

Lived Experience, Nonviolence, and Curriculum Studies

Curriculum as Lived

Currere, Mindfulness, and Nonviolent
Companionship



Edited by

Hongyu Wang

Jo Flory

Curriculum as Lived

Lived Experience, Nonviolence, and Curriculum Studies

Series Editors: Hongyu Wang, Molly Quinn and Liesa Smith

This book series invites manuscripts that center on curriculum scholarship, research, and work that infuses the stream of lived experience and flow through the fixation upon standardization and the political polarization in today's world, thereby opening vibrant possibilities. Beyond instrumental planning and pursuit, curriculum as lived experience involves temporality, subjectivity, place and space, embodiment and aesthetics, personhood and relations, meditative attunement, cross-cultural movement, political praxis, diversity and equity, sustainability and creativity, and spirituality, among other dimensions. As a highly diversified, dynamic, and interdisciplinary field, curriculum studies is marked by the ongoing emergence of new, complex, and interwoven lines of inquiry. This series welcomes manuscripts that contribute to enhancing and enriching curriculum studies as a field through diverse viewpoints from school, college, or community-based curriculum as lived.

While the scope of this series is broad to include all meaningful curriculum topics, it also particularly encourages theoretical and practical undertakings of nonviolence education. Forming nonviolent relationships with the self, the other, and the world through ethical engagement with difference in educational experience is imperative, as we face existential crises in multiple realms. This series intends to open an explorative space for this emerging line of curriculum inquiry, in its intersections with nonviolence and peace studies, social justice education, aesthetic education, holistic education, and other relevant areas.

Professors, K-20 educators, graduate students, educational administrators, curriculum designers and coordinators, community-based practitioners and leaders, and independent researchers will find this series of interest.

Curriculum as Lived

***Currere, Mindfulness, and
Nonviolent Companionship***

Edited by

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And

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Dedicated to
Hongyan Wang
Kathi and Charles Stafford

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Dr. Hongyu Wang is a Professor in curriculum studies at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa. Her major research areas are curriculum theory, nonviolence education, and East/West inquiry.

She has authored many books and articles in both English and Chinese. Representative books include *Awakenings to the Calling of Nonviolence in Curriculum Studies* (2024; Peter Lang; Its YouTube book launch: <https://youtu.be/QRW3BwKwvc0>), *Contemporary Daoism, Organic Relationality, and Curriculum of Integrative Creativity* (2021; IAP), *Nonviolence and Education* (2014; Routledge), and *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a Third Space* (2004; Peter Lang). She was a coeditor for *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (2008–2011), and cofounded the Special Interest Group on Confucianism, Taoism, and Education in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 2007. She recently opened a YouTube channel on Nonviolence Education, which welcomes submissions.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Dr. Cathy Bankston has been an educator for over 25 years. She has taught middle schoolers to graduate students in both public and private institutions and currently works with community college freshmen, teaching critical reading and academic writing skills. Her research interests include various aspects of developmental, nonviolence, and Christian education, and her work as an educator can best be described as a tapestry of ideas woven around themes of faith, autonomy, nonviolence, personal growth, and

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Medea Gabrielle Bendel serves as the Director of Teaching and Learning at Bishop Kelley High School. In working with both students and teachers, she is committed to promoting the expansion of student voice in curriculum development. Her Master's work in Curriculum and Leadership Studies promotes the use of curriculum co-creation with an integration of mindfulness, mastery learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and elements of aesthetic learning. She champions a holistic approach to education that values student experience and seeks to meet the needs and foster each student's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. She completed an MA in history at the University of Tulsa as a James Madison Fellow, focusing on the US West, slavery and race relations, and US constitutional history. She is scheduled to complete her Master's degree from Oklahoma State University in the Summer of 2025.

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Dr. Heidi W Jenkins is an Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Northeastern State University and teaches in the Library Media and Information Technology program. She worked in secondary schools as a teacher for 10 years and as a school librarian for 19 years before moving into higher education in 2023. She has written and presented on the topics of nonviolence, nonviolence education, *currere*, and nonviolence in young adult literature, as well as the exploration of mental illness through young adult literature and nonfiction resources. Her current research focuses on *currere* through the reading of the academic text and accessibility within educational spaces.

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As a school principal, Vanessa champions inclusive and student-centered initiatives, ensuring that schools serve as spaces of safety, growth, and empowerment. She frequently writes and speaks on the role of mindfulness in education, emphasizing the power of self-awareness and relational peacebuilding. Vanessa's work continues to inspire educators seeking to integrate nonviolence and reflective practices into their own teaching and leadership.

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Heidi Massi's professional endeavors have focused on lifelong learning and education outside the traditional school system. During her 25 years of experience, newspapers, transitional living facilities, popular education, and detention facilities have become her preferred learning spaces. In 2001, she began her career as a Newspaper in Education Program Coordinator and Assistant to the Ombudsman at the Venezuelan newspaper, *El Nacional*. During her eight years at Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma, she led their bilingual adult basic education center for vulnerable populations and transitional housing programs for homeless families. In 2022, she joined the Case Management Division of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman

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Brian S. McKinney is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at Oklahoma State University. His teaching and research focus on the intersections of psychology and second language (L2) learning, with an emphasis on fostering emotional well-being in educational settings. Drawing on Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Brian highlights the interconnected nature of cognition and emotion in L2 development. His work integrates mindfulness practices to support emotion regulation, cultivate self-compassion and compassionate relationships with others, and foster learner motivation. Through his research, Brian aims to provide educators with practical tools to promote learners' holistic growth, resilience, and academic success.

Dr. Emily Mortimer is the Vice President of the Tulsa Regional STEM Alliance (TRSA), where she leads strategic initiatives to expand access to high-quality, inclusive STEM learning experiences across northeastern Oklahoma. With over a decade of experience in STEM education, her work bridges formal and informal learning environments to create equitable pathways for students and educators. She holds a PhD in Education, with her dissertation focusing on the lived experiences of women in STEM and the systemic barriers they face throughout their academic and professional journeys. A passionate advocate for inclusive education, she has served on multiple advisory boards and task forces focused on workforce development, K-12 curriculum innovation, and nonprofit leadership. She is particularly interested in community-driven approaches to educational reform and in creating spaces where diverse learners and educators can thrive. She believes that authentic, experience-based learning—whether through play, practice, or personal storytelling—is essential to unlocking human potential.

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First, our heartfelt thanks to all contributors to this book for their courage in sharing their personal journeys, offering their insights into life, and bringing alive their wisdom about what it means to be educated and to educate. This book was given birth because of their profoundly inspirational voices and visions as educators. We remain in awe of their accomplishments.

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Hongyu dedicates this book to her sister, Hongyan Wang, who is passionate about traveling around the world to experience life with curiosity and openness. Jo dedicates it to her sister and brother, Kathi and Charles Stafford, for their unwavering support and for opening up new worlds to her through popular culture.

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INTRODUCTION: EXPERIENTIAL UNDERSTANDING, INTEGRATIVE PATHWAYS, AND A PEDAGOGY OF EMERGENCE

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ABSTRACT

This introduction chapter provides theoretical foundations and pedagogical contexts for this collection of educators' writings, discussing the conception of curriculum as lived, *currere* and autobiographical inquiry in curriculum studies, and a philosophy of nonviolence and mindfulness as well as the intersections between *currere* and mindfulness in teacher education. Three forms of experiential studies and self-education are explored: autobiographical understanding, mindfulness practices and mindful relationships, and nonviolent companionship with nature, along with the formulation of a generative pedagogy of emergence that creates conditions for these authors' emergent pathways. A brief description of each book chapter is woven into these discussions. This chapter opens the page to the later heartfelt, profoundly moving, compassionate, and evocative chapters to capture the integrative power of nonviolence and the spirit of educational independence for inner and outer work.

Keywords: *Currere*; mindfulness; nonviolence; lived curriculum; shadow work; experiential learning

Wow! As I put away all the chapters to write this introduction, I am still amazed, touched, and inspired, as I was when I first read the initial versions of these stories, a few of which were first written 10 years ago. Together, this collection demonstrates what educators¹ can achieve through experiential understanding and integrative cultivation of personhood in curriculum as lived (Aoki, 2005; Pinar, 2015) even when it has been such a difficult and even traumatic time in US education. I would not be surprised if you as readers have tears in your eyes or revelations with joy in your hearts after reading these chapters. As the first volume in a new book series, “Lived Experience, Nonviolence, and Curriculum Studies,” this book demonstrates, individually and collectively, the “integrative power” of nonviolence (Nagler, 2004, p. 64) in embodied understanding, emergent openness, and compassionate relationality.

Three forms of experiential studies and self-education, all of which involve theoretical understandings and self-directed independent practices, are analyzed in this collection: *currere*/autobiographical inquiry, mindfulness and mindful relationships, and nonviolent companionship. While all authors discuss their individual life history, present struggles, and future visions in process-oriented praxis, their stories are situated in the bigger contexts of community, politics, spirituality, and education. They talk directly to and talk back to authorities, institutions, society, and culture, as they question societal norms and rules in their lives and actively seek different views in education and in the public world. Their inner work and outer work are intricately and dynamically connected (Pinar, 2012; Wang, 2024a).

Curriculum as lived is intergenerational storytelling (Grumet, 1988; Pinar, 1994) and complicated and complex conversations (Doll, 2012; Pinar, 2012), following nonlinear, “polyphonic lines of movements” (Aoki, 2005, p. 209). Rather than moving toward pre-set destinations, these authors have dwelled in lived time and lived space in memory, vision, place, history, and culture to open new pathways. Going beyond the simplistic storytelling sometimes prevalent in teacher education that mirrors self-similarity or portrays linear progress (Miller, 2005), these authors unsettle the taken-for-granted and make curved movements for subjective and social transformation. Their journeys have been full of turns and twists, with surprising discoveries, gradually deepened understanding, or moments of

¹The authors of these chapters are my former and current students. I refer to them as educators, not only because those who graduated are no longer students but also because my current students are also mostly educators who hold various positions in the field of education. In discussing teaching contexts, though, I refer them as students.

gestalt integration. Not outcome-oriented, these chapters depict emergent paths carved out of moving back and forth, digging down and springing up to renew inner and outer landscapes, a process-oriented approach that is a feature of this book.

Traveling to the depths of both the individual and collective psyche to integrate the shadow and achieve fuller personhood is part of intergenerational conversations. The notion of the shadow in a Jungian perspective and the importance of shadow work is a central thread in this book. The shadow includes repressed unpleasant elements, underdeveloped functions, and potentials that do not fit into societal expectations (Jung, 1953; Mayes, 2005; Wang, 2024a). Recognizing and integrating the shadow can not only help a person achieve the fuller self, it is also an ethical necessity to avoid “the moral error of ascribing one’s shadow-nature to another” (Mayes, 2005, p. 27) person or group. Since national, cultural, and racial psyches all have their shadow sides, “the projection of such collective shadows is the major cause of intolerance, racism and war” (Mayes, 2007, p. 106), which makes weaving integrative pathways at the individual level an educational project.

Deeply engaging curriculum as lived experience, these authors uncover the shadow within the self; reveal the systemic violence in their lives, such as colonization, patriarchy, and religious dogmas (to name a few); and understand how collective violence has impacted their loved ones (such as their parents), who have influenced them. The multilayered dimensions of individual, family, and society are intertwined in these authors’ experiential understanding and creative meaning-making to travel through complicated layers of terrain and vistas. On such contemplative and critical journeys, they refuse to mirror self-similarity from the older generation but instead seek to author their own lives as educators who accompany students in their lived experience.

Such shadow work can be difficult, and yet it also leads to personal healing when difficult emotions within the self are recognized, converted, and integrated, and when negative projections are withdrawn, creating better relationships with others. Healing the wounds is not only deeply personal but also cultural, involving facing and deconstructing the social violence of our time and unpacking its impact on the family and individual. As a profession, educators are gendered as female in the U. S. context and have suffered a collective wound from the scapegoating of politicians and corporate leaders for all the problems that power elites have made themselves (Pinar, 2012). Embedded in cultural complex and collective trauma (Beebe, 2004; Singer & Kimbles, 2004), those who do not want to get stuck must cultivate their capacity for mourning the loss, healing the divide, and seeking wholeness.

To heal the internal and external divide, one must confront the mechanisms of control and domination in individual, cultural, systemic, and

political violence. In affirming the importance of sensory experience, of embodied tensions as creative, of indigenous waterways and improvised navigations, the educators in this collection make an effort to integrate the self and simultaneously ground themselves against patriarchy, racism, and other systemic violence. Courage is often associated with the masculinity that excludes the role of vulnerability and weakness, and “masculine power is often presented as an ability to dominate others” (Romano, 2022, p. 24). However, I contest that the psychical, ethical, and spiritual courage that shines through this book works precisely to deconstruct patriarchal power and infuses feminine sensibility and ecological sustainability. What is more uplifting than nurturing the courage to confront one’s inner shadow embedded in the cultural and collective unconscious, to face pain and work with difficulty, and to form noncontrolling relationships with others without shadow projections?

Experiential learning is often action-oriented in communal contexts in higher education (DeVitis, 2013), but these authors’ experiential studies have distinctively contemplative elements. All projects have the components of “seeing and hearing things as they are, bearing witness to life” (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 123) with nonjudgmental observation. All require slowing down to notice what is happening in the inner experience of the self and the interactions between the self and the other. And all involve contemplative writing, such as the first two steps of *currere* or journal entries for other projects, as detailed later. Contemplation effectively builds a bridge between the inner and outer work, since it requires participants to examine their interiority in forming relationships with human or nonhuman others and align relational attunement with self-awareness.

Curriculum as lived is also a testimony that, despite power elites’ relentless effort to increase their control over school education, teachers have courageously pursued their educational aspirations to demonstrate their (relative) independence. Refusing to be the carrier of shadow projections from external forces and refusing to project the inner shadow onto marginalized students and their communities, educators in this collection have preserved their critical minds, crafted their integrative capacity, and life-affirmatively relate to students against the background of a polarized and anxiety-driven world. It is my assertion that in education, personal cultivation situated in the interconnectedness of life should take priority over socialization and politicization (Wang, 2024b).

Cultivating personhood as the root of education toward wholeness and nonviolence transcends divisive power struggles in politics. Of course, education has a political aspect, as well as intellectual, ethical, social, aesthetic, and ecological aspects, but education is existential and beyond any short-term political and economic goals. Why should education be secondary to politics, profit, or national interest? Why not the reverse? Educators’ voices in this book sing the songs of ethical, spiritual, and ecological aspirations,

and the world would be better off if it attended to their voices. The normative demands and external impositions, no matter in what form, devalue teachers' work and teachers. I think it is imperative that teachers and students be allowed to explore diverse paths in crafting their integrative personhood and seeking emergent pathways.

These chapters were first written by students in the graduate courses that I taught from 2013 to 2023 at Oklahoma State University and went through further iterations of reflective understanding, critical analysis, and multiple re-writing. Collectively, this book provides readers a glimpse into educators' journeys of holding on to sustained struggles, doing complex inner work, and grounding perseverance in a turbulent time. And their experiential understanding, self-exploration, and creative integration to convert negative energies of aggression and fear and to infuse positive energies of compassion, love, and nonviolence are profoundly inspirational.

In this introduction chapter, I provide theoretical and pedagogical contexts for this book, discussing *currere* (Part I), nonviolent companionship (Part II), and mindfulness (Part III), and then exploring the intersections between *currere* and mindfulness in Part IV. A brief description of each chapter is also provided for readers' convenience, although there is no way for me to capture its complexity, let alone its spirit, in one sentence.

CURRERE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY

The term *currere* is the Latin root of curriculum, which refers to the process of running the course, rather than the static content of subject matter. It has become an influential approach in the field of curriculum studies in the USA and worldwide (Doll, 2017; Martin, 2009; Snowber, 2017; Wang, 2010). As William F. Pinar (1975, 1994, 2012) has developed it, *currere* is a process of making connections between educators' life histories and studies "to reconstruct our understanding of what it means to teach, to study, to become 'educated' in the present moment" (Pinar, 2012, p. xiii). "Threading one's subjectivity—simultaneously socially constructed and historically informed—through academic knowledge to communicate with others" (p. xv), *currere* serves to engage in individual and social reconstruction. Initially it was an invitation for teachers (prospective and in-service teachers) to follow this process, although efforts to use it for school students have also been made (Doerr, 2004).

Currere involves four steps, which are all connected: regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetical (Pinar, 1975). These steps use a combination of free association, meditative breathing, phenomenological bracketing, and experiential synthesis to enable one to re-enter the past, envision the future, juxtapose the present with the past and the future in analysis, and reach an integrative repositioning. This process involves not only the inner

work of moving out of the given state of mind, but it also involves the outer work of social, political, and cultural mobilization. In teacher education, it has often been used as a writing project, although performance, poetry, art, and other creative formulations may blend in.

Autobiographical inquiry is a broader term that includes autobiographical narrative inquiry and self-study that do not necessarily follow the four steps but make connections between the personal and the social dimensions of lived experience (Casemore, 2008; Clandinin, 2013; Ng-A-Fook, 2009). In my teaching, however, I prefer to use *currere* in its four steps because its specific formulations enable students to release the forgotten or the hidden, suspend judgment, free the imagination, and synthesize for new possibilities to emerge (Wang, 2010, 2021). The theoretical foundations of *currere* are phenomenology, existentialism, analytical psychology, and Zen Buddhism, but in its further development, feminist, post-structural, decolonial, and aesthetic conceptualizations (to name a few) have been added to the mix. The multiplicity of lenses has given *currere* writers more freedom to explore in their own ways.

I have been using *currere* as an assignment in teacher education for 20 years, often requiring students to follow the four steps in a semester-long writing project, each step for one month with a minimum of one hour of free writing weekly without any interruptions. I provide general guidelines for each step, emphasizing the nature of free association, nonjudgmental observation, and stream of consciousness writing, which are unique to the first two steps for shifting perspectives. These features allow the nonlinear flow of time to connect what was separate, to invite the innermost thoughts and feelings to have voices, and to let what is hidden emerge, suspending criticism and self-criticism. I intentionally encourage students to follow the inner time of memory and vision work, which does not follow the chronological order, so that connections can be made at unexpected turns.

In the first few years of using *currere* as a required assignment in teacher education, I collected two or three pages of writing at the end of each step—the students' own choice from their weekly writings—and gave them feedback (Wang, 2010). In later years, I use *currere* as an optional, rather than required, writing assignment; and while maintaining the similar guidelines for each step, I no longer ask students to hand in a part of their writing for each step but give them the freedom to explore on their own, providing guidance only when requested. Instead, I have focused on creating pedagogical conditions of time, space, peer sharing, and periodic updating to decenter the teacher's authority position so that the students' journeys can play out in their own rhythms. At the same time, my intentional arrangement of reading materials simultaneous with students' processes invites students to destabilize the established ideas and beliefs and generate practical wisdom through integrating theory and practice.

Many students have said that the regressive stage of *currere* was most revealing, as their re-entry into the past to nonjudgmentally re-experience events, emotions, and temporal nonlinearity helped them uncover life themes otherwise not visible. While the progressive step seemed to be difficult initially, some students reached sudden awareness when they let go of setting rational goals and released their imaginations (Wang, 2010; Wang & Flory, 2023). While transformative moments can happen in any of the four steps, the role of psychoanalytic contemplation in the first two steps is crucial for freeing students from their habitual seeing and thinking.

Part I includes six *currere* or *currere*-inspired chapters. Most relate to mourning the loss of a parent and are situated in gendered, racial, and international contexts. These authors' memory work through complicated and tensioned relationships meanders through their psychological and social life to affirm difficult yet loving connections, approaching education as an intergenerational gift. Fuller and deeper understandings of our relationships with our parents connect us to the younger generation with a clearer and more integrated vision. In Chapter 1, Liesa Griffin Smith poetically seeks passages in the lived experience surrounding her father's death and creates multilayered nonviolent narratives, inspiring educators in today's traumatic time. In Chapter 2, Steven Woods also confronts the figure of the father (but in the Native context) and advocates listening as a way through, around, and beyond violence for reconfiguring father-son gendered relationships and his pedagogy.

In Chapter 3 Chelsey Walters elaborates the process of her unlearning the rules of religious dogmas and coming to terms with her reactions and responses to create new versions of her personhood. In Chapter 4, Naomi Poindexter sings the song of her mother, selecting three stories of her mother and of herself to illuminate everyday occurrences of violence and nonviolence in family and in education. In Chapter 5, Yan Xu presents a cross-cultural perspective on her journey of finding peace with her mother, daughters, and herself. In Chapter 6, Emily Mortimer mourns the loss of her father and learns from his embodied teaching to create a life-affirming world with her students.

PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE AND COMPANIONSHIP PROJECTS

As a result of my autobiographical revelation in a cross-cultural journey, I have embraced nonviolence work in education for the past 15 years (Wang, 2014, 2024a). Nonviolence as a political movement was highlighted by Gandhi's and King's leadership, but as a way of life it has existed throughout human history (Sethia, 2021; Wang, 2021), and re-formulating it for

education is an imperative task. Nonviolence education not only deconstructs the mechanisms of control and domination, it also cultivates body/mind/spirit integration within the self and develops nondualistic interpersonal, intergroup, international, and humanity/planet relationships.

The thread of nonviolence appears in many chapters in this book. *Currere* is an open-ended process, and in my initial teaching I did not expect students to see a close relationship between the two. Over the years, however, with students' help, I have realized that *currere itself* is a process of forming a nonviolent relationship with the self and others. I also introduce the *currere* language of shadow work into nonviolence for the conversion of difficult emotions and the connection of fragmentations. Thus, *currere* and nonviolence mutually enhance each other for individual and social integration (Wang, 2024a).

Over the years, I have formulated nonviolence as an everyday practice in education to hold the tensions between compassion and aggression in order to sustain the intentionality of nonviolence and make ongoing efforts to cultivate possibilities for mutually flourishing relationships (Hershock, 2012; Wang, 2021, 2024a). Nonviolence is not about eliminating violence once for all, or destroying systems and structures once for all, but about dwelling in tension to infuse integrative life energy into educational dynamics. As Mnisha Roy (2004) points out, there is a difference between perfection and the Jungian sense of completeness that incorporates both the light and the dark: "The individual may strive after perfection...but must suffer from the opposite of his [*sic*] intentions for the sake of his [*sic*] completeness" (Jung, quoted in Roy, 2004, p. 73). If pursuing pure light, one's own darkness can be easily projected onto others or the world in interpersonal, intergroup, and international relationships. Without pursuing the perfection of eliminating violence, nonviolence education is firmly rooted in the personal cultivation of integration that can contain the darkness within and refuse to see an enemy in the other.

As a daily praxis in education, nonviolence work supports teachers' attunement to students, to the complexity of their inner life in social contexts, and to the relational dynamics of teaching and learning. Decoupling from the desire for control and management, nonviolence education allows curriculum emergence and students' becoming. Nonviolent relationality in education is multiple, fluid, and improvisational, not only between teacher and student and among students, but also with the world to enable peaceful knowing, being, and interbeing. What happens when students learn, not for mastering knowledge but for relating to the world in awe, curiosity, and exploration? What if to "know" is to play with difficulty in order to seek meaning and purpose?

Shifting relational dynamics in education, we need to attend to making connections across differences. Post-structural insights tell us that erasing difference can be a form of violence (Derrida, 1992), since social violence