



A Personal Inquiry, Through *Currere* Into the Person Earth Relationship, Using the Hermeneutic Spiral as Model*

Reviewed by
William M. Reynolds
University of Rochester

*Christine Foster Myers. Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1983.

This dissertation investigates the possibilities of phenomenology and hermeneutics for "*currere*" as a method in developing a curriculum framework for Outdoor/Environmental Education (OEE). The study is divided into three parts. Part I deals with: (a) the curricular genesis of OEE; and (b) Myers' legitimation of hermeneutical and experiential orientations as essential to her overall project. Part II constitutes the major portion of the work. The autobiographical method of *currere* developed by the curriculum reconceptualist William Pinar is used, but molded and organized around an original understanding of the hermeneutic spiral. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue which includes a self-reflective review and evaluation of what has been undertaken. Each part of the study deserves a more thorough review than is possible here, but I offer the following points.

In the Introduction, Myers explores the conceptions of earth which have "shaped individuals' attitudes towards the person/earth relationship" (p. 2).¹ She explores historically the different attitudes of earth as "other." This leads to an examination of the literature on Outdoor/Environmental Education. She traces back early interest in nature appreciation to the 1800s and the words of the Romantics and Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau. Myers postulates that these writers "emphasized the wholistic view of the mankind/nature philosophies (p. 6). She then proceeds to the twentieth century and discusses the numerous developments in the field of Outdoor/Environmental Education (OEE). The major positive development in the present period, it appears, is that OEE is slowly becoming more comprehensive and more holistic. Myers continues: "the aim of 'total education for a total environment' is seen as more and more appropriately descriptive of these efforts" (p. 12).

Myers' search for a methodology led her to reconceptualist curriculum theory which brought her to the works of one of its best known leaders, William Pinar. Pinar's work stresses an individual's lived experience as a possible basis for understanding the deeper realities of educational life, particularly life in school. Myers' work with the concept of lived experience drew her to hermeneutics. She states in the closing pages of the Introduction: "The following chapters are a metaphor for the personally lived experience of the nature of the person/earth relationship as it relates to *currere*. The chapters are intended as a whole, to illustrate the hermeneutic spiral as a method for *currere* (p. 35). Myers opposes linear models with a seasonal hermeneutic spiral, a model which implies continuity rather than conclusivity.

An attempt is made to put the (hermeneutic) spiral to use. This lyrically written section comprises the major portion of the dissertation. Myers intermingles traditional research writing with experienced interpretations of the meaning of nature. The result is a thoroughly innovative piece of research writing. Myers begins with Springtime, which is described as indexicality, the process by which prior understandings (in this

case autobiographical glimpses of relationships to the earth) are brought to the process of understanding (p. 31). Myers then travels through Summer (Interpretation), and continues through Autumn (Reflexivity). This is the portion where interpreted events are given over to a process of reflection as a preparation for the understanding process (p. 32). She then comes to Winter (Understanding) and spirals to a New Spring (New Indexicality). Myers writes of the journey:

Part II of this dissertation represents the personal re-experiencing of my relationship with earth. I began by entering the spiral, through the process of *currere*, in the springtime of my preschool days. This autobiographical journey toward a new understanding of the person/earth relationship continued through the seasonal cycles of the spiral. As the seasons in my recollections from my past experiences evolved into new phases of the cycle, so did the lived seasons during the writing of this dissertation evolve from spring to spring. (p. 113)

In the Epilogue section, Myers comes to the conclusion that in the building of models in curriculum, in her case for OEE, understanding must begin with a reflexive look at personal perspectives. The reflexive attitude is one of the major points of emphasis in the reconceptualist mode of theory. That we examine our lived experiences with some distance enables us to come to new understandings about our various points of view. This reflexive process, as Myers demonstrates, leads one to new attitudes and understandings, even to active movement to change what has been the persistent mode in Outdoor/Environmental Education. Not only does Myers agree with Sale and Lee in *Environmental Education in the Elementary School*, and feel that OEE educators must analyze their values and perspectives, but also that these same educators should encourage students to develop their own methods of value analysis.

It is encouraging to find another educator and researcher actively involved in a reflexive analysis of curriculum. The relationship of person/earth, as Myers emphasizes, is perhaps one of the most crucial relationships students and teachers must reflect on. Certainly in the Western world attitudes toward the earth have needed analysis for a long time. Myers' stress on changing our views of the person/earth relationship as a beginning toward the reconstruction of Outdoor/Environmental Education is a movement in the right direction. "The optimistic view of education is that the transformation of our concepts towards earth/matter/person which are forcing us to generate new models for understanding matter, time, and space will eventually lead the school to reconstruct a curriculum for a [holistic] view of the world and our relationship to it" (p. 127). We as educators and students can only hope that this optimistic view is capable of being achieved.

Notes

1. All page citations are from the text of the dissertation.