A sixteen-year-old boy who had the best academic achievement in his school threw himself off his apartment balcony on March 28, 2013. His Will said, “Mom, I cannot endure this pain anymore. My brain nibbles my heart. I am sorry” (Kim, 2013). A brain nibbling at a heart metaphorically expresses the tyranny of the pressure on students for academic achievement. Korean students’ suicide rate is the highest in the world (Lee & Jang, 2011). Researchers have reported the intensity of the pressure and shown that there is a correlation between students’ suicide rates and levels of academic stress (Ang & Huan, 2006; Kandel & Raveis, 1991; Lee & Jang, 2011). The severity of the tragedy is associated with the history and culture of Korean education that is known as hakbeolism, an indigenous Korean concept, which emphasizes achieving credentials from privileged universities as the top priority of education (Kim, 2004; Kim, 2008; Jung, 2014). In this culture, what matters the most in education is how efficiently one learns particular knowledge and skill sets. Under this ideology, education is predicated primarily on instrumental rationality and survival of the fittest, which advocates educational Darwinism based on the philosophy of “aggressive competition and social Darwinism” (Lampert, 2012, p. 50).

*Hakbeolism* has affected Korean people’s attitudes toward education, which they take very seriously, for individuals as well as society (Ripley, 2013). However, this culture can lead to some negative consequences in Korean society: social inequality and its reproduction (Hong & Youngs, 2008; Jung & Lee, 2003); the phenomenon of shadow education (Lee & Shouse, 2011); and the diminished well-being of students’ and their families (Lee, 2014). Taking a sociological and psychological perspective in critiquing *hakbeolism*, Sang Bong Kim (2004) argues that it is a kind of “corruptive collective identity fallen into the bottomless pit of inauthenticity” (p. 193). Collective identity, Kim explains, has its rationale when both my identity and yours remain alive and are actualized at our points of intersection. In the same vein, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, and Wetherell (1987) explain that collective identity, which is different from an interpersonal identity that requires personalized bonds of attachment and a sense of belonging, resides in a “*depersonalized sense of self, a shift toward the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person*” (p. 50). Identity influenced by *hakbeolism*, then, prioritizes collective identity over, if not at the expense of, individual identity (Kim, 2004). Individual and collective identity are
neither antagonistic nor mutually exclusive. For the development of authentic and healthy identity, individuals need both a sense of belonging as a member of a society and the freedom to incorporate one’s subjectivity into his or her identity formation.

Subjectivity, in the most general sense, is what expresses one’s singularity. It is “the inner self, the lived sense of ‘self’—however non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented—that is associated with what has been given and what has been chosen, those residues of trauma and of fantasy” (Pinar, 2009, p. 3). By reconstructing a subject’s engagement with knowledge and lived experience in the world, one’s subjectivity takes form (Green & Reid, 2008, p. 20). In this sense, subjectivity is an essential and fundamental site of learning and teaching. Without incorporating subjectivity, teaching is reduced to procedural and systematized implementation, and learning is a dead act of mimicking whatever teachers or subject specialists choose for students. In this regime, there is only intellectual submission and the substitution of subjectivity for academic achievement. Here, standardization of education risks effacing subjectivity. South Korea is hardly alone in this crisis (see Poetter & Googins, 2017). Teachers in Florida, for instance, are told to “stay to a script…to teach the exact same thing in every single classroom” (Hernandez, 2016), a practice which “consumes every moment of every day” (Solnet, 2011). The erosion of the subjectivity of students, a destructive consequence of the dehumanization of education through standardization and high-stakes testing, engenders students’ dependency and arrests the development of autonomy (see Jung, 2016).

In South Korea, education has been under the spell of politicians and the conservatives in society who advocate for its standardization. Some educators have internalized such an agenda, which fixes education into specified, pre-ordained objectives, solidifies a core of content knowledge, and, as a result, blocks educational possibilities. What can I, a teacher educator, do to fight against this tragedy? How can I make my teaching matter in activating subjectivities that sometimes are traumatized or haunted by the tyranny of standardization? What can I do for my students to help them deal with the historical and cultural legacies that they embody? Through studying the lives of three heroic figures—Jane Addams, Laura Bragg, and Pier Paolo Pasolini—in The Worldliness of a Cosmopolitan Education (Pinar, 2009), Pinar encourages me to find my own way of engaging ethically with my students and the world. His notion of subjective reconstruction extends to engaging in a life-long study of one’s own that he calls a cosmopolitan education through “subjective and social reconstruction” (Pinar, 2009, p. 148). One of my own ways is to teach through currere, which I purposefully and carefully incorporate into my teaching.

In 2015, in a sophomore-level curriculum theory and practice course, I juxtaposed the subject matter with the method of currere in an effort to activate students’ subjectivities and incorporate their lived experience. In my teaching experiences, I have found the complexity of resolve most intriguing. I am interested in understanding the role of resolve in students’ subjective reconstruction. In what follows, I analyze students’ writings and interview transcripts to understand how the method of currere works for change and its implications for teacher education.