as being derived from concrete experiences (Schmitz, 2018), horizon is something that moves with one and invites one to advance further (Gadamer, 2013). Thus, one’s horizon always evolves as one’s experience and study expands. A horizon then becomes a way of understanding and contemplating one’s certain type of being. For Gadamer, a horizon (or situation) is hermeneutical, conditioned by tradition, essentially conditioned by history (Schmitz, 2018). Gadamer (2013) then states that: “all self-knowledge arises from what is historically pre-given...” (p. 63) and it is subject to one’s horizon. Understanding happens when our current horizon is moved to a new horizon, which is enabled by an encounter (Gadamer, 2013). Hence, the process of understanding is a fusion of horizons: The old and the new horizon merging into something that is animating (Clark, 2008). The fusion of horizons creates a continuously evolving space in the middle, open to questions and visits.

Gadamer’s idea of horizon summons transcendence: we can always go beyond ourselves, both material and spiritual, to understand the differing realities and ideas. Gadamer (2013) posits that different levels of horizons are revealed and incarnated within a person. While situating in a particular context, teachers’ horizons are manifested in various issues, ultimately embedded in a multifarious understanding of teaching. To teach, then, is to wander, to venture through the world of pedagogical callings full of learning and teaching possibilities to come.

Prior experience presents itself as a starting point, from which teachers begin to learn and unlearn, connecting with new experience. “Experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (Seidel & Jardine, 2014, p. 22). Experience gained from prior teaching seems to be the invisible path that connects both the past and present, allowing teachers to dwell at the intersection between past and present, between familiarity and strangeness. To attend to or dwell in the middle seems imperative, for the reciprocity of perspectives between the old and new does not take place naturally. Also, teachers may interpret the curriculum in a different way as their horizons move.

As a result, it requires teachers to understand their prior interest, experience and knowledge that are temporally and spatially braided and embodied. Consequently, teacher understanding is first and foremost a reconstruction of theoretical knowledge and experiences of teachers. It is a becoming process, during which meaning is constantly revised and updated. Teacher understanding reveals unseen aspects of teacher experience, and through which teachers find their path. Prior experience seems to be an avenue to new experience, sometimes a detoured one. Teacher understanding is an endless unfolding of the individual horizon wherever the teacher traverses through space and time. It opens up not only the world of individual others, but also unforeseen, startling possibilities in the understanding one’s own being (Seidel & Jardine, 2014).

The fourth one pays attention to the non-intellectual side such as aesthetic, ethical, political concerns involved in teaching and teachers’ being. Teaching is a complicated, multi-dimensional

undertaking, filled with encounters and events that requires aesthetic, ethical, and political attention and thinking. In the following, I will focus on the three dimensions, manifested through various encounters and events in teaching and student's learning.

Ethics is inherently embedded in teaching practice (Campbell, 2003). There are different levels of ethical decision-making in which teachers commonly engage, ranging from abstract questions to seemingly trivial questions about everyday issues (Orchard, Heilbronn, & Winstanley, 2016). Characterized by moral ambiguity, these questions may vary under different circumstances, including but not limited to: What makes a good teacher? If students talk in class, should the teacher silence them? Different teachers may react differently: there are no prescriptive guidelines for such ethical concerns. Take the second question as an example. As Thornberg (2006) suggests, if children believe they talk in a constructive and relevant manner, indiscriminate silencing of children may cause moral concerns. Without understanding the relational and contingent nature of teaching, teachers may lose sight of the ethical complexity embedded in their teaching (Thornberg, 2006). Such ethical complexity requires the teacher to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity. Hansen (2001) explores the moral heart of teaching and contends moral sensitivity to be an important disposition for the teacher. The moral heart of teaching, according to Hansen, integrates the teacher's sincere interest in the student, his/her responsibility for the relationship, the content learned and the understanding of a growing person.

Instead of following an established protocol or procedure, reaching an ethical or just decision entails three conditions (Derrida, 1992, cited in Clarke and Phelan, 2017). Clarke and Phelan (2017) interpret the three conditions, the third of which is from Smith (2005):

First, it must involve a moment of genuine undecidability. Second, the decision must take some account of the rule or the law at the same time as it brackets, suspends or transgresses it, for without this reference it can make no claim to being just or ethical. Third, the ethical or just decision must be made in response to a particular urgent situation without recourse or opportunity to seek full information. (p. 12)

For them, due to its ambiguity and uncertainty, this ethical dimension does not lend itself to “a checklist or instilled through correct training” (Clark & Phelan, 2017, p. 13). The moments of undecidability that locates teacher ethical subjectivity, opens up space for “a plurality of potentially dissenting voices” (Clarke and Phelan, 2017, p. 13). Thus, informed by these difficult moments, teachers begin to reconsider their responsibility, their role as a teacher, connecting to both students and the broader social and cultural context, thereby engaging in reconfiguration. Such an ethical attentiveness creates a space for differentiated, complex, subtle understanding that resists instrumentalism and standardization.

The political dimension focuses on power dynamics embedded in teaching, involving biases, oppressive structures that can undermine learning and bring potential damage to students. The political dimension might exist at various levels in educational settings. A well-founded understanding of classroom power dynamics continues to elude educational researchers and practitioners, particularly in teacher-student relationships from elementary to graduate education (Aguinis, Nesler, Quigley, Lee, & Tedeschi, 1996; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Kreisberg, 1992, cited in Tai, 1998).

In *Political Moments in the Classroom*, Himley et al. (1997) explore political moments in teaching, understood as uncomfortable, teachable, or transformative moments in which teachers faced an “episode that is immediate, perhaps disruptive, and that dramatizes the anger, sense of threat, and deep disagreement about difference that characterize contemporary culture and that inevitably now emerge in the classroom” (p. 3). Next, Himley et al. (1997) pose the question: As

a writing teacher who aims to help students develop their own voices, what is her/his job when those voices “emerged from within the homophobic discourses of culture” (p. 3)? They also ask about how to “lead an intelligent discussion on difference” (p. 4). How can teachers lead students into a discussion of difference as well as allow students to recognize the cosmopolitan nature of educational experience? Their work provides more insights into this dialogue. Compared to the political moments in classroom, Clarke and Phelan (2017) focus on the macro level–policy development. Considering the advancement of professional standards and the imposition of performance-related procedures in teacher education manifested in recent policies, they argue that teachers are left with little time and space for democratic deliberation or to prepare their students for democratic futures (p. 83). They draw attention to the critical dimension of the ethico-political work of teachers–promoting pluralism and legitimizing dissent in the interests of democracy.

Teacher understanding involves an aesthetic dimension, which is closely tied to an emotional element, as Eisner and Powell (2002) argue. They write that:

Art is a particular quality of human experience that to some degree could be present in any interaction an individual had with the world. Art...[is] a living process that humans experienced when a certain quality of attentiveness and emotion were a part of the engagement (p. 133).

Further, they describe the aesthetic experience as forms of experience “that possess an emotional quality that is both feelingful and satisfying” (p. 135). Based on their work, Clandinin and Huber (2002) posit that artistry and aesthetics both reside in the lives of teachers they study and the work of narrative inquiry. They depict a three-dimensional space as a way to attend to teachers’ inner emotions, to the aesthetic reactions woven across time, place, and events. The three dimensional space consists of personal and social (interaction), past, present, and future (continuity), and the notion of place (situation), creating a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in which teachers turn inward to inner feelings, aesthetic reaction, and move backward and forward temporally within specific physical boundaries of inquiry landscape (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). Teaching is not only an intellectual labor but also an emotional one. This aesthetic (emotional) dimension is embedded in teachers’ teaching. When teachers are attentive to students, to students’ interests and concerns, they are emotionally involved. A Chinese story may be used to illustrate the aesthetic dimension embedded in teaching:

*Boya* (伯牙) was a Chinese *qin* (an ancient Chinese stringed instrument) player from the Spring and Autumn Period or the Warring States period... A few years later, his skills in playing the musical instrument had already reached a fairly high level. But he still felt that he could not superbly express the various things which had deeply impressed him. Knowing what was in his mind, his teacher said he would take *Boya* to his own teacher who would help *Boya* with his music. He took him by boat to the Penglai Island, a fabled abode of immortals, in the East China Sea. When they reached there, *Lian Cheng* told *Boya* to wait while he went to pick up his teacher. Then he disappeared with his boat. *Boya* waited and waited for several days but his teacher didn’t come back. His heart was filled with sadness. The running waters, the flying seagulls and the silent woods all seemed to be composing a sad melody. With myriads of thoughts welling up in his mind, he began to play a tune on his *qin*. He made the most beautiful performance ever and realized the true secret of playing the *qin*. He found his music got more expression. It turned out that his teacher was putting him there by himself on purpose to let him find an inspiration in the arms of Nature. On the island, *Boya* enjoyed the natural scenarios and listen to the roaring of the great waves. He incorporated the beautiful nature with his music, thus reaching a realm of thought he had never experienced before. Later *Boya* became a famous musician in Chinese history. (China Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2014)

In this story, echoing the natural beauty of the island and sea, *Boya* transcended the finiteness of skill, enlivening his feelings and soul, and moving toward “an infinite land” characterized by endless lingering. This story tells us that the teachers created a “world” through which *Boya* could be in touch with his own feeling, connecting with his own heart. The teacher did not teach *Boya* directly but led and showed. Being attuned to the place and surroundings, *Boya* immersed himself into a liminal world in which he searched, resonated, and felt and eventually achieved more in-depth understanding of music, himself and the world. “The ecstatic experience triggered by aesthetic feeling favors a reshuffling in the individual’s perception of reality and disrupts formulaic modes of experience, releasing the individual from the spell of established pictures of the world and opening up a space for the imaginative play with, and the emancipatory reaggregation of, given elements of experience” (Pinar, 2011, p. 99). His experience on *Penglai* Island transported *Boya* to a world of wonder and miracle that spurred, inspired his heart and soul. This story is archetypal. The teacher—*Cheng Lian*—allowed *Boya* to wander, to engage himself in self-transformation. Living on the island allows *Boya* to turn inward to notice how his feeling was interwoven with the wind, with the cloud, with the teacher who he was waiting for, and the teacher who took him to the island.

In addition to this emotional facet, the aesthetic dimension in teaching may also involve a non-goal directed state: “there is a to-and-fro movement that is not intended to bring the activity to an end” (Simms, 2015, p. 60). As described above, *Boya* wandered between the beautiful scenery and his inner feeling, the given and the possible, the possible and the unimaginable, eventually realizing subjective reconstruction. This non-goal state brings “new and unexpected patternings into our way of thinking and reflecting, offering us new vantage points to the world” (Greene, 2005). Teaching allows such a moment, such a lingering. There is an ancient Chinese poem titled *Visiting a private garden without success*:

It must be because he hates clogs on his moss  
I knock ten times still his gate stayed closed  
But spring cannot be kept locked in a garden  
a branch of red blossoms reached out past the wall.

*Ye Shaoweng*

The red blossoms inadvertently show their striking beauty to us. Dawson (1998) notes: “Any beautiful thing has a radiant elegance about it which...points beyond itself and drives us to look for further elegant unities in other things” (p. xxvi). Savoring this beauty, suddenly I feel the breeze on my face, soft and glittering, a ray of afternoon sunshine dancing on my hair. I just feel it. I feel closer to myself, to the world, as if I am lingering on a bridge between myself and world. I am not just seeing this picture; however, I become the visitor who knocked on the door ten times. I am dwelling in a more “real” world, a world of my creation. A world I can genuinely see and feel, and dwell, a felt one, an imagined one. How can our pedagogy lure us to this world, where we can linger, call back, and savor? Seidel and Jardine (2014) use the concept of “fulfilled time” to describe the time of the work being done, “the time belonging to the fullness of that work and its rich territoriality” (p. 67). It is itinerant and returning (Seidel & Jardine, 2014). This moment that the poem conveyed, for me, might be a moment just before the fulfilled time, pre-fulfilled time breeding inspiration, ensuing flourishing. It takes its own sweet spell, preceding flurries of moments of possibility and lures. This is the moment that teaching allows and creates.

To be noted, these three dimensions may overlap under certain circumstances, exemplified in one situation or event. Teachers’ autobiographical accounts may provide related content,

contributing to ethical, political and aesthetic (emotional) understanding of teacher education, allowing teachers to see how these dimensions are evolved and manifested in teachers' practices.

In this section, I have described the traits of teaching understanding, which involves the following: 1) understanding that it is neither objective nor a completed body of knowledge, always evolving as teachers engage in various educational activities, 2) manifestation in teachers' participation in educational practice, 3) understanding that always takes place within the experiential and conceptual horizons of teachers' being in the world, and 4) a special attention to aesthetic, emotional, ethical, and political dimensions involved in teaching and teacher's being. These traits are sometimes overlapping: the first three may be more concerned about the "intellectual side" of teaching and teacher's being; the fourth one may be more concerned about the "non-intellectual side." At the same time, these traits address both social and personal, public and private aspects of teaching and teachers' lives.

### 3. Summary

In this section, I re-envision teacher knowledge as teacher understanding, emphasizing teacher subjectivity at the core, and characterized by historically embodied, meaningfully constellated, temporally and spatially entwined, ontological disclosure of the teacher's being in the world.

My sense of teacher subjectivity emphasizes a freedom in/with/beyond stuckness, a site between activity and inactivity, a subtle but intricate realm of beliefs, thoughts and possible actions that constitute a specific type of freedom—I call it de-structural freedom. It is a territory of freedom that is both restrictive and open, both fluid and stable, both contingent and transcendent, both constitutive and extrinsic, both material and spiritual, both impotential and active. Such understanding dwells between theory and practice, the personal and social, material and spiritual, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, aesthetics, intuitive grasp of self, students, and teaching. Acknowledging teacher subjectivity—a de-structural freedom—as the core, this teacher understanding stresses the endless unfolding of the individual teacher.

### *Currere* and Teacher Understanding

How can we cultivate such understanding of the teacher in teacher education? How can we prepare teachers with such understanding? The challenge that faces reconceptualist teacher education is the development of an academic discourse that can mediate between the traditional content and methods courses (Grumet, 1989). Based on the previous discussion, I argue that autobiographical writing would contribute significantly to the acquisition of teacher understanding.

For Pinar (2015), teaching is not a collective, but finally an individual matter that is intellectual, ethical, and political, enacted and revealed through daily classroom practice by teachers. "Like artwork, teaching is a form of self-expression that becomes, in its subjective meaning and social significance, "self-overcoming" in its "self-critical" (inter)disciplinarity (Pinar, 2009, p. 46). "The training of a teacher for...the curriculum of intensity, spontaneity, authenticity, and discipline must be training to study oneself" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 591). Thus, such self-examination and ethical engagement with other and otherness require autobiography, a "complicated" autobiography inseparable from the study of academic knowledge. However, autobiography led by *currere* is different from ethical self-formation mentioned above since it may require a more existential study of self characterized by *currere*.

Such subjectively structured academic study, threaded through the teacher's narrative, I argue, is the subject matter of teacher education. A creation of lived experience, academic study, and self-

reflective practice is the basis for teacher education that aims for the acquisition of teacher understanding. It is self-knowledge that requires the individual's subjective sense of intellectual labor, best achieved through the teacher's lived experience. To acquire this understanding, teachers need to write autobiographically, moving between academic knowledge and personal narratives. For Grumet (1989), it is essential that teacher education programs foster this intellectual capacity to oscillate between the particular and the general, the individual story and the general consensus. Autobiographical inquiry led by *currere* conveys how teachers' understanding is acquired, held, and how it can be transformed. As argued by Grumet (1989):

If I am a teacher, I must be able to recover and narrate my own story, and I must be able to discover how it is both similar to and different from yours. Finally, I must be able to gather up both accounts and to read them against the cultural myths and convictions that constitute our common ground of knowledge. This is a profound literacy, and autobiographical studies provide one path to the fluency, expressiveness, and critical thought that it requires. (p. 14)

Through writing autobiographically, the teacher can cultivate understanding on various issues that emerge in teaching. In the following, I will further illustrate how *currere* (writing autobiographically) can contribute to teachers acquiring this understanding. First, writing autobiographically allows teachers to engage in what Britzman (1986) calls the "hidden work" of negotiating the past and future demands (p. 221). *Currere* engages teachers with their past and present experience and anticipation towards the future, creating "an avenue" in which teachers move back and forth. Such a passage between the past and future may make teacher to experience disequilibrium since teacher may see change, uncertainty and difference embedded in their journey of teaching. However, "disequilibrium is a necessary condition for transformation" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 230), leading to a change either in thought or action. For example, when comparing to the past, teachers may see the change in themselves; when looking forward to the future, teachers may perceive their own limitation. To negotiate the gap, teachers need to adjust themselves and make changes; to attend to this hidden work, teacher reconsider their role as a teacher and what teaching means to them. Under such circumstances, teachers are more likely to put their thought into action. Engaging with the hidden work of negotiation between the past and the future begets the transformation. Understanding this hidden work is enabled through *currere*.

Second, the method of *currere* creates an "educational praxis" in which teachers can take into account or even theorize various issues related to teachers and teaching through writing autobiographically. Butt in his research strives to understand biography and autobiography as "educational praxis" (cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 556). The idea is to create narratives from which teachers can learn about teaching but not in the sense of fixed lessons (Kanu & Glor, 2006). *Currere* is realized in a way that offers a dynamic, unfinished renderings of the self as the subject; moreover, it provides opportunities to theorize a particular moment, allowing possibilities for change to emerge, to achieve momentary unifying coherence (Willinsky, 1989). I argue that the educational praxis that I have proposed here might be different from the one proposed by Butt and the "educational praxis" is an educational space that is a liminal, emotionally engaged space, a full disclosure of teachers' ontological being. It can extend into a broader space. Teacher's autobiography works as a thriving center piece from which to contemplate, write and extend (Wang, 2020b). Teachers are to acquire this fluid, constructive understanding, which is neither objective nor complete. This educational praxis is the site of teacher's inner work. In addition, teachers can engage in collaborative autobiography, which allows teachers to share and understand their lives within a community that values self-understanding (Kanu & Glor, 2006). Palmer (2019) explores how intern teachers use *currere* throughout the internship, in which they realize how

curriculum might show itself from these experiences, and how the lived experience of intern teachers construct a curriculum as a dwelling place for their pedagogy. Palmer's work provides an example of how teachers can use *currere* to acquire understanding on curriculum and teaching.

Third, *currere* invites teachers to engage in writing autobiographically, through which they are able to depict how they have evolved ontologically. This ontological being of teachers involves intellectual, ethical, political and aesthetic dimensions, all of which can be depicted using *currere*. Teachers capture the aesthetic moment, interrogate ethical and political related issues emerging in their teaching through writing autobiographically. By understanding various moments and life events in teachers' life, teacher come to realize what underlying structure contributes to their becoming.

Lastly, *currere* provides a liminal space for teacher to wander and wonder, between public and private, self and other, teaching and being taught, learning and unlearning, past and present, the determinable and indeterminable. In the *currere*/autobiographical method, public and private, theory and practice, abstract and concrete are interwoven closely. In this space, teachers can address their own problems, anticipations, traversing within/through the liminal space, through which they reach a deeper sense of understanding related to self and the world by connecting with and reacting to other and otherness. In this sense, *currere* becomes social, by which self connects with others. Self does not exist in isolation and writing one's own story involves describing one's situatedness, socially, culturally and politically. *Currere* can provide opportunities, for sustained reflection on "questions that might touch a person's soul—questions about his sensibility, her fate, wholly conflicting world views, the vanity of human existence, and so on" (Kwak, 2011, p. 1735). Eventually, *currere* touches upon the teacher's heart.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

With a critique of some of the early attempts to understand the nature of teacher knowledge, this paper provides a detailed account of my own conceptualization of teacher knowledge. I term it teacher understanding. In this exploratory attempt, I re-envision teacher knowledge as teacher understanding, emphasizing teacher subjectivity at the core, characterized by historically embodied, temporally and spatially entwined, meaningfully constellated, ontological disclosure of the teacher's being in the world. Such understanding dwells between theory and practice, personal and social, past and present, toward constituting an intellectual, ethical, aesthetics, intuitive grasp of self, students, and teaching.

A creation of lived experience, academic study, and self-reflective practice is the basis for teacher education that aims for the acquisition of teacher understanding. Such self-examination and ethical engagement with the other and otherness require autobiography, a "complicated" autobiography inseparable from the study of academic knowledge. I argue that *currere* can contribute significantly to the acquisition of my conception of teacher understanding.

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