Just lingering, a complicated conversation

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This article[3] discusses multiple senses of curricula created and woven among authors and students, capturing classroom conversations and students' self-assessments at the end of courses that we, Maria Sussekind and Stephanie Nascimento, taught in Pedagogy and undergraduate classes at UNIRIO/ Rio de Janeiro State Federal University, Brazil during the last years. Our pathway was illuminated by the theoretical contributions of Professor William F. Pinar who, from our long conversations between the years 2011 and 2013 and, as his works also point out, taught us the importance of unstitching theories, displacing knowledges and deconstructing theories. That became our understanding and approach to his work, drawing on *Currere* (Pinar, 1975) and its unfolding by the methodological-theoretical concept of *complicated conversations* (Pinar, 2012; Süssekind, 2014). However, we were weaving curricular theory and methodology *within* everyday life studies in the Brazilian curricular field (Pinar, 2011; Süssekind, 2012). To carry out this method, we *used (reused)* oral and written conversations captured in the classroom, arguing that curricula are *complicated conversations* that entangle and rhizomatize knowledge, biographies, feelings and cosmogonies, bringing from an *indiciary archeology* (Ginzburg, 1989) different perspectives and notions of curricula and conversations, allowing for democratic learning with/in/of differences and displacing the dominant relation between curricula-knowledge-society.

We, the authors, working curricula as a register of (oral and written) conversations that happened within classrooms *as lived-experience* (Aoki, 2005), are trying to displace language not just in the learning processes at the university but with our theoretical approach to conversations, evident in the style of this article. In this decolonizing movement, we assume conversations are rhizomatic, in defiance of the modern Western idea of authorship. Arguing that colonizing language was born to be the register of slavery, constituting the erasure and invisibilization of those knowledges, epistemologies, cosmogonies and histories (Santos, 2019), we defy the traditional academic template, using quotes from Pinar as subtitles so as not to foreclose on but continue our conversations in each section of this article. The article is thus meant to be itself a conversation with you, dear reader and where our students' words will also be interpolated, thus weaving a curriculum tissue texturized by theories and complicated by subjectivity and its history. It will be an implicated and complicated conversation. According to Pinar, conversations

> are complicated because people are talking to each other. And because teachers talk not only to their students, but also to their own mentors, their own experiences and their contents, because the contents themselves are conversations (...) such conversation is also complicated by being informed, of course, for what occurs and occurred outside the classroom,

as in the students' families. The conversation is complicated because it happens between everyone in society. (Süssekind, 2014b, p. 207)

So, if curriculum is a conversation and a complicated one, it is because it happens between people in schools or universities in their everyday lives, *within* classrooms and also in their other *spacetimes* (Pinar, 2001), inside and outside, as seen in Alves, cited in Pinar's (2011) research about debates in the Brazilian curriculum field. Curriculum is a complicated conversation, bringing local and global dialogues, influences, ancestries, stories and histories, cultures and allegories (Pinar, 2012), as well as the interiority of each of those involved. For Pinar (2017), curriculum is the seeking of the "history of subjectivity: how history is internalized and reconstructed" (p. 195) and this is not just a contemporary idiom of the conversations but a tendency or risk: "In this Age of Internet, time is flat-lined, when history disappears subjectivity shrinks" (p. 195). That's why conversations must be seen also as texturized and in multiple layers, painting innumerable social and cultural lines besides those abyssal ones of oppression brought out by Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2007) thinking[4] including on capitalism, fundamentalisms, patriarchalism and colonialism. Santos' work provides a necessary social and historical context, complicating this conversation even more, traces evident in students' speaking:

> Beyond such conceptualization and the citation of authors, it says how much I got involved in this course. I recalled my career as a teacher, slum resident, the prejudices I faced in 2010 when entering the classroom at this university and the challenge of alphabetizing children with my sexuality as a cause for distrust ... (Student XII, 2019)

These elements, like capitalism, fundamentalisms, patriarchalism and colonialism, amongst others, can complicate and implicate curriculum conversations, leading us to extend the conversation to Santos, who helps us understand, in the debate of the North-South relationship, the role played by Science in reinforcing colonization movements at the university and schools and in their curricula. Recognizing Pinar's idea of complicated conversation, Paraskeva (2011) argues that we should ask if this international conversation is challenging what Santos (2007) denounced as epistemicides: "Is the conversation committed on opening the canons of knowledge? Or, as we fear - and hope we are wrong - is it an attempt to build a new canon? If so, it would be a disaster" (Süssekind, 2014d, p. 73).

So, as a complicated conversation between all forms of knowledge, not only those associated with science, curriculum needs to be considered from an everyday life studies perspective as multiple experiences, enhancing a complicated conversation within all knowledge forms, but not hierarchically. According to Pinar (2012), curriculum is more than discourse or narrative: it is autobiographical and it is a complicated conversation that will surely bear the hallmarks of racism and homophobia, as we are all traversed by prejudice in hetero-patriarchal, racist and homophobic contemporary societies; and it is precisely how and where the conversation goes and makes the difference, since classrooms and society *per se* are spaces of sexism and racism in multiple forms. So, this complicated conversation that curriculum is, becomes also an everyday fabrication and invention (Certeau, 1994) while it is, for Pinar, a sort of

> discovery and articulation for themselves and others of the educational significance of school subjects, for *the self* and for society. (Pinar, 2008, p. 140). And they are complicated... due to lack of transparency or self-transparency. It's complicated by how opaque are teachers and students to themselves and others. (Süssekind, 2014b, p. 31)

Like physicians and other professionals, teachers can and do make mistakes (Pinar, 2012, p. 18). The pressure over us is huge. (Pinar, 2008, p. 151)

While teaching teacher education courses, Stephanie and I were talking with students and *with* Pinar, who reinforced the idea that "[c]onceived as a complicated conversation, curriculum is a permanent effort to communicate with others" (Pinar, 2012, p. 47). In this sense, complicating the curricular conversation is the constant struggle for social emancipation (Santos, 2007), rising up against dichotomies, hierarchies and abyssalities (Santos, 2001, 2007, 2010) in a permanent search for a horizontal, rhizomatic and dissenting movement that forces us to look, recognizing and exchanging, rather than annihilating, the difference.

> Like the importance of ecology and dissent in *teachinglearning* movements. Like surprise, astonishment, constitutive elements of complicated conversations. (...) Surprise in the research. Because research is committed to surprising, inventing and *de-creating* the social. (Süssekind & Santos, 2016, p. 285)

During the January 2019 summer course, we invited different teachers, activists and artists to conduct complicated conversations and somehow enliven, color and bare differences and the different. These are two assessments written by students on the occasion, reporting that with the conversations,

> I was able to meet several teachers who spoke of democratic education in different ways, which shows me there is not only one way to democratize education, the more diverse the paths, more likely is to achieve it. (Student I, 2019)

> Exchanging ideas together often becomes more productive and a better way of learning than conventional teaching which often puts a lot of individual pressure on the student, where he or she is often forced to memorize what has been taught. The experience of valuing the ideas of individuals, uniquely and without pressure, helps their growth, and the class ends up having another path, whether to disagree or not with, which is also good for teachers. (Student VI, 2019)

Bringing together the idea of curricula as complicated conversations and the commitment to democratic education[5] was an experience with some strong learning that displaced us all. We have been required to escape from the total explanatory perspectives that take on the task of defining what is right or wrong, expected or innovative, prescribed or nonexistent. At the same time, we found ourselves crying, weaving rhizomes, hoaxing the writings (Certeau, 1994), deciphering parchments (Alves, 2001) and talking in a complicated way, emptying a project of unique future towards the North. Above all, we were weaving collective and individual diverse knowledges, learning not to summarize and preserve consensus, seeking other forms to register the curriculum lived by the group: as a lived experience registered *posteriori* to our curriculum dislocating abyssal lines towards the South, the democracy and the ecology.

> At the ecology of knowledge, as a post-abyssal epistemology, the pursuit of credibility for non-scientific knowledge does not imply discrediting scientific knowledge. It simply implies its counter-hegemonic use. (Santos, 2010, p. 48)
>
> Because it is a curriculum designed for life, it has to be thought beyond the classroom, a curriculum that is real, always dialoguing with students, teachers, the community itself, as the demands are diverse. (Student III, 2017)

By working with our own knowledge and the knowledges that the students brought from theorists and authors studied throughout the teachers' education, like excavators, it was as if we were doing a treasure hunt, valuing students' ideas even in dissent, as quoted by *Student III* above. One question catches our attention: to understand curricula as complicated conversations requires working on dissent, which makes the recognition of the legitimacy of the other pass through the appreciation of difference and autonomy. That is why we have suggested that the final assessments should consider the *currere* method.

In our reading of Pinar (1975), *currere* is the idea that writings about curriculum are documents of excavation and displacement, a recognition that people pre-exist to knowledge and not vice versa. Thus, students' written productions have value as an effort of self-rewriting and self-declaration of identity. *Currere* is, therefore, somehow historicized, post-written, autobiographical and cosmopolitan at the same time. *Currere* is also a complicated conversation woven from the self and many others that inhabit us. Bringing post-abyssal thinking (Santos, 2001, 2007, 2010, 2013) into dialogue once more, we will say that *currere* curriculum's *practicestheorypractices* (Alves, 2001) and conversation are actions from nonlinear, experiential and co-present perspectives. With Certeau (1994), we value an ordinary person who makes creative uses of culture and we invent new ways to train ourselves as teachers and to research at-from-with studies of everyday life. With Pinar (2011; 2012), we learn to dig holes in our lesson plans (Süssekind, 2014) by practicing complicated conversations with curricula in order to write *currere* (Pinar, 1975). With Alves (2001) and Oliveira (2012), we dive into the *knowingdoings* of the teacher's education curricula creation and its richness and disobedient daily life.

In the curricula in, of, *within* teacher education and research, (Süssekind, 2007; 2012), we have invested in the study of singular narratives captured in "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2012, p. 193) that happen in the daily life of schools and university where we perceive ordinary people creating (Certeau, 1994) knowledge in education situations that value dissent, co-presence and cognitive justice-oriented practices (Santos, 2010, p. 40), which "we think is important exchange "(Süssekind & Lontra, 2016, p. 86). Thinking of our complicated conversations as a practice of dissent, we compare it with Santos' (2007) idea of intercultural or diatopic translation, which makes it possible to better understand curricula as negotiation of *spacestimes*, layers of silences and multiplication of meanings, redemption of experience and even invention of words, thus constituting zones of mutual intelligibility between cultures and knowledge.

Is conversation a possibility of post-abyssal practice in research? In Santos, we find that "the struggle for global social justice must, therefore, also be a struggle for global cognitive justice. In order to be successful, this struggle requires new thinking, post-abyssal thinking" (Santos, 2013, p. 11). Thus, by moving the abyssal lines of practicing co-presence and intercultural translation (Santos, 2007) from a perspective of social and cognitive justice (Santos, 2013) it becomes possible to constitute and to value the existence of more horizontal *spacestimes* of dialogues, in which different logics and

values cohabit the same *spacestime*s. This is a properly complicated conversation, with *glocal* implications and whose existence happens only in difference and, therefore, in dissent. And as the students report it.

> The curriculum is not limited to a document containing discipline programs, or a well-written script about what should be done. A curriculum is made day by day, knowing the experience of each individual. That is why it makes no sense for a closed document that precludes diversity of thoughts. Respecting and knowing how to work with differences is the current difficulty, we will not go into a pattern, let us be different. Long live the diversity! (Student VIII, 2017)

In an ever-complicated conversation, agreement is in itself an impossibility since the contents are themselves complicated conversations, for teaching is curricula creation in everyday life, making more complicated the conversation between visibilities and opacities. Recently, Pinar (2017) wrote that "*currere*, above all, is a turn toward the subject, and his non-coincidence with the self is perhaps the prerequisite for a dissonant education" (p. 197). *Currere* is a complicated conversation with ourselves, our readings and wishes. That is why it is always at odds, subsisting in dissonance and dissent: it is resistance.

> The affront to traditionalism will be made by me, democracy will be practiced in my daily actions, and those who oppose it must do their very best to try to keep me from following. But I am sure that they will lose this battle, because respect for religions and their stories will be present in my speeches, conversations will create knowledge in the spaces I am in, the appreciation and recognition of differences and I will always defend a collective and multicultural curriculum, aiming to overcome prejudice and inequality, while building a democratic society. (Student X, 2019)

Agreement, within a traditional learning canon, is abandoned in the name of the right to dissent, knowledge, autonomy of thinking and, ultimately, to democracy. *Student XI*, despite noticing the authoritarian mark of a certain expectation of agreement, feels comfortable to disagree and criticize.

> Of course, I don't agree with 100% of everything you say and I don't like the bad words (LOL). (Student XI, 2019)

Within a post-abyssal epistemological approach, we argue that classrooms with democratic practices are possible since they value the average person in their practices of invention, uses and consumptions, unveiling the daily life of teachers' education, the conversations in which we form ourselves and others in the legitimization of the different, valorizing historicity, subjectivities, situational status, perishables, incompleteness and knowledge localities.

> Not considering your baggage of knowledge is denying your existence. Nothing can/should prevent anyone's existence. If I try to be like the other just to be accepted I deny myself as existing being. We must be careful when we self-deny or deny the other. (Student IV, 2017)

As *Student IV* says, "to deny one's knowledge is to annihilate one's existence." Consequently, we understand curricula as complicated conversations that unfold into a profusion of narratives that can be "interpreted under the idea of curriculum political, epistemological and methodological crossings of teacher education and self-education" (Süssekind & Lontra, 2016, p. 87), always as unique, new and human crossings.

> Thus, we understand that *formation* as well as the *curriculum* "is not that something goes from immobility to movement" (Skliar, 2014, p. 26), and, in this sense, the teacher is an artist, and "the complicated conversation is his medium" (Süssekind & Pinar, 2014, p 16). (Süssekind & Lontra, 2016, p. 91)

In this sense, investigation into learning-teaching-learning processes, professional education and curricula's practice, responds little to the idea of a curriculum as a list of objectives and content with measured results. Rather, we experience that curriculum as a complicated conversation, a movement, a crossing, numerous paths. For Aoki (2005), teachers are like bridges. This is what happens in all spaces and levels of education, involving planners and teachers, as well as the school community and society in general, their allegories, clichés, plots, historicity, contexts and situational ways (Pinar, 2012; Süssekind, 2014b).

> If curricula are crossings, if they are complicated, cosmopolitan, historicized conversations that bring glocality in multiple dimensions, which rhizomatically prevent fixity and suggest liquidity and fleetingness, then classrooms are spaces of event, difference and invention, of "manipulating common places" by conquering their own. (Süssekind & Lontra, 2016, p. 94)

For us, this also means assuming that curricular practices constitute *knowingdoing* networks and subjectivities (Alves, 2001; Oliveira, 2012) as processes of permanent reconstruction/ recreation, invention and exchange between "ordinary" people (Certeau, 1994, p. 14), although in this process, school is only one amongst many *spacestimes* (Alves, 2001), which are, like us, made of this rhizomatic social fabric (Süssekind, 2014). The daily invention of curricula is made in conversations lived and narrated, in meetings that are the conversations in the classroom.

> In the meetings there are exchanges of experiences with teachers and curricula as well as *collectivesingular* narratives, which are captured in the "complicated conversations" and studied from the epistemologies from the South. (Reis, Süssekind & Lontra, 2017, p. 137)
> Understanding, thus, the curricula as daily creation (Oliveira, 2012) that is done through negotiations with major or lesser silences that are the complicated conversations (Pinar, 2012), we *thinkpractice* (Oliveira, 2012) the curricula as a field of experience entangled in the exercise of teaching, through encounters and narratives (Reis, 2014). (Reis, Süssekind & Lontra, 2017, p. 138)

When we understand curriculum as a complicated conversation, academic disciplines are living traditions, dynamic, learned through participation (Pinar, 2012, p. 194)

Talking to curricula as complicated conversations, we set out to think of classrooms and "the *thinkingpracticing* curricula in school everyday life as a creative encounter of different and common that go through the reconstruction of oneself, the world and even the contents" (Reis, Süssekind & Lontra, 2017, p. 138). And so, we recognize that teaching is intellectual, creative, eventful, and experimental. In this sense it is worth understanding that curricula and writing are created on a daily basis (Oliveira, 2012) as a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) and that why is necessary to hear what practitioners of everyday life (Certeau, 1994) have to say, if we want to understand knowledge as a condition of existence in the relationship between people, and, not as an individual property. (Reis, Süssekind & Lontra, 2017, p. 137). Since it is a curriculum designed for life, it has to be thought beyond the classroom, a curriculum that is real, always dialoguing with students, teachers, the community itself, because demands are diverse. (Student III, 2017)

As we have already said, conversation is complicated because it happens among everyone in society, so curriculum *is* conversation, something that is done in an autobiographical way, being also group and societal, manufactured also in a collective and historicized way (Pinar, 2012; Süssekind, 2014a; 2014b). In teacher education, we believe, students learn the advantages of being democratic and alive.

> Didactics and curriculum are not about whatever needs to be taught only, but also about the experiences students and teachers bring to the conversation. All of this should be part of the classroom and count as content. A conversational, dynamic, complicated curriculum. (Student VII, 2018)

Therefore, we (Süssekind, 2012; 2014a) claim that taking curricula as complicated conversations is, in connection with the idea of invention and everyday practice, to value its everyday creation aspect by returning teachers and students to themselves as protagonists (Ferraço, 2003). Such connection, the possibility of understanding curricula as *thoughtpracticed* (Oliveira, 2012); as negotiation, or *noisy auction* (Ferraço, 2003), points to possibilities such as thinking curriculum-as-lived-experiences[6], a contribution brought by Pinar from Ted Aoki (2005). In the same direction, Pinar argues that the notion of curriculum needs to consider the conversation established between students and teachers at all levels involved in education, that is not restricted to the classroom, thus emphasizing personal/autobiographical, cultural/allegorical, social and political aspects, also the historicity of the subjectivity of the curriculum - seen as a verb-concept, but also as a practice. While talking-thinking-making curriculum, teachers talk not only to their students, but to their own mentors, their own experiences and their contents as well, since the contents themselves are conversations (Pinar, 2008). In a textbook, conversations may be presented as series of facts, representing a tentative agreement on what is truth, about this or that. So, conversations are tattooed by their time and have a certain direction or argument, moving towards them, said Pinar (Süssekind, 2014). For him, for example, racism is an indelible mark of American curricula and as many activities are planned, books written and anti-racist policies implemented yet, for the same reasons, racism will continue to be part of the complicated conversation that curricula are (Süssekind, 2014c; 2014b).

By taking curricula as complicated conversations, we abandon the possibility that a teacher in classroom may teach the same class, negotiating the same directions as another teacher in next room and, therefore, applying the same curriculum or the same test. By assuming, epistemologically, complexity and inventiveness, the power of creation, re-creation and invention in school daily life, it is not possible to sustain the existence/possibility of a scriptural text. Also, it becomes a condition, as I learned from Alves, to dive into the school's daily life in order to *listenfeel* (2001) (Certeau, 1994) teachers and the classroom's many layers of voices. (Aoki, 2005) (Süssekind, 2014, p. 1520)

When history disappears, subjectivity shrinks (Pinar, 2017, p. 195)

I can't wait to meet you
And continue that conversation
We didn't finish yesterday
Stayed for today.[7]

Understanding and writing, registering the curriculum as a complicated conversation, we intend to argue that it is an everyday creation that resides in the differences, as well as in the complexity, of human networks and the epistemological diversity of the world. In a school or academic environment, instead of exalting the world of different groups and practices, we need to draw from silence and oblivion the ontological and human significance of difference. Through conversations and narratives, we can build meaningful knowledge of all of us, definitely disregarding the possibility of a total, unique knowledge shaped from any *a priori* defined common interests. A complicated conversation only exists as dissensus.

Our theorization is guided by the idea of a classroom *spacetime* as a rich space for collaboration, exchange and solidarity, with multiple forms of knowledge and interests which contribute to the permanent and infinite process of human and professional formation. The power of the collective and practice in curriculum elaboration must be placed in a theoretical place of irrefutable importance, being the finite means though the uses are infinite (Certeau, 1994). Curricula created ecologically moves towards justice, social, cognitive and epistemological.

Understanding curriculum as an everyday life creation, and as a conversation (Alves, 2001), everyday life studies highlight teachers' narratives as a kind of political, methodological and epistemological research of choice. It is an epistemological turn that consolidates the idea that teachers' experience is defined as knowledge networks (Pinar, 2011), very close to the idea of curriculum-as-lived, experience formulated by Aoki (2005), giving newness and density to studies of everyday life (Süssekind, 2012; 2014c)

(…) no longer split by the dichotomies and hierarchies between knowledge, values, cultures. Subjects of aesthetic experience, inside and outside schools. Subjects who make themselves and their worlds, inseparable dimensions of word's existence, always impregnated by the perception of what we do, learn and re-signify. (Oliveira, 2012, p. 9)

Research itself becomes a complicated conversation in teacher education, without prescription, method or protocol. There are clues, tips on following people, following the plot and allegory, as stated by postmodern ethnography (Marcus, 1998). Research, under this approach, is *doing things together* (Becker, 1967, p. 21; Certeau, 1994, p. 58). Such

work is about establishing relationships, sharing knowledge, building wisdom, being aware of voice stratification (Aoki, 2005) as vigilant classroom teachers who want to reallocate the authority of knowledge, working less with logic than with experience (Dewey *apud* Doll, in Trueit, 2012; Süssekind, 2014c).

> Strange but I already feel like an old friend of yours
> Your blue All Star matches my high-top black sneakers[8]

Everyday life studies propose a theoretical movement that understands the curriculum as a conversation, as lived experiences, and focuses on the side of personal and common daily invention and creation (Certeau, 1994). This is why the epistemological debate about research and curriculum in teacher education can refer us not only to Pinar's concept of *currere*, but also to Aoki's (2005) legacy, who understands curriculum as a lived experience and teachers' stories as bridges to understand it (Süssekind, 2014c, p. 208).

> This story demonstrates the colors and multiplicity that exist in the school classrooms, in the complicated conversation that is the curriculum. (Süssekind, Porto & Reis, 2018, p. 5)

Notes

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3 A different and smaller version of this text was published in Portuguese in a book. Süssekind, M. L. (2019) Quem conversa conversa com. [If it's a conversation we are talking with, not to]. In: Oliveira, I. B., Peixoto, L., Süssekind, M. L. *Estudos do cotidiano, currículo e formação docente.* Curitiba, CRV.

4 "As a product of abyssal thinking, scientific knowledge is not socially distributed equitably, nor could it be, since its original purpose was to convert this side of the line into a subject of knowledge and the other side of the line into object of knowledge. Real-world interventions that favor them tend to be those that serve social groups that have greater access to this knowledge. As long as the abyssal lines continue to draw, the struggle for cognitive justice will not succeed if it is based solely on the idea of a more equitable distribution of scientific knowledge. Apart from the fact that such a distribution is impossible under the conditions of capitalism and colonialism, scientific knowledge has intrinsic limits to the kind of intervention it promotes in the real world. In the ecology of knowledge, as a post-abyssal epistemology, the pursuit of credibility for non-scientific knowledge does not imply discrediting scientific knowledge. It simply implies its counter-hegemonic use" (Santos, 2010, p.48).

5 Democratic education, whose definition has been socially and historically disputed and built as a "permanent process of democratization in which the school is not a ready and finished institution, since democracy only exists if and when it is democratically built from the perspective of respect for human rights and dialogue with social movements. For this, the autonomy of each school is the foundation of the democratization process, which therefore requires the emptying of standardizing educational policies in any pedagogical sense or sphere. Thus, democratic public education is necessarily for all

citizens, so it is popular, free, secular, inclusive, of social quality and is opposed to all forms of prejudice being-antiracist, anti- machismo, anti-sexist, anti-misogynist, anti-xenophobic, anti-lgbtphobic, anti-adult centric, thus contributing to overcoming all forms of discrimination" (CONAPE, 2018).

6 For Aoki, curriculum administrators need to hear more of the stories that teachers tell by building *a posteriori* curriculum, such as reports of lived experiences.

7 *All Star*. José Fernando Gomes Dos Reis / Nando Reis. Warner/Chappell Music, Inc

8 *All Star*. José Fernando Gomes Dos Reis / Nando Reis. Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

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