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# Why am I here? Librarians, Critical Reflection, and Library Values

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# Why am I here?

Librarians, Critical Reflection, and  
Library Values



# Abstract:

Professional and pre-professional reflection connects everyday librarianship to the philosophy, values, and ethics that shape our discipline. As such, ongoing reflection is an essential librarian competency to bridge thought and action; uncover personal values of librarianship; and ground librarian practice with library theory. This session reports on research using reflection methodology with a cohort of practicing librarians to uncover librarian motivations, values, and experiences that have shaped their own forms of librarianship. The intended outcome from this research is to suggest a process for librarian self-examination that illuminates connections to library philosophy and motivations for librarian practice.

Write a letter to your favorite  
librarian about your first memory  
of libraries

Writing Activity

(7 minutes)

# Study parameters...

- 6 academic librarians
- Met for 12 weeks
- Reflection curriculum of writing and concepts
- Final “synthesis” reflection coded for themes
- Follow-up survey about reflection experience

# Literature Review

How is reflection applied within librarianship?

Examined literature:

Library Science

Education

Curriculum Studies

Narrative/Critical Reflection

Database Keyword Analysis of:

Dissertation & Theses

LISTA

ERIC

Education Research Complete

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Grant (2007) identified over 900 articles within librarianship between 1969-2007 that involved reflection. Of these articles, only 6 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).”

# Why?

As a profession, we do not reflect holistically.

Reflection occurs in these areas of librarianship:

- library research methodologies
- library instruction
- gathering oral histories
- interacting with oral traditions

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A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping light blue circles. The left circle is labeled 'Participant' and contains a bulleted list of five items: Life Experiences, Beliefs, Relationships, Understandings, and Expectations. The right circle is labeled 'Librarianship' and contains a bulleted list of five items: Experiences, LIS Education, Philosophy, Career, and Expectations. The overlapping area in the center represents the intersection of these two domains.

## Participant

- Life Experiences
- Beliefs
- Relationships
- Understandings
- Expectations

## Librarianship

- Experiences
- LIS Education
- Philosophy
- Career
- Expectations

# Authenticity

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Write a letter to a young child about  
what libraries will look like in their  
lifetime?

Writing Activity

(7 minutes)

# *CURRERE*

A reflection methodology

William Pinar - Curriculum Studies

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# Regressive

Past:

...description and analysis of one's intellectual biography or if you prefer educational past.

# Progressive

Future:

...description of one's imagined future.

# Analytical

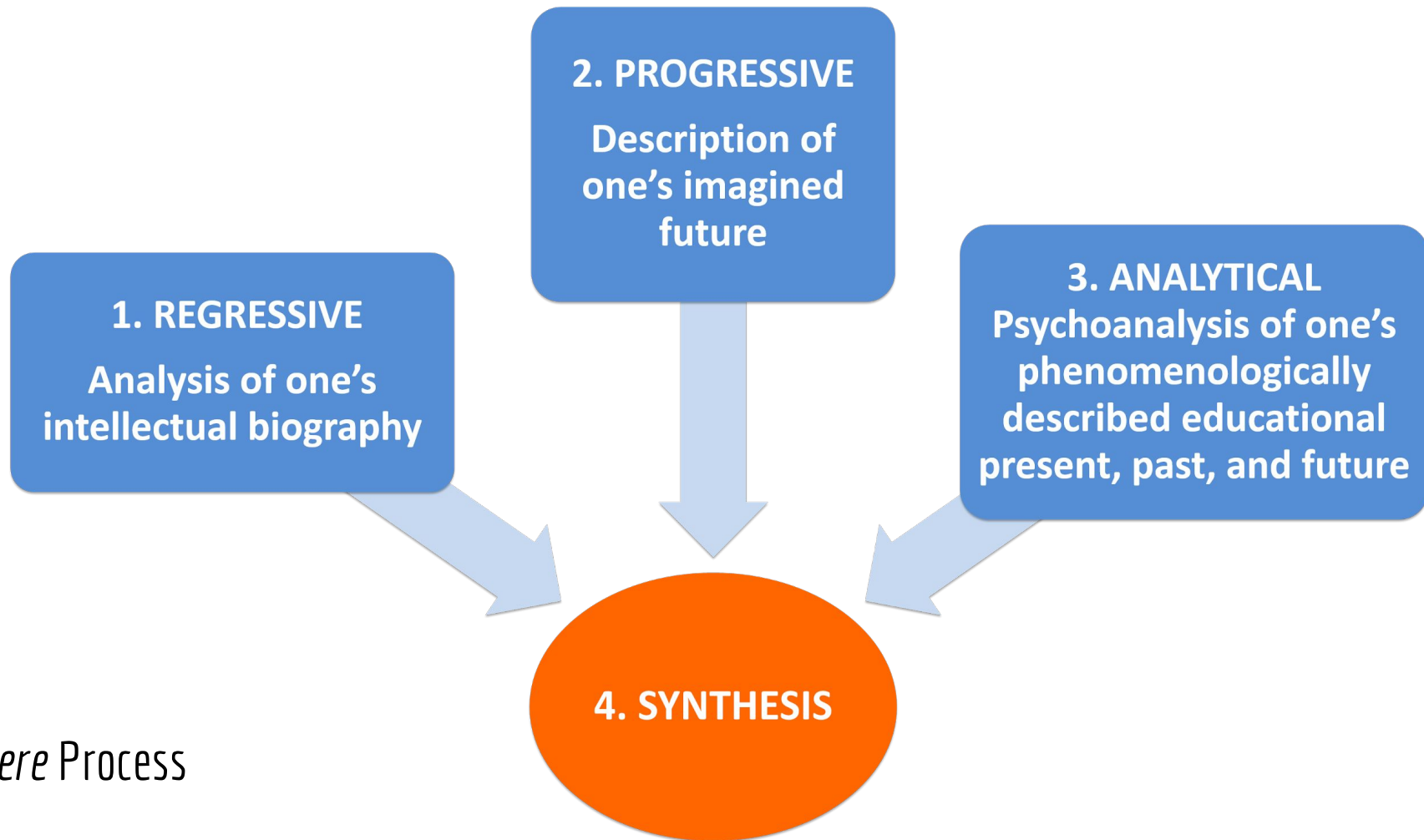
Present:

...a psychoanalysis of one's phenomenologically described educational present, past, and future

# Synthesis

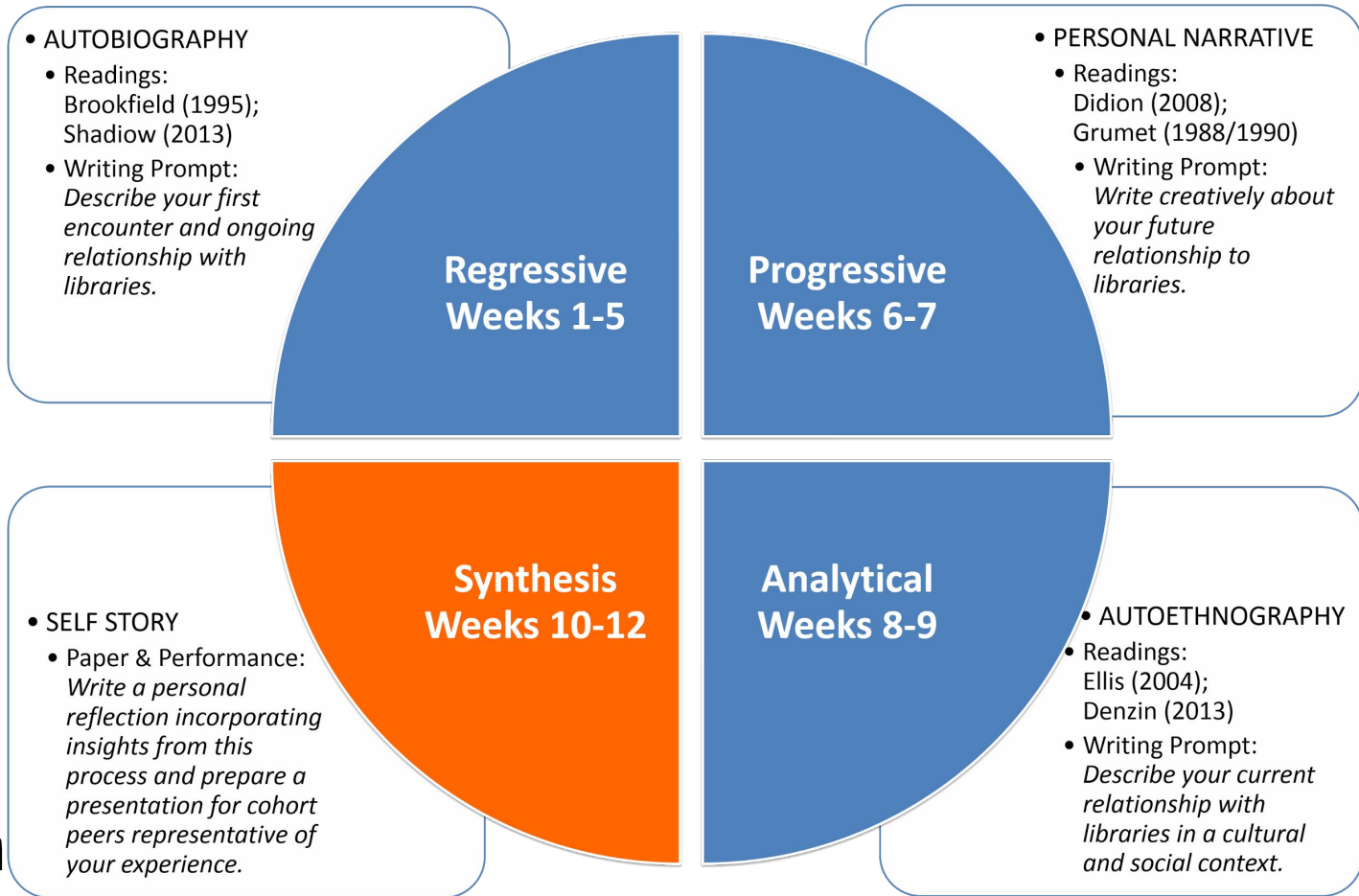
Synthesis:

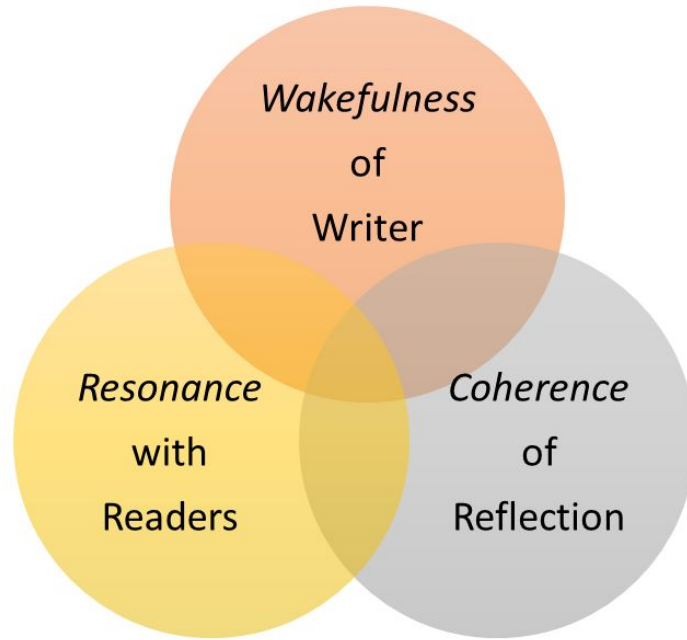
...that totalizes the fragments of education experience (that is to say the response and context of the subject) and places this integrated understanding of individual experience into the larger political and cultural web, explaining the dialectical relation between the two.



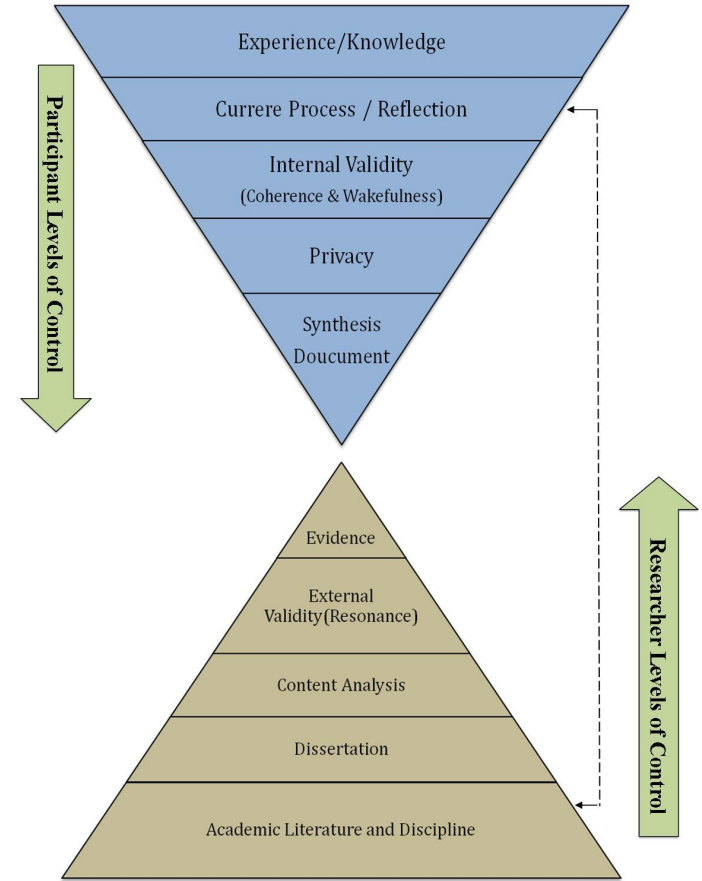
*Currere Process*

# Reflection Curriculum





Validity





## Participant

- Life Experiences
- Beliefs
- Relationships
- Understandings
- Expectations

## Librarianship

- Experiences
- LIS Education
- Philosophy
- Career
- Expectations

## Synthesis Reflections Coding



Write a letter to your “transition  
age self” (year 6, 12, 16, 19, 21)  
about your current career working  
in libraries?

Writing Activity

(7 minutes)

<u>Number of Survey Responses</u>	<u>Pre-Currere Mindset</u>	<u>Post-Currere Mindset</u>
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

Follow-Up Survey - Word Association

I am a mid-career librarian, and I've been increasingly been 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. (Dora)

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)

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. (Evelyn)

Ambivalent and Tired

# Burnout

and

# Debt

Pre-Curre Mindset

Ambivalent; Tired

Frustrated; Blocked

Unfocused; Engaged;  
Unconnected, Thoughtful;  
Indifferent; Uncertain; Outmoded;  
Biding Time

<u>Number of Survey Responses</u>	<u>Pre-Currere Mindset</u>	<u>Post-Currere Mindset</u>
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Reflection can be transformative!

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)

Renewed and Thoughtful

*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?*

Follow-up Survey Question



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.

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.

Renewed and Thoughtful

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 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.

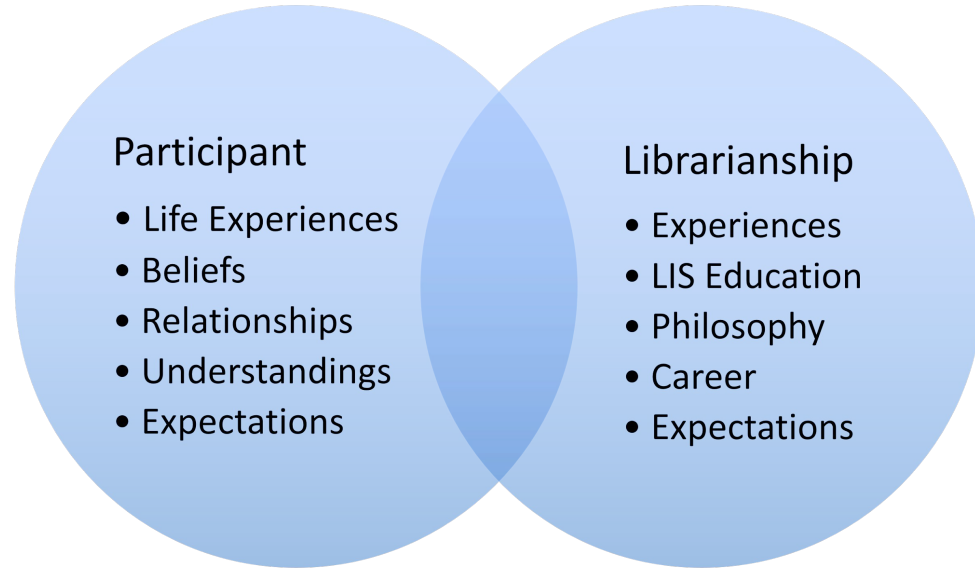
Renewed and Thoughtful

Reflect on the three reflections you made.  
Think critically about them.  
Write about why librarianship is significant  
to you, using evidence from your previous  
reflections...

Writing Activity

(7 minutes)

Where/What are the  
librarian values  
uncovered in these  
reflections?



# Findings...

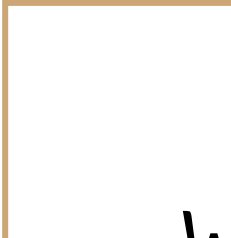
## **Pre-*currere* curriculum:**

Librarians are feeling “blocked” and “ambivalent” about the profession.

Exhibiting possible symptoms of burnout.

## **Post-*currere* curriculum:**

Librarians felt “renewed”, “thoughtful”, “rejuvenated”, and “aware” about the profession.



Why are you  
here?

Any revelations from your own  
reflection experiences?



# Discussion?

Questions / Comments

Thank you

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