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What To Make of a Diminished Thing: Re-envisioning Spirit and Relation in Environmental Education

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Abstract

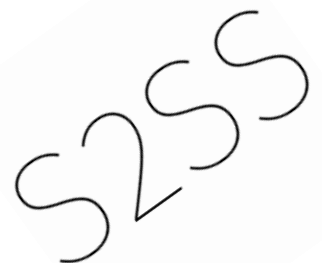
Traditional westernized systems of education reflect complex historical, social, and political forces that prioritize uniformity at expense of people's multi-dimensionality. This paper details a returning to relation via education's potential to entwine multiple perspectives in mutual understanding of lived experience. Education in this way becomes an interwoven tapestry and a means to speak across difference in mending, rather than in mutual deterioration. Enjoining personal storytelling with indigenous epistemology, the author pursues hope in reconfiguring the display of our educational tapestry.

Keywords: relation, philosophy of knowledge, constructivism, contextual learning, fluidity of understanding, story-telling, weaving knowledge, environmental education

Folds made in stark, bleached office paper still remind me of lessons learned in aerodynamics; distant memories clinging to calculated strategies accounting for the wind, hill height and force behind my throwing arm. That same paper, stretched out before me – dark lines connecting two-dimensional spaces as large as our planet, defining nations, seas, and townships imploring memorization in the geographical realm of my young mind. I recall learning to read in the hallways of my youth, pretending to perfect grammar in the rooms of my adolescence, and struggling through the linguistic-like cathedrals of thesis' built by John Locke, John Steinbeck, and Pearl S. Buck in my young adulthood. All of this is to say as a student in the American educational system, I learned something – something.

I memorized the history I was told was important, ruminated on perfected principles of multiculturalism, and spent countless hours hoping, praying that if only I could ingest it all, I would be smarter in the eyes of those who saw me.

But intelligence seems a transient thing and knowing not at all a guarantee of education, but a loose possibility. What then is it to settle into knowing? And is education its provider? If one were to look at intelligence as the deliverance of the American educational system, then suffice it to say that knowledge is the resolution of filling a void with the right sized piece as equally as a child would fit a square peg into a square hole. In this model, education becomes the input of data into biological tissue, exercising it as one would any muscle, and upholding that the larger it expands and the greater that it holds and the quicker that it processes, the more valuable that it is.



In the essay *Teaching to Transgress* writer bell hooks describes this process as the “banking system” of education. Imagine in this way, the brain as an empty vessel and education the method by which to fill it until it is full (or spilling over). Via newly delivered information, our value then proceeds alongside the effectiveness with which we memorize, store, and regurgitate the ‘knowledge’ that has been deposited there (p. 14). It is a convenient, temporary deposit, rather than a lasting cognizance. If my rusty mathematics are correct, education through this lens is reliant upon a game of addition; it is an approach to learning fixed in gluttonous consumption rather than the embodiment of freedom.

So, what happens then when our equations do not compute, and something in our deepest knowing understands that circles CAN fit within square holes, and that that very hole is but a small shape in context of a greater structure? Where does that feeling lie in learning? Are intuition, personal truth, and the fluidity of understanding shelved equally alongside the tomes of reason, fact, and certainty?

In my own life, being educated has not equated to knowledge nor the wisdom in knowing. Though I have ingested my fair share of theory and chronological blather, I do not feel any closer to the feet of understanding nor sitting high in the lap of consciousness. Try as we might to fill empty spaces with what another perceives as valuable, the end act is the same: we are filling a vessel on the presumption that a) it was empty to begin with, b) that we are entitled to know what should be placed there, and c) that what we provide will be incorporated without question, without cause, and without injury.

Rightly, I have benefitted from the incessant addition of facts and figures, and as such can compose sentences, deduce hypotheses, and solve calculations that I am in every way better for. However, the incessant pounding of education as addition, as filling, and ultimately as an intrusion, has not delivered me to the doors of intelligence. Rather, history became louder than present truth, and facts more significant than stories.

Yet I, as other students, am presently alive with dimensions of *this* life’s experience that do not correlate nor make sense against the intricacies of the French Revolution nor of the roaring 20’s as seen by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Where was mention made of the political and social upheaval incurred by the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan, or the implications of the corporate and financial class war dividing not only the many nations of America, but of the world? The reality I was living within and walking amongst had no context, and no path forward. And all this, from the perspective of a privileged, educationally catered to, middle-class white girl. I learned to not see myself nor others reflected in education; I learned to mistrust my own truth. And, arguably, because I cared too much to not be considered stupid, I permitted my own, and others, denial.

A wise professor, Nick Stanger, once said that parsing out our personal self from professional self is a foolhardy endeavor because who we are as people is how we show up as educators.

In light of his words and compounded now by standing days away from receiving my master's in education, I have come to similarly question that how I have shown up in *being* educated is equal to how I show up *as* an educator.

Contrary to education's incessant reliance on addition, what distinguishes matters of knowing I have found has been delivered to me most poignantly through loss. In times defined not by increasing tally marks but of subtraction, deduction, and removal, my undoing rather than assembly most illustriously defines my story of knowing. And there is nothing in the addition of education that could have prepared me for that.

Stories are a form of navigation – they are maps of our interiority as it relates to our exteriority.

They are meant to recount and to hold accountable, to weave illusion and honor history, to provide caution, to enforce morality, to relate and to dismiss. They are for truth-seekers and naysayers, for dreamers, and deniers. They complexify, they simplify, they can be bent to lie, and dream into being. Their purpose is great, their impact far-reaching. Like you, I have many stories. While some are not intended for pain nor pity, many are told for the sharing of truth in this path of humanness. This is one of mine.

When I was a child, we would dangle our feet from sun calloused docks in Seattle's South Lake Union, diesel coating every surface but none more extensively than the inside of my nostrils. The incessant clanging of running rigging against hollow masts, metallic and commanding, still beckons in the recesses of my mind. And though it was always cloudy in a Northwest sky, the sun still shined whenever we were together.

My parents bought the Zephyr Feather, a 22-foot rendition of an east-coast catboat before any of us children were born.

Lauding it as a playground, we would duck in and out of harbors and beach ourselves on sandbars; nets extended in the off chance of crawdads, toy boats tugging behind in our wake. We gazed upon charts like languages unknown, journey through locks and pull alongside fueling docks, sharing in the company of one another and the future of our tomorrow's. All are some of my better memories, the sea coming to us so young.

All 6'6" looming, overall-clad with a crooked, inspiring smile, my father smelled often of oil, Old Spice, and the wind. His bear-like hands covered in the remnants of intricate architectural plans in a way only graphite converging on skin can reflect. He helped accustom me to salt air, throwing a tomahawk, and brewing a mean cup o' joe. I learned the fancy footwork of ballroom dances atop his own two feet and how to hold my breath under water grasping his shoulders. Biscuit loving, dahlia raising, one-knee driving while he played the mandolin picking, hot-springs sitting, he could be everything and yet nothing – half of me... my father.

Watersheds navigated in my youth are whole because of interlaced rivers, tributaries and distant headwaters. Stories form in the interplay of obscurity drawn from plot,

protagonist, and theme. Silken webs merge in creation as minutely as an arachnid's home or as expansively as a forest's ecosystem. Likewise, our bearing as educators is rooted in entangling what we think and what we see in the world as it coalesces alongside the truth of others. The beauty that I see here is in our capacity to be malleable. Rather than arriving at the totality of our being, we are caught in perpetual movement defining and redefining ourselves. We cease to be stagnant and commence in becoming. And as we shrink or expand within ourselves, we do so alongside the development of others. As we shrink or expand within ourselves, we do so alongside the development of others. All is interwoven.

Behind any cloth, interlacing threads are strung amongst a structure utilized to ensure the support and tension of its weaving.

Looms commonly serve this purpose, steadying the threads that form from it. To begin, you must create a warp with which to weave. Vertically aligned, these threads are strung as a cloth's backbone. Horizontal weft threads are then woven between and around to create pattern and design. Whole, what once were individually definable threads, interlace into a collective composition. Be they simple or intricate, it is from their inter-reliance that the potential of their design is formed.

I tried for hours to deduce where, if any place, the individual and the community could be metaphorically ascribed to the components of a weaving. And for every instance in which I assured myself that I had drawn a conclusion, I found myself ruminating on countless instances where my deductions were no longer applicable. Because we are all, at any given point, as much warp as we are weft, a mere fiber or a complex fabric. Nothing, I have come to understand, is done in isolation.

The relations we form between self, other, in community, amid nature, and with our opposition are a finely knit and fragile tapestry. With whom we relate and how we form connection entwines the fabric of our knowing.

Educator Manulani Aluli-Meyer refers to our interweaving as "Holographic Epistemology". Knowledge, she sees, is comprised of three versions of reality represented by the body "... as the objective, physical outside world...", the mind "...via the inside subjective world... of thought, mind, idea and interiority...", and the spirit, a world shaped by "...a spiritual dimension un-linked to religious dogma, described in ethereal, mystic, and yet experiential terms..." (p. 94). When body, mind and spirit are equally incorporated, knowing is an active exchange of individual and collective experience that endures over years, generations, and life-times. Relationships shift from being nouns, to becoming verbs.

And when we recognize that "...we are more than our bodies, more than our minds... [and that] Matter is not separate from spirit", learning then becomes three-dimensional and "the whole of life is found in all parts" (p. 97).

Yet the more that I familiarize myself in educational fields, or as an individual on this planet, the more commonly I am coming to see our struggle in remaining whole. As an individual in community, I am more commonly witness to apathy in the eyes of a stranger as we pass on the street than a “hello, and how do you do?”. I am more frequently surrounded by contempt, derision and intolerance encountering differences of belief and behavior than I am to open-mindedness and inquiry. I am becoming increasingly more concerned, especially in my role as an educator because our separation is more commonly normalized than our affinity. Body is opposed to mind and both are superior to spirit. “Objectivity is divorced from subjectivity and both are synonyms for the hard/soft sciences while the topic of spirituality has become a pink crystal New Age embarrassment to all forms of Science.

The trilogy has become a dysfunctional family” (p. 94). And I believe that we among it, are becoming a dysfunctional society.

The more I look, the more fearful I am that the collective fabric among us is being unwoven. And it comes with a cost. In education, as in life, when we neglect spirit, we do so at the expense of seeing students as complex, multidimensional human beings, with values and beliefs as much as they have fears and failures. We cease to see the identity as a fluid process of discovery and rather diminish it as fragments needing repair.

And yet in the twelve years in which I have served in a variety of formal and informal educational positions, never once have I met a student that is broken. However, in entering positions as camp counselor to underserved youth, primary teacher in a private school, or manager to a leadership and professional development program for teenage gang- members, I was primed at length and in painful detail to prepare myself for students that had failed and were therefore failures.

Instead what I found were classrooms of youth that had been habituated into inconceivably painful and beautiful lives with nowhere to share their context. They did want to learn. They did want to listen. And they wanted to absorb that education, but they had never been given the opportunity because they had been deemed unworthy from the start.

I am of the belief that, “People do not choose to fail or disappoint. No one wants to feel incapable, apathetic, or ineffective. If you look at a person’s action (or inaction) and see [questionable behavior], you are missing key details. There is always an explanation. There are always barriers. Just because you can’t see them, or don’t view them as legitimate, doesn’t mean they’re not there. (Look harder)” (p. 12). In their piece, *Laziness Does Not Exist but Unseen Barriers Do*, social psychologist Devon Price writes, “If a person’s behavior doesn’t make sense to you, it is because you’re missing a part of their context” (p. 5). ...If a person’s behavior does not make sense to you, it is because you are missing a part of their context.

Periods of abundance, areas of scarcity, major traumas, small annoyances, daily necessity and yearly deficiency shape the fragmented reality of our every day. And yet

when we do not truly know what it feels like to be that person, in their reality, it becomes all the easier to "...impose abstract, rigid expectations on a person's behavior" (Price, p. 5). But rigid expectations imposed by others limits not only the potential that is encouraged in us to be seeking, but limits the potential we foresee ourselves as having, and there is little room for fluidity, broadening, or dreaming in that.

What to make of a diminished thing?

Rigid, contained, geometrically perplexing, the potential of stark, bleached office paper is in its key details. Folds made and remade, reminding me that though ninety-degree corners beckon for straight creases, I am incapable of a perfect line. Made... no (shake head) ... remade... no (shake head). The remanence of creases past is blaring, strewn and interfering in the greatness of a one-dimensional surface, flat along the table. What do I know of flight when I cannot even make a proper fold? That same paper, stretched out before me, dark lines forming words I do not understand the weight of, connecting three-dimensional relationships all 6'6" looming defining my past, present, and future imploring recalculations as large as... my life. I recall that wings need stability to fly and that stability is not I. It is not I.

Almost nine years ago, I lost my father to a foreign invader, watching him drown gracefully in the misery of stomach cancer and heartache. For all the retrievable intricacies I learned from my father, the reality is, I had spent most of my life never knowing him at all. Barred in a jail of our own making, stubborn and the pain of the past become too thick and blinding. It is not that his lessons were complete. And, though it took me years to understand, it was not because he ceased to care. Despite the potential between us, I just stopped listening. The pain we had contrived between us became louder and more longstanding than the beauty that awaited us. And I fed it; I sustained it. With stubbornness and selfishness, with pain and misplaced anger, I allowed the value of my arrogance to weigh heavier than humility. Lying beside him ashen and strong, I'd find myself wishing for all the things we'd never said since I was 13. Even at 28, holding his hand I felt like a child. I cannot say I am any more adult-like now at 33. Life was still so young inside him and fleeting. And now, it is gone.

If there is one thing for which I am fearful for our children, it is the increasing distance we are cultivating between us. For what we cultivate there is becoming nothing short of emptiness - where differences in opinion are shunned and conversation does not exist. It is not necessarily the loss of my father I most regret. It is in our missed opportunity for connection and communication; it is that our nearness could have been bridged had we just opened our hearts. Though hurt and anger complexified who I saw my father as being, I learned that I could not honor my truth without acknowledging the validity of his own. Communication is a tool we have access to yet is often perceived as easier to leave rusty on a forgotten shelf. In life, as in education, loss and regret are constant. As an educator, I believe I am afraid of making a mistake similar to that which I chose with my father; that education will persist in perpetuation of the same, worn out stories, in

silence and without discussion. I am afraid of neglecting, rather than tending to a core wound festering in many of us – be it at the hands of grief or invalidation, ridicule or omission, that we as self, as autonomous, as individual – will be obliterated.

Yet, in the wise words of late author Ursula Le Guin (2017), “Fear is seldom wise and never kind” (p. 13).

Seeking hope in education requires that we collect our fear and carry forward. I chose to be an educator because I, like others here today, believe in asking hard questions; believe in more than what we have been given and more than what we yet know to be true; believe that change is inevitable, and that if even in a small way, we are to be part of it changing. The process of learning is the process of potential. And the field of education a likely space for learning’s provision. This comes with hard work, with persistence, late nights and rejections. It comes with sacrifice and discipline, criticism, doubts, failure and risk. And each of these struggles are worth it for the hope that is fostered there. Though I feel hope in my motivations to teach, where I *find* hope is in the beautiful way that students weave themselves in and amongst the weft(ed) threads of education.

When I first met Daniel Chang Rockwood if I was not being met with silence, it was with passive defiance; needless to say, I had been “warned” about him. Given his iffy track record and supposed gang affiliations, he was being provided a last opportunity to get through school. Which led him to me, and with great reluctance, to the leadership and professional development program for which he was recommended. In our time together, it was clear that while he was quick to gain the respect of fellow peers, it appeared he in no way respected me.

Though he and I’s relationship never much improved during that time, Daniel eventually carved out his own place in the program through the trust he had built with others... with laughter and hard work, shared tears and shared perspective. After several months of working together however, one day, in an act of courageous honesty, he told me he would be leaving the program.

Daniel expressed regret in leaving the community he had helped build, for falling short of a commitment he had made, and in gratitude that someone had given him the chance even though in leaving, he felt he hadn’t deserved it. Exiting the program, he knew, came with a host of consequences and life altering circumstances. And, amidst risk of them all, he admitted that holding true to himself was far greater. Holding true to himself was far greater.

Often when I reflect back on past students, and Daniel in particular, I find myself wondering: What is going to happen to good people in bad systems? In my limited experience, I have witnessed a tendency to adapt. To continue to adapt. And then to reach a point at which that person breaks because their moral values conflict with what they encounter in real life and find reinforced in systems that maintain their opposition. These

pieces are all at odds with one another. And to shift our paradigm, we need to find a way to bring them into sync.

So, what then does it mean to be in relation? What is the responsibility of the individual to the whole? What is the responsibility of the whole to the individual? See Appendix A: Activity

I didn't hear from Daniel again for close to 5 years. And when I did, our interaction was in no way what I expected. Hearing off hand that I was to embark on a sail across the Pacific Ocean, Daniel felt compelled to speak his truth in the off chance he would never again have the opportunity to.

Through a series of long and wandering emails, he offered me his life's story, what necessitated his quitting the program so many years before and how drastically his life had been changed from the chance occurrence of engaging with a group of people that genuinely cared.

Though I do not feel comfortable placing words to a story that is not my own, with his permission, I would like to share a few pieces honoring his belief that, "you never know what kind of impact you'll make in someone's life when you try". When Daniel left the program, it is because he had been given the opportunity to reconnect with his birth family, of whom, unbeknownst to him, he'd been kidnapped from as a child. He had spent the entirety of his young adult life in and out of the foster care system enduring abuse, isolation, and neglect, and in and out of the public education system that reinforced a lack of self-worth.

In the few months we had all shared together, he learned to trust adults again, and realized that regardless of past circumstances, he was and could become whomever he sought to be.

He kept in contact with his peers, and through their ongoing relationships, felt supported in graduating high school, serving in the military, and pursuing a career in becoming a teacher. "I say to myself," he wrote, "I'd like to teach, but not in a classroom. I want to teach people about life." He speaks often of new-found passions that have grown into obsessions, and dreams he continues to hold himself to in full awareness of the obstacles and consequences preventing them from happening *yet*.

When I asked Daniel what it means to him to be in relation, he responded with the following:

"I've held on to this for a while and was going to write it in a post card but I think given your question, I'll share it with you now. It's a poem, you've most likely heard, by one of my favorites, Charles Bukowski.

I found it during an English class I took in San Diego, with which became my favorite professor. The project was to find a passage in a book, that really resonates with you, and stand in front of the room while you shared it.

Well, I was the only one who memorized their poem! I have lived every word of it. So, you could say, that it is my Anthem. And since it is mine, I feel like I can share it with you -- so that it may be yours as well.

It is best read slowly, and aloud, in your own voice, however I have written it in mine...

*If you're going to try, go all the way. Otherwise, don't even start.
If you're going to try, go all the way.
This could mean losing Wives, relatives
girlfriends, jobs
And maybe your mind.
Go all the way.
It could mean not eating for three or four days. It could mean freezing on a park bench.
It could mean jail.
It could mean derision.
Mockery – isolation.
Isolation is the gift.
All the others are a test of your endurance, really want to do it.
of how much you
And, you'll do it,
Despite rejection and the worst odds.
And it will be better than anything else you can imagine. If you're going to try, go all the way.
There is no other feeling like that.
You will be alone with the gods, and the nights with fire.
Do it. Do it. Do it.
will flame
All the way, all the way.
You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is.
- Roll the Dice, Charles Bukowski*

So, Zoe to answer your question, relation to me means being complete in my relation to myself.”

For all that relation means to this community, that weaving is stronger with all of you now part of it because each of you presented yourselves wholly, autonomously, uniquely. Weaving and education, I believe, are stronger because of the individuals that compose it. All of us are joining the fabric of our own lives, each and every day in a practice of insight and self-discovery but it is not separate from the larger tapestry of community. Weaving is equally warp *and* weft.

Throughout this capstone process, I have learned that education is an interwoven tapestry and a means to speak across difference in mending, rather than in mutual deterioration. And so, our act of being in collectivity, whether in learning or in weaving, becomes a hopeful act.

Redesigning the present fabric of education is not a simple task, nor a convenient mending. Try as we might to fill empty spaces with what another perceives as valuable, the end act is the same: we are filling a vessel on the presumption that a) it was empty to begin with, b) that we are entitled to know what should be placed there, and c) that what we provide will be incorporated without question, without cause, and without injury.

Nurturing hope in education is not a set equation but may, if addressed creatively, reconfigure the display of our tapestry in unparalleled dimensions. Hope in education therefore to me, looks like rewriting a, b, and c. The theory of constructivism aligns on the presumption that students learn foremost from their own, lived experience.

Through this lens, student's minds are seen not as empty, but as complete and ever evolving. If education maintains through a system of addition, then let us ADD students into that space. Let us direct opportunities that multiply their voice. And let us begin by first seeing them as something WORTH adding. One of my most valuable duties as an educator is in first recognizing that I do not hold all the answers. But it is not only good enough to admit that my students do, it's in upholding my end of our relationship, where the weft of my weaving can meet the warp of their own, to where they feel not only enabled to speak, but heard when they do so. I want to believe that when people come together they choose to work together for a common betterment and when we do so, we learn to consider "how to respond to life through questions in [our] heart[s] rather than the accumulation of computation[s] in [our] mind[s]" (Meyer, p.99).

When we draw attention to what is at hand, we give it power. In naming it, in inviting it, in holding it as something of value, we allow it to be attended to and addressed as a priority.

Each of us has values that have been formed individually and in community or collectivity. There is no guarantee that these values are at peace with one another; often when we search for sameness, we obscure or overlook valuable assets that are embedded in the lives of ourselves and in others (Gruen, 2013). In life, as in education, loss and regret are constant. Yet, with the privilege of foresight, anticipating difficulty creates space for the capacity to rewrite our response by speaking truth about it. We create resiliency in that openness, and nurture empathy in changing the perspective of our relationships.

When I think back on my relationship to my father, I wonder if our own personal growth is inexorably tied up in the growth and progress of others? What could hope could look like if we designed education reframed in forgiveness? Growing up, instead of leaning into forgiveness, I feared letting love between us resume. What I never knew was how strongly that love persisted, paying no mind to fear or pain. For grief, I have learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give but cannot.

All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go. What potential could arise from looking back on my 13- year-old self with love rather than admonishing it for its stubbornness? What if we chose to be kind to that self instead?

Folds made in stark, bleached office paper still remind me of lessons learned in aerodynamics; distant memories clinging to calculated strategies accounting for the wind, hill height and force behind my throwing arm. That same paper, stretched out before me – dark lines connecting you to me in entirety, defining multi-dimensional spaces as large as who we hope to be imploring memorization in all the realms of my young mind. My past, my present, my future, welcomed into the linguistic-like cathedrals of thesis' built by less commonly told stories, in honor of community and in invitation of all our voices.

All of this is to say as a student in the American educational system, I learned that I am something – that we are something.

Author's Note

Some names have been changed in this version of the presentation to protect the individual's identity.

I have many people for which I am grateful, and in debt, for my presence here today.

Thank you to the faculty that have expanded my view: Gene, Professor Hayes, Nick and Joshua. Nick, Gene, thank you, for your introspection and commitment to us all not only as students, but as people. Thank you for encouraging me above all else to hold true to myself. Joshua, thank you for your infectious enthusiasm for life and inspiring me to see the world through your eyes so contagiously. You have taught me how to listen with my heart and love the world unconditionally. To you all, I gave up a long time ago feeling like I would ever see who I wanted to be as an instructor reflected back at me. You all naturally embody the spirit of the educator I wish to be. Thank you for giving me hope for the future of education.

C17, no piece of this cloth can accurately represent the complexity of you as individuals, nor your incredible natures. And yet no tapestry in my life seems complete without you. Just as I've put my foot in my mouth once before I'm going to do it again. I did not come to this program intending to make friends but have found in each of you not only friendship, but an approach to life that is complex, fully aware, and in deep appreciation of all the world has to offer. Each of you in your own way have taught me throughout this process what it looks like to feel trusted, supported, and welcomed in open my heart again.

To my family.... Regina, thank you for your bravery and openness, and for welcoming me so openly into your family. Your travelling here today is a testament to your grace and generosity. I could not be more grateful. To my mom, for never limiting who you believed I could be. For your courage, your strength and your embodiment of who I hope to be as a woman, thank you. Zephyr, even though you're technically my little brother, I've always looked up to you. You embody steadiness, fairness and reliability in ways I can only hope to one day embrace. And to you, my heart.... Justin. There are few words I could write that would fully express how humbled and grateful I am in the ways you love, support, and challenge me. You arrived in a time of my life when I did not know how much I needed you. I hold immense love for you all. To C18 and all the rest of you who showed up today, my heart is full to have all of you here together. Be well and live free.

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Appendix A. Activity

In an act of resolving these meandering questions for myself, I asked each of my fellow cohort members what color or design would best represent them if woven into a tapestry. Solid and patterned, vibrant and subtle – all are located here, nestled in amongst one another, on the third panel of a weaving I’m attempting.

[MOVE --- stand in front of weaving].

As you can see, two of these panels are incomplete. On one there is only warp, the other only weft.

Just as each of my follow cohort members are unique in their contribution, I would like to invite you all to similarly find yourselves represented here. Perhaps together, we can better understand the nature of these questions.

In a moment, you, too, will be provided with a strip of cloth and a marker. On this strip of cloth, I would like for you to add a word in answer to “What, to you, does it mean to be in relation?” This word or set of words I recognize is a vulnerability of your own and I am hoping to welcome you into this space with comfort enough to share it, if you desire it to be so. Once you have finished writing, I would like then for you to mingle amongst the other strangers of this space, introduce yourselves if you feel comfortable, and exchange the word and the piece of fabric that was yours, taking theirs instead. You can continue to exchange with others for as long as you feel comfortable. However, once you have exchanged fabrics at least once, I would like to invite you to join me here, in a circle surrounding this tapestry for our next steps.

Please begin with finding the fabric and pens below your chairs. Are there any questions?

[MINGLE, MAKE SPACE, RETURN] *** Get someone else’s word.

You are presently the keeper of someone else’s word, another individual’s vulnerability. And I am hoping, in a process of a large gentle mess, that we will weave each individual, through these words, into a collective strength.

Upon the fabric I received is written “-----”. I, too, very much hope for this to be woven into the future of education. Thank you, stranger I do not know yet, for your word. With your permission, I will now weave it as a warp into an empty weft. As a snake moves, so too does this piece of fabric, in and out of alternating strands until its end. If you do not know yet how to weave, I am going to begin by asking you three (pick three) to share your word in a moment, assisting you in weaving them in, and then ask *you* to teach three others to do the same.

Those three will then read their words, weave, and teach the next three and so on until we are complete.

When we have finished, I am hoping we will be able to marvel at the intricate way your individuality comes together collectively as a woven display of our relations in education.

Thank you for engaging in that with me.... You may now return to your seats.