

CURRERE AS A METHOD FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION IN THE PROFESSION
OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents who instilled in me the value of education at an early age through encouraging curiosity and reading, among other wonderful traits that I continue to rediscover every day.

Finally, I dedicate this undertaking to my wife, Erin, without whose support, sacrifice, and inspiration, I could not have completed this project.

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ABSTRACT

Academic librarianship has an intimate association with narratives and stories from their traditional role in curating, caring for, and making collections accessible. Librarians also experience the intricacies and challenges of narrative inquiry through the qualitative research they undertake, oral histories they gather, reflective teaching practices they facilitate, and oral-traditions they interact with. Despite these intersections with reflection and narratives, academic librarianship, and library sciences as a whole, have not fully incorporated their own narratives within their practices. Academic librarianship has the ability but not the spaces to critically reflect in a holistic manner. Shadiow (2013) encourages us all to “recall, retell, and then scrutinize your stories” (p. ix) through critical reflection. One potential method to accomplish this task of “scrutinizing our stories” is the reflective technique known as *currere*. Grumet (1976a) suggests that *currere* allows us to put our “essences back into existence” (p. 41). *Currere* provides a pathway to putting ourselves back into librarianship much as it has done with other educators. This study explores the use of *currere* with a group of practicing academic librarians by the application of a reflection curriculum over a twelve week period. The central research question of this study seeks to answer is: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?*

Keywords: *currere*, critical reflection, academic librarianship

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| ACRL | Association of College & Research Libraries |
| ALA | American Library Association |
| CILIP | Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals |
| LIS | Library & Information Science |
| LOEX | Library Orientation Exchange |

STATEMENT ON HUMAN LIVES RESEARCH

This research involves the examination of human lives. The study participants have graciously granted the researcher access to the personal and private content of their lived experience. This access is not given lightly nor without potential personal or professional risk to the study participants. With this in mind, the methodology design and reporting of results is constructed to respect these lives and experiences.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Librarianship, Stories, and Reflection

Academic libraries, in a traditional sense, are filled with stories. Whether in-person or online, a scholar can browse a library's collection and discover a series of personal accounts, biographies, autobiographies, diaries, journals, and descriptive histories that convey the stories of others. These intimate and transformative narratives interweave our life stories within culture and society. At the same time, a researcher may wander the collections and encounter monographs that posit theories, provide methodologies, report on scientific findings, or are steeped in various academic disciplines. These works can also be considered stories, as they contribute to the narrative of a discipline; provide guideposts to the major characters in a research area; and offer up a body of scholarly literature for reflection, rumination, or application in our lives.

While libraries have been great champions of stories through curating, organizing, and ensuring access points to these narratives, they have at times been remiss in documenting and telling their own stories. Exploring the shelves of library and information science monographs, one will find discussions of best practices, bibliometrics, collection development, and reference services, but few works interlacing these practices with the lives and aspirations of the librarians themselves. In particular, the library sciences have done a poor job of creating opportunities for librarians to reflect holistically within the profession as means to tell the story of librarianship. There is not a

designated co-mingling space where practice, theory, and passion become deeply acquainted with each other.

This lack of librarian-derived narratives is not surprising, as the ability to incorporate critical reflection as part of one's decision-making process is a life-long learning competency that is often not taught in library science graduate programs. This deep deliberation is a proficiency that requires continual refinement and development over time.

Reflection at its most basic means to "to bend back" (Valli, 1997). In a reflective pose, we "bend back" our thoughts and ideas; emotions and insights; critique and constructs, in order to apply them to previous events and future actions. Valli further suggests that "a reflective person is someone who thinks back on what is seen and heard, who contemplates, who is a deliberative thinker" (p. 68). Drawing from the reflective teaching literature, Tompkins (2009) defines reflective practice "as a method of inquiry that makes sense of complex or perplexing problems" (p. 223). Reflection is respected within many professions as a form of professional development, self-assessment, or even retention (Brown, 2007).

Academic librarianship is no exception in valuing this type of deliberative practice. Library research literature is rife with reflective undertakings about the profession (Grant, 2007), suggestions for incorporating reflection into librarian instruction (Booth, 2011; Forrest, 2008; National LOEX, 2004), the use of reflection within library research methodologies (Booth & Brice, 2004), and reflection as a call to arms in some quarters of librarianship to help re-envision the whole profession (Budd, 2003; Lewis, 2008). Varlejs and Stec (2004) see reflection as an antidote to cynicism and

burnout within academic librarianship by helping focus librarians on the “why” and “how” they help their users (p. 59). Sheridan (1990) suggests reflection can help address the profession’s sense of “irrelevancy, insensitivity to client needs, and stubborn loyalty to outmoded methods” (p. 22). In the United Kingdom, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) requires librarians to provide evidence of reflection as part of the portfolio assessment for professional qualification (Watson, 2008). In this way, CILIP expects librarians to demonstrate deep thinking about their profession and practices.

The area within academic librarianship that has made the most strides in adopting reflective techniques is that of library instruction (National LOEX, 2004). This comes as no surprise as scholarship in instruction, learning, and curriculum has included reflection (Valli, 1992, 1997) and narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as significant areas of educational research (Casey, 1995). In general, this educational scholarship is the body of research that academic librarians draw from to structure workshops, bibliographic instruction sessions, and other educational efforts. One prime example is the inclusion of reflection within the Intentional Teaching Track of professional development immersion offered by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL, n.d.). Their professional development syllabus includes the reflective teaching texts, *Becoming a Reflective Teacher* (Brookfield, 1995) and *Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (Palmer, 1998). In 2003, the National Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX) conference focused specifically on reflective practice in library instruction. The conference theme was *Reflective Thinking: A Bridge to Learning* (National LOEX, 2004). Baker, the keynote speaker at the conference, saw

reflective practice as “an ongoing pursuit of questions and answers” (2004, p. 3). Baker suggested various rewards of reflective teaching as “your work becomes more interesting, exciting, alive, and full of ideas. You achieve better results for yourself, your users, and your organization” (p. 6).

Research Problem/Significance

Despite the ongoing advocacy for reflective practice with library instruction, the profession of academic librarianship has not completely embraced deep analytical and transformative reflection as applied to vocation as a whole. Grant (2007) identified over 900 articles within librarianship published between 1969-2007 that involved reflection. Of these articles, only six were considered examples of *analytical reflection* in that they “represent a systematic approach to revisiting experiences or situations, questioning motivations, attempting to pinpoint the reason why they experienced a situation a particular way, and contemplating how this might impact on future practice” (p. 158). This is not an unforeseen finding, as some scholars have suggested that interpreting and incorporating the complex narratives that reflection may uncover is not a simple process (Brophy, 2009). Notwithstanding this difficulty, deep reflection is an important part of ongoing growth and learning within the profession. Brophy (2009) also reminds us that every action, every decision, and every interaction no matter how small presents an opportunity to reflect.

Professional practice involves continuous learning. Every decision is itself an occasion for learning, involving the marshalling of evidence, analysis of significance, the choice of a course of action, and evaluation of the outcome. Each individual decision draws on prior experience. (Brophy, 2009, p. 51).

There is room within any profession, and perhaps even more so within academic librarianship, to consider new ways to inspire professional growth through reflection,

self-narratives, or auto-ethnographies. While reflective practice is building momentum within library instruction, critical and analytical reflection has yet to be fully embraced in a holistic and meaningful manner within all aspects of academic librarianship. We rarely see critical reflective narratives from cataloging, collection development, or circulation librarians, to name a few unheard areas of librarianship. Academic librarians possess many experiences and dispositions that can inform reflective practice more widely within their profession. There are lessons to be learned from interacting with narratives generated through library science research, applying reflective practices beyond library instruction, and adopting reflective techniques and methodologies from other areas that may advance the discipline.

This study will first explore the literature to review the role critical reflection plays within academic librarianship. The review will examine the discipline's relationships with facilitating and creating complex narratives through research methodologies, oral histories, and library instruction. These building blocks will then be deployed in a reflective methodology developed by Pinar called *currere* (Pinar & Grumet 1976). Pinar developed this reflective technique as a means to aid in the “investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey or pilgrimage.” (Pinar 1975a, p. 400). *Currere* may also prove to be beneficial to academic librarianship as a method to provide critical, transformative reflection about the profession.

My sincere belief that *currere* may be a valuable methodology for librarianship is based on personal experience. I undertook a *currere* reflective journey of my own as part of my graduate studies (Stoddart, 2010). As a result of my own *currere* experience, I am

curious to create a similar experience for a group of practicing librarians and examine the results. This study deployed a *currere* curriculum with a cohort of academic librarians. Through a series of guided exercises, the cohort reflected on their professional and personal experiences regarding librarianship in a holistic, structured, and critical manner. These reflective documents were then examined for themes.

Being Heard: My *Currere* Experience

Being heard. Those two words were the outcome of my own personal *currere* reflective synthesis. I want to be heard and I want others to be heard – that is my personal mission as a librarian. Stereotypically, librarians are associated with silence. As uncovered through my *currere* process, I wanted my actions to make noise, to be loud, or perhaps more accurately make a difference. I want to help people and in doing so matter... matter to the people I am helping... matter to myself. As I discovered through the *currere* process, I was practicing librarianship in a cloud of uncertainty and insecurity.

Besides seemingly unable to convey what a librarian is... what I am, I also find it difficult to define what is a lasting and meaningful outcome from my efforts in general. (Stoddart, 2010, p. 8).

Another way to think about being heard is to give voice, to speak out. I am continually challenged as a librarian to find a voice for my desire to make a difference and to give a voice to others through my work so they can make a difference as well. This is what I wrote in my own personal *currere* reflection about finding a voice:

To be read is to create knowledge and to share it. Let us find our voice together. Let us share each of our texts where we are both author and reader at the same time. After all I am not learning to educate others but to educate myself. A selfishness perhaps every teacher should have. The irony is that this education cannot occur alone. We must make space to learn from others but we must understand ourselves first as *currere* works to do. Otherwise this exchange of

ideas is not legitimate. I understand now that I am afraid of not being heard. But that is not a bad thing because along with this fear, I also possess the tools to overcome it. These are the same tools I am able to share with my students. (Stoddart, 2010, p. 11).

A librarian gives voice to information by connecting and providing access to those who need to hear it. A librarian empowers patrons to find their own voice through interacting with the narratives and research within a library. A librarian curates a diversity of voices through building collections full of stories, cultures, and discovery. So for me, the idea of *being heard* has become a mantra – a pause in my day when I ask myself why I do what I do. *Currere* instilled in me a new sense of curiosity and wonder into my practice about how I can *be heard*, but it also encouraged me to seek ways for others in my profession to find their voice. The seeds of this dissertation are rooted in that first *currere* journey, and inspired this current study, an exploration of ways that librarians can share their voices within librarianship and *be heard*.

Research Question(s)

The central research question of this study is: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?* The study is also framed by these guiding sub-questions:

1. How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?
2. Are librarians' personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice? (see Figure 1)

The study design, and in particular the reflection writing prompts are structured to support inquiry by the cohort members into these sub-questions.

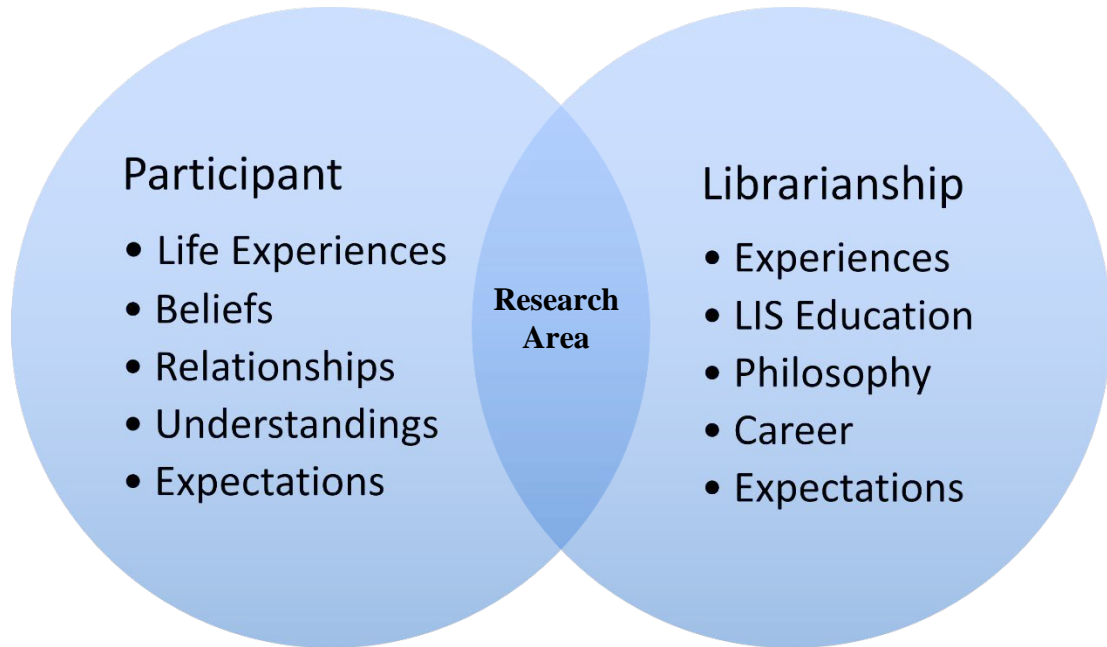


Figure 1 Venn Diagram of Intended Research Area

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of five chapters. The first chapter outlines the profession's need to better engage in critical reflection in a holistic manner, as well as the researcher's personal inspiration for using *currere* as a potential methodology. The second chapter is a literature review that explores the relationship between librarianship and reflective practice, seeks to identify the gap in the research literature this study serves to meet, and provides justification for *currere* as a methodology. The third chapter provides a description of the methods, of the *currere* curriculum that will be deployed, of the post-*currere* follow-up survey, and of the cohort recruitment strategy. There is also a discussion of the *currere* method in detail, as well as articulating concerns about validity, reliability, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four reports the results in coding the cohort's final Synthesis reflections and the unexpected challenges that occurred, and reviews the follow-up survey results. Themes from the survey and coded reflections are

then supported by quotations from cohort member writing. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the implications of this study and suggests opportunities for further consideration.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review undertakes an exploration of how academic librarianship encounters its own narratives and suggests a new way, *currere*, to uncover unheard stories about the profession. In particular, this literature review examines how critical reflection is deployed within librarianship and seeks to identify a gap in the research where *currere* might offer insight. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, “The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). In taking a close examination of the literature, it is hoped that the literature review will uncover the “story” of how librarians might benefit from a critical reflective methodology, such as *currere*, within their professional practice.

Methodologies: Reflection, Autoethnography, and Narrative Inquiry

Reflection is included within the body of scholarship known as narrative research (Casey, 1995) or narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007). Research on narrative is “distinctly interdisciplinary, including elements of literary, historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and cultural studies” (Casey, 1995, p. 212). At the core of narrative research and inquiry is the idea that “(w)hether implicit or elaborated, every study of narrative is based on a particular understanding of the speaker’s self” (Casey, 1995, p. 213). Casey notes that depending on one’s perspective or research framework, narrative

can run the continuum from voyeurism and exhibitionism, to liberatory practices that “put the shards of experience together” and reconstruct identities (Casey, 1995, p. 216). Whatever the case, reflection is not simply viewing the experiences, feelings, and descriptions captured in these narratives as a “causal story” but an interpretation to be valued and cultivated (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 5). The qualities and processes of critical reflection often manifest as part of autobiographies, autoethnographies, or simply as directed reflection. The resulting text or story elicited through these exercises is captured as a narrative. Narrative is both a phenomenon and a method: “(n)arrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). There are many ways to generate narratives, either by facilitating them in others, such as through directed reflection, interviews, or ethnographies; or self-generated narratives such as autobiographies, autoethnographies, or self-reflection. Education as a discipline has developed a robust body of literature supporting narrative inquiry (e.g. Ayers & Schubert, 1992; Blake & Blake, 2012; Webster & Mertova, 2007), in particular the concept of critical reflection (e.g. Brookfield, 1995; Shadiow, 2013.). For example, Norquay (1990) used the process of composing life histories with pre-service teachers as a platform to “begin to challenge and change the way in which gender, race and class profoundly shape how both students and teachers encounter classroom practices” (p. 291). Critical reflection has been described as a process “not unlike the task of writing your name with your non-dominant hand: the process is unusual, slow, deliberate, and unexpected” (Shadiow, 2013, p. 29). The construction and viewing of one’s life in this “unanticipated way” rewards with new

insight. Brookfield (1995) suggests that the importance of critical reflection is found in these outcomes:

- It helps inform action;
- It helps develop a rationale for practice;
- It helps us avoid self-laceration – blaming oneself for things not necessarily under our control;
- It grounds us emotionally;
- It increases trust with others. (pp. 22-27)

Shadiow (2013) encourages us to use the stories generated from autobiographies as forms of critical incidents and to name them and analyze them, looking specifically for patterns and assumptions. It is this “hunting of assumptions” that make critical reflection a useful methodology (Brookfield, 1995). Critical reflection can lead to uncovering embedded assumptions that are paradigmatic or structuring (Brookfield, 1995, p. 8). As Brookfield relates, our autobiographies impact us “deeper than that of reason” working on an “emotional level” that have “profound and long-lasting influence” far beyond what “we learn from textbooks or hear from superiors” (1995, p. 31).

Grumet (1988) suggests that autobiographical endeavors delve across multiple avenues of understanding in order to comprise their content.

For data we turned to autobiographical accounts of educational experience. For methods of analysis we turned to psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and feminist theories. As we study the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities. We work to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm presently separating our public and private worlds. (p. xv)

As such, autobiography and critical reflection is a mission of both knowing and recovering, taking apart and building, of zooming in and zooming out. Ellis (2004)

captures the motion of this weaving and pulling perfectly in discussing the gaze of auto-ethnographers:

First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. (Ellis, 2004, pp. 37-38)

Despite the potential benefits of creating and interpreting narratives, it can be problematic confronting, or even facilitating such deep critical reflection. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note:

...in researcher-practitioner relationships where practitioners have long been silenced through being used as objects for study, we are faced with a dilemma. Practitioners have experienced themselves as without voice in the research process and may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories. (p. 4)

Connelly and Clandinin point out that entry into narratives by researchers is a “negotiation” of ethics and relationships. These relationships involve community-building with participants, empowerment, and trust (1990). Other narrative researchers, (in particular Grumet, 1987), echo this same “anxiety” about these power relationships between researchers facilitating and interpreting narratives, and those offering up their lives in stories (Casey, 1995, p. 219). In Casey’s summation, this concern is not simply a matter of building trust within narrative inquiry but also an issue “concerning the constitution of the self” (p. 219).

At this point, when discussing the concept of *self*, the threads of the social and subjective construction of narratives and their interpretation enter the picture.

Subjectivity is the “human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 1). As we all know from our own

lived experiences, lives are messy things, filled with complexity and confusions interwoven within the worlds we operate, as well as our perceptions of *self*.

Contrast subjectivity with the idea of objectivity which aims to distance the researcher and research evidence from these sometimes conflating, complicating, and confounding influences. Subjectivity and the socially situated-self become a strength as well as challenge in narrative inquiry, as participants are breathing in, subsisting on, and using their stories in real time and in application in their day-to-day existence. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) relate, “people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (p. 4). This autobiographic reflection takes place within a “societal context” and the individual, narrative, and its interpretation are “situated within a network of social relationships” (Casey, 1995, p. 220). Kohler Riessman (2008) echoes this point: “Although it may be ‘natural,’ telling and writing stories is invariably situated and strategic, taking place in institutional and cultural contexts with circulating discourses and regulatory practices, always crafted with the audience in mind” (p. 183). It is important to remember that the audience in critical reflection or other narratives, includes the author themselves, as well as the reader. Grumet (1991) worries about these narratives becoming “authoritative” when formally interpreted, removing any sense of multiplicity or ongoing transference of meaning. The desire for narratives to contain a variety of interpretative pathways, instead of a single all-knowing objective understanding, creates entryways within these works for transformation, new understanding, and growth. While this makes the task of interpretation more difficult, this contradiction creates spaces for further examination.

Multiple accounts demand that we reconcile the endurance of cultural myths with accounts of experience that contradict them. When cultural myths persist in the very journals, letters, and shopping lists of those whose interests they appear to contradict, interpretation becomes even more difficult. (Grumet, 1988, p. 59)

Grumet goes on to say, “we invite endless problems of interpretation, not as imposters at the banquet planned for the truth, but as guests of honor”(p. 60). As such, Jewett (2008) notes that narrative inquiry such as autoethnography,

...claims to offer a promising reconciliation of autobiographic urge (toward self) and ethnographic desire (toward others). Such claims hinge upon notions of intimacy, a textual intimacy between text and reader, and more seductive still, an epistemological intimacy between self and other through a research subjectivity that claims to collapse such categories. (p. 3)

In talking about participating in this “believing game” of affirming and giving voice to another’s narrative, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note, “Distance or separation does not characterize connected knowing” (p. 4). Objectivity, in this case, becomes a liability to the researcher. Instead, intimacy is warranted, even desired in narrative inquiry, but it must be acknowledged that the interpreter’s story becomes part of the retelling of the narrative. That intermingling of narrative and interpretation is not necessarily an undesirable characteristic of narrative research. Rosen (1988) noted that this intimacy, especially with autobiography, lends *authenticity* to the narrative. This legitimacy arises within such narratives because “it speaks with the voice of ‘commonsense,’... corresponds to a way of thinking and imagining,” invites us into the process of living, grants access to the “living space of another...is perceived as testimony,” and finally requires the complicit engagement of the listener or reader (Rosen, 1988, p. 81). This *authenticity* is a quality to be coveted in narrative research, even from the interpreter, as their own subjectivity is also now expected to be explicit

within the narrative analysis (Casey, 1995, p. 232). Kohler Riessman (2008) states that “(n)arrative truths are always partial – committed and incomplete”, and to insure a sense of trustworthiness the methodology, ethical considerations, and theory associated with gathering and interpreting such narratives must be fully developed and documented (p. 186).

These narrative methods return us to our lives and offer up evidence as to why we live them as we do. Such inquiry is of value to any profession, and Schön’s call to be a “reflective practitioner” (1983) resonates strongly within academic librarianship as a pathway to professional growth and greater understanding of the profession. In the next section, library science’s interaction with narrative is explored. Here, the rigor of methodology and the intimacy of subjectivity are shown to be qualities of academic librarianship in practice, as well as a foundation to build a program of more meaningful critical reflective stance within the profession.

Encountering Subjectivity: Reflective Tradition in Academic Librarianship

In examining the spaces where subjectivity, narrative thought, and reflection enter the vocation of academic librarianship, there are four distinct arenas that come to the forefront. These intersections occur:

1. Within the qualitative aspects of the research methodologies deployed in library science;
2. During the discipline’s creation and curation of oral histories;
3. Through complicated encounters with the oral traditions of non-Western societies; and
4. By way of reflective practices within library instruction.

While reflection may not yet be fully embraced within academic librarianship, that is not to say librarians do not have the capacity to develop or interact with complex narratives related to reflection or narrative inquiry.

Academic librarians have not been afraid to deploy narrative generating methodologies such as ethnographies (Khoo, Roziklis, & Hall, 2012; Wakimoto, 2013), oral history research (Baum, 1996; Lee, 1989), action research, case studies, focus groups, interviews, open-ended surveying, or other qualitative methods in researching their discipline (Beck & Manuel, 2008; Wildemuth, 2009; Wallace & Van Fleet, 2012). Librarians also undertake qualitative assessments and evaluations to improve library services and to tell the story of the library to stakeholders (Dugan, Herson, & Nitecki, 2009; Matthews, 2007a and 2007b). Wallace and Van Fleet (2012) remind us that a “central purpose of research and evaluation in library and information science is revisiting what the profession knows and does and reflecting on the possibility that the knowledge base needs restructuring or that the policies, practices, and tools of an institution need revision or improvement” (p. 287). Librarians initiate many studies involving narratives as sense-making devices to better understand what activities patrons undertake in library space (e.g. Suarez, 2007; Delcore, Mullooly, & Scroggins, 2009), or to improve delivery of information literacy instruction (e.g. Detmering & Johnson, 2012), or understand information-seeking behavior (e.g. Anderson, 2005 & 2006; Haglund & Olsson, 2008). For example, the problem-based methodology of Action Research requires librarians to reflect directly on the results of their study to implement changes or improvements. Reflection is one of the integral parts of the Action Research Cycle (Beck & Manuel, 2008, p. 199).

Wallace and Van Fleet (2012) adopt the framework of Schön (1983) in situating reflection within the practitioner:

The essence of reflective practice lies in the practitioner who, rather than simply following rules, applying standard tools, or adopting so-called best practices is constantly questioning rules, tools, practices. This is the process of asking not only ‘what should I do in this situation?’ but accompanying that fundamental question with the equally important question ‘why?’. (Wallace & Van Fleet, 2012, p. 41)

Wallace and Van Fleet believe the foundations of the qualitative research are *reality* and *complexity* (p. 28). Both concepts, reality and complexity, are intimately embedded in the narratives, personal or otherwise, generated from library research. Further, Wallace and Van Fleet (2012) suggest the purposes of qualitative research are to describe, interpret, verify, evaluate, and validate findings (p. 28). Of particular interest to research associated with narrative and reflection are the “testing of beliefs, assumptions, theories, or previous interpretation” as suggested by verification (p. 28). As Brookfield (1995) points out, critical reflection is about these “hunting assumptions” and testing their veracity. Additionally, qualitative research puts an emphasis on the personal as well as societal value when applying evaluation within research (Wallace & Van Fleet, 2012, p. 28). This idea of “personal value” is often a focus of narrative research especially within reflections, focus groups, or interviews.

The area where reflection, in particular self-reflection, has made the most inroads in academic librarianship is found within library instruction. Library instruction involves teaching patrons how to access and use library resources, as well as guidance on research methodologies, scholarly communication, information literacy competencies, and other information services or technology skills that support scholarship and research.

Reflection is seen as a way for libraries to “nurture” their teaching selves, impact student

learning, and become “fulfilled professionals” (National LOEX, 2004, p. vii). Varlejs and Stec (2004) suggest that reflection has a positive impact on librarian practice.

The assumption is, after all, that librarians who are in the habit of examining their own motives, performance, and results will be more likely to succeed in teaching their students (or patrons, or clients) to be competent information resource users. (p. 59)

Lupton (2002) acknowledges a tension within academic librarianship towards the time required for critical self-reflection and teaching, as administrators may view a librarian’s primary role instead as a provider of services such as books and materials (p. 82). However, Lupton (2002) advocates that librarians embrace their role as educators, including the practice of critical reflection, in order to facilitate the “getting of wisdom” in their students. Library science literature reveals two threads of reflection surrounding library instruction. The first is the facilitation of reflection in students as way to impact learning (e.g. Bordonaro & Richardson, 2004). The second is advocating for reflection in librarians involved with instruction as way to enhance effective teaching (e.g. Tompkins, 2009). The literature does include some examples of general reflection on academic librarianship and teaching such as those provided by Farber (1999) which look back on the profession from a vantage point of a seasoned librarian. But these works are best classified as recollections and generally fall within *non-analytical reflections* identified by Grant (2007) that are more descriptive than an application of critical reasoning.

In regards to student learning, Sen (2010) found positive impact associated with directed student reflection on “academic learning, the need for self-development, actual self-development, the ability to critically review, an awareness of one’s own mental functions, support decision making and empowerment and emancipation” (p. 91).

Bordonaro and Richardson (2004) also found that student reflection in combination with

the scaffolding of the lesson allowed the students to better grasp both the process of learning as well as the content of the course. However, despite the potential value of directed student reflection, Sen (2010) rightly points out that, “(r)eflective practice is not a clear concept to understand at first, it is also challenging to teach and can be demanding in the amount of student support that is needed...” (p. 92).

If there is a need to incorporate reflective practices with students, there is also a need to employ reflection with library instructors. Drawing from experience as both a librarian and student, Hutchins (2004) reminds teaching-librarians: “we are our stories” (p. 107). Hutchins’ words are inspired by the work of Palmer (1998) who frames this concept similarly as “we teach who we are.” Sheridan (1990) strongly advocated for libraries to adopt Schön’s “reflection-in-action” model (1983), especially in bibliographic instruction. Deploying such reflection would engage librarians with the concepts of cooperation, listening, and collaborative learning in order to better connect library instruction to information seeking behaviors that occur in the real world. Burge (2004) suggests some strategies librarians can incorporate to help facilitate reflection on instruction and library services. Some of these strategies included looking for and challenging assumptions about library services; acknowledging antinomies or paradoxes in the delivery of library services; and trying out metaphors, analogies, and similes to spur thinking in different ways (p. 13). All of these strategies are intended to engage teaching librarians with their own experiences, practices, and assumptions in unfamiliar and challenging ways in order to inspire thought and reflection. Burge (2004) also provides a series of reflective questions that focus librarians on educational matters; learning and learners; colleagues; literature in other disciplines; and other institutional

matters (pp. 14-16). Tompkins (2009) found that reflective journaling about library instruction was “a source of inspiration and professional development” (p. 232).

Tompkins suggests a reflective teaching journal can act as a “repository for observations, perceptions, and ideas” (p. 231). Such journaling “can assist librarians in reviewing and analyzing their practice, leading to change and improvement” (Tompkins, 2009, p. 223).

Booth (2011) provides one of the strongest voices in recent times about connecting reflection and effective teaching in libraries. Booth’s book *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning* (2011) challenges librarians to be better teachers through applying instruction theory; learning theory; instructional design; metacognition; and reflection. Booth notes that “reflective practice is all about motivation, honesty, and adaptability, and it can help you engage with your teaching in ways you might not expect” (p. 19). Booth models reflection throughout the book peppering the content with her stories and reflections about teaching and librarianship. Despite reflection making inroads within the instructional sphere of academic librarianship, that is not to say it has always been transformative or meaningful. Brookfield (1995) reminds us that, “(r)eflection is not, by definition, critical. It is entirely possible to be reflective while focusing solely on the “nuts and bolts” of practice within a classroom or other undertaking” (p. 8). With this in mind, there is still work to be done expanding the scope and intensity of reflective practice within the profession.

Another particularly rich area of academic librarianship that facilitates and interacts with complex narratives is that of *oral history*. The gathering and organizing of oral histories has been a traditional area of library research for some time. There is a long history of this connection between librarianship and oral history programs. The formal

development of oral history as a research area is credited with the establishment of the Oral Research Office at Columbia University in 1948 (Hoffman, 1996, p. 88). The Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley was founded in 1954, exemplifying the early adoption of oral history within some spheres of librarianship (Baum, 1996). Lee (1989) believes libraries have an important role in acquiring, organizing, disseminating, and generating oral histories. Lee saw the “creation and generation of information” aspect of oral history research as the future of librarianship. Baum (1996) concurs, suggesting that libraries have a special role in “creating, curating, consuming, and counseling” oral histories. Grele (1998) notes that oral histories have found a “hospitable” home within libraries and that “oral historians have, for the most part, turned to librarians and archivists for support and sustenance” (p. 39). In many cases librarians are actively documenting oral histories, but they also play an important role in curating and making accessible narratives in archives that have been previously gathered. These past narratives are just as rich a source of engagement for interpretation. Morgan-Fleming, Riegle, and Fryer (2007) suggest:

...by examining personal correspondence and pictures or listening to oral histories individuals leave to posterity, researchers can continue to question the appropriate level of analysis as well as the extent to which a particular idea or structure has been accepted or shaped one’s experience. They thus might gain insight into the way in through which we have historically explained our society, its institutions, and reproduction of each. (p. 87)

Oral history is “a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from the recent past which are of historical significance” (Hoffman, 1996, p. 88). The narratives captured via oral histories are composed of recollections of past events and reflections on their meaning (Moss, 1996). A reflection in this sense is “a contemporary event of

contemplating and evaluating the past, but it is not the past which is the subject of evaluation” (Moss, 1996, p. 112). Lynd (2010) describes oral history as a form of “guerrilla history,” making the case that written history is simply an extension of the memories and internal histories we all carry with us that ultimately influence our attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Grele (1998) points out that oral histories are “a structural field in which men live their history and which guides their practice or action” (p. 45). Passerini (1998) agrees, reminding us that oral histories contain the building blocks of culture.

Above all, we should not ignore that the raw material of oral history consists not just in factual statements, but pre-eminently and expression and representation of culture, and therefore includes not only literal narrations but also the dimension of memory, ideology and subconscious desires. (p. 54)

Further, these narratives are embedded with a “sense of identity, consciousness of oneself, and more considered forms of intellectual activity” (Passerini, 1998, p. 54). The subjectivity of these accounts, Portelli suggests, makes oral history and narratives of this type different: “it is less about *events* than about their *meaning*” (1998, p. 67). Oral narratives are “tied in with the circumstance of life” and are “documents of the time they were collected and not the period under investigation” (Kargbo, 2008, p. 444). The content of the interview itself is multi-layered: comprising performance, conversation with the interviewer, internal dialogue, dialogue with the greater culture and historical context of events being described (Grele, 1998). Because of this complexity, Grele suggests that oral history narratives deserve the same close attention and interpretation applied by scholars to autobiographic narratives from luminaries such as Marx or Freud:

If read properly, they do reveal to us hidden levels of discourse -- the search which is the aim of symptomatic reading. If read (or really listened to) again and again, not just for facts and comments, but also, as Althusser¹ suggests, for insight and oversights, for the combination of vision and non-vision, and especially for answers to questions which were never asked, we should be able to isolate and describe the problematic which informs the particular interview. (Grele, 1998, p. 45).

This inherent subjectivity found with oral histories and other facilitated reflection is challenging for the researcher gathering and analyzing these works. Wallace and Van Fleet (2012) point out the gathering of historical narratives directly from participants removes historical distance and thus objectivity, however in some cases this immediacy is warranted and even desired by historical researchers (pp. 159-178). Portelli (1998) emphasizes that, “subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible ‘facts’” (p. 67). Grele (1998) argues that oral histories are co-constructed narratives built between the interviewer and interviewee, or *conversational narratives*. The complex nature of these personal histories requires just as complex investigation drawing from a social, psychological, and historical analysis that is rooted in the “appropriateness of the occasion” (Grele, 1998, p. 44). Portelli (1998) specifically calls out oral histories as *narratives* and researchers who analyze these materials must avail themselves of narrative theories found in other disciplines such as literature or folklore (p. 66). Nonetheless, these newly uncovered narratives create a unique and complex form of evidence requiring careful analysis from both the historian and librarian alike. The task of oral histories falls within the constellation of narrative inquiry discussed earlier as many of the same concerns, analysis, and characteristics are found within the oral history area of study.

¹ Althusser, L., & Balibar, E. (1990). *Reading Capital*. New York: Verso. 5th edition. pp. 28-30.

In a similar vein as oral histories, another narrative interaction within academic librarianship involves encounters with cultures and societies that value *oral traditions*. Grele (1998) reminds us that the qualities and content of oral history “contains, within itself, its own system of structures, not a system derived from the narrow conventions of written history” (p. 43). This complication between the conventions of written history and the values of oral traditions is a place libraries sometimes find themselves. As champions and curators of the written word, libraries are agents of written history. However, there has been concern about how this Western conception of libraries operates in “oral-traditional societies,” such those found in Africa (John, 1979). Kargbo (2008) argues that the capturing of oral narratives serve not only a historical purpose but a cultural one. The culture of oral traditions challenges the traditional library paradigm of collecting the written word (John, 1979; Kargbo, 2008). In describing the complicated relationship between oral traditions and libraries in Africa, Amadi (1981) notes, “Africans have long possessed walking encyclopedias, proto-libraries, or libraries without shelves – not in terms of paperless, pushbutton, modern systems, but in terms of human memory constituting society’s cultural repertoire” (p. 209). For Kargbo (2008), the intimacy, immediacy, and connection of oral traditions “reveal the values and usages which penetrate a people” (p. 444). Amadi (1981) asserts that these oral narratives in Africa are devalued due to the “Western world’s extraordinary penchant for documentation” (p. 210). One radical stratagem Amadi suggests is “debooking” libraries and instead provide services that support oral traditions more in line with African culture (p. 215). At the heart of Amadi’s call is a need to balance oral traditions and the narratives they generate with the Western tradition of valuing written, objective, and vetted research over other

forms or formats. Without this balance, both society and the individual may suffer. “If culture is a resource..., then traditional societies are that much poorer when librarians exclude the oral aspect of their cultural heritage from their collections” (John, 1979, pp. 338-339). The existence of these oral narratives and traditions provide not only challenges to library services but also an added complexity concerning how libraries interact with these narratives and texts. As Kargbo (2008) suggests, oral traditions serve to “cement the gaps” not captured in writing or technology. Citing Ba (1981), Kargbo (2008) notes that our internal and cultural stories move from the

...esoteric to exoteric, oral tradition is able to put itself within man’s reach; speak to them according to their understanding, unveil itself in accordance with their aptitude. It is one’s religion, knowledge, natural science, apprenticeship in a craft, history, entertainment, recreation, since any point of detail can always take us all the way back to primordial unity. (Kargbo, 2008, p. 443; Ba, 1981, p. 168).

Kargbo (2008) strongly advocates for libraries to play a critical role in gathering, preserving and disseminating oral traditions. As institutions of cultural transmission, it is the library’s duty “to collect and preserve as testimony to ways of life and areas of knowledge”; this task should be undertaken to create a “dialogue... between tradition and modernity” (p. 446). Library engagement in the gathering and curating collections of these “dialogues” is in itself a facilitation of critical and cultural reflection in others.

The experiences that make up the content of our internal narratives uncovered through oral history research influence our beliefs (Passerini, 1998), actions (Lynd, 2010), and the meaning that participants inscribe on the world around us (Portelli, 1998). Oral traditions add a further cultural element to these narratives, histories, and stories (Kargbo, 2008). Taken as whole, “oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they

did” (Portelli, 1998, p. 67). As such, these objects, whether oral or written, are potent and intimate texts librarians interact with introducing the ideas of subjectivity and trustworthiness; multi-layered narrative analysis and interpretation; and sensitivity to cultural and societal influences on action or beliefs. Ironically, while Grumet (1976b) has noted that our culture and society has preserved “the products of its self-consciousness in museums and libraries” (p. 126), librarianship itself has no established reflective tradition that is documenting its “self-conscious” practice. Reminiscent of oral traditions, the “walking library” about the profession of academic librarianship is something that has yet to be deeply uncovered, valued, or analyzed.

***Currere* as a Method for Reflection in Academic Librarianship**

In discussing how to sustain one’s “passion” about librarianship, Bell (2003) advocated for carving out “reflective time” and using these pauses to “contemplate one’s personal mission can help plan a new path for professional renewal and development” (p. 640). Unfortunately, academic librarianship has not yet found the means to effectively incorporate a systematic program for profession-wide reflection. The systematic review of reflective literature within library science by Grant (2007) supports this assertion. Grant found very few articles that undertook *analytical reflection* about library practices. Jacobs (2008) identifies a divide between practice and theory within librarianship that impacts the ability of librarians to effectively understand and teach information literacy. A bridge across this gap is required in order to build towards the idea of *praxis* —“the interplay of theory and practice”. As Jacobs notes, “if we do not use theory as a means toward critical self-reflection and contextualization, our daily practices will come to naught” (p. 260). In an article describing this need to bridge library practice and theory,

Budd (2003) acknowledges that much of the practice of librarianship goes “untheorized”. For Budd, “*Praxis* refers to action that carries social and ethical implications and is not reducible to technical performance of tasks” (p. 20). In essence, librarians need to understand themselves before they can effectively understand their practice or profession. This idea of *praxis* also allows for a necessary infusion of subjectivity in order for librarians to build intimate connections to the beliefs and values that guide one’s understanding. The curriculum scholar, Pinar (2004) notes that, “Understanding incorporates comprehension but expertise and the erudition upon which it depends require the cultivation of subjectively situated, historically attuned intellectual judgment” (p. 43). This judgment, or ability to make informed decisions, is the intersection of “academic knowledge and professional ethics, by technical know-how coupled with a passionate sense of public service, all threaded through the subjectivity of the socially engaged individual” (p. 43). Jacobs (2008) suggests a potential starting point to nurture *praxis*, at least within the sphere of library instruction, is to undertake a “creative, reflective dialogue” between students and librarian-teachers (p. 261). Taking this one step further, beyond library instruction, there is a need for a sustained program of creative and reflective conversation to be had across the whole of the academic librarianship profession. These dialogues, or as Pinar (2004) suggests “subjective engagements”, give voice to practice through *currere*, as “it structures conversation in public, accords it life and meaning” (p. 48).

These calls for sustained and transformative reflection (Bell, 2003; Budd, 2003; Jacobs, 2008) are fraught with obstacles. As Lupton (2002) points out, without the support of senior administrators, librarians are challenged to envision themselves as

educators or anything else, let alone to find the time necessary to critically reflect in a meaningful manner. Yet, the profession is continually reminded such reflective time is essential for the health and growth of academic librarianship in order to “avoid blind spots and tunnel vision” (Budd, 2003, p. 31), combat cynicism and burnout (Varlejs & Stec, 2004), and remove the sense of “irrelevancy” librarians sometimes feel about their work (Sheridan, 1990).

One reflective process that has been used widely in the fields of Education and Curriculum Studies is *currere* (e.g. Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Pinar, 2004). *Currere* is an autobiographical method created by curriculum theorist Pinar to assist in developing and putting curriculum into meaningful practice for educators (Pinar, 1976, 1994). This methodology has the potential to assist in the development of the reflective gaze within the profession of academic librarianship. The methodology “focuses on the educational experience of the individual as reported by the individual; it seeks to describe what the individual himself/herself makes of behaviors” (Doerr, 2004, p. 8). Pinar relates that “*currere* is a form of social psychoanalysis, a complicated conversation with (oneself) and others, the point of which is movement: autobiographic, political, cultural” (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 249). Much as the calls for *praxis* in academic librarianship, so believes Pinar (1975a) that *currere* is a method to achieve this aim in curriculum workers. Except with *currere*, Pinar (1975a) is attempting to bridge not just practice and theory, but also consciousness and behavior, because “shift in the source of behavior signals a shift in the behavior itself” (p. 413). Doerr (2004) characterized *currere* as an “awakening” and sees the method as way to break through indifference – an indifference built through habit and compliance that submerges the consciousness and

therefore the ability for people to “ask questions that increase awareness of how they live with their worlds” (p. 9). Pinar (2004) frames *currere* as a tool to “understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of one’s life (and vice versa), and how both are imbricated in society, politics, and culture” (p. 45). Such a method has the potential for librarians to bring to the forefront the contribution academic librarianship makes to understanding one’s life (and vice versa).

Currere draws its inspiration from many disciplines including existentialism, phenomenology, psychology, psychiatry, literary theory, and educational theory (Doerr, 2004, p. 7). It is this rich foundation that makes *currere* a robust methodology for reflection. The methodology of *currere* is made up of four stages: “regressive--progressive--analytical--synthetical” (Pinar, 1976, p. 51).

- (a) *regressive* because it involves description and analysis of one’s intellectual biography or if you prefer educational past;
- (b) *progressive*, because it involves description of one’s imagined future;
- (c) *analytic*, because it calls for a psychoanalysis of one’s phenomenologically described educational present, past, and future; and
- (d) *synthetic*, because it totalizes the fragments of education experience (that is to say the response and context of the subject) and places this integrated understanding of individual experience into the larger political and cultural web, explaining the dialectical relation between the two. (Pinar, 1975b, p. 424)

Another way to think of working through the method is that each stage brackets a period or perception of lived time as evidence. This evidence then composes a picture of one’s life in the past, the present and the future (Pinar, 1976, 1994; Doerr, 2004, pp. 16-17). These pictures can then be compared against each other to illustrate differences, growth, or illumination of ideas. Placing these various temporal gazes in front of us affords a richer experience to reflect on, stretching and refracting one’s gaze across the continuum we live our lives. This is reminiscent of the “refracting” of the cultural self as

it moves inwards and outwards in the process of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004, pp. 37-38). *Currere* provides an examination of self-generated evidence from multiple vantage points, with multiple interpretations, and multiple questions these reflective glances may raise. Limiting a reflective gaze only to the past-present provides restrictions on the transparency of self-generated available evidence we can learn from. As Grumet (1988) points out, “the present is hardly more transparent to our inquiring gaze than the past. We have all come to form within the very forms we wish to study. And so it is difficult to separate the well-taught consciousness from the consciousness that teaches” (p. 59). In essence, “*currere* is a form of social psychoanalysis, a complicated conversation with (oneself) and others, the point of which is movement: autobiographic, political, cultural” (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 249). What is brought to light in *currere* is an autobiography or autoethnography, a deep and critical reflection that can be used to examine obstacles, successes, and the meaning one has ascribed to one’s life, profession or other circumstance. Graham (1992) highlights that the autobiographical content uncovered and created by *currere* “is an intentional act of consciousness ensures that by bracketing off, remembering, and describing objects of consciousness, the knowledge so gained would be grounded in the lived experiences of the individual” (p. 35). *Currere* acknowledges the ongoing search by us all for “meaning as an interactive and reflective process undertaken in a social milieu” (Graham, 1992, p. 27). This methodology is “conscious of race, gender, social justice, history, context, place, and power relations” (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 253), and can serve as a place for adherents to examine the complexities these issues bring forth. In short, *currere* presents a radical educational opportunity for the participant to learn about themselves. Grumet (1976a) posits that the

overall role of education is to engage “a person’s dialogue with the world of experience” (pp. 33-34). Graham (1992), in talking about the aim of *currere* within the educational enterprise, surmises that for an experience to be educational “it must be a blend of objectivity and subjectivity, an encounter which changes and extends its immediate significance even as it subtly alters and informs the individual’s psyche itself” (p. 34).

Currere presents itself as an alternative to the “linear, traditional modes of research” (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 248), as well as the types of non-analytical reflection described by Grant (2007). *Currere*,

...fully engages memory construction and the effects of time, place, and psychological attachment on memory, creating a meta-awareness and analysis of self. The method interlaces past, present, and future in order to develop with more clarity the biological details that have constructed and continue to construct one’s consciousness, subjectivity, and identity. (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 248)

As bell hooks (1994) reminds us, the opportunities afforded through education can be spaces for liberation. The “habit of repression” is the norm, but a liberatory practice enabled by educators is a place to “interrogate” actions (hooks, 1994, p. 147). Concerning this process of learning and liberating ourselves, Pinar asks those who begin to walk down the path of *currere*, “How does it feel to be uprooted from the geographical, social, and psychological ambiance in which I live my day-to-day life?” (Pinar 1975a, p. 399). The project of *currere* is challenging and is indeed a form of reflective exercise intending to uproot. Villaverde sees *currere* as going *beyond* reflection. *Currere* “grounds us in a theorizing existence where we continually contextualize our perceptions, internalizations, imaginations, and synthesizing moments, understanding knowledge production with a critical system of meaning” (Villaverde & Pinar, 1999, p. 248). Reflective practice is an educational experience that has the

potential to liberate, uproot assumptions, and uncover, much as oral histories and traditions do, the lived experience. Critical reflection is essential for academic librarians to sustain their passion for the profession, build *praxis*, and engage library stakeholders as authentic practitioners.

The Place for *Currere* in Academic Librarianship

Academic librarianship has an intimate association with narratives and stories through their traditional role in curating, caring for, and making accessible their collections. Librarians also experience the intricacies and challenges of narrative inquiry through the qualitative research they undertake, oral histories they gather, reflective teaching practices they facilitate, and oral-traditions they interact with. Despite these intersections with reflection and narratives, academic librarianship, and library sciences as a whole, have not fully incorporated their own narratives within their practices. Academic librarianship has the ability but not the well-defined spaces to critically reflect in a holistic manner. Shadiow (2013) encourages us all to “recall, retell, and then scrutinize your stories” (p. ix) through critical reflection. One potential method to accomplish this task of “scrutinizing our stories” is the reflective technique known as *currere*. Grumet (1976a) suggests that *currere* allows us to put our “essences back into existence” (p. 41). *Currere* offers one pathway to putting ourselves back into librarianship much as it has done with other educators.

An example of putting ourselves back into our profession is the work of Brown (2007). Brown used the *currere* method with five teacher participants at “career turning points” including one who was considering a transition to becoming a public librarian. Brown saw the immediate transformative engagement this method could provide:

...I began to realize that *currere* could be a way for experienced teachers to organize their memories, to shed light into darkened corners of forgotten rooms of their past, to reflect upon their goals and to discover themes in their careers. Because *currere* includes self-analysis and self-synthesis, the narrative remains entirely in the hands of the writer and does not require a researcher's interpretation for validity, thus empowering the writer to re-imagine and re-story. Using *currere*, educators might be able to re-story their professional careers in powerful ways that reflect their current lives. Such reflection might help educators make career choices and perhaps encourage them to remain in the field (Brown, 2007, pp. 4-5).

As Brown (2007) exemplifies, *currere* has been a scholarly method widely used within education circles, especially in dissertations associated with teaching or curriculum. A search in the online *Proquest Dissertations and Theses* indexing database² reveals forty-eight dissertations and five master's theses since 1980 that contain *currere* in their abstracts. This database search is not exhaustive but gives a flavor for the type of study a *currere* methodology has been applied to. In 2004, Doerr noted eleven *currere*-related dissertations, two detailing the use of *currere* in classrooms, and the rest concerned *currere* in theory or practiced by the author (p. 18). A decade later, these findings still ring true. In a recent search of the subjects associated with these *currere*-related works in the *Dissertations and Theses* database, a majority of them pertain to curricula (25), teaching (25), curriculum development (14), and/or educational theory (6). However a few of these works concern themselves with higher education (3), educational sociology (3), women's studies (2), dance (1), film studies (1), and/or theatre (1). Delving deeper into the keywords associated with the *currere* dissertations and theses in the database, one can see additional breadth. Curriculum (6), pedagogy (5), and science (4) are associated as keywords the most often, but others such as imagination (3),

² Searched online August 14, 2013 via Boise State University's Albertson Library.

phenomenology (3), professional development (3), aesthetics (2), animal rights (2), identity (2), and narrative inquiry (2) are also noted. Unfortunately, what is not found within this dissertation and theses database are *curre*-related dissertations with subjects or keywords associated with librarians, libraries, or library science. This suggests that the *curre* method has not yet been applied within the area of libraries or academic librarianship. This is further evidenced from the lack of results when searching for the keyword *curre* in the library-centric research database *Library Information & Technology Abstracts (LISTA)*³ or for the terms *curre* with *librarian* or *library* in the education databases ERIC.ed.gov⁴ or *Education Research Complete*⁵. This lack of connection between *curre* and libraries within the research literature is not indicative of a mismatch between this reflective method and the discipline of library science. Far from it, as *curre* has had a wide-ranging application in various disciplines such as dance (Jewett, 2008), ecology (Doerr, 2000, 2004), film studies (Buhring, 2008), kinesiology (Sotudeh, 2012), and politics (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009), just to name a few. Academic librarianship would simply be one more addition to this list that has explored the potential of *curre* in new, unique, and meaningful ways.

The method of *curre* presents a rich opportunity for academic librarians to explore their profession. There is definite work that needs to be undertaken to instill reflective practices within academic librarianship. A method such as this can provide a platform for librarians to take a deep and critical look at the influences and aspirations that contribute to making academic librarianship meaningful.

³ Searched online August 14, 2013 via Oregon State University Libraries

⁴ Searched online August 14, 2013 via internet

⁵ Searched online August 14, 2013 via Boise State University's Albertson Library

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The data-gathering portion of this study took place from January 2015 through June 2015. The cohort initially consisted of seven librarians from a single academic library in the Pacific Northwest. One participant dropped out midway through the study, leaving six participants who finished the project. This study deployed a *currere*-inspired curriculum of four structured critical reflections with a cohort of practicing academic librarians. A participant-generated Synthesis document of these reflections was analyzed using qualitative methods to code for emergent and distinct themes. A follow-up survey was distributed a few weeks after the final Synthesis reflection to offer insight into how completing *currere* curriculum has influenced cohort member's everyday library practice.

This research and the reflection curriculum was inspired by the autobiographical and self-narrative methodologies developed by curriculum theorists William F. Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet (1976), as well as the autoethnography methodologies described by Carolyn Ellis (2004), Heewon Chang (2008), and Norman K. Denzin (2014). Additional inspiration was drawn from the narrative inquiry research of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This project walks the same pathways of Doerr (2004) who used *currere* with a group of high school ecology students and Brown (2007) who employed *currere* with a cohort of teachers. This study breaks new ground in deploying this reflective methodology with a cohort of practicing librarians.

Study participants were led through a series of reflection exercises culminating in an overall reflection synthesis project to provide a window into how librarianship is embodied in practicing librarians. These librarian-generated reflections were analyzed for themes, connections, and discontinuity with Library and Information Science (LIS) core values, theory and philosophy. The intended outcome from this research is to suggest a process for librarian self-examination that illuminates connections to library philosophy and motivation for librarian practice. The closer librarianship is able to examine the constellation of stories that comprise the librarian experience, the better the profession is positioned to understand its place within the overarching community and culture at large. Critical reflection is an essential avenue for academic librarians to sustain their passion for the profession, build *praxis*, and engage library stakeholders as authentic practitioners.

Participant Population

Criteria for inclusion in this study were librarians at a large doctorate granting university who have an LIS Masters, are in an LIS Master's program, or are considering attending an LIS Master's program. A preference was given to participants who possess a Master's in Library Science graduate degree or equivalent. Academic librarians were deliberately selected as the study population, as this is the area of librarianship that the researcher, as a practicing academic librarian, is most familiar. This familiarity allows the researcher to have some degree of already established credibility with participants as well as a basic foundation of experiences to assist in analyzing participant-generated reflection evidence.

All participants were over the age of 18. Specific ethnicities, ages, genders, or pregnant women were not targeted by this study, nor were these populations excluded from participating in this project. However, vulnerable populations such as prisoners and cognitively/educationally-impaired participants were deliberately excluded from participating.

Since this project was undertaken in a location where cohort members work, and the subject of this research involved participant feelings, opinions, and observations about their library work environments, care was taken in the participant selection process to make direct reporting lines between cohort members overt and clear. Cohort members were directly asked if participation by any of their fellow co-workers might lead to any potential workplace issue. No potential workplace issues were reported and no potential members of the cohort were excluded from participating due to any perceived work conflicts. An additional part of the study design to reduce potential workplace discomfort was that participants retained control of how much and what they chose to share during each cohort meeting. If the cohort members experienced unease or concern with any of the research study's dynamics, they were able to leave the study at any time and take with them any reflections or documents and these would not be used in the study.

Based on the experiences of previous researchers' similar *currere* reflection projects (Brown, 2007; Doerr, 2004), and the time needed to analyze the data, the ideal number of participants would be five. The study ended up with six participants completing the study.

Recruitment and Informed Consent

Permission was received to recruit and hold the study within a single university library system. Recruitment was primarily accomplished through work email sent directly to library faculty and a brief recruitment talk during a library visit. Recruitment emails followed the Boise State University Institutional Review Board guidelines and included: title of the study, name of principal investigator, clear statement that it is research, and contact information.

Cohort Demographics and Profiles

To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms are substituted for the real names of the participants, the university library, and study location.

Library Profile

The cohort of participating librarians was drawn from a public research university with a Carnegie classification of “very high research activity.” The university typically enrolls over 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students in its academic programs. This university has a small number of libraries on its main campus as well as additional libraries on its satellite campuses. The university libraries has a budget over \$13 million and employs over 150 librarians and staff. Participating librarians were from the main library and one satellite campus library.

Librarian Profiles

Seven female librarians initially participated in this project. Five participants were from the main campus library and two from a satellite campus library. One librarian dropped out halfway through the study leaving five librarians from the main library and one librarian from a satellite campus library completing the study. Participating librarians

included those from the areas of university administration, department managers, instruction, subject liaisons, reference, and access services. Participants were comprised of public services functions as opposed to the technical services side of librarianship such as cataloging or acquisitions. All librarians completing the project were considered faculty and have earned tenure at their current institution. The librarians described themselves as mid-career or past mid-career. The participants had worked in libraries between 13-40 years with an average employment of 25 years and median of 22 years. Within their current library, participants had worked between 10-36 years, with an average of 18.5 years, and a median of 15 years.

Cohort Profiles

Agatha holds an administrative position in the library. She describes herself as being in her current position a “long time”. She is thoughtful and reserved during group interactions, preferring instead to share information in her reflective writing. Agatha has explored various avenues for changing her role in librarianship, such as moving into special collections or teaching library science.

Becca is an instruction librarian and subject specialist in the social sciences. She describes herself as being “stuck” and has been sensitive to recent library reorganizations that have changed her relationships and interactions with library colleagues. Becca acknowledges that her emotional home-life sometimes bleeds into her work-life which can lead to complications. She brings a calming presence to the cohort.

Carol is a public services librarian. She describes herself as being past the midpoint in her career. Carol is drawn to participating in this research study as a way to help “recreate the motivations” that led her into librarianship. She is an avid traveler who

often draws on cultural experiences in her reflections. Carol was the most willing to experiment with her reflection writing, incorporating differing formats to evoke emotion.

Dora is an instruction librarian and also a subject specialist in the social sciences. She describes herself as mid-career. Dora used the term “floundering” when talking about her current situation in libraries. One of Dora’s key values is “agency.” She is always willing to contribute an intelligent thought to group conversation about reflection and the *currere* process.

Evelyn works in public services in the satellite library. Evelyn is currently winding up her career and plans to retire within the next five years. Currently, Evelyn has “no professional goal” within librarianship and is interested in using this process to reflect on her career. She was dedicated to the project beaming in remotely via teleconferencing. Evelyn occasionally voices skepticism regarding many of the reflective writing assignments but is good-natured about it. She asks a lot of clarifying questions and wants examples, which are beneficial for the whole cohort.

Fran works in public services. She is in the upper-end of her career. One of her cohort members described Fran as a model reference librarian. Fran has noticed an ebb and flow to her career and is currently in a “slow down” phase. In addition to the career ebb and flow, Fran notes that we take on multiple personas within our profession and personal lives and that it might be challenging to reflect on them all.

Privacy and Confidentiality

As the project required cohort members to meet weekly, as well as recruited from a small pool of co-workers, cohort members knew the identity of each study participant. This was an unavoidable aspect of the study. Composing reflective and narrative inquiry

in a group setting requires relationship building, and in most cases not hiding behind personas, as means to build trust. The extending timeframe of 12 weeks allowed cohort members to engage in dialogue and interaction as a means to build trust.

Each cohort member maintained control of all content they chose to include in each reflection stage of the *currere* curriculum. Reflection exercises did occur during allotted meeting times, but most reflections were primarily composed at a location chosen by each cohort participant. Participants had the option to share or not share reflection drafts during each meeting. Discussions and conversations undertaken during each meeting were not recorded or captured other than general impressions captured in the researcher's personal journal. The only required reflective data-points for each member was the Synthesis document and final presentation. Other reflective data was voluntary and was gathered after the final cohort meeting. Each cohort member was asked to sign a participant matrix (see Appendix B) during the first meeting that acknowledged the requirement to use the Synthesis reflection for the study. At the last meeting, cohort members were again presented with a participation matrix in order for them to assign release and use of any additional reflection documents for research purposes. Finally, a draft of the research write-up was shared with cohort members to insure that their reflections were accurately represented as well as to assure that privacy expectations, confidentiality, and accuracy of representation were maintained at the level deemed appropriate by each participant.

Risks and Power Dynamics

Grumet (1991) reminds us that storytelling is ultimately a negotiation of power (p. 68). As with any research involving power dynamics, this involves both care and risk for

the researcher. In this *currere* curriculum, the negotiation of power resides in the contemplative process to dredge up harmful or unwanted memories; the power in sharing intimate information with peers that might damage a reputation or relationship; and the power of being misrepresented by the researcher to colleagues within the discipline of academic librarianship. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) address this when they note that:

One of the ever-present and strongest tensions is how to understand the place of people in inquiry. One of the simplest ways of saying this is that in formalist inquiry, people, if they are identified at all, are looked at as exemplars of a form -- of an idea, a theory, a social category. In narrative inquiry, people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories. (p. 43)

As embodiments of lived stories, this also brings up the issue of who owns each story. Grumet (1991) emphasizes that telling stories, sharing narratives, and granting access to products of reflection are a risky business. Once a story is shared with someone, it is near impossible to “get back” (p. 69). This ownership of a reflection is a delicate negotiation as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out. Researchers are required “to be thoughtful of our research participants as our first audience and, indeed, our most important audience, for it is to them that we owe our care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories that sustain them. But as researchers, we also owe our care and responsibility to a larger audience, to the conversation of a scholarly discourse, and our research texts need also to speak of how we lived and told our stories with the particular field of inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 173-174). Connelly and Clandinin explain that entry into narratives by researchers is a “negotiation” of ethics and relationships. These relationships involve the intentional development of community, empowerment, and trust with research participants (1990). Other narrative researchers, (in particular Grumet 1987, 1990, 1991), echo this same “anxiety” about these power

relationships between researchers facilitating and interpreting narratives, and those offering up their lives in stories (Casey, 1995, p. 219). In Casey's summation, this concern is not simply a matter of building trust within narrative inquiry but also an issue "concerning the constitution of the self" (p. 219). Indeed, Grumet (1991) sees inviting someone to tell their story "diminishes the teller" and is a "form of alienation" and therefore requires a strong ethic from the researcher (p. 70). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advocate for this need for a strong sense of thoughtful ethics as the role of the researcher in narrative inquiry blurs from data collector, to data interpreter, to even co-writer of narratives (pp. 169-185). Grumet (1991) points out that unlike an intimate relationship with friends where the boundaries of misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and other trust violations are assumed or built-in – otherwise known as forgiveness – inquiry into narrative and reflection offers no such luxury for the researcher.

With this ethic in mind, the researcher strived to be intentional and transparent in how cohort stories were generated and used – in essence, to model *wakefulness* for the cohort members (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Grumet (1991) advocates for the researcher to be clear as to what he/she is after and not to interrogate widely without informing the participant what he/she is looking for. Grumet demands that the inquiry respects and build the agency of the participant. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak of this as the "relational responsibility" of the researcher, and that ownership of each story need to be negotiated through the developing relationship between the researcher and narrative author. Each story needs to be "honored" within its own merit and context (pp. 176-177). In order to facilitate the development of relationships and trust, the *currere* project was spread over 12 weeks in order to allow relationships and community to be

built and observed over time. Before submitting the final Synthesis document, the prolonged development of community and trust allowed the cohort to evaluate how the researcher valued, protected, and respected each participant derived narrative. Further extending trust and guarding against breaking it, cohort members had the opportunity to read and comment on a draft of this dissertation to insure accurate representation of each personal narrative. Additionally, a significant portion of the power in the researcher and research participant relationship resided in the cohort member: participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and retain the right to withdraw their reflections and participation prior to submission of the final dissertation product. By displacing the power relationship between researcher and researcher participant, it was hoped that many of the research issues surrounding trust and representation would be mitigated.

Study Design

The study took place over a 12-week period. The researcher met with the study participants once a week at their library. Permission was received from the University Librarian at the cohort's library to undertake the study at this location and meet during work hours. The cohort and researcher met for one hour to be introduced to topics related to critical reflection, autoethnography, *currere* methodology, and narrative inquiry, as well as write and discuss reflections (see Figure 2.). A typical meeting included these parts:

- Review of homework reflective writing,
- Class discussion about reflection topics,
- Discussion of homework reflection prompt,
- A five-minute exit reflection on a topic derived from meeting discussions.

The last few meetings involved a presentation by participants to cohort peers of their final Synthesis reflection. A full list of class activities, reflection prompts, and overall curriculum is included as an appendix item (Appendix A).

The guiding methodology for the study was the *currere* reflective framework proposed by Pinar (1976, 1994). *Currere* asks participants to create and to interact critically with their own personal reflective evidence along a temporal continuum from past to present to future. The four processes of this reflection as outlined by Pinar (1994) are:

1. Regressive (past): “One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present” (p. 21)
2. Progressive (future): “In the phase we look the other way... We have found that the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences, in complicated ways, the present; it forms the present. (p. 24).
3. Analytical (present): “For many the present is woven into the fabric of institutional life. Within that historical form, embodied concretely in the building which houses your office and those of your colleagues and students, what is your present? What are one’s intellectual interests? What is one’s emotional condition?” (pp. 25-26)
4. Synthesis: “Who is that? In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present?” (p. 26).

At each of the *currere* stages, a participant is asked to critically reflect from a specific temporal point of view. This methodology is intended to explore the “complex relation between the temporal and conceptual” (Pinar, 1994, p. 19). The subject of this conceptual exploration is librarianship as situated within the lived experiences of librarians.

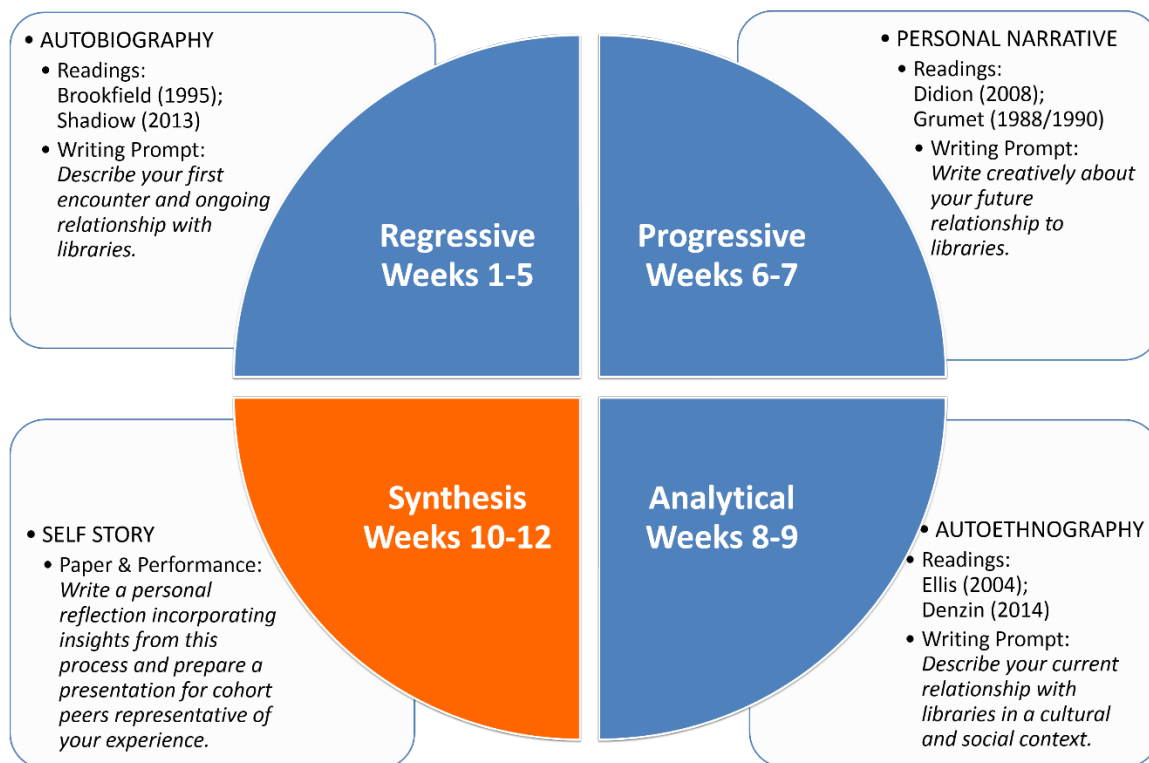


Figure 2 *Currere Curriculum*

For the purposes of this study, reflections in each *currere* stage were guided by a writing prompt centered around librarianship and a suggested research framework associated with narrative inquiry or critical reflection. See the table below for additional details:

Table 3.1 **Guiding Methodologies and Writing Prompts**

| <i>Currere</i> Stage | Guiding Reflective Methodology | Writing Prompt |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Regressive | Autobiography | <i>Describe your first encounter and ongoing relationship with libraries.</i> |
| Progressive | Personal Narrative | <i>Write creatively and descriptively about your future relationship with libraries.</i> |
| Analytical | Autoethnography | <i>Describe your current relationship with libraries in a cultural and social context.</i> |

| | | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Synthesis | Participant choice of methodology (self-story) | <i>Write a personal reflection incorporating insights from this process.</i> |
| Peer Performance | Presentation | <i>Prepare a presentation for cohort peers representative of your Synthesis experience</i> |

Cohort members were given journals and maintained ownership of all reflective data prior to turning in their Synthesis reflection to the researcher. Participants were asked to share only the Synthesis reflection document with the researcher for dissertation purposes. Participants gave a final presentation to cohort peers and the researcher about their Synthesis document or experience. Additional reflective material was shared with the researcher at the discretion of each research participant. The researcher also kept a brief journal during this twelve-week period about his experience. In summary, the three items (unless given additional access by the research participants) that was used by the researcher for analysis were:

- Researcher reflection journal
- Participant Synthesis reflection
- Presentation to cohort peers

The subject of this overall inquiry was concerned with the intersection of librarianship and the personal experiences of librarians. The writing prompts were designed with that intersection in mind. The additional narrative and reflective guiding methodologies were chosen not only to provide structure for the participants, but also to assist with the internal and external validity of this study.

Denzin (2014) provides brief descriptions of these self-reflection methods:

- *Autobiography: Personal history of one's life.*

- Narrative: *A story having a plot and existence separate from the life of the teller.*
- Autoethnography: *Account of one's life as an ethnographer.*
- Self-Story: *Story of self in relation to an event.* (pp. 15-17)

Additional information about these guiding methodologies and the *currere* framework is offered in more detail in the following sections.

Currere: Regressive / Autobiography

Autobiography offers a powerful entryway to understanding the personal experience of practicing librarians. For the purposes of this study, having cohort members write in the first-person about their first experience with libraries built a foundation from which further reflections would arise. This also established a starting point on the temporal continuum and a first comparison point in the *currere* process. The intimacy of a first-person personal narrative also served to break down the formalities of faculty librarians who often write within the traditional third-person, objective boundaries of academic writing. Grumet (1991) rightly points out that: “Viewed against the background of bureaucratic, depersonalized institutions, storytelling seems pretty authentic, or at least expressive. It seems natural to assume that the first person is closer to us than the third...” (p. 68). Similarly, this authenticity extends to other reflective practices the cohort participated later in the *currere* process. Autobiographies, as well as the whole series of *currere* reflective outputs, serve as an alternative to traditional research evidence generated within the paradigm of depersonalized or objective research methodologies. However, this is not to say the autobiographic and reflective texts are not appropriate forms of evidence for academic research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that: “There is a fine line between autobiographical writing used as field texts and

autobiographical writing used as research texts. Autobiography and memoir are recognized forms of research texts” (p. 101). Including the “personal” as a desired aspect of autobiography provides not just authentic evidence for analysis for the researcher, but also an equally powerful, if not more meaningful process of self-examination for the research participant. Grumet (1990) builds on this intersection of authenticity in our personal and professional lives:

Autobiography becomes a medium for both teaching and research because each entry expresses the particular peace its author has made between the individuality of his or her subjectivity and the intersubjective and public character of meaning. The wound that haunts our consciousness by severing our private lives from our public world may begin to repair itself, at least on the level of text, as the languages of both worlds and their ways of being mingle in educational theory and practice. (para. 20)

Autobiography offered a logical first step for this research study, as it provided a reflective touchstone for participants that they were familiar with as they entered the *currere* process; and also the necessary backward temporal glance and first-person intimacy of experience required of this methodology to yield authentic data.

***Currere*: Progressive / Narrative Inquiry**

The next stage in the *currere* process was for one’s self-reflection to gaze toward the future and imagine what could be. Pinar (1994) directs us to “look the other way”, not on the ways the past may contribute to the present, but instead to how the future might inspire. As Pinar suggests, “the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences in complicated ways, the present, it forms the present” (p. 24).

The reflective exercise used to guide cohort participants through this stage was a personal narrative. At this point, participants were prompted to speculate about their future relationship with libraries and librarianship. They were asked to construct this

speculation as a narrative – a story of their future. Here, in order to distance themselves from the temporal present, participants were encouraged to write in the third person. In this manner, cohort members constructed a story about their imagined futures.

Narrative provides a great complement to the *currere* process in scope and structure. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have insightfully noted about narrative inquiry:

As we worked within our three-dimensional spaces as narrative inquirers, what became clear to us was that as inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future. What we mean by this is that we tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures. (p. 60)

It is this space of “possible plotlines for our futures” that *currere* also seeks to empower the participant through each series of exercises. The Progressive stage of *currere* in particular meets this aim by engaging each participant to outline his or her own possible futures, and it is from this future vantage point participants will begin to examine their present. A particular characteristic of authentic narrative inquiry for Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is what they identify as the three-dimensional space of narrative:

...any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 49)

Thus, the characteristics of narrative, or “three-dimensional space,” for inquiry as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) see it, are as follows:

- Interaction (personal and social)
- Continuity (past, present and future)
- Situation (place)

This is the same three-dimensional space that *currere* seeks to uncover through placing the reflections across a temporal continuum and by engaging relationships, emotions, and contexts at each stage. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) frame this three-dimensional space as *looking backward and forward; inward and outward*; and locating inquiry in place (or context).

By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to the temporality -- past, present, and future. (p. 50)

These dimensions also aid in constructing the rigor of the overall inquiry through the critical examination of reflective outputs and evidence.

...one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and its futures. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

Thus, the *currere* methodology not only mirrors but expands upon the task of narrative inquiry by creating multiple reflective outputs that are oriented temporally, socially/personally, and united in the situational through the experience of each person undertaking the task of *currere* in the final Synthesis stage. At their core, these reflective methodologies are about raising the submerged life to the visible, turning an eye on our invisible lives, capturing a shadow we might never have known was following us.

Connelly and Clandinin wrote, “The central value of narrative inquiry is its quality as subject matter. Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways” (1990, p. 10). Narrative inquiry, therefore, offers a powerful tool

to begin articulating the intersections between cohort members' personal lives and their lives within librarianship.

Currere: Analytical / Autoethnography

The third stage of the *currere* process, Analytical, asks to examine the present through more reflective exercise. At this step, participants begin to refine their lens more critically as they start to incorporate the influences of social, cultural and institutional factors on their present condition. Pinar (1994) guides the Analytical *currere* process in this manner:

For many the present is woven into the fabric of institutional life. Within that historical form, embodied concretely in the building which houses your office and those who are your colleagues and students, what is your present? What are one's intellectual interests? What is one's emotional condition?

To what ideas, what areas of study, which discipline, is one drawn? From what is one repelled? List these. Describe, not interpret these actions. Photograph the present as if one were a camera, including oneself in the present taking the photograph, and your response to this process (p. 25).

Better articulation of this idea of an "institutional life" of librarianship is an intended outcome for this dissertation project. For this stage, autoethnography offers a readymade methodological structure to describe the present through reflective exercise. Carolyn Ellis (2004, 2013) has done extensive research in this area and articulates autoethnography's premise in this manner:

For most of us, autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process it seeks a story

that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living. (Ellis, 2013, p. 10)

The fact that we begin to “observe our ourselves observing” and seek ways to leverage this vantage to “interrogate what we think and believe” belies the power of the autoethnographic method. The editors of *The Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013) conceptualize this reflective methodology as having these characteristics unique to it as compared to other types of personal reflection or narrative generating methodologies:

- Autoethnographies comment on or critique culture and cultural practices
- Autoethnographies make contributions to existing research
- Autoethnographies embrace vulnerability with purpose
- Autoethnographies create reciprocity in order to compel a response (pp. 22-25)

By incorporating the structure of autoethnography into the *currere* process, the hope is to inspire the study participants to critically examine their present in an academic dialogue familiar to faculty librarians that already undertake research and publish within the traditional academic research paradigm. This critical perspective is drawing from anthropology and ethnography and adds an additional layer of rigor to the examination that participants might choose to undertake in their Analytical reflective process and later in their Synthesis document. This rigor and critical examination also serves to connect participant reflections not only to the discipline of librarianship but also to take steps in engaging in larger conversations with the academic communities librarianship might be a part of. In describing autobiographic reflection, Grumet (1991) touches on the idea of engaging communities within the ethnographic perspective:

Somewhat less romantic, but still inclined to be sentimental, is the ethnographic perspective, which sees narrative as a cultural symbolization that contributes to the continuity and shaping of a community. Although, the ethnographer, unlike the aesthete, celebrates the story's function, he joins his literary colleagues in respecting the form of the telling as being bonded to its meaning. More possessive than the writer who relinquishes his text to an anonymous reader to make of it what she will, the anthropologist requires that those who participate in the process of interpretation share a history of community membership and experience with the narrator. (Grumet, 1991, p. 68)

This process of shared interpretation and community is an essential component of this study's overall methodology and curriculum. The *currere* process moves from private reflection to public via the final Synthesis stage for analysis in the dissertation, as well as the peer presentation of the Synthesis experience. It was suggested to cohort participants to integrate additional evidence into their Analytical reflective description of the present from evidence they might have already shared; this evidence could be public or private, academic or personal. Chang (2013) notes that the researcher's personal experiences are the primary source of data in autoethnography. Researchers "draw from autobiographic data such as memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and ongoing self-reflective and self-observational memos" (p. 108). Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) identify three types of "data" typically used in autoethnography: field notes, personal documents, and interviews (p. 65). These were the types of data that were generated in this dissertation project as potential evidence. These types of data are also available to cohort members as they constructed their autoethnography for the Analytical stage of the *currere* method.

Much like narrative inquiry, autoethnography also offers a complementary reflective process to guide participants through one of the stages of the *currere* methodology. The varied purposes of autoethnography are "intertwined and mutually

implicating” according to Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013, p. 37). The unique purposes of autoethnography are articulated in this manner:

- Disrupting norms of research practice and representation;
- Working from insider knowledge;
- Maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty and making life better;
- Breaking silence, (re)claiming voice, and writing to right;
- Making work accessible. (Holman Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013, p. 32-37)

Making work “accessible” to the community of librarianship is what drew me to incorporating autoethnography as a guiding methodology within this dissertation project. How can we make the work of librarianship not only accessible to others but also accessible to ourselves? “(A)n autoethnographic self-interview involves dialogue between one’s past and present selves, at times actively with others as well, in which memories and understandings about the past are constructed anew” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 69). *Currere* will allow the participant to take this step even further interrogating not only the past but also the present and the future selves in trying to make meaning. This cumulative experience happens at the Synthesis stage of the *currere* process, which is described next.

***Currere*: Synthesis/Participant Driven Methodology**

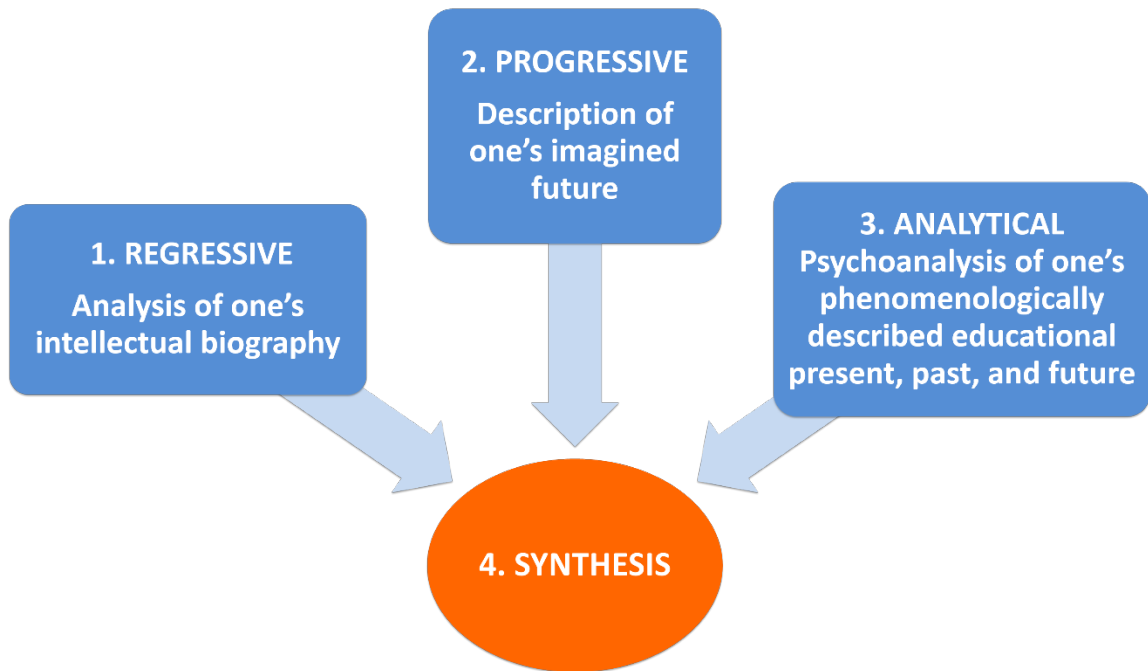


Figure 3 **Synthesis *Currere* Stage**

The final stage of the *currere* methodology is Synthesis which brings together all the reflective pieces in the present. This was the critical stage for the dissertation as this was the primary source of data that was analyzed. Here, participants were asked to review the three reflections (Regressive, Progressive, Analytical) they have already created during the *currere* process. Using this evidence, participants searched for their own themes, areas of dissonance, or newly developed insight. There was no guiding methodology suggested to participants during this Synthesis stage. Instead, the reflection design and analysis was left open to each cohort member's own imagination. In this final stage, the meaning making was a process that was owned, controlled, and guided by the participant. As a result, the researcher did not provide a suggested framework to lead

participants through this process. However, Pinar (1994) offers these guiding thoughts for the Synthesis project of *carrere*:

- In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present?
- What is the contribution of my scholarly and professional work to my present? Do they illuminate the present? Obscure it?
- Are one's intellectual interests biographically freeing, that is do they permit, in fact encourage, movement?
- Do they point to increased conceptual sophistication and refinement, deeper knowledge and understanding, of both one's chosen field of study and that field's symbolic relation to one's evolving biography? Do they move one to enter new, higher levels of being? (pp. 26-27)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize *continuity* within their three-dimensional framework of narrative. At this Synthesis stage, cohort participants are encouraged to seek out the continuity of their stories, reflections, and narratives. What threads are interwoven in each outcome of their personal *carrere* process? What threads are false leads, following to nothing of importance? What threads have been dropped and may need to be picked up again? The Synthesis piece offers a space for the acknowledgement of strengths and barriers in one's life, as well as a possible direction for action or new plotlines to be authored or revisited. In speaking about the reflective empowerment associated with autoethnography, Bochner (2013) emphasizes the integration of experience and feeling in one's daily interactions.

Autoethnography is an expression of the desire to turn social science inquiry into a non-alienating practice, one in which I (as researcher) do not need to suppress my own subjectivity, where I can become more attuned to the subjectively felt experiences of others, where I am free to reflect on the consequences of my work, not only for others but also for myself, and where all parts of myself – emotional, spiritual, intellectual, embodied, and moral – can be voiced and integrated into my work. (p. 53)

In the last Synthesis stage, much like Bochner suggests for autoethnography, we seek to reflect on consequences and not submerge the subjective experience our day-to-day practices. Librarianship is its own form of social science whose inquiry is concerning how people interact, organize, and engage with information, texts, and books but rarely does it ask librarians to inquire about their own interactions and practice. Bochner (2013) sees autoethnography as a rallying point for making the human sciences more human (p. 53). Autoethnography, and the other associated reflective efforts folded into this *currere* project, allow for librarianship to put the “human” back into its endeavors especially in ways librarians embody librarianship’s values, principles, and ethics. A Synthesis comprised of multiple reflections offers the opportunity to engage our experiences from various vantage points. Grumet (1991) suggests that reflection is not complete until those composing the reflection also engage with its interpretation: “When we work with life history, the autobiographical act is not complete until the writer of the story becomes its reader and the temporal fissure that has opened between the writing and the reading invites negation as well affirmation” (p. 73). Grumet (1991) further explains that: “Multiple narratives make it possible for us to go beyond and around the text, to research it without accusing it of false consciousness, on one hand, or succumbing to its rationale, on the other” (p. 75). As such, by interweaving these multiple narratives, the Synthesis piece was the most significant reflection for analysis in the dissertation because it embodied not only the participant’s reflections on librarianship but also the interpretation of librarianship and its meaning.

Peer Performance of Synthesis

As an addendum to the Synthesis reflection, this study's *currere* curriculum required participants to present, perform, or make public in some form a representation of their final Synthesis experience to their cohort peers. Having personally gone through a *currere* process that included a peer presentation component (Stoddart, 2010), this researcher found this is an important means to not only affirm the findings in the Synthesis stage but also bring the results into the real world – moving the private reflection to public. In so doing, this public performance made the Synthesis experience an actionable form of evidence for future direction or change. Grumet (1991) concurs on the importance of ultimately sharing reflections. “Multiple texts and multiple interpreters bring the presentation of personal knowledge out of the whispered confidences of the analytic dyad, complicit couple, sadomasochistic duo, and into a community of people who share a world” (p. 76). For this dissertation project, participants were required to share with cohort peers a presentation or performance of their Synthesis document that was approximately 10 minutes in length.

Follow-Up Survey

Approximately one month after the final participant presentations, a follow-up survey was sent to cohort members (Appendix D). The survey responses were anonymous for purposes of confidentiality and hopefully to assist in gathering honest feedback. The first block of survey questions inquired about tenure status, career length, and stage of library career. The second series of questions were open-ended and asked:

What, if anything, has changed in how you approach your work in libraries as a result of going through this reflective process? What impact might this reflective process have had on your practice of librarianship?

and:

What are some actionable takeaways from this reflective experience? What will you emphasize, focus on, or change?

These questions were intended to for the participants to reflect on the overall experience of going through the *currere* reflective methodology.

The third set of questions was made up of two similar questions asking to select the top three words that described the cohort member's mindset about librarianship **prior** and then **after** going through the *currere* reflection process.

- Prior to *currere* word choices: *positive, negative, engaged, unengaged, focused, unfocused, aware, unaware, connected, unconnected, balanced, unbalanced, ambivalent, blocked, curious, thoughtful, tired, uncertain, frustrated, indifferent.*
- After *currere* word choices: *no change, inspired, passionate, rejuvenated, renewed, unblocked, positive, negative, engaged, unengaged, focused, unfocused, aware, unaware, connected, unconnected, balanced, unbalanced, ambivalent, blocked, curious, thoughtful, tired, uncertain, frustrated, indifferent.*

The word choices were randomized for each survey, so the instrument would not lead the respondents to answer in a particular manner. Respondents were also given the option to add their own words to both the pre- and post- *currere* word choices in case none of the provided words matched their experiences.

The concluding question was open-ended and was designed to have the cohort members sum up their values or philosophy of librarianship after going through the guided reflection. This question was:

During our meetings and writing, we spent a lot of time reflecting on the intersection of our personal lives and libraries. After going through all this reflection and writing, what would you say is your personal meaning of librarianship?

Analysis

A content analysis of participant Synthesis documents and other research materials was undertaken to identify themes regarding librarianship and personal professional experience. This content analysis seeks to inform the primary research question: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?*

Coding was from the “substantive” categorization described by Maxwell (2004) wherein codes are “primarily descriptive” that also includes “description of participants’ concepts and beliefs” (p. 97). These coded excerpts were then compared to values and topics found in library literature to inform the secondary research questions: *How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?* and *Are librarians’ personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?* The web-based qualitative analysis tool Dedoose (Dedoose.com) was used to aid in coding and grouping themes. A first pass was made of the Synthesis document for each cohort member coding writing excerpts for topics, themes or emotions. These codes were then

The follow-up survey results were analyzed using the tools available in the survey research tool Qualtrics (Qualtrics.com). These tools were mainly used to group answers by respondent and provide charts, tables, or graphs of responses.

Validity, Generalizability, and Other Concerns

When undertaking research, the researcher must acknowledge how the study’s methodology supports both the internal and external validity in its design. In terms of internal validity, the methodology must assure that the design is coherent, reliable, and

able to gather the intended evidence in a consistent manner. Externally, the methodology must support the idea that the results can be generalizable to others and that the methodology may be repeated elsewhere to achieve similar results.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that there is a tension within narrative inquiry (and thus perhaps also other reflective methodologies) that these efforts are not theoretical enough or they lack the capacity to contribute to or build theory. Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) point out that autoethnography's multiple modes of engagement also can point to a lack of "methodology clarity" (p. 64). Yet, instead of lamenting this possible methodology weakness, Anderson and Glass-Coffin frame this "methodological openness" as a virtue of autoethnography rather than an obstacle (p. 64). Anderson and Glass-Coffin consider these to be the strengths of autoethnography:

- Methodological openness
- Methodological range of materials from "impressionistic" to "objective"
- Methodological description often blended within the narrative itself
- Texts -- outputs of the methodology do not conform to traditional social science texts such as academic articles (pp. 64-65).

These characteristics of autoethnography are also found within the process of *currere*, which also embraces the idea of "methodological openness" in the open manner it guides the processes, outputs, and interpretation of reflection.

While "methodological openness" might be a desired aspect of this process that is not to convey that validity is not an ongoing concern. Kohler Riessman (2008) talks of two types of validity that are inherent in narrative inquiry and reflection. "When applied to narrative projects, two levels of validity are important – the story told by a research participant and the validity of the analysis, or the story told by the researcher" (Kohler

Riessman, 2008, p. 184). In the case of this *currere* project of leading a cohort through critical reflection exercises, the validity of the stories told by the participants were judged, interpreted, and valued by the cohort members themselves. The second type of validity suggested by Kohler Riessman, the story told by the researcher, was demonstrated in the content analysis undertaken of the Synthesis documents for LIS themes. Kohler Riessman (2008) reminds us that a research project is situated and its validity should be “assessed within the situated perspective and the traditions that frame it” (p. 185). Brophy (2009) suggests a number of strategies to strengthen the validity of qualitative narrative research. These situated techniques may be useful in narrative and critical reflection methodologies such as *currere* and are as follows:

- Triangulation
- Negative Case Analysis
- Peer Group Debriefing
- Participant Checking
- Cumulative Validation
- Identification and Analysis of outliers and individual unexpected results
- Audit Trail

In designing this dissertation project as a curriculum, the hope was to integrate many of these validity strategies within *currere* process. The table below outlines how the curriculum design addresses each validation strategy suggested by Brophy (2009).

Table 3.2 Validation Strategies

| Validation Strategy | Dissertation Project Strategies |
|----------------------------|--|
| Triangulation | Creating multiple forms of evidence through <i>currere</i> methodology and reflection exercises allow for triangulation of themes within Synthesis document. |
| Negative Case Analysis | Collecting narratives from a cohort to see if librarianship |

| | |
|--|--|
| | experiences are similar or vary. If there is not a general commonality of experiences, that is something to examine further. |
| Peer Group Debriefing | Creating a librarian cohort to share reflections. Requiring a presentation of Synthesis document to peers in cohort. |
| Participant Checking | Including the cohort as readers of the dissertation during submission process. |
| Cumulative Validation | Comparing Synthesis reflection to values and themes of librarianship identified in the literature. |
| Identification/Analysis of Outliers/Unexpected Results | Acknowledging outliers from both the cohort participants and the cumulative validation process as a means for discussion. |
| Audit Trail | Creating a structure by way of the <i>currere</i> curriculum to document the creation and gathering reflection evidence. |

Additionally, the curriculum incorporates three strategies identified in the research literature that are intended to strengthen the validity, quality, and inquiry surrounding reflection and narrative. These strategies are *coherence* (Agar & Hobbs, 1982; Kohler Riessman, 2008), *resonance* (Conle, 1996), and *wakefulness* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These concepts were discussed with cohort participants throughout the twelve-week curriculum as they worked through the *currere* process. The intent was for both the researcher and research participants to incorporate the strategies of *coherence*, *resonance*, and *wakefulness* into their reflective and inquiry processes.

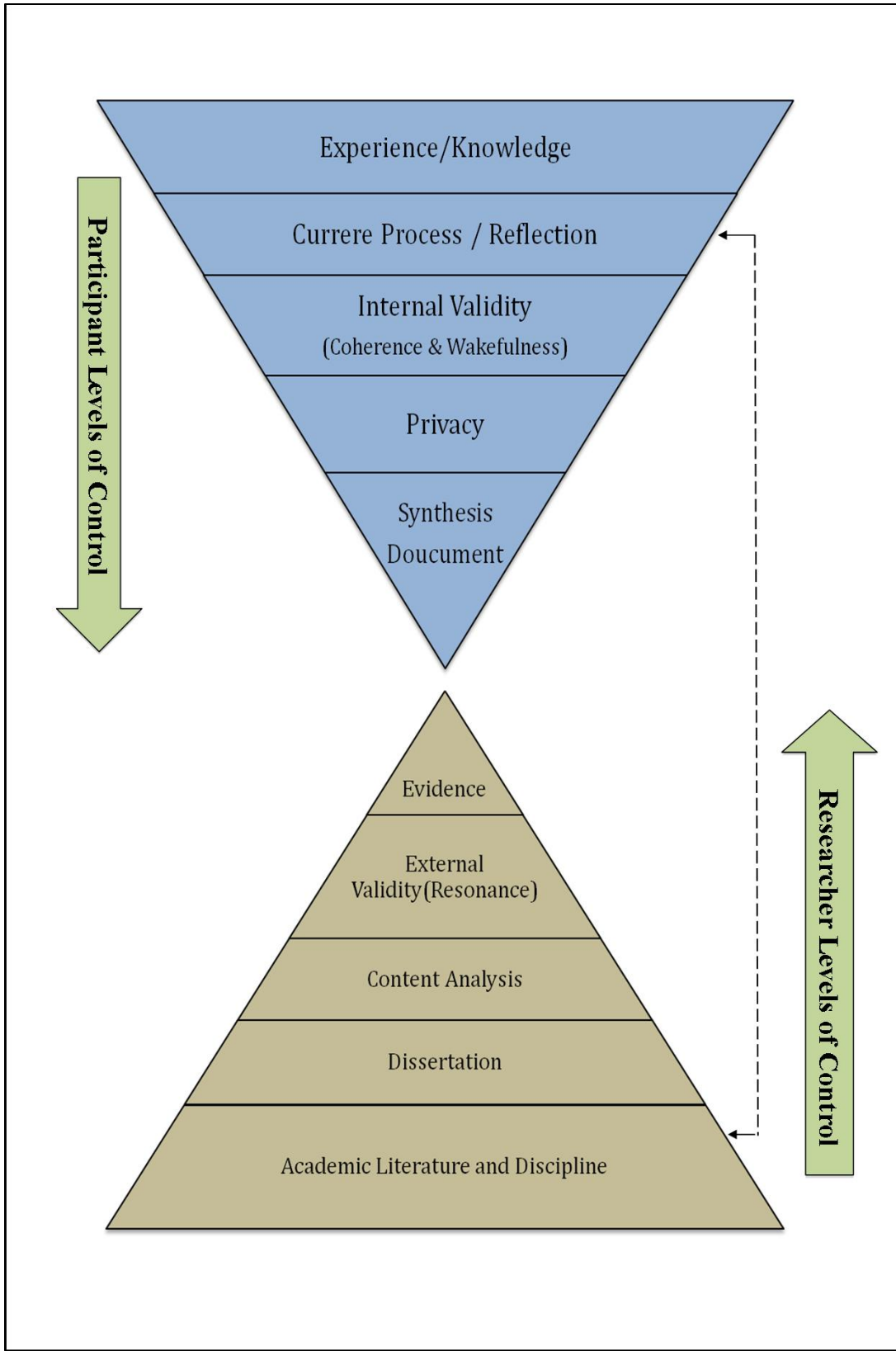


Figure 4 Levels of Control

Coherence

Coherence, and its opposite concept incoherence, are the ways a narrative or story hangs together to communicate, persuade, and demonstrate trustworthiness (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 189). Often in an objective analysis of texts, one would look to how this work corresponds to known facts as a means to demonstrate trustworthiness and thus strengthen its ability to persuade. Kohler Riessman (2008) posits that:

... the correspondence of reported events in a personal narrative with other kinds of evidence is not as relevant as in realist tales, sometimes even besides the point. Narrative scholars would generally agree that a narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in similar way. (p. 187)

Rather than corresponding to objective facts and events, Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests that narratives should strive to be coherent in their structure and reception. It is through *coherence* that persuasion can be achieved. Kohler and Riessman propose asking these questions related to narrative in order to build *coherence* within its text.

- Do episodes of a life story hang together?
- Are sections of a theoretical argument linked and consistent?
- Are there major gaps or inconsistencies?
- Is the interpreter's analytic account persuasive? (p. 189)

Agar and Hobbs (1982) propose three types of *coherence* when evaluating ethnographic texts. *Global*, which involves how well the intended "plan" or purpose of the text is executed. In essence, does the plot of the narrative make sense given its topic or purpose? The second, *Local*, is how well the context is defined and elaborated upon. Much like how the consistency of the setting and place of a story influence its believability. "Here the coherence in the text is a reflection of coherence in the world"

(Agar & Hobbs, 1982, p. 6). The final type of coherence identified by Agar and Hobbs is *Themal*, which simply are the ongoing and recurrent themes found within a text. Taken as a whole, the *Global*, *Local*, and *Themal* as forms of narrative *coherence* serve to articulate the fidelity of the overall narrative plot, context, and content.

While consistency is a desired outcome, it is also not necessarily the only intended outcome of reflective practices. Inconsistency and incoherence inhabit the opposite end of the *coherence* continuum, and if acknowledged in the narrative inquiry are appropriate ways to support the overall validity of the research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn of “unintentional and intentional deceptions” generated through narrative inquiry by falsehood or fiction (p. 10). In particular, Connelly and Clandinin worry about “the Hollywood ending” wherein everything turns out positively or has a storybook resolution in narrative texts, when in fact this may not be the case. Unresolved gaps, dissonance, and incoherence are legitimate interpretations of reflection and come to light when viewing a text through the lens of *coherence*. Kohler Riessman (2008) points to this as a possible outcome.

At another level, validity can be strengthened if the analytic story the investigator constructs links pieces of data and renders them meaningful and coherent theoretically. Instead of trying to find coherence and factuality in individual’s stories, investigators might search for coexistent realities – selves and communities that are pulling together and pulling apart at the same time... Making sense analytically of both convergence and divergence would support trustworthiness. (p. 191)

Coherence provides a tool to aid in bolstering the internal validity of the cohort reflections, while at the same time serving to strengthen the external validity of the Synthesis reflections within the dissertation in comparison to library literature.

Resonance

Currere is an attempt to explore the connections and disconnections between life stories and reflection. Conle (1996) terms these intersections of life stories and experiences as *resonance*. The process of reflection generates additional stories both in the person reflecting and those that are granted access to these reflections. These stories are “narratively connected” and serve to expand the impact of the story much like the ripples in a pond. These ripples are not duplicates, replications, or mirrors of the exact experience but shared intersections of understanding. “Resonance does not need identical elements. As in the resonance of physics, proximity and internal responsiveness are most important” (Conle, 1996, p. 304). Additionally, Conle reminds us, “(e)ach responding set differed slightly from the other, for in each there were also components that were present in others” (p. 304). In sharing products of reflection, the goal is not to generalize a replicable experience but to build pathways to shared knowledge, experiences, or feelings. The proximity and internal responsiveness to a reflection, this *resonance*, provide checkpoints for truthfulness.

Kohler Riessman (2008) reminds the researcher that as storytellers our narratives, reflections, and other analytic stories must interact with an audience (p. 184). That audience could be ourselves as we read our own narrative reflections, but also could be the audience with whom we share our reflective experiences. *Resonance* advocates for interaction with these texts on our own terms. The only required lens, framework, or methodology to engage with a reflection is our own experience and life story. In fact, Conle (1996) suggests this lack of a formal inquiry framework is appropriate in order to engage with a narrative across all cognitive levels.

If a story is used as a sense-making tool, it leaves us myriad occasions for resonance. Associations can be made through its images, its mood, its moral associations, and more. If a list of propositions is presented to us, on the other hand, it leaves primarily possibilities for cognitive connections only. The resonance process is complex and covers a whole range of cognitive and non-cognitive elements. (Conle, 1996, pp. 313-314)

It is these “associations” which aid in making products of reflection generalizable into other situations. This is not a simple process of presenting objective facts, outcomes, or data but a process of engaging the lived experience of others. Unlike remaining objective and unemotional, critical reflection requires one to create opportunities of both emotion and subjectivity not only for one’s self, but for others. As Conle (1996) found,“(n)o two experiences that connected in this way were exactly alike, but the emotional connections seemed to be able to bridge differences and create similarities. For this bridging effect, it is of course essential that experiential stories be shared” (p. 305). To facilitate this sharing and bridging, the reflections in this dissertation project were undertaken as a cohort. However, as reflection is a personal process, the degree to which the participant decided to share reflective evidence was controlled by each participant (see Privacy section). *Resonance* offers a conceptual device to test the validity of the reflective practice of cohort participants. Cohort members were able to, and encouraged to, test the *resonance* of the insights with their peers through class discussion, sharing of reflective writing, and the Synthesis presentation. Additional *resonance* opportunities were created through the dissertation examination of the final Synthesis documents created by the curriculum cohort.

Wakefulness

The final conceptual device that was shared with cohort members was the idea of *wakefulness* proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In essence, this is the idea of

being self-aware and alert about reflective practices, uses, conflicts, and application.

Wakefulness acknowledges the fact that we make conscious choices in the way we construct, interpret, and tell our life stories. As authors, we have the ability to self-edit and self-critique; inflate and conceal; selectively share and selectively remember. Our choices are deliberate and these decisions need to be documented and accounted for in making our reflective practices legitimate, valid, and worthwhile. Choices are purposeful and contribute to the outcomes and reception of the narratives and reflections we create. “Narrative inquirers help their readers by self-consciously discussing the selections made, the possible alternative stories, and other limitations seen from the vantage point of ‘I, the critic’” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 182). Kohler Riessman (2008) concurs regarding the need to make “modes of inquiry explicit” in order to insure validity – in essence how a researcher “moved from a piece of evidence... to a theoretical formulation” (p. 186). In short, when immersed within the *currere* and reflective practice, we need to be aware of others as much as ourselves. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) frame *wakefulness* in this manner:

“We need to find ways of being aware of what those on either side of the reductionistic or formalistic boundaries might think or say of our work, and we need to be alert and aware of the contexts for our work, and we need to be alert and aware of questions about field texts and research texts from the point of view of the three-dimensional inquiry space. We call this awareness *wakefulness*.” (p. 182).

Kohler Riessman (2008) argues that social science researchers are required to make arguments about their research to “persuade audiences about the trustworthiness of their data and interpretations”... and to achieve this, researchers need to thoroughly document that they “followed a methodological path, guided by ethical considerations

and theory, to story their findings” (p. 186). This thoroughness and awareness of our reflective practice is *wakefulness*.

Within the *currere* curriculum, the researcher tasked the cohort members to remain conscious and alert; to engage their reflective texts on both a personal level and a social one, and to consider the choices made in constructing, sharing, and interpreting the *currere* reflective evidence. In so doing, it was hoped that this self-awareness would contribute to the overall quality and validity of each reflection. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit, this process of *wakefulness* will yield richer, thicker, and more impactful texts.

A language of wakefulness allows us to proceed forward with a constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters. This wakefulness is best fostered in response to communities where diversity is cherished, where wondering and other possibilities is encouraged. (p. 182)



Figure 5 Wakefulness, Resonance, Coherence

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The *currere* reflection curriculum, coding project, and follow-up survey were designed to gather data to support the central research question: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?* The four *currere* reflection prompts and follow-up survey were intended to elicit participant responses that might inform these two research sub-questions:

1. How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?
2. Are librarians' personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?

The findings of the *currere* curriculum, reflection evidence analysis, and follow-up survey are detailed in the following sections.

Constraints: Self-Reported Data and Group Dynamics

This study relied on self-reported data. As previously mentioned, in leveling the power dynamics between researcher and participant, as well as co-worker and colleague, each cohort member retained the right to reveal or not reveal as much as they felt comfortable. Participants were free to exercise this power whenever they felt uncomfortable or unsure.

As the researcher, I know of at least two instances where librarians were uncomfortable sharing reflections or thoughts. These instances may have impacted what was ultimately shared with the researcher. One cohort member shared privately with the researcher that she was uneasy revealing personal information within the group meetings

and was considering dropping out altogether. Thankfully, this cohort member chose not to drop out of the study. Another librarian wrote in her Synthesis document that she was “censoring” herself as she wrote the reflection as she found it very emotional and did not feel comfortable sharing such information with her colleagues. Such issues of discomfort and trust within the study cohort must be taken into account regarding the depth and quality of the reflective writing shared with the researcher.

Some of these concerns can be attributed to using participants from the same library where previous workplace trust issues might carry over into the research study. These issues can also be attributed to the failure in the research design to adequately build trust within the cohort to overcome workplace dynamics.

At some level, personal reflection is always going to have an element of censorship and discomfort. That the cohort members were experiencing it and sharing it with the researcher indicates some trust-building did occur between the researcher and study participants. However, in the future, a study that utilizes more time and emphasizes building trust between cohort members might yield better reflections for analysis.

Observations on the Twelve-Week Curriculum

The reflective curriculum was designed to include twelve one-hour sessions over a twelve-week period. These sessions allowed for participants to ease into taking a reflective stance in their writing, as well as helped build trust between the cohort and the researcher. The sessions were also meant for participants to experiment with different writing styles, find their reflective voice, and have the opportunity to compose multiple drafts of various reflections. However, due to various professional and work obligations by both the participants and the researcher, the cohort met in-person for nine meetings

with the three remaining sessions designated as writing time. Not meeting in person for every single session did not take away from the research study, as reflection can occur both within formal and informal settings.

The curriculum was built to introduce reflection as a concept over the first three weeks. This warm-up was intended for participants to explore the differences between their professional academic writing and the various styles of reflective writing. The researcher continually emphasized that there were no “wrong” reflections throughout every meeting, which sometimes seemed hard for some cohort members to take to heart with their writing. Although participants were unsure about the overall process during the reflection warm-up sessions, they were eager to undertake writing assignments and discuss their thoughts. One homework assignment of particular note was to interview a fellow cohort member. The assignment was open-ended about how to accomplish the interview. This resulted in different interpretations of the assignment, questions asked, and other parameters. For example, Dora recorded her interview while others did not. This ambiguity was not intended by the researcher, but led to an interesting discussion of who ultimately “owns” the content of the interview and how people are represented when something is written down, recorded, or otherwise captured. The group settled into a familiar rhythm over the first few weeks of discussing readings, in-class reflections, and overall conversation about reflection. This dynamic carried over into the other meeting periods and created a sense of familiarity by removing some cohort anxiety about participant expectations for the study.

The reading that inspired the most discussion was Joan Didion’s (2008) essay *On Keeping a Notebook*. This work was introduced as a model for how one might

incorporate memories, diaries, and other personal evidence into their reflections. Cohort members enjoyed this essay but were daunted by Didion's prose.

In general, most of the readings were intended to provide background information that participants could follow up with if needed. This was a direct result of the researcher's personal experience with the *currere* process, as the reflective writing process can sometimes seem like a vague or ambiguous undertaking, a reference can provide guidance. This ambiguity is an intentional characteristic in reflection, as discovery, meaning-making, and self-analysis are often a struggle filled with uncertainty and anxiety. However, offering a few guideposts through recommended readings can make the *currere* pilgrimage a bit more navigable. Another touchstone provided by the researcher was sharing his own *currere* (Stoddart, 2010) which the cohort read. This personal bit of writing was well-received, but much like the Didion piece, participants were unsure about the quality of their own reflective pieces. This was understandable, as the cohort undertook their *currere* as volunteers with low-risk stakes, unlike Didion who is a professional author, and the researcher whose *currere* was intended as a final assignment for a graduate level class.

Three additional readings not listed in the original curriculum were suggested by the researcher. First was Schroeder's (2014) collections of interviews about librarianship called *Critical journeys: How 14 librarians came to embrace critical practice*. This was introduced as a way to demonstrate thoughtfulness and critical examination of professional careers in librarianship. Two other books, *The folded clock: A diary* by Julavits (2015) and Manguso's (2015) *Ongoingness: The end of a diary* were suggested as examples of how the authors used their personal diaries as evidence, as well as how

they experimented with form and temporal elements. The intention was for these works to inspire the cohort members to experiment with their writing, which was well received.

In addition to discussing the suggested readings during the meetings, time was also given to reflective writing by the participants. The curriculum included suggested reflective writing prompts, but the researcher was open to suggestions from the participants. A list of reflection prompts is below:

- Draw the intersection of you and librarianship
- What was your last “a-ha” moment?
- What did you do this last weekend?
- What is wakefulness?
- What do you leave at the door when you come to work?
- What are your personal values? What are your professional values?
- What would you tell your 21-year-old self?
- What have you learned so far about reflection?
- What was the significance of your last epiphany?

These in-person reflections proved quite valuable to setting the stage for deeper reflective writing by the cohort members. For example, Evelyn observed an amazing breakthrough when addressing “What would you tell your 21-year-old self?” which seemed to be the turning point for her buying into the reflective process and *currere* methodology.

The majority of the sessions included discussion about the readings, cohort member writings, and study concepts such as coherence, resonance, and wakefulness. At first, these discussions were lively as participants figured out their place within the cohort group. However, as the participants moved through the curriculum, many members became more reserved, not speaking or sharing insights during group discussion. Some of these reservations had to do with the personal nature of some the reflections, which was

understandable as participants began to reflect more deeply and emotionally about their experiences. However, some of the reservation amongst cohort members could have been attributed to trust dynamics within the group. The researcher spoke with one cohort member that had considered removing herself from the discussion sessions, as she was uncomfortable sharing in the group setting. The discomfort was associated more with having to work closely with cohort members after the study ended. The researcher assured the participant that sharing during group discussions was voluntary and instead she could capture her thoughts in her reflections that would be shared with the researcher. This was an acceptable compromise for the participant and she continued with the study.

Despite these wrinkles from group dynamics, the participants remained enthusiastic and engaged throughout the *currere* curriculum process. The face-to-face meetings proved informative for cohort members and provided a forum to ask questions and practice reflective writing. The researcher built rapport with each cohort member, modeled trustworthy behavior, and guided participants through the four-step *currere* process. Overall, the curriculum was successful in introducing the concepts of critical reflection and the *currere* methodology.

The final two weeks were set aside for the study participants to give a presentation to their fellow cohort members about the *currere* experience and final Synthesis reflection. The prompt for this presentation was to: *Develop a 10-minute presentation, performance, public display, etc. that is inspired by this synthesis document. This will serve to translate your synthesis experience and make it public.* These presentations ranged from a poster, to a video, and to various slideshows using presentation software.

Synthesis Reflection Coding

The final cohort members' Synthesis reflections were coded for themes using the online-based Dedoose software. These themes were analyzed for similarity and disparity within the cohort. Additional analysis took place for themes potentially found within library literature. Particular attention was paid to themes that informed the study's main research question: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as *currere*, reveal about librarianship?* Additional evidence that supported the study's secondary research questions were noted:

1. How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?
2. Are librarians' personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?

While the peer presentations about their *currere* experience were available as a possible dataset for examination, the researcher chose not to include them in this study's analysis. This exclusion was due to the reserved nature of the presentations that were observed by the researcher, as well as the personal communication with a few cohort members about being uncomfortable in sharing their experience. Without the peer presentations, this left the six Synthesis reflections as the main body of evidence to analyze.

There were 129 different codes applied to 133 excerpts in the six Synthesis documents. A complete list of codes is provided in Appendix C. Codes were collapsed into similar categories resulting in child codes nesting under parent codes. For example, the codes *Bad Attitude*, *Frustration*, *No Emotion* were gathered under the parent code *Attitude/Feelings*. This process resulted in 59 total parent codes. The final Synthesis

document codes are shown in the word cloud below (see Figure 6). The larger the font in the word cloud the more frequent the code was applied to Synthesis reflection excerpts.



Figure 6 Code Word Cloud

After the first round of coding, only a handful of distinct and similar themes were uncovered. These themes included excerpts about Books, Family, Leaving Librarianship, and Early Library Memories. These coded themes and associated excerpts did not serve to adequately inform the study's research questions, tie strongly to the library literature, or afford a clear window into the cohort member's personal library values or library philosophy. This may be due to study participants being given license to interpret the final reflection prompt as they saw fit to their life experience. The Synthesis reflection prompt asked cohort members *to articulate your relationship with libraries and any outcomes, boundaries, values, philosophy, direction, inconsistencies, etc. that you feel define this landscape for you*. Cohort members were allowed to focus their final reflections in any manner they deemed meaningful. This resulted in a wide-ranging reporting of experiences across the six cohort members. Some cohort members chose to

concentrate their final Synthesis reflections on early professional library-related experiences (Fran), while others examined the role family or family members played in shaping their library identity (Becca / Dora). Others wrote about their current frustration or ambivalence toward the profession of librarianship (Agatha / Carol).

As the researcher had permission to analyze additional reflection material generated in the study, a handful of these supplementary reflections were examined and coded as a possible research data set that might have offered additional insight or provide additional focus for the study. This new brief analysis did not uncover any additional themes but served to support the findings found in the original examination of each cohort member's Synthesis reflection documents. This is not surprising, as the Synthesis reflections are designed in the *currere* methodology to be a self-analysis and amalgamation of the previously generated reflection materials. Thus, many of the themes found in the earlier reflections should have been expected to reappear in the final Synthesis stage for each cohort member. As further analysis of the earlier cohort member reflections did not yield deeper understanding of the final Synthesis writings, a different approach was taken. The researcher sent a follow-up survey approximately one month after the *currere* curriculum ended. The survey was intended to capture cohort member's affective state of mind and attitude while participating in the study.

Survey Pre- and Post-*Currere* Responses

The survey results added an important layer to this study (see Appendix D). The survey asked specifically about each cohort member's personal meaning of librarianship as means to address the secondary research questions:

1. How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?

2. Are librarians' personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?

The responses to the survey were surprising and insightful. In particular, the results of survey questions 7 and 8, that asked cohort members to associate words to the pre-and post-*currere* mindset toward librarianship, suggested themes to focus on in coded Synthesis reflections based on the frequency of responses (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Post-Currere Survey Word Associations

| Number of Survey Responses | Pre-Currere Mindset | Post-Currere Mindset |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 3 | Ambivalent; Tired | Renewed; Thoughtful |
| 2 | Frustrated; Blocked | Unblocked; Rejuvenated; Aware; |
| 1 | Unfocused; Engaged; Unconnected; Thoughtful; Indifferent; Uncertain; Outmoded; Biding Time | Positive, Curious; Engaged; Focused; Optimistic; Moving Forward |

It was apparent that there was a shared dichotomy of experience pre- and post-*currere* for the cohort members. Prior to the *currere* experience, cohort members displayed a negative mindset toward librarianship by associating with the words *ambivalent*, *tired*, *frustrated*, and *blocked*. Cohort members even suggested additional terms such as *biding time* and *outmoded*. These attitudes make sense, as most cohort members discussed similar sentiments in the first group meeting. For example, Becca indicated she felt “stuck” and Dora stated she was “floundering” during introductions at our first cohort meeting.

More positively, after completing the *currere* reflection curriculum, all cohort members indicated a new favorable mindset toward librarianship. Cohort members most

identified with the words *renewed, thoughtful, aware, unblocked, and rejuvenated*.

Cohort members added the words *moving forward* and *optimistic*.

The results of the survey indicated that the experience of reflection during the *currere* curriculum was just as important, if not more important, than the content of the final Synthesis reflective pieces. This added an interesting wrinkle to the study, as it became clear that the researcher needed to focus more intently on examining the process of the reflection experience rather than overanalyzing the reflective writing content. That is not to say that the themes discovered in the reflective writing are not worthwhile. To the contrary, the themes uncovered in the final Synthesis support the findings of the survey. These themes of Ambivalent and Renewed are explored further below.

Ambivalent, Tired, Frustrated, and Blocked

All of the study participants indicated some ambivalence or frustration toward librarianship prior to participating in this study. These feelings are consistent with the content of the Synthesis reflections that were analyzed for themes, as well as the results of the post-*currere* survey. For example, Fran noted an uncomfortable ambivalence toward librarianship that she struggled to understand.

This initial lack of understanding and reality about libraries and work, this inability to realize the meaning of what a job in a library would really be like, this ambivalence about a library career when I valued libraries so much — what does this inconsistency mean? (Fran, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Dora framed the outcomes from her current state of mind as being *burned out, treading water, and aspirational*. She saw it as a “struggle” to reveal this. Another librarian also echoed this internal emotional conflict in her reflective writing saying, “Thinking about my future in libraries makes me angry. Admitting that makes me angry.

I have been in a crisis of sorts for years now...” Dora picked up this thread of dissatisfaction and saw *currere* as an outlet to explore this emotional landscape.

I am a mid-career librarian, and I’ve been increasingly feeling unsure about who I was as a librarian, and what I should be doing – especially given the landscape of changes, tensions, and breaking-down that I see around me in the field of librarianship. I had been feeling increasingly dissatisfied with my career and my day-to-day work, but was very worried that my inherent laziness would prevent me from doing anything about it. Participating in *Currere* might give me a chance to work through some of this, so I decided to volunteer as a participant. (Dora, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Much like Dora, Agatha also noted a “breaking-down” in the profession but framed this more as a form of stagnation or that librarianship is “spinning wheels” without much foresight.

In libraries, we talk a lot about not re-inventing the wheel as we work in the present tense. We know about this as a profession because we keep trying to solve the same problems over and over. Over the past years, as we’ve faced new technologies, such as the trend toward discovery systems, it dawned on me that people were saying the same things that I heard people saying back when the journal databases were coming available for end-user searching. I was a new librarian at that point and was not invested in performing searches for patrons. It wasn’t that mediated searching wouldn’t have been a great way to do business. It was just luck of the chronological draw that I never got to do it that way. Teaching people how to construct complex searches in the old platforms like Silver Platter was one of my original jobs, and I enjoyed doing it. (Agatha, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Carol also noted a sense of rigidity within librarianship and did not see much opportunity for change in her organization.

The lines are drawn. Every constituency has been claimed. I’m not a subject specialist. All of the student organizations, campus centers have been claimed by other librarians. When I go away, I’ll feel free of a lot of those constraints. I want to focus on doing things and chuck all of the lines and borders away. I want to do some kind of field research librarian thing. (Carol, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Carol found this rigidity of “lines and borders” in the library constraining on both her professional and personal identity.

I don't feel I have that quality of interactions around here. It's an existential thing. Sometimes I feel stuck in the structures that define who I am by where I work, what my job position is, what I've done in the past, and how people have known me through the years. (Carol, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Other cohort members felt this constraint of feeling stuck in their professional roles. Agatha even went so far as to plan a few exit strategies from librarianship as a result.

I also explored other graduate programs that I could parlay into work in other types of cultural or educational institutions, breaking away from administration by moving to an entirely different field of curation, such as history, art history, or textiles. (Agatha, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Evelyn was worried that her exit strategy of retirement might be further away than she desired and this added to her own frustration.

I have to admit now that I was also harboring a bad attitude about work. At some point in the last few years, I started to seriously think about retirement and whether I could ever afford to retire. I had recently become more involved in my elderly parents' care and realized how expensive assisted living or a caretaker could be. At the same time, I started to hear and read the news that many of the baby boom generation could and would live to be nearly 100. Again, I asked myself if I could afford to retire or would I have to keep working until I physically couldn't any longer. It was not a pleasant prospect, to be on the Bob Dylan Retirement Plan (74 years old and still working). There were just a lot of things adding up to create a general state of grouchiness. (Evelyn, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Agatha concurred, as finances were indeed an issue to her negativity as she counted the days until she was eligible for loan forgiveness from the federal government.

I want to plan concretely but because the end game involves a federal government program, I am cautious, and I don't think that's misguided. If I was able to use my archival training, if I was able to move out of administration, I could imagine myself having a future in libraries. If I were to pursue a doctorate, I can imagine

teaching the history of libraries, history of books, and such. Neither of these pursuits seems particularly practical at this juncture, due to finances, logistics, and such. But 2017 is coming soon, getting closer and closer all the time, and as Deborah Harry once sang, dreaming is free. (Agatha, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Debt and money worries remained a theme as Becca noted in her reflection.

My pre-professional life racked up quite a bit of debt, and my professional life has been spent paying that debt down as best as I can... I am not complaining about my salary, but I am aware that it doesn't provide the same levels of safety and opportunity as I see in the lives of friends who are faculty in other departments and paid on a different scale. I am aware that more money would make it easier to balance parenting and work. I live in a society where the economy is a constant worry, and I work in a profession where funding both limits us and drives us to innovate. I think my workplace and my profession have done a very good job innovating, but I wonder (more often than I should) what it would be like to innovate because of an excess of funds instead of a deficit. (Becca, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Yet Agatha acknowledged that while debt might be a job-related frustration, it is also the work itself of librarianship that contributes to her negativity.

Put another way, I invested a good deal of cash into another way of being stuck. I had thought about leaving the library field for several years prior, first spending time exploring MBA programs. I saw this as a potential avenue to receiving similar pay for similar work in a different arena, but realized it was really the work that was the problem, regardless of the arena. (Agatha, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Taken as a whole, this group of librarians are worried about debt, not seeing much opportunity in the profession to change their status, or a profession unable to reimagine itself. As a result, these librarians feel "stuck" in a profession with limited satisfactory exit strategies. All of this led to overall cohort member feelings of being *frustrated*, *blocked*, *tired* and *ambivalent* toward the profession that were revealed in the survey. It is palpable in these reflection excerpts that these librarians felt something needs to change either in the profession that would allow some mobility or within their own attitudes and

beliefs. The results of the post-*currere* survey suggest that a structured reflection methodology such as *currere* might offer a potential avenue for change.

Renewed and Thoughtful

The post-*currere* survey revealed a sea change in cohort member's attitudes toward librarianship after completing the *currere* reflection curriculum. Prior to participating the study, participants felt blocked, stuck, and generally negative toward their profession and librarianship. After spending time reflecting and writing during the *currere* curriculum, and returning to their jobs, the cohort members responded they associated with the terms *renewed*, *thoughtful*, *aware*, *unblocked*, *rejuvenated*, *moving forward* and *optimistic*. This sense of renewal is mainly supported by results in the survey, and not as much in the *currere*-generated reflection documents. However, there are a few instances where this positive light does shine through in the Synthesis reflections. For example, Dora stated:

One *currere* exercise that we did over the spring was to write about our expectations of our future in libraries. The only way I could process this was to actually look briefly at three possible futures: Burned Out; Treading Water; and Aspirational (I considered doing a "Choose Your Own Adventure" heuristic for this, but decided not to in the interest of time, but it still calls to me...). These were very difficult to write, and I'm not going to go into much more detail in this document except to say that the Aspirational one was the only direction I really wanted to pursue! This led me to pursue a policy of looking for new horizons and saying Yes for a while, to see where it would get me. I'm kind of excited about this. (Dora, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Evelyn, also found some guidance in the reflective curriculum. She described having an "epiphany" during one of the reflection exercises that was a turning point to change her attitude from positive to negative. She summarized this in her Synthesis document.

I think now if I had known libraries were in my future, I might have gone to library school... and everything would now be different. But I didn't and it isn't. But, here's the thing...working in libraries and being a librarian is exactly what I want to do. I love my job and I love being a librarian. I can't imagine what it would be like to not be a librarian. Instead of counting the days to retirement, I realized that I should be enjoying every day, doing what I love to do. If that is wakefulness, then I think I found it. I hope I have learned to be more in the moment and take everything from that moment. It was something of an epiphany and truly turned my attitude about work around. (Evelyn, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

A question on the survey asked, *What, if anything, has changed in how you approach your work in libraries as a result of going through this reflective process?*

What impact might this reflective process have had on your practice of librarianship?

There were a wide variety of positive answers associated with this particular question that speak to the sense of renewal and thoughtfulness experienced as a result of journeying through the structured reflection curriculum. The responses to the survey were anonymous, so there are no attributions to specific cohort members in the quotes below.

I think I've become more experimental in what I do. Perhaps some of this was starting already before the class, but going through the writing exercises has helped me feel that I can figure out what I want to do, and find a way to do it. I feel like I got a lot of the thinking out of the way, and now I'm looking at ways to do what I want. This means I'm learning new technology, and am determined to use it as an expression of my professional ideals.

After going through the reflective process, I have changed my attitude about my work. I am more positive about my job and my work. I have more energy when I am at work because I have a more positive attitude about it. I love my job - the reflective process helped me realize that.

I'm approaching my work with a longer perspective in mind. I think about how who I was in my first job as a librarian and the changes I've experienced. I'm thinking about the parts of my job that still compel me to be invested and doing my best.

I'm spending more time thinking about what I want to do going forward. Thinking about my career reflectively made me realize that if I wanted to change anything, I needed to do it now and I needed to be serious about it, so I'm working (it's a process) on looking for and being open to new opportunities to carve out some new turf for myself in terms of interests and activities. I'm already starting to see a

difference in what I am doing and how I think of myself as an academic (mid-career) librarian.

I am more cognizant of how my "outside the libraries" life affects my librarianship, and vice versa. I think the reflective process has also helped me see that I had been focusing quite narrowly on the present in my work life. The reflective process has helped me see past the present and situate my current work in the context of past work and experiences and also of future aspirations and expectations.

I have reached a new level of understanding with myself, about myself. The experience re-invigorated some scholarly interests of mine as well. Not sure what this will mean for my practice of librarianship, but I feel a bit more sane around the edges.

Findings Summary

The central research question of this study was: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?* This study found that a critical reflection methodology, such as *currere*, may offer positive outcomes to mid-career librarians experiencing symptoms of burnout.

As day-to-day practice was not specifically addressed in most of the Synthesis reflections composed by the study participants, the secondary research question of: *How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?*, was not adequately answered. However, the coding of the Synthesis reflections revealed that areas of life experience, such as personal finances and family, remained important concerns for cohort members that may carry over into the way librarians approach their jobs.

Finally, the secondary research question of: *Are librarians' personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?*, was also not adequately addressed in the coded reflection evidence. Overall,

the cohort member's description of their application and definition of personal and professional values remained vague in the Synthesis reflections.

In summary, the study observed that critical reflection may impart a positive mindset toward librarianship for librarians feeling ambivalent about the profession. Evidence of the transformation was mainly reflected in the follow-up survey and not found as strongly in the content analysis of the written synthesis reflections. The overall results of the study suggest that critical reflection can make a positive contribution to the profession of academic librarianship.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Where this study started is not where the study ended up. The intended destination of uncovering librarian values and philosophy through a critical reflection curriculum was not reached... or at least not directly. This outcome is not a bad thing, as the journey the cohort librarians undertook in thinking deeply, bringing forth experiences, and reflecting on their own lives proved incredibly insightful to the librarians themselves. This reflective pilgrimage started from a place of negativity about librarianship and migrated to a space of positivity, direction, and thoughtfulness. A researcher could not ask for a better outcome than to have his/her study meaningfully change lives.

In the following sections, the starting place of negativity is discussed more fully in the context of professional burnout and exhaustion. The resulting positive mindset librarians exhibited after completing the *currere* experience is examined through the lens of critical reflection as a transformative and transcending experience.

Librarian Burnout, Low Morale, Depression, Exhaustion and Stress

The results of the post-*currere* survey reported that the cohort librarians had negative associations with librarianship including identifying with the words *ambivalent*, *tired*, *blocked*, and *frustrated*. These terms could lead one to believe that these cohort members were potentially exhibiting symptoms of professional burnout. Christian (2015) examined the librarian related burnout literature and defines this condition as “prolonged exposure to workplace stressors that often drain an employee’s vitality and enthusiasm

and lead to less engagement and less productivity” (p. 2). Burnout is indeed an issue within the profession (Affleck, 1996; Caputo, 1991; McCormack & Cotter, 2013; Nauratil, 1989). However burnout is a complicated condition to diagnose and this study was not designed to address burnout specifically, so this research cannot make the claim that librarians participating in this cohort were truly burned out on the profession.

McCormack and Cotter (2013) examined the literature of librarian burnout and noted that while there is some evidence to suggest burnout may be occurring within librarianship, there is not “enough definitive evidence to be able to make general statements where specifically burnout is occurring, why and what can be done about it” (pp. 88-89).

McCormack and Cotter (2013) go on to say “Burnout... is not easy to distinguish its symptoms from those of similar phenomena such as low morale, depression, exhaustion and stress” (p. 16). This study did not set out to explore the nuances of burnout within the profession but instead the impact structured reflection might have within librarianship.

The findings indicate that at least within this cohort, librarians exhibited characteristics associated with burnout or potentially on the path to burnout before starting on the *currere* process. As Evelyn shared in her Synthesis reflection, “I have to admit now that I was also harboring a bad attitude about work.” Dora specifically used the term “burned out” in describing her state of mind. Burnout has real consequences ranging from poor job performance to more serious health concerns. “Burned out workers are those who find themselves suffering from severe emotional fatigue, which is frequently accompanied by physiological symptoms. They feel distressed, alienated, inadequate, and unmotivated” (McCormack & Cotter, 2013 p. 2).

One of the most widely used burnout assessment tools is the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) which identifies three main characteristics of professional burnout: emotional exhaustion; depersonalization and/or cynicism; and reduced personal accomplishment. There are examples of these burnout characteristics found within the Synthesis documents created by the cohort. In regards to emotional exhaustion, one cohort member talks about a possible professional “meltdown” almost occurring in her career that has still had ongoing repercussions that she is currently working through. In Carol’s Synthesis narrative, there is a thread of depersonalization as libraries continue to embrace technology to automate interactions.

While part of me embraces technology, there is a side of it that is deadening as it doesn’t seem to help solve problems, but just perpetuate them. The endless march of publisher databases that change, morph, and establish new hoops for people to jump through. The intricacies of what became of the library catalog...the mega catalog that hiccups continually has left me cold. (Carol, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Dora related to this lack of ambition or sense of reduced personal accomplishment when she stated, “I had been feeling increasingly dissatisfied with my career and my day-to-day work, but was very worried that my inherent laziness would prevent me from doing anything about it.” These excerpts are just a few examples of potential symptoms of professional burnout peppered through the Synthesis reflections created by the cohort.

This study’s cohort is not alone in experiencing these feelings of burnout associated with librarianship. Affleck (1996) deployed the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) to examine 142 instruction librarians for symptoms of burnout. The study found that 52.8% of the respondents scored highly in one of the burnout dimensions identified previously: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of sense of personal accomplishment. Another 8.5% of instruction librarians

surveyed scored high across all burnout dimensions. Harwell (2013) undertook a similar study with business librarians using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* and found similar results to Affleck's (1996), with 13.4% of his respondents scoring high in all three burnout dimensions. Additionally, Affleck (1996) conducted follow-up interviews with six librarians in her study that suggested that "role overload" and "inter-role conflict" might be a factor associated to these particular librarians and burnout symptoms (p. 178). The cohort members in this study, as well as many librarians in the professional as a whole, continue to experience "role overload." Academic librarians are tasked with the assignment of various subject liaison areas often with little true subject expertise, multiple undergraduate and graduate instruction responsibilities, outreach and service expectations, as well as pressure to achieve tenure. All of these responsibilities on top of the day-to-day task of running a library through reference services, access and circulation duties, and collection development and one can see the potential for "role overload" and any resulting negative consequences.

Echoing an earlier study by Becker (1993), Sheesley (2001) provides another examination and interpretation of the library science literature on burnout and offers some suggested solutions mainly focusing on adjusting instructional strategies. Unfortunately, Sheesley does not specifically call out reflection as a possible resource to aid in librarian stress or burnout. Christian (2015) also offers some suggested strategies drawn from the literature to coping with burnout. One solution included is "self-examination," however, the context is limited to the acute encounter causing stress on the librarian, not a structured reflection methodology examining and engaging with experiences throughout a librarian's career. On the other hand, Varlejs and Stec (2004)

call out reflection specifically as one tool to help with professional burnout and cynicism within librarianship.

An outcome of this study that needs further examination is the role that structured reflection, such as *currere*, might play in relieving the symptoms of professional burnout and stress. This current study found that librarians who exhibited possible signs of burnout prior to undertaking the *currere* process showed a positive change in attitude afterwards. This echoes the findings of Brown (2007) who used *currere* with a small group of teachers.

...five teachers who began the year unsure as to their futures in education came to career decisions. Although not all stayed at their assignments, the ones who stayed grew to understand why they stayed. Those who left gained an understanding not only of why they wished to leave, but what they planned to do in the future. It is important to note that, in one way or another, all five remained in the profession. Using a structured, supportive system like *currere* to help teachers create their educational autobiographies and to reflect over their educational careers is one way administrators may improve teacher retention. (Brown, 2007, p. 227-228)

Similarly, after participating in the structured reflective process of *currere* in this study, the cohort librarians identified more positively with their profession, associating their mindset with the words *thoughtful*, *rejuvenated*, and *renewed*. Critical reflection proved valuable to these librarians, imparting lasting impact, as well as having a potential ripple effect of creating a better library experience for patrons who now interact with more engaged librarians.

Reflection as Transcendence

Grumet (1987) reminds us that the telling of personal stories, such as found in the processes of *currere* and autobiography, is a form of alienation, as “the telling diminishes the teller...” (p. 372). This insight portends that true critical reflection is not something

that occurs completely on the written page as it is captured, but more in the internal struggle to reveal and expose hidden experiences, and the self-imposed meanings ascribed to them. The true journey of reflective discovery is internalized, isolated, and visceral in nature. What ends on the page is not a complete picture of the process or outcome of the experience of critical reflection. The putting of word to paper should not be the final, fixed, or formal interpretation of a reflection, as Grumet (1991) continues to emphasize that our reflections need to have a sense of multiplicity of meanings. The reflective evidence generated by this study's small cohort supports this sentiment, or as Grumet (1987) relates, "The stories we tell to others may be finally less dangerous to the ones we tell to ourselves" (p. 322). Obviously, based on the results of this study, the content found in the cohort reflections were not where the *currere* methodology was taking hold and having sway with each librarian. It was the story each librarian began to tell or re-tell themselves that proved most influential.

Currere, as Grumet (1976b) relates, is a developmental process "designed to give the individual information that he can use to direct his own development" (p. 113). Grumet further points out that it is not the formalized end products of *currere* generated reflections that crystallize change but instead within *currere* it is more a "developmental process in which the telling and reading and revising is of the utmost importance" (Graham, 1992, p. 30). This study falls in line with this insight as evidenced by the post-*currere* survey that confirmed the process of reflection is just, if not more, important than the content of the written reflection. Each librarian's migration from a state of *blocked* to *rejuvenated* is not to be taken lightly and needs celebrated, embraced, and highlighted.

In essence, *currere* participants are experiencing a form of transcendence in reconstructing their various identities through the reflective undertaking as they mingle with their past, present, and future selves. *Currere* enables us to transcend from one state of mind to another. Experiences are reaffirmed, remembered, and reevaluated. The intentional nature of the *currere* methodology is a space where “experiences are reclaimed” and hidden biases are “revealed for inspection” (Graham, 1992, p. 30). In immersing oneself within the *currere* process, beliefs, values, and experiences transcend from a bramble strewn field of unknowingness to a knowing sort of pathway where the evening dimness of forgetfulness gives way to the light of remembrance. In this space, direction, purposefulness, and meaning can take root. Graham (1992) points out that Pinar seriously saw *currere* as a process for transcendence.

Pinar wastes no time in asserting that in this necessarily slow and long-term effort can be discovered possibilities for transcendence, a process which he would hold involves a potent sense of becoming, through excavating and bringing to light that which has been buried by many years of schooling and social conditioning. (Graham, 1992, p. 29)

This study found that critical structured reflection can lead to a “potent sense of becoming” for its librarian participants. Grumet (1976b) suggests that *currere* will afford participants the opportunity to “recover their own intentionality and find there the energy for their academic work as well as the links that connect that to the concerns and events of their daily experience” (p. 123). It is precisely this recapturing of energy and connection that allows one to overcome shift course from a potential pathway of burnout and exhaustion, to one of thoughtfulness, renewal, and rejuvenation.

Re-search, Reflection, and the Re-searcher

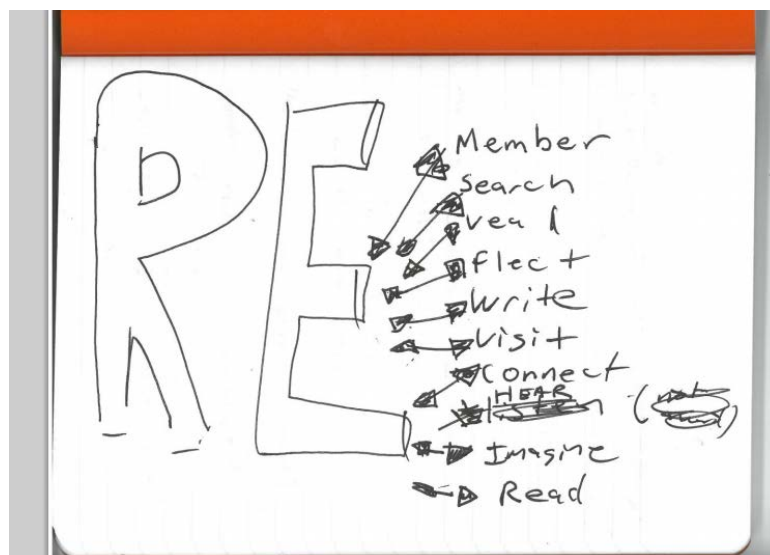


Figure 7 "Re-"

Research changes not only the study participants but also the researcher. In the case of this study, the researcher gained new insight into his understanding of critical reflection. This insight was a personal revelation about the potential impacts and transformative processes of critical reflection. Based on my experience facilitating this study, I learned that *the process of critical reflection is more important than the content of written reflective evidence*. Admittedly, this is not groundbreaking or new information, but I now more fully embraced this idea of process over content as one of the outcomes of this study. The *currere* curriculum offered a small measure of positive transformation for the study participants, as documented in the survey results, as well as for the researcher. In short, the true impact of critical reflection occurs mostly in the internal reflective process of the individual, which is not necessarily represented by what the writer puts on the page. This realization was being worked through in my own reflective journal throughout the study:

I am excited but also have worry that this whole process won't yield anything significant. I guess that is the risk but the process itself might be rewarding, and I hope so. (Stoddart, Researcher Journal, March 8, 2015)

This uncertainty is followed up by an entry a month later that acknowledges the value in embracing the process of reflection holistically, not just what is written down.

It has been awhile but it seems a lot has happened. I see reflection and the need for connection to one's core identity and this self-discovery process in so many things... I worry that tying this to a professional identity - the quest to place the self within a profession is not the best method for this. This weird longing "to be" should be a discovery process formal and informal throughout our lives. Is prayer and reflection the same thing or again are we placing ourselves in others view to see ourselves or a version of our self? I have been reading about diaries and how the authors know looking back seem dissatisfied with the self they see found there. The idea of narratives and separation of identities - we are there and not there on the page. (Stoddart, Researcher Journal, April 10, 2015)

It was not until the final survey, when the evidence of cohort member transformation was presented to me, that I fully realized the power of critical reflection.

Reflection pushes the gaze backward into our lives to pull out the moments of meaning. It is not so much a one-time occurrence but a continual process, repeated, over and over -- a call to go backward and start again. This process of restarting occurs in other actions we do -- re-reading, re-writing, etc. There is value in this continual process that is visited again and again, becoming in itself a certain kind of self-discovery.

One reflection exercise the cohort was asked to conduct in class was to draw the intersection of their personal lives and librarianship. In the researcher's own entry, this idea of "re-" that requires the librarian or individual to begin again, was emphasized in my drawing (see Figure 7). Another word to think about in terms of "re-" is *research*. The idea of "re-" asks the researcher to search again, to gaze back to the hypothesis and methodology, and ask themselves what has changed, what have they learned, how can the search begin anew? In this study, the personal revelation that the process of reflection

was where most of the transformation occurred with the study participants suggests a new path for the researcher. A better-designed research study would ask each cohort member to more fully and implicitly interpret his/her own Synthesis reflections. If, as this study suggests, that reflection may reduce symptoms of professional burnout, then pre- and post- tests using a formal burnout inventory would be needed to gauge reflection's impact on cohort members. Additional interviews with cohort members about their reflection process would also be needed to more deeply explore the transformative aspects of reflection.

Reflection can change lives, that I am certain, both as a researcher and as an individual. The study and its *currere* curriculum proved that it had profound and positive impact on the lives of the cohort members. Research is a continual process, a search, a journey, and at its root the discovery is intended to explain and better understand the world. Reflection is its own research project focused on explaining and better understanding ourselves and by extension our place in the world. Taking a reflective and critical stance changes not only ourselves but the world around us. This study taught cohort members, and the researcher, to take a reflective stance, embrace the process, and in turn change lives.

Concluding Thoughts: *Currere* Changing Librarian Lives

The central research question of this study was: *What does structured, holistic, and critical reflection, such as currere, reveal about librarianship?* The study was also framed by these guiding sub-questions:

1. How do the personal and professional experiences of librarians overlap in their day-to-day professional practice?
2. Are librarian's personal values, philosophies, and theories about librarianship aligned with professional values and practice?

The *currere* curriculum deployed in this study did not fully answer these questions. However, the *currere* process and holistic structured critical reflection writing did prove valuable in changing librarian attitudes and motivations to the profession. The initial research questions proved unattainable with the available evidence. But the study suggests that some of these answers might be found in the internalized but unobservable reflective process each librarian undertook during the *currere* curriculum.

“I want to be heard.” I found this phrase in my own *currere* experience and this is perhaps the true underlying goal of this study, empowering librarian voices. What reflection teaches us is the first person who needs to be heard, the first person who needs to listen, is ourselves. A structured reflection experience, such as *currere*, creates a framework to build a better understanding of ourselves, a narrative that needs to be listened to, and through that understanding a clearer perspective of our profession of librarianship. Dora wrote in her final Synthesis reflection, “I was a librarian before I was a librarian.” I think this true for many librarians in the profession and rediscovering and re-voicing these touchstones from time to time is critical to moving forward in librarianship and in our lives. Evelyn captures the power of critical reflection simply when she said, “It seems to be that this is the goal of the reflective process. To take the time and energy to go a little bit deeper into what drives us. I can’t say that the process changed any of my practices but it definitely changed my attitude about my working life and for that I am grateful (Evelyn, Synthesis reflection, June 2015).” *Currere* allowed for participants to “go a bit deeper” to explore librarian motivations in the same way that, “Pinar hoped to be able to analyze the educational experience, to reconstruct curriculum materials in terms of the individual’s own consciousness (Graham, 1992, pp. 28-29). This

study's intention was to similarly use *currere* as a method to reconstruct librarianship in terms of each librarian's consciousness. A form of librarianship where the distractions of library processes, policies, and structural immobility were shed like sheep's wool to reveal the true body of librarianship beneath. The study did not achieve this ambitious program but instead found another kind of purpose in shedding a heavy coat, a sense of freedom to walk through the world with a light load, to look at and engage the world through *thoughtfulness*, *rejuvenation*, and *renewal*. How truly liberating is that?

A lesson to learn about critical reflection is that you do not go into the process knowing. Writing is its own form of discovery, and while we might know what we want to write about, it often doesn't come out the way we expect. We might not have a word for something that is tugging at our hearts, or the words lead us astray or perhaps to somewhere unexpected that may be better or may be worse. But if we take the premise of reflective writing as a way to discover some small parcel of truth, then the role of reflective writing really is at its core, a discovery of self. That is no small thing. Focusing, refocusing, unpacking ourselves during the reflection process and repacking ourselves to move on in our day to day physical lives is not a simple thing. It is a deeply personal process. With any process, it is ongoing and does not end when a reflection is captured on paper. Reflection can be sustainable and at the same time sustaining. Becca did a good job capturing the ongoing-ness of the reflective and discovery process in her Synthesis.

There should be some sort of lovely conclusion here, to tidy things up or to tie it all together, but I've been working on this for some time and can't come up with one. Perhaps because once you dive into reflection, there isn't really an end point – I keep reflecting and changing my mind about things, keep finding new themes or deciding that there aren't any themes after all but that they're as good a rhetorical device as any. I don't imagine this will stop any time soon. If there is a concluding thought here, it will just be that it's okay, that it doesn't stop. It's probably good. (Becca, Synthesis reflection, June 2015)

Grumet (1987), who may be the patron saint of this study, offers some additional insight about the ideal experience with reflective practice: “So if telling a story requires giving oneself away, then we are obligated to devise a method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that told, and the self that listens: a method that returns the story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains her self in good company” (p. 323). For the librarians in this study, *currere* helped return a story of themselves to their original owners. For some it was an inspirational story, a eureka moment here or there, or even just an assurance that things are okay. These aren’t small tidings, but an openness to listen deeply to the narratives that make up our personal and professional lives. In my personal experience with *currere*, it is this openness that is the point, as we have closed ourselves off from our experiences.

The *currere* process allows greater access to the knowledge you possess which in return rewards a potential an openness to others. Ultimately, this process of *currere* allows for a wider insight as to the where, the how, the why your knowledge associates with those around you. In order to do that you must travel away from others and into yourself. (Stoddart, 2010, p. 10)

We all lead complicated lives, compartmentalized in some ways, hidden in others. This study experimented with co-mingling librarian professional and personal experiences. Librarianship would do well to continue to explore avenues to incorporate such reflection in their practices as evidenced by the positive outcomes of this study toward symptoms of professional burnout. A methodology or curriculum like *currere* is one place to start. There are also many other reflective methods for librarianship to explore beyond *currere*, such as autoethnography or narrative inquiry that might yield interesting and positive results. Whatever the case, advocating for and supporting

reflective practice within the profession will better tell the story of librarianship and in turn create a more fulfilling profession.

In summary, Dora offered a few words from her final reflection that I will leave with the reader: “So what does all of this mean? I guess to me, seeing the profession through the lens of my own experience means that librarianship is stressful, undefined, full of regret, but even more, full of opportunity and promise.”

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APPENDIX A

Week by Week Curriculum

1. Discussion Agenda: Meeting 1

Introduction to the project

What is the project and timeline

What is *Currere*

The writing requirements.

Informed Consent Forms

Intersection of Libraries/Librarianship and YOU (activity).

For Next Meeting -- Reading(s) and Homework

Exit reflection

Homework: Interview A Cohort Member Due on Meeting#2

For next meeting:

Conduct a short (5 minute) interview with the cohort member you have been assigned

Write up the interview as a narrative to be shared with the cohort next week. See Ellis's Guidelines for Personal Writing Papers to help with constructing the narrative. Try to capture the content, context, and spirit of the interview.

That narrative should be 1-3 pages.

2. Discussion Agenda: Meeting 2

Report out on Interviews

Meet for 10 minutes with who you interviewed and let them read, discussion, and edit interview.

Read / Discuss interviews

Write up an autobiographical timeline for libraries in your life
(optional if time)

Exit Reflection

Meeting #2: Activities

Review your interview with your peer

Discuss interviews

If time allows: With the topic libraries, librarians, or librarianship -- write up an autobiographical chronology.

For example:

1972 born into a family of readers

1977 - attended elementary school

where visited libraries

1980 - Mother converts room into a library

2010 - attended library school

Exit Reflection

Homework: Life Stories Due Meeting #3

This activity will allow you to begin to reflecting and writing as well representing yourself within the text. Please choose one prompt to write about. Your writing should be at least 1-3 pages.

Write about an event and pay close attention to setting the scene. Concentrate on concrete, sensual detail or

Write a conversation. Make it sound natural, though you will edit out the filler and small talk of real conversation. Pay attention to rhythm and length of the sentences. Dialogue does more and convey information; it sets the scene, develops characters and advances action.

(From Ellis (2004) Suggested Readings & Assignments
pp. 351-352)

3. Discussion Agenda: Meeting #3

1. Review reflections
2. Correspondence
3. Exit Reflection

Homework: Life Stories Due Meeting #4

This activity will allow you to begin to reflecting and writing as well representing yourself within the text. Please choose one prompt to write about. Your writing should be at least 1-3 pages.

Write about an emotion. Try not to use emotion labels but instead show sensory details that might trigger the reader's memory of his/her own emotion.

Let the reader share the experience. Often subtle language is better than dramatic, or

Write about your thoughts. Consider using internal monologue to show us what you are thinking.

(From Ellis (2004) Suggested Readings & Assignments p.

351-352

4. Discussion Agenda: 4th Meeting

Review Reflections

Wakefulness

Exit Reflection

Homework: Life Stories Due Meeting #5

This week's writing will be the starting point for the first part of the *currere* process - regressive. I am going to ask you to write about an autobiographical moment from your past. Write 1-3 pages on this prompt:

Writing prompt:

In the first person, write about one of your earliest vivid memories associated with libraries, librarians, or librarianship.

5. Discussion Agenda: 5th Meeting

Review Reflection: Autobiography (Regressive)

Work on Autobiography in meeting if needed.

Exit Reflection

Homework: Reflection Due Meeting #6

During this class we discussed the autobiography you created. Based on this discussion, if you want to revisit your autobiography, you may do so.

Or, you can engage with the next reflection topics.

Writing prompt:

Choose one:

1. Revisit the autobiography you drafted and add additional material.

OR

2. List five values, in order of importance, that you consider important in your life. Give a brief description of each in your own terms. Select the most important one and explain why it is important. (Chang, 2008 - *Autoethnography as Method*, p. 97)

OR

3. List five proverbs, in order of importance, that you heard repeatedly in your family, extended community, and/or society and that have had an impact in your life. Describe briefly the context in which each of them was used. Select the one most important to you and explain how it influenced your thought, belief, and behavior. (Chang 2008 - *Autoethnography as Method* p. 162)

6.Discussion Agenda: 6th Meeting

Review Reflection

Strategies for writing about the future.

Exit Reflection

Homework: Personal Narrative

This week's (and next week's) writing will be second part of the *currere* process - progressive. I am going to ask you to do some speculative writing about your future. Write 1-3 pages on this prompt:

Writing prompt:

Write creatively and descriptively about your future relationship with libraries.

7. Discussion Agenda: 7th Meeting

Review reflections (Progressive)

Work on Personal Narrative/Progressive reflection in meeting if needed.

Exit reflection

Homework: Finish Personal Narrative Due 8th Meeting

Continue to build on or rewrite your reflection for this prompt.

Writing prompt:

Write creatively and descriptively about your future relationship with libraries.

8. Discussion Agenda: 8th Meeting

Review Reflections

Autoethnography - combining the cultural/social/personal

Types of narrative evidence available

Exit Reflection

Homework: Autoethnography (Analytic) Due Meeting #9

We now have reached the third phase of the *currere* process -- Analytic. This part asks you to focus on the present and to also consider the social and cultural elements that may influence it.

Writing Prompt:

Describe your current relationship with libraries in a cultural and social context.

9. Discussion Agenda: 9th Meeting

Review Autoethnographies

Use meeting time to continue to write autoethnography

Exit Reflection

Homework: Autoethnography (Analytic) Due Meeting #10

Continue to write/refine/edit your autoethnography...

Writing Prompt:

Describe your current relationship with libraries in a cultural and social context.

10. Discussion Agenda: 10th Meeting

Review Reflection

Reminders: Resonance, Coherence, Wakefulness

Synthesis

Exit Reflection

Homework: Synthesis Reflection Due Meeting #12

Using the evidence that you have created through reflection and the *currere* process create these two items:

1. A synthesis document incorporating and citing evidence from your reflections. This should be at least three pages. Use this synthesis document to articulate your relationship with libraries and any outcomes, boundaries, values, philosophy, direction, inconsistencies, etc. that you feel define this landscape for you.
2. Develop a 10 minute presentation, performance, public display, etc. that is inspired by this synthesis document. This will serve to translate your synthesis experience and make it public.

11. Discussion Agenda: 11th Meeting

(Tentative) Synthesis Presentation(s)

Questions about Synthesis paper or projects

Activity - to be determined

Exit Reflection

Homework: Continue to work on Synthesis

Paper/Presentation

12. Discussion Agenda: 12th Meeting

1. Synthesis Presentations
2. Activity: Draw intersection
3. IRB/Dissertation "Housekeeping"
4. Exit Reflection

Activity: Draw Intersection of Libraries & You

Let's revisit this activity and see if your perspective and image has changed --

YOU: Your life, beliefs, relationships, understandings, expectations, experiences etc.

LIBRARIES/LIBRARIANSHIP: books, your job, your experiences, training, relationships, views, etc.

Activity:

Draw a picture of this relationship and share with the class. This picture could be a word cloud, diagram, artistic rendering, abstract painting -- whatever makes sense to you. Be prepared to share this with the class.

APPENDIX B

Participation Matrix

Pre Project Participation

Instructions: To be signed prior to beginning the reflection curriculum project.

| Document | Read | Code for Themes for dissertation or publication | Direct Quote for dissertation or publication |
|--------------------|------|---|--|
| Synthesis Document | X | X | X |
| Presentation | X | X | X |

I acknowledge that Rick Stoddart will use my final synthesis document and public presentation as data to analyze for his dissertation and possible additional academic scholarship.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Post Project Participation

Instructions: To be signed by cohort members after completing Synthesis reflection and public presentation.

After completion the reflection project, I acknowledge and give permission that Rick Stoddart may continue to use my final synthesis document and public presentation as data to analyze for his dissertation and possible additional academic scholarship.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Additionally, I give permission for the primary investigator (Rick Stoddart) to:

| Document | Read | Code for Themes | Direct Quote |
|---|------|-----------------|--------------|
| Warm Up and Exit Reflections, Documents or Products | | | |
| Autobiography Document | | | |
| Personal Narrative Document | | | |
| Autoethnography Document | | | |
| Other Self-Reflection | | | |

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Codes

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Real World | borders | Second Career |
| Societal Challenges to Libraries | structure | Change at Work |
| Meaning Making | Technology | Career as librarian |
| Being Alone | television | Leaving Librarianship |
| loneliness | Help | Job |
| introvert | information | Uncertainty |
| Monasticism | missing pieces | Uncertainty About Profession |
| School | problems | Ambivalence About Profession |
| self aware | questions | Didn't know what to do with life |
| personas | problem-solving | Time |
| teaching | vendors | Vagueness |
| relationships | bridges | Attitude / Feelings |
| Family | Give Back | No Passion |
| Loss | exchange | Positive Attitude |
| friends | sharing | Bad Attitude |
| interactions | exchange | Change in Attitude |
| meetings | quote | Epiphany |
| Students | mix | Happiness=Libraries |
| engagement | change | Feelings |
| other librarians | Books / Literature / Words | Frustration |
| Stability | English | Focus |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Safety | Books | no emotion |
| Security | "Wordiness" | Cold |
| Money | reading | passion |
| Balance | language | Barriers |
| Early Library Memory | words | Hoops |
| Planning | reader | Librarian Stuff |
| Culture | Literature | Library Value |
| history | listening | Databases |
| Ireland | Narrative | Collection Development |
| translation | Career | Catalog |
| art | Librarian Influence | Professional identity |
| Expression/Creativity | Alternative Profession | patron centered |
| travel | Change in Profession | Bureaucracy |
| Good quote | Innovation | Library as place |
| boundaries | Burnout | Physical Library |
| Knew would become librarian | Need change | Virtual Library |
| Special libraries | Guilt | Patron- |
| Libraries = Comfort | Access | Perspective |
| Internalized Profession | self censorship | |
| Values | authenticity | |
| Agency | making mistakes | |
| Personal Responsibility | compassion | |
| | hypocrite | |
| | Courtesy | |

| | | |
|--|------------|--|
| | politeness | |
| | humor | |

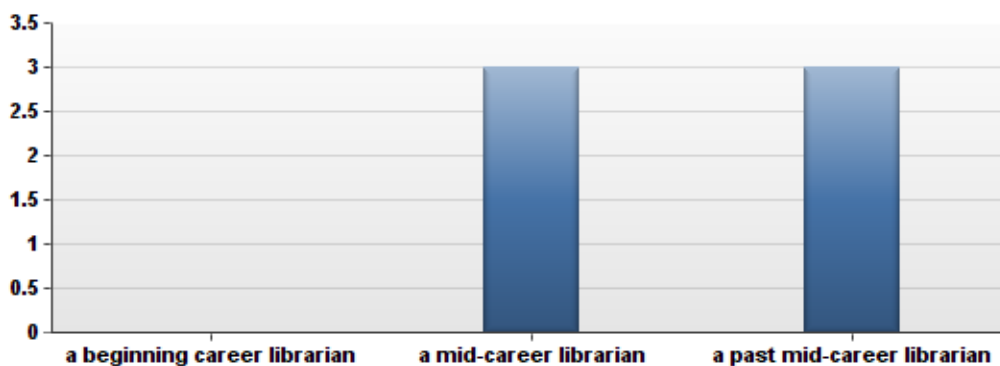
APPENDIX D

Currere Follow-Up Survey Administered 8/3/2015

Currere Follow-Up Survey Administered 8/3/2015

Last Modified: 09/07/2015

1. Do you consider yourself....



| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|------------------------------|----------|------|
| 1 | a beginning career librarian | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | a mid-career librarian | 3 | 50% |
| 3 | a past mid-career librarian | 3 | 50% |
| | Total | 6 | 100% |

2. How long have you worked in libraries?

Text Response

22 years

37 years (golly!)

40 years

17 years

about 13 years

23

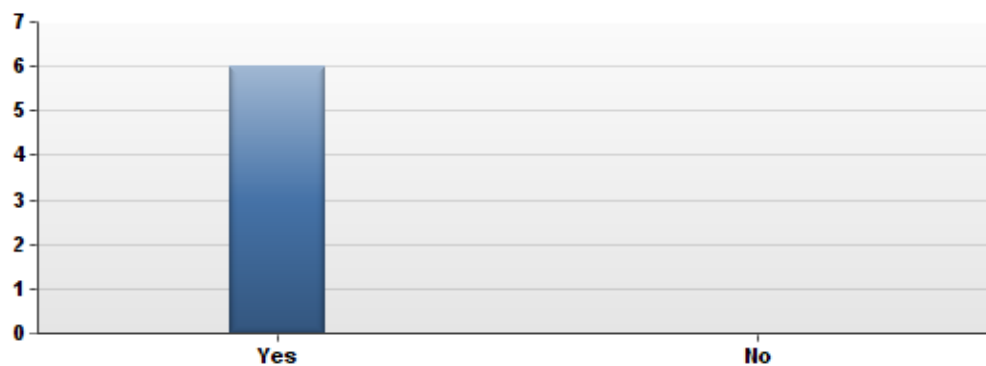
| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 6 |

3. How long have you worked at your current institution?

| Text Response |
|----------------|
| 22 years |
| 16 years |
| 36 years |
| 15 years |
| about 10 years |
| 12 |
| |
| |

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 6 |

4. Have you received tenure at your current institution?



| # | Answer | Response | % |
|---|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | Yes | 6 | 100% |
| 2 | No | 0 | 0% |
| | Tota | 6 | 100% |
| | | | |

5. What, if anything, has changed in how you approach your work in libraries as a result of going through this reflective process? What impact might this reflective process have had on your practice of librarianship?

Text Response

I think I've become more experimental in what I do. Perhaps some of this was starting already before the class, but going through the writing exercises has helped me feel that I can figure out what I want to do, and find a way to do it. I feel like I got a lot of the thinking out of the way, and now I'm looking at ways to do what I want. This means I'm learning new technology, and am determined to use it as an expression of my professional ideals.

After going through the reflective process, I have changed my attitude about my work. I am more positive about my job and my work. I have more energy when I am at work because I have more positive attitude about it. I love my job - the reflective process helped me realize that.

a. I'm approaching my work with a longer perspective in mind. I think about how who I was in my first job as a librarian and the changes I've experienced. b. I'm thinking about the parts of my job that still compel me to be invested and doing my best.

I'm spending more time thinking about what I want to do going forward. Thinking about my career reflectively made me realize that if I wanted to change anything, I needed to do it now and I needed to be serious about it, so I'm working (its a process) on looking for and being open to new opportunities to carve out some new turf for myself in terms of interests and activities. I'm already starting to see a difference in what I am doing and how I think of myself as an academic (mid-career) librarian.

I am more cognizant of how my "outside the libraries" life affects my librarianship, and vice versa. I think the reflective process has also helped me see that I had been focusing quite narrowly on the present in my work life. The reflective proces has helped me see past the present and situate my current work in the context of past work and experiences and also of future aspirations and expectations.

I have reached a new level of understanding with myself, about myself. The experience re-invigorated some scholarly interests of mine as well. Not sure what this will mean for my practice of librarianship, but I feel a bit more sane around the edges.

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 6 |

6. What are some actionable takeaways from this reflective experience? What will you emphasize, focus on, or change?

Text Response

I won't assume that things are off limits, or impossible to achieve. I feel more emboldened to be creative and to be open to new experiences, wherever they come from.

Well, I have stopped counting down the days to retirement and instead am focusing on enjoying the work I do every day.

Because of the reflective experience I am focusing on the meaningful aspects of my job, things in which I find enjoyment and feel I have an impact. I see the time I can make an impact (in this job) dwindling rapidly and need to make the most of this part of my life.

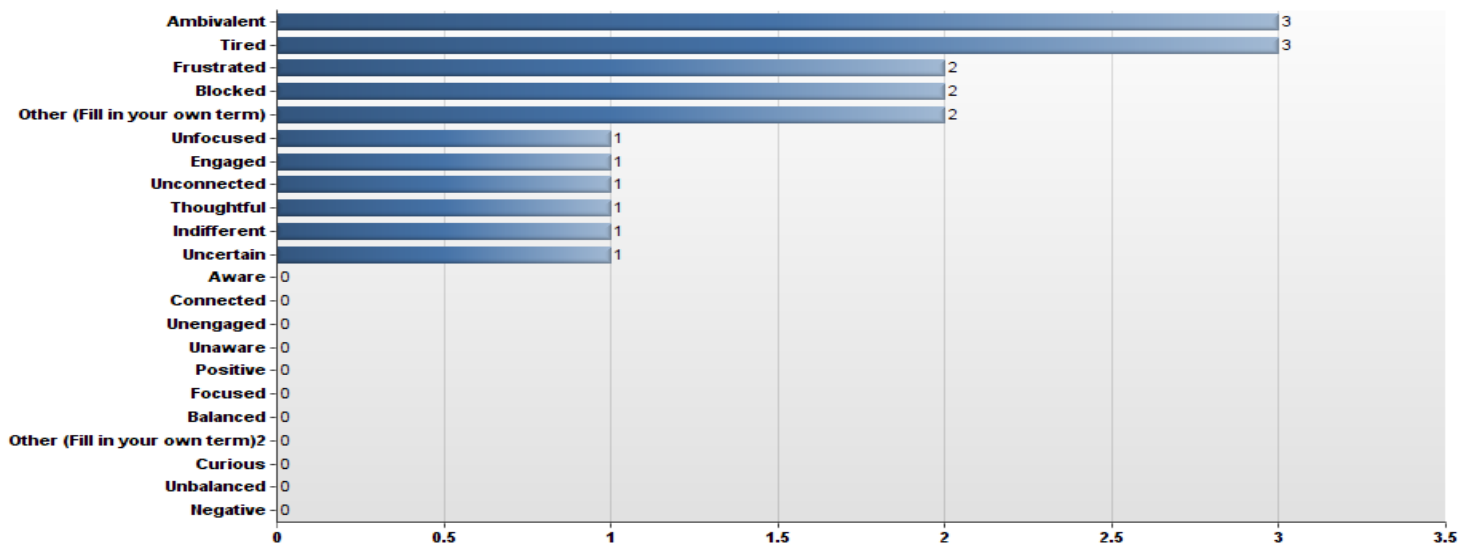
I'm trying to find the balance between reflection and rumination, which is a challenge for me. My takeaways are to find projects that interest and excite me, and increase my involvement and interaction (on campus, in my community and/or in the profession). I already applied and was appointed to a campus commission that I'm not sure I would have thought about trying to join without the currere process, for example.

Bringing wakefulness into my work life - thinking about my work and career more strategically. Recognizing the artificiality of the seperation of work and life has allowed me to stop thinking of how my non-work life is a liability and start thinking of how it can impact my work positively.

1) Remember to not get bogged down in the past, or the future, or the present. Look for the connections, keep the flow. 2) Remember how valuable journaling is for processing events, emotions, decision points. Keep journaling.

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 6 |

7. Please pick the TOP 1-3 words or phrases that describe your mindset about



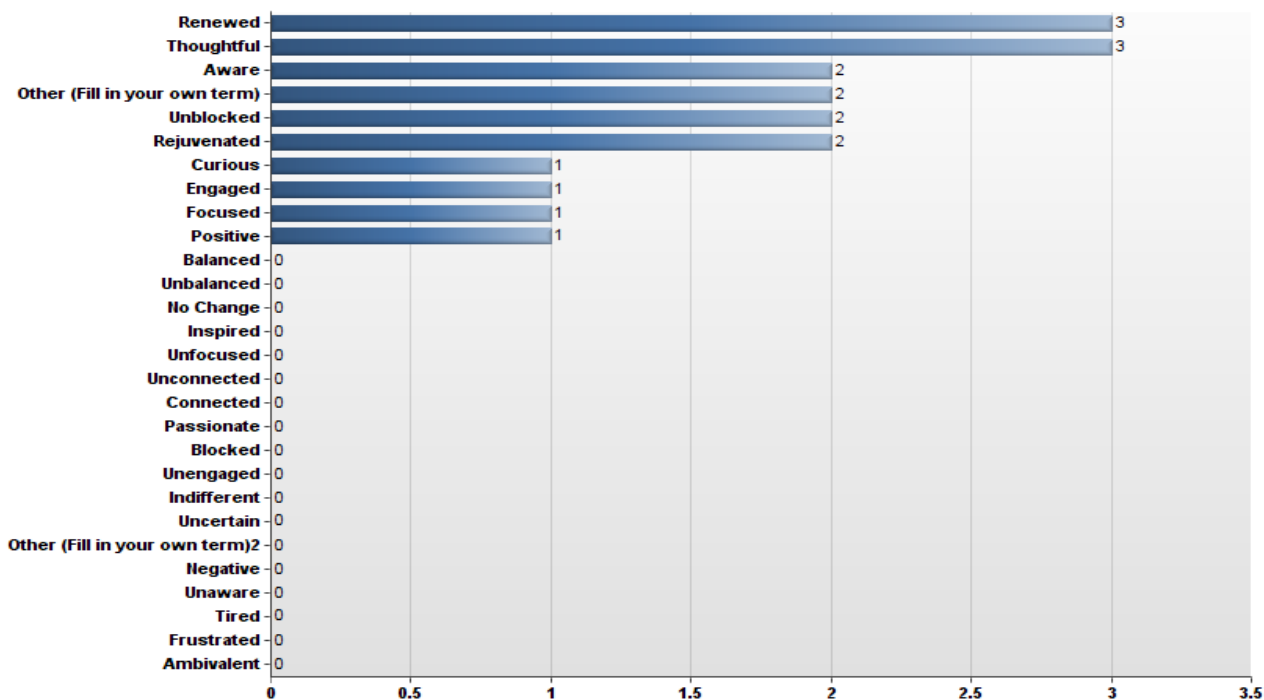
librarianship PRIOR to going through the Currere reflective process -- (Choose between 1-3 terms)





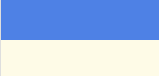





| # | Answer | Response | % |
|----|--------------------------------|----------|-----|
| 1 | Focused | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Balanced | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | Unbalanced | 0 | 0% |
| 12 | Other (Fill in your own term)2 | 0 | 0% |
| 13 | Curious | 0 | 0% |
| 14 | Positive | 0 | 0% |
| 15 | Negative | 0 | 0% |
| 16 | Unaware | 0 | 0% |
| 17 | Aware | 0 | 0% |
| 19 | Unengaged | 0 | 0% |
| 21 | Connected | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | Unfocused | 1 | 17% |
| 7 | Indifferent | 1 | 17% |
| 8 | Uncertain | 1 | 17% |
| 10 | Thoughtful | 1 | 17% |
| 18 | Engaged | 1 | 17% |
| 22 | Unconnected | 1 | 17% |
| 6 | Frustrated | 2 | 33% |
| 11 | Other (Fill in your own term) | 2 | 33% |

| | | | | |
|----|------------|--|---|-----|
| 20 | Blocked | | 2 | 33% |
| 5 | Tired | | 3 | 50% |
| 9 | Ambivalent | | 3 | 50% |

| Other (Fill in your own term) | Other (Fill in your own term)2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| outmoded | |
| Biding time | |

8. Please pick the TOP 1-3 words or phrases that describe your mindset about librarianship AFTER going through the Currere reflective process -- (Choose between 1-3 items)



| # | Answer | | Response | % |
|----|--------------------------------|---|----------|-----|
| 28 | Passionate | | 0 | 0% |
| 12 | Other (Fill in your own term)2 | | 0 | 0% |
| 29 | Connected | | 0 | 0% |
| 26 | Inspired | | 0 | 0% |
| 15 | Negative | | 0 | 0% |
| 20 | Blocked | | 0 | 0% |
| 23 | No Change | | 0 | 0% |
| 16 | Unaware | | 0 | 0% |
| 30 | Unconnected | | 0 | 0% |
| 9 | Ambivalent | | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | Unbalanced | | 0 | 0% |
| 3 | Balanced | | 0 | 0% |
| 2 | Unfocused | | 0 | 0% |
| 5 | Tired | | 0 | 0% |
| 6 | Frustrated | | 0 | 0% |
| 8 | Uncertain | | 0 | 0% |
| 7 | Indifferent | | 0 | 0% |
| 19 | Unengaged | | 0 | 0% |
| 14 | Positive |  | 1 | 17% |
| 13 | Curious |  | 1 | 17% |
| 18 | Engaged |  | 1 | 17% |
| 1 | Focused |  | 1 | 17% |
| 11 | Other (Fill in your own term) |  | 2 | 33% |
| 17 | Aware |  | 2 | 33% |
| 27 | Rejuvenated |  | 2 | 33% |
| 24 | Unblocked |  | 2 | 33% |
| 10 | Thoughtful |  | 3 | 50% |
| 25 | Renewed |  | 3 | 50% |

| Other (Fill in your own term) | Other (Fill in your own term)2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| moving forward Optimistic | |

9. During our meetings and writing, we spent a lot of time reflecting on the intersection of our personal lives and libraries. After going through all this reflection and writing, what would you say is your personal meaning of librarianship?

Text Response

To empower others by providing a means to learn

Hmmm, I don't know that my personal meaning of librarianship changed as a result of the reflective process. I still think librarians (and libraries) serve a unique function in society of providing access to information, while balancing the rights of content owners with information consumers. What did change during the reflective process was my attitude towards my job.

I see librarianship as an exceptionally diverse and beneficial profession, and I have been a part of it.

Librarianship to me at this point in my life/career is helping to connect people with the information that they need and/or want. The key words here are help (I make no claim to success!), connect (librarians can serve as the joints in the plumbing of life...?), information (which can be abstract or solid), and need/want.

Helping others to access the information they need and want, empowering students to get beyond the fear of research and to the point where they can engage their curiosity through research and information-seeking.

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 5 |

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Date: January 21, 2015
To: Rick Stoddart cc: Stan Steiner
From: Social & Behavioral Institutional Review Board (SB-IRB)
 c/o Office of Research Compliance (ORC)
Subject: SB-IRB Notification of Approval - Original - 101-SB15-009
Currere as a Method for Critical Reflection in the Profession of Academic Librarianship

The Boise State University IRB has approved your protocol submission. Your protocol is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (#0000097) and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Protocol Number: 101-SB15-009 | Received: 1/15/2015 | Review: Expedited |
| Expires: 1/20/2016 | Approved: 1/21/2015 | Category: 7 |

Your approved protocol is effective until 1/20/2016. To remain open, your protocol must be renewed on an annual basis and cannot be renewed beyond 1/20/2018. For the activities to continue beyond 1/20/2018, a new protocol application must be submitted.

ORC will notify you of the protocol's upcoming expiration roughly 30 days prior to 1/20/2016. You, as the PI, have the primary responsibility to ensure any forms are submitted in a timely manner for the approved activities to continue. If the protocol is not renewed before 1/20/2016, the protocol will be closed. If you wish to continue the activities after the protocol is closed, you must submit a new protocol application for SB-IRB review and approval.

You must notify the SB-IRB of any additions or changes to your approved protocol using a Modification Form. The SB-IRB must review and approve the modifications before they can begin. When your activities are complete or discontinued, please submit a Final Report. An executive summary or other documents with the results of the research may be included.

All forms are available on the ORC website at <http://goo.gl/D2FYTV>

Please direct any questions or concerns to ORC at 426-5401 or humansubjects@boisestate.edu.

Thank you and good luck with your research.

Dr. Mary Pritchard
 Chair
 Boise State University Social & Behavioral Institutional Review Board