
We are All Donald Trump

Dis/entangling from the Us/Them Binary in Education

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DONALD TRUMP'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN and administration have brought to the forefront of our collective attention a white supremacy, xenophobia, and sexism that for many years endured unchecked in the shadows of American society and its political structures. Racism and hatred existed as fringe perspectives that were disallowed from mainstream political discourse, and it was unacceptable to most people to voice these opinions aloud or to enact them openly. Yet, with Donald Trump's flagrant xenophobic and misogynistic statements, such as Mexicans are "rapists" (Trump, 2015), Haitians "all have AIDS" (Shear & Hirschfeld Davis, 2017), Haiti and African nations are "shithole countries" (Dawsey, 2018), and insulting women as ugly (Shear & Sullivan, 2018) or objectifying them as merely sexual objects that he could grab "by the pussy" (Trump, 2005), some took his openness to offend as permission to speak and do as he did and ushered in a *post-truth* world. That is, regardless of the truth of Trump's claims, his emotions and personal beliefs were more influential than objective facts in his suggested public policy (Midgley, 2016). Thus, the violent supremacies that were once seemingly hidden within mainstream society became visible and, to a minority of the American population, acceptable as legitimated post-truths. Since Trump's election, reports of hate crimes to police have risen significantly (Levin & Reitzel, 2018), and Müller and Schwarz (2018) argued that Trump's Islamophobic tweets influenced hate crimes against Muslims. Not limited to private individuals, these attitudes have manifested in official government policies with executive orders such as the ban on immigration from predominantly Muslim countries, a refusal to enforce DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and the denial of due process for immigrant families seeking asylum that resulted in the separation of parents from their children during detainment. The hatred is visible and tangible.

In addition to bringing forth these once covertly influential views, the election season and the events that followed with the current presidential administration have highlighted ostensibly explosive political, cultural, and ethical divisions in the United States. These divisions, made more distinct with the influence of the two-party system in American politics, have morphed into a discourse of "us versus them" to the point of seemingly irreconcilable differences exemplified with

large-scale protests and marches, Twitter wars, and destroyed personal relationships. The gray area of American politics seems to have vanished, leaving behind the mindset of “you are either for us or against us”—you are either contributing to these attitudes and policies or you are working against them. There is no longer any negotiating territory. It seems almost impossible to have any kind of understanding or compromise within this incommunicable difference.

This binary, or “The Trump Effect,” as Costello (2016) called this increased sense of divisiveness, spilled over into schools, and whether teachers brought it up or not, students were “bringing heightened emotion to school along with their backpacks” (p. 6). As educators, this presented a challenge. For one, it created tension among student populations with an increase in racial taunting and violence, such as chants of “Build the wall” referring to a proposed wall at the U.S.-Mexico border (Stafford & Higgins, 2016). Moreover, just as students bring their political views to school, teachers, whether knowingly or not, carry their own figurative backpacks of political opinions. We, the authors of this paper, have struggled with how to teach, or even think about teaching, those students within our classes who hold views so much unlike our own—views with which we strongly disagree. We asked ourselves the question—how do we teach within this historical situation of seemingly irreconcilable divisiveness? Yet, what we realized when discussing this question was that the underlying problem was not the divisiveness itself but rather the “us/them” binary that we reinforced with questions like, “How to do we teach them? How do they learn from us?”

The question we began asking, then, and the focus of this paper is, “How do we move ourselves away from the us/them binary in order to contribute to healing the divisions?” To answer this question, we created the concept *dis/entanglement* to engage with a different discourse. This concept functions to reconceptualize the subject and *relationality*, or the way in which we are connected with the world in general. Dis/entanglement, as we discuss more fully later, is an acknowledgment that “we” are connected to the world—we both are the world and are within the world and, as such, may act with *response-ability* (Barad, 2007). That is, being entangled within this historical situation, we are called to address the cleavages that separate and harm us. As we argue in this paper, it is helpful to imagine a more just future if we imagine that we are all Donald Trump. That is, in relationality, we position ourselves as inseparable from that which we might wish to perceive as nothing like us. Yet, when we consider this possibility that we are Donald Trump, we consider our own contributions to the conditions that create the injustices around us, and we can envision and act towards healing wounds and creating flourishing relationships.

In this paper, we engage in an *ethico-onto-epistemological* imagining of dis/entanglement from the knots that bind us immovably from making change. Specifically, we focus on the gridlock that the us/them binary and the Cartesian subject create to instead real-ize (in the sense of *to make real* and experienced) our interconnectedness, interdependence, and response-ability. We begin by discussing ethico-onto-epistemology, relationality, and response-ability before discussing possible implications of our dis/entanglements in secondary schools and teacher education programs.

Acting Beyond the Binary

Ethico-onto-epistemology, a term coined by Barad (2007), could be described as an approach to acting in relation, being, and knowing in the world that envisages these three as indivisible from one another. As St. Pierre, Jackson, and Mazzei (2016) explain, “how we conceive the relation of knowledge and being is a profoundly ethical issue” (p. 99). This theoretical frame

functions as a doing rather than simply thinking about knowledge, reality, and ethics, or what Barad might refer to as an enactment. Within an ethico-onto-epistemological framework, reality exists as a continuous force of ever-differing, entangled, relational interactions between all types of matter, decentering both the human and the individual. Barad (2010) conceptualizes these entanglements as more than an interconnectedness of matter—entanglements are “relations of obligations” (p. 265). The idea of ethico-onto-epistemology is to turn away from the Cartesian model dominated by a focus on an independent, rational self that “established a new ontological order in which ontology is separated from and dominated by epistemology” (St. Pierre, 2016, p. 114). While previous scholars have critiqued the Cartesian subject (Harding, 1991), ethico-onto-epistemology is an attempt to mend the false cuts made by the dominant Western thought that separate acting in relation, being, and knowing.

Ethico-onto-epistemology renders impossible the Cartesian subject who is a separate, autonomous, and independent rational thinker. Descartes (1637/2017) characterized this subject, the *cogito*, with the phrase, “I am thinking, therefore I exist” (p. 15). In other words, Descartes (1637/2017) philosophized that all he knows to be true is that he is a *thinker* and *only* a thinker. He continued, “This taught me that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which doesn’t need any *place*, or depend on any *material thing*, in order to exist” (p. 15). This thinker, then, is separate from the body, senses, and emotions and is detached from every other physical thing that is not him. It is an independent, autonomous, rational “I” distinct from the materiality of everyone and everything. Descartes privileged reason over every other faculty. He wrote, “For after all, whether we are awake or asleep, we ought never to let ourselves be convinced except by the evidentness of our reason. Note that I say ‘our reason’, not ‘our imagination’ or ‘our senses’” (p. 18). This subject, we argue, is so prevalent in Western ontology and epistemology that it is regularly assumed and taken to be “common sense.” When thinking about “I,” one automatically assumes a Cartesian subject, rather than complex, dynamic, entangled relationships. In ethico-onto-epistemology, the Cartesian subject doesn’t work. Yet, this Cartesian conception of the self still performs in the world around us. We are not free from it simply because we think it false. We still live in a world filled with this version of the self built into the fibers of political, societal, and cultural structures. While scholars, particularly feminist and decolonial scholars such as Alcoff (2008), Ani (1994), Bordo (2008), Coole and Frost (2010), Lugones (2010), Oyèwùmí, (2008), and Saez (1999), have challenged effectively Cartesian philosophy and binary logic, we turn to dis/entanglement as a different imagination of how to move away from the Cartesian subject and the false binaries in which we find ourselves.

Dis/entanglement functions as an ethico-onto-epistemological concept in which knowing, being, and acting are not separate but rather are intimately and irreducibly connected. This concept relies on different conceptions of the subject, relationality, and ethics. As an ethico-onto-epistemological concept, it is a call to action rather than a transcendent, theoretical term. Thinking with dis/entanglement, we acknowledge that we live in a Cartesian-dominated world. Yet, dis/entanglement also allows us to imagine how we might lessen its hold on us—we have the ability to pull the strings of the knots as an attempt to create change. This doing of dis/entanglement requires that we think with a different conceptualization of the subject and relationality, which we discuss in the next section.

Relationality

Existence on this planet and beyond is entangled. Nothing exists truly separate from anything else. For example, this table the computer is resting on contains the wood from the tree that was cut down, the sun that allowed the tree to live and grow, the soil that nourished it, the rain that watered it, and the carpenter who made it. Human and nonhuman, living and nonliving, are all essential parts of this table, and dividing them up not only fails to make sense, it is unethical. Without any one of the aforementioned energies, this table in front of us would cease to exist. It only exists in relationality.

Humans too are born literally entangled with their mothers. But birth is a creation of something entirely different than the entanglement of the womb that came before. Birth begins with an actual cut of the umbilical cord. This is a literal disentanglement as the child is physically separated from the mother's body. Yet, it is not that simple. It is not as if the entanglement of mother and child has ended. Rather, it is a different configuration of the relationality with many different possibilities that could actualize from this cut—breastfed, bottle-fed, adoption, surrogacy. And that relationship continues in its reconfiguring as the child grows, life moves, and the mother ages. It is a beautiful process of departure and returning different—of movement and change. This is the complex relationship that we call dis/entanglement.

Barad (1996, 2007, 2010, 2012) borrowed the term *entanglement* from quantum physics to describe an ontology that is not the individual affair that Descartes might articulate, but rather one in which all matter, living and nonliving, exists in an inextricable relationship with one another. As Barad (2007) described it, entanglement is much more than a simple connection with the world: “To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence” (p. ix). In other words, the self is not a singular, independent “I” in an ontology of entanglement. With the application of this concept beyond the quantum level to broader life, Barad (2010) called into question “two-ness, and ultimately one-ness” of an independent self as she argued, “One is too few, two is too many” (p. 251). This idea exists, and has existed, in Buddhist philosophy for two millennia, with what Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (2001/2009) called non-self. He wrote:

Non-self is something miraculous. When we look deeply at a flower, we see all the non-flower elements there, such as earth, sun, minerals, the gardener, and so on. If we look deeply enough, we will see that the whole cosmos has come together to manifest this miracle. The flower is full of all the elements of the cosmos—time, space, the sun, rain, even your consciousness—everything. But the flower is empty of one thing. It is full of all things, but it is empty of one thing: a separate existence. It is empty of any separate entity called self. (pp. 106-7)

We think of the subject as presented in this way as represented by the mathematical equation of $1 < “I” < 2$ —the “I” rests somewhere between total individuation and the complete dissolution of individual identity in relation with everything else.

As Barad (2007) discussed, entanglement is not an interaction between two separate entities but is rather a complex relationship of interdependence and co-creation between the inseparable individual and the whole. Within this entangled relationship, the $1 < “I” < 2$ is iteratively reconfiguring in its relationality with the world and changing the identity of existence. That is, within this inseparability of the one from the all, there are “differentiations that cut together/apart”

(Barad, 2007, p. 241)—the $1 < \text{“I”} < 2$ is not stable but rather is a fluctuating contraction both affecting and being affected by dis/continuous encounters with the world. The self also continuously differs from itself in relationality with the whole of which it is a part. This is encapsulated in the South African principle of Ubuntu: “I am because we are, and we are because I am.” This precept refers to the fact that an “individual” is continually differing through their relationship of co-creation with the entire “community,” and reciprocally, the entire “community” is impacted by the words-thoughts-actions of each “individual.” There is still an “I” and the possibility of difference within this relationship of interdependence. As the Ubuntu principle insinuates, the self is in constant co-creation through this interdependent relationship. This interdependent relationship also requires that difference and differing among individuations is ontological. The “I” and the “We” are inseparable, as the individual cannot be disconnected from the whole while the whole cannot be without the individual and the difference it brings. Yet, there is a larger self contained in the “We.” Within this different philosophy of ethico-onto-epistemology, the idea of an independent, stable, human existence is under erasure. Relationality transforms as we move away from the Cartesian conception of the isolated, individualized man to one of coexistence and co-creation.

In this mathematically different existence of $1 < \text{“I”} < 2$, there is no “I” that is singular, separate, or autonomous, no matter how invisible we, and the American, Capitalist system, might attempt to make it. As Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) asserted, erasure of the “I” is not the goal:

To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (p. 3)

The point is a different conception of the “I,” one that acknowledges that, in our individuation, we are not independent from one another. This does not mean, however, that we are all the same. Therefore, there can be a “you” and “me,” and simultaneously, we are all you and all me, as we explain in the next section.

Response-ability

Nhất Hạnh (1987/2005) wrote about the idea that we are all each other when he chronicled the rape of young female refugees by pirates after the Vietnam War. Nhất Hạnh described how naturally we want to shoot and kill the sea pirates who do this after they horribly hurt these young girls. He reminded us with this story to see too that, because of our entanglement, we are all connected to the conditions that are producing the sea pirates committing these atrocities. Nhất Hạnh wrote, “I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I would now be the pirate” (p. 66). In this way, there is no essentialized sea pirate. Rather, he is created through his engagement with the world—with the systems, discourses, people, and materiality of his experiences. Nhất Hạnh explained this:

I saw that many babies are born along the Gulf of Siam, hundreds every day, and if we educators, social workers, politicians, and others do not do something about the situation, in twenty-five years a number of them will become sea pirates. That is certain. If you or I

were born today in those fishing villages, we might become sea pirates in twenty-five years. If you take a gun and shoot the pirate, you shoot all of us, because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs. (p. 66)

Nhất Hạnh pointed out how each of us is implicated in the systems that create the conditions for some of us to become sea pirates, and how easily it could be us, ourselves, being constructed by these conditions.

We, of course, are not literally the sea pirate. But we are not figuratively the sea pirate either. We are the sea pirate through our relationality, somewhere in between this binary. We are both—1 < “I” < 2. What we do mean is that, because we are in this entangled relationality, we contribute to conditions that produce the effects of the policies of Donald Trump, and therefore, we can influence changes that create more ethical circumstances for all of us and especially for those of us most disenfranchised. We want to emphasize here that this conception of being one with the sea pirate or one with Donald Trump does not mean that blame belongs to the lives that are harmed. After all, if we are the beings we deplore, we are also those who experience injustice—we are the village girls, too. If we see ourselves in our connections, entangled with the sea pirate, entangled with the village girls who were raped, entangled with Donald Trump, entangled with the four year old little boy separated from his mother, then we have an ability to initiate change—a *response-ability* (Barad, 2010). That is, as Barad explained, response-ability is the ability to respond and act in ways that are mutually life giving and life affirming, in our entangled relations.

Dis/entanglement is what we think of as one opportunity or strategy for being response-able. For one, it is an acknowledgment of the entangled relationality of the world while simultaneously acting as a reminder that we, in our 1 < “I” < 2 existence, have the ability to hope for a more just future to come and an ability to act on that hope (Barad, 2010). The addition of the ‘*dis/*’ then, emphasizes the possibilities of creating different relations, perhaps more ethical ones, through which we can move away from and respond to violence and injustice.

This concept of dis/entanglement became, and continues to be, the process of our disengaging from the perceived and experienced separations resulting from the Trump election and towards the entangling of many factors, forces, and energies—material and immaterial, human and non-human, virtual and actual—into something different. In other words, dis/entanglement is our tool to address both the issue of the “I” as 1 < “I” < 2 and the possibilities for action within that existence. In our decisions and actions, we make the cuts that separate us, but that does not erase the world’s relationality. We do not and cannot exist nor think alone, as knowing and being are not separate phenomena—the Cartesian rational and independent man is a falsehood. Dis/entanglement is not just something that happens to us—it is something that we do and something that can be done to us. To be clear, it is not that this concept of dis/entanglement means that one can fully individualize or completely dis/entangle; rather, we exist in ongoing, always already intertwined relations. Dis/entanglement provides us with the possibility of an ongoing process of moving away from stuckness and violence towards something different, towards healing. And it is a process that never ends—it is nothing but unceasing movement.

Nhất Hạnh (2001/2009) wrote about this process of dis/entanglement by describing how, looking deeply, we can see that flowers will transform into compost, but this does not mean we need to despair. We can see ourselves metaphorically as the gardener who has the power of transforming the compost into the flower. The compost is in the flower, and the flower is in the compost. They cannot exist separately. This is why we put a slash in dis/entangle, because we can never completely separate. Again, the Cartesian fabrication of an independent, rational thinker is

a myth. But this relationality is what makes response-ability possible: “If we are very aware, we can change the course of things” (Nhất Hạnh, 1987/2005, p. 69).

Yet, even if we refuse to acknowledge this ontological entanglement, if we try to *disentangle* from our relationality, we are still implicated in ethical, or less than ethical, interactions. This ignorance still acts (Tuana, 2008). One might choose to disentangle from ethical responsibilities like in the example of the sea pirate. As Barad (2007) wrote, we live in “relations of irreducible responsibility” (p. 265). The reconceptualization of the “I” in entanglement establishes that we are inseparable from another in an unbreakable relationship. Our actions, then, may still be our own, but they also become the world’s. For example, a tomato farmer may willfully or unintentionally fail to acknowledge our relationality and act in disregard of the effects that certain pesticide use creates for plants, animals, the humans who harvest the fruit, the water supply, the soil, and the air. The farmer’s decision around pesticides and farming practices has larger effects—therein lies the existence of “relations of obligation” (Barad, 2010, p. 265). Our agency and free will does not give us the ability to do whatever we want. There is still an “I” that acts, but we cannot disentangle our actions’ relations to others. We can’t wish them away. Our action is not totalizing; it is multifaceted, but it does act in relation to. Again, there are no dichotomies in ethico-onto-epistemology; rather, we live in both and. As individuations, our actions, when we think we are acting for just ourselves, are always affecting someone and something else in our relationality. We see what happens when we act as if we do *not* live in relationality—the sea pirate had no regard for the lives he was harming in his actions. Dis/entanglement is a neutral term. It does not offer us a once and for all solution, nor is it a guarantee for ethical choices. But it does offer us a space, a possibility, an opportunity for them.

Relationality and Response in Education

We come to this paper as educators of pre-service teachers and high school students. This theorizing on dis/entanglement arose out of our own encounters of stuckness with our students. It was in those moments of pedagogical freezing that we struggled with how to respond when a student makes comments like “I’m not a feminist” or “I don’t like having women teachers.” We do not like to hear statements like these. When they occur, they seem violent to our minds and assaulting to our goals of pushing back against injustices. In theorizing these difficult moments, we realized that we, too, are those students. There is not a binary of us/them. We are all literally in the same boat, in the same entangled web, on the same planet. We are all our students. When a student says, “America shouldn’t allow refugees in the country” or “black people aren’t slaves anymore so they should be happy with the rights they have,” we are those students, too. When a pre-service teacher says, “those kids can’t do that” or “poor people should just work harder,” we are those students. In this section, we discuss what we learned and experienced through this inquiry as educators teaching in this political context. We discuss how we found it helpful to dis/entangle, move away, from our own binary thinking. Then, we articulate how we tried to turn towards acting in relationality. Finally, we describe how we practiced *holding space* for our students.

We realized we had to dis/entangle from our own stuckness, our own perceptions of “the other side,” and from the discourses that the election has intensified and then entangle with our students whose thoughts left us physically disgusted. To disentangle, as in completely separate or cut off, is a false reality—we are not capable of that kind of disentangling, and if we attempt that, then we’re not going to get anywhere. Instead, we remain in two isolated echo chambers,

reinforcing the mythic binary. Yet, the answer is not dis/entangling with consciousness-raising to help our students “perceive their situation correctly” either (Sarachild, 2000, p. 274). If we think of those who disagree with our politics or philosophies of education as lacking the correct knowledge, then we are seeing a deficit in them—we are correct, and they are wrong; we know the answers, and they do not. In other words, this binary of us/them can lead to deficit thinking that encourages the Cartesian stable identity. As educators, we want to move away from that characterization because it seems to create a stagnation and stuckness that maintains and reinforces hierarchies. “My side” is always us and privileged. “They” are always them and lacking. And change never occurs. Yet, as we have discussed throughout this paper, we are all whole, not lacking anything, and we are in the process of constant creation. That is, we are always already complete in a reality, a universe, where change, ongoing differing, occurs. The binary is a falsehood, and remaining in that binary creates violence.

If as teachers we stay in this binary, we too maintain and reinforce the Cartesian logic of decades of education and of our greater society’s media discourse. This falsehood, however long it has been in existence, is a part of this post-truth era in which we find ourselves. We attempt to dis/entangle from this idea that there are two sides as a confrontation with post-truth. There are not two sides; there are not multiple sides; there is only oneness in this different conception of the individual as $1 < \text{“I”} < 2$ as we have discussed. The problem with both sides’ thinking (i.e., liberals and conservatives) is that we are separable and that we are not responsible for one another. Liberals and conservatives both unfriend people on social media and remove people from their lives over political difference. People can feed the illusion that we can be separate. However, without the acknowledgment that we are all entangled, we lessen the possibilities for ethical futures. We are not trying to convert “the other side to our side;” instead, we attempt to dis/entangle from “sides” and falsities that seemingly spread so quickly and find acceptance too easily.

We found it useful to consider how we might teach with an orientation toward relationality in our goal of dis/entangling ethically from this post-truth of the us/them binary. If we are each other as Valdez and Paredes (n.d.) wrote of the Mayan principle “In lak’esh,” *tú eres mi otro yo, you are my other me*, then we are also response-able for caring for the whole, including the individuations within it, and for recognizing that my actions do indeed affect you, and yours, me. We are attempting to orient pedagogy towards relationality. For instance, we created a project on immigration for Ashli’s high school government class. Instead of having students evaluate controversial issues based on a “pro-con” debate model in which students evaluate “sides” in order to decide which one is “right,” we removed the “sides” from the analysis and had students evaluate immigration policy options. In other words, students engaged with the topic holistically by considering the complexity of differences in multiple perspectives in relation with one another and, as such, confronted post-truth “facts” about immigration and the us/them binary—the idea that there is only one right approach to immigration policy from the two choices offered by Democrats and Republicans. Then, after evaluating the myriad policy options, students looked for commonalities in their own policies that they devised. What shocked them was that, despite the common impression that Americans are divided deeply on immigration policy, their peers and the general American population, based on the policies that each student created and several public opinion polls about American attitudes towards immigration, are much more in agreement on immigration than the teenagers would have thought.

Continuing this theme of moving away from the us/them binary, Ashli introduced political ideologies with the goal of orienting herself and the students outside the confounds of a two-party system in the United States that contributes to this falsity that it is us versus them. Students began

by taking a political ideology quiz that mapped political beliefs based on economic and political axes, instead of a liberal-conservative, or right-left, spectrum (Pace News, 2018). Instead of consciousness-raising, which positions students as deficient while the teacher holds the correct knowledge, the lesson aimed to address an American post-truth that there are only two sides from which to choose. This, then, simultaneously created a different orientation towards relationality that not only confronted the us/them binary but also held space for multiple viewpoints on political issues. In taking away the linear leftwing/rightwing spectrum, it became more difficult for students to think of their relationship with their peers as us/them. In fact, the results of the quiz showed that no member of the class ideologically aligned with either liberal or conservative ideology. While these lessons were not meant to solve the political divisiveness, they have been strategies in which we attempted to apply this theorizing of relationality, of Ubuntu, “I am because you are,” to practice and dis/entangle, at least for a short duration, from the binary of us/them. As we discuss next, this was an attempt at holding space for students to maintain their political difference without establishing a toxic us/them binary in the class.

Finally, we theorized about holding space for our students. By hold space, we mean being with difference without judgment, without boxing it into binaries or making separate, fixed identities out of it, and reading those on to our students. Difference for us, as Deleuze (1968/1994) argued, “is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing” (p. 57). For Deleuze, this meant that difference is reality itself. That is, life, perhaps the subject, for example, is constant change. Again, this idea of difference is unlike the stable world, including the subject, that Cartesian thought imagines. Difference, as we imagine it when holding space, is normal—it is the way of the universe—and, as such, is not undesirable like negative narratives of difference commonly found in schools that privilege standardization and uniformity might make it seem. We see this discomfort with difference manifesting in ourselves through deep desires to correct, change, or even annihilate Trump-sympathizing perspectives. In this view, political difference becomes a disease to eradicate. Or, it may arise when we simply disagree with students. However, as Deleuze (1968/1994) wrote, “difference must leave its cave and cease to be a monster” (p. 29). We should reconsider our negative views of difference and act as a petard to the seemingly impenetrable fortress in order to make meaningful strides towards living with our diversity ethically.

As teachers, then, we tried to hold space by listening, being with, and opening ourselves both to students’ expressions of difference and to the possibilities for them to differ themselves. For example, Shara attempted this with her early childhood pre-service teachers. In a class discussion about the impact of language, a student did not see an issue with jokingly characterizing students as “problem children” to peers. Shara considered this as an unthoughtful comment that negatively affected her perception of the student. Noticing how this interaction slightly biased her against this student, Shara tried to hold space. In other words, she tried to honor her student’s difference instead of wanting to *fix* it. So, in their next interaction, Shara listened instead to her student with the question “Who are you?” as if she were learning about this student for the first time. In this conversation, the student discussed that, contrary to grand discourses about the importance of standardized tests and data, she understood that tests can never represent the totality of a student or what they can know and do. In fact, she critiqued the system as harmful to students who may develop deficit narratives of themselves because of the emphasis placed on high test scores. Through the process of holding space, Shara saw that, indeed, her student did care about the children with whom she was working. By holding space, Shara didn’t develop an entire opinion of this student based on one comment that she had made; perhaps Shara did not understand where

she had been coming from in the first place. If Shara had let that one interaction create a single narrative of who this pre-service teacher is, she may have made it impossible to see different, multifaceted aspects of this complex and always changing student. Instead, by holding space, Shara allowed for a relationality of difference.

By considering our entangled relationality and our response-ability, we were able to begin to dis/entangle from the stuckness and judgment in order to traverse towards an orientation of empathy and openness for change. We have a response-ability to not only help our students think through those statements and actions that they make and where those thoughts originate, but we also have a call to consider our own roles in constructing the circumstances around us, perhaps even in reinforcing the seeming political divide in the United States. Like Nhất Hạnh, said, it is a “we”—we are all responsible for the actions that create the sea pirate. Even in our difference, acting in relationality encourages us to act with compassion and the acknowledgment of our co-creation together. Therefore, we should dis/entangle from our disdain for the monster that difference has become.

Conclusion

We created this paper to think about how we can teach ethically in the historical context of a seemingly post-truth era accompanied with the election and presidency of Donald Trump. We theorized that, if we think about being in relationality, then we can attempt to dis/entangle from our knots, our prejudices, and our stereotypes in order to make something different for the future. And as Bergson (1934/2007) wrote, we have “a whole veil of prejudices to brush aside” (p. 108). We wanted to theorize how opportunities could exist for individual action to occur, especially in the ability to move away from or address harmful entanglements with/in this us/them political binary. We may get away from this binary, but we cannot get away from each other. In other words, we make cuts that separate us but that does not erase the world’s relationality. We still exist in relationality characterized by a $1 < \text{‘I’} < 2$ existence in which variation is natural to the whole. Or as Deleuze (1968/1994) wrote so eloquently:

The beautiful soul is in effect one who sees differences everywhere and appeals to them only as respectable, reconcilable or federative differences, while history continues to be made through bloody contradictions. The beautiful soul behaves like a justice of the peace thrown onto a field of battle, one who sees in the inexpiable struggles only simple ‘differends’ or perhaps misunderstandings. (p. 52)

Deleuze here described what we think of as response-ability: acting in ethical relation to difference. In this sense, we are all implicated in the opposing perspectives we wish to destroy. Donald Trump is because of us. We are because of Donald Trump. Donald Trump has been constructed because of our complacency in the intersections of anti-blackness, white supremacy, misogyny, Islamophobia, ableism, ageism, nativism, hetero-normativity, and every other damaging belief that divides us with an illusion that we do not exist ontologically entangled with one another.

These beliefs and divisions already existed before the 2016 election. Yet, Donald Trump has become the face of them by intensifying and mattering white supremacy into a normalized discourse for some. We are because of Donald Trump because his actions create real affects and changes in the way in which we interact in the world—they make us question who we are. If we

see these terrible things he is doing to people—deportations, immigration bans, young children in chain-link fence holding cells, dismantling public education and affordable healthcare, a refusal to address police violence against black and brown people, reducing environmental protections, increasing concentrations of wealth into the hands of a few, starving public servants, and damaging the economy for a wall to continue the illusion that we are separate—he is shaping us by how we respond to his violence. In other words, we have a response-ability to affect the world in ways that dis/entangle from the stucknesses of his affections and to contribute to our mutually thriving existence—what affects one, affects all. We are not suggesting that our turn towards relationality and a different conception of the self will solve political divisions or unjust conditions. We offer this analysis as a suggestion for reconsidering our positions and responses as educators in a divided political climate.

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