Responding to the Ravages of COVID-19: Dialogic Encounters in/as Pedagogy in Social Studies

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Abstract

The ravages of COVID-19 are demonstrating that human understanding is vulnerable and fragile, and is perpetually overwhelmed and outmanoeuvred by the contingency of events. It also reveals the limits and finitude of our ability to preplan or predict the happenstances of classroom life. Through this paper, we consider the potential of hermeneutic dialogue to embrace this uncertainty, and invite the ethic required in this moment. Drawing on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, we propose that educators become increasingly practised at fostering dialogic spaces, ones that are not solely accessible by implementation of particular strategies. Rather, this calls for cultivating a stance in the world that honours the vulnerability, ambiguity and unfinishedness of the subject matter and of ourselves. Through an existential quest, we are called to venture with others as an opportunity to uncover a more ethical, more attuned way of being in the world.

> How can we be fair, kindly and humane toward others, let our maxims be as praiseworthy as they may be, if we lack the capacity to make strange natures genuinely and truly a part of ourselves, appropriate strange situations, make strange feelings our own?
>
> —Friederich Schiller

As the authors write this paper, the world has been thrust into responding to the horrors and uncertainties of the global pandemic, COVID-19. We are reawakened to the vulnerability, susceptibility, fragility and dependencies of human and nonhuman life. Urgent and pressing questions bear down on us. Previous understandings of morality, citizenship, democracy and community have been put into question. We are exposed to the limits of modern science. Each day we must respond to new and emerging situations. As social studies educators,[1] we are confronted with the dislocation from our quotidian lives. The very notion of normalcy has been burst asunder.

The ravages of COVID-19 demonstrate that human thought is vulnerable and fragile and is perpetually overwhelmed and outmanoeuvred by the contingency of events. It also reveals the limits and finitude of our ability to preplan or predict the happenstances of classroom life. To respond to the urgent and pressing burdens posed by the ferocity of this virus, we must creatively and imaginatively adapt to such unknown forces. Acknowledging the precarity and unknowability surrounding this global pandemic, there is no singular pedagogical method or resource that could possibly respond. The magnitude and danger of the COVID-19 pandemic expose the inadequacy of prepackaged pedagogical strategies to respond. Instead, we wonder, how might teachers cultivate a sense of openness and attunement through hermeneutic dialogic encounters? We offer that teacher candidates become increasingly practised at fostering dialogic spaces that are not solely accessible by the implementation of particular strategies. Rather, this calls for

cultivating a stance in the world that honours the vulnerability, contingency and unfinishedness of the subject matter and of ourselves.

Through this paper, we consider the potential of hermeneutic dialogue to embrace uncertainty, and invite the ethic required in this moment. For the sake of this piece, we are relying on the current pandemic; however, our argument is not hinged to this particular moment of precarity, but rather the constancy of these moments; the eventfulness keeps coming. In what follows, we articulate our understanding of hermeneutic dialogue, and outline its pedagogical relevance. We consider first the pervasive discourses in society, education and social studies that might discourage, foreclose and/or dismiss such dialogue. We also consider how these pervasive discourses provide a rationale for a turn to hermeneutic dialogue in the practice of teaching. In dialogic encounters the end is not known; there is no single truth that can be uncovered. Here it may be possible to find our way during these pandemic times—to a future with unknown possibilities.

Theoretical Framework[2]

> To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented.
>
> —Gadamer 2004

The authors draw upon Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics as an interpretive frame that explores human understanding. Our inquiry is not simply an esoteric philosophizing, but rather is grounded in the practical affairs of the lived experiences of classroom life. As an opportunity to enlarge one's understanding, we engage Gadamer's notion of experience (*Erfahrung*). For Gadamer, to be and to become experienced is not merely to accumulate verifiable knowledge; rather, it pulls in another direction; it calls for one to venture, to put at risk one's well-worn pathways. Dialogic encounters require an adventure, and adventures are inherently risky. Through dialogue, a space is created where one is always mediating the lifeworld, working through previously held understandings alongside fellow interlocutors. Such encounters bid for one to turn one's care and attention away from amassing definitive knowledge, to creating a space that accentuates coming to an understanding. As Gadamer (2004) suggests, it is through one's venturing that the living topics undergo a "true increase in being" (p 156). Gadamer refers to this space as "the true locus of hermeneutics" (p 306). Ventures with others are profoundly relational: they require the nurturance of a moral bond that obligates one to hear the voice of the other, to experience the other's claims as true regarding the subject matter; in coming to an understanding with the other, one is confronted with one's interiority, one's prejudices.

Central to Gadamer's hermeneutics is the belief that we are always and already embedded in the ways of the world—in history, culture, language—in our historicity. To Gadamer, historicity influences all human understanding; we are always projecting understanding of a particular time and place, and we can never fully recognize these prejudices. Thus, within an educational context, historicity recognizes that students and teachers are always and already entangled in the very fabric of life we are trying to understand. Topics such as citizenship, democracy, human rights and freedom are living inheritances—full of ancestral voices. In dialogue, each one of us stands in relation—between the past and present; however, each individual student's understanding in their venture is treated as an understanding of the place and not simply of the individual's interiority. Their uniqueness is not an expression from their inner recesses, created *ex nihilo*, but rather through their living in commonplaces. Dialogue provides an opportunity to confront our historicity, our interiority, our prejudices.

It is in and through dialogic encounters that one's expectations are repeatedly thwarted. Encounters with the unfamiliar induce suffering—a suffering that reveals one's limited and finite understanding. However, through suffering one garners insight, which Gadamer (2004) describes as "an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive" (p 364–65). In moments of breakdown, one gathers insight into the fallibility and contingency of human possibilities. The illumination of "a hitherto concealed experience" (Gadamer 2004, 90) reveals generative possibilities, as new understandings are held in a constellation alongside previously held meanings. The horizon of the present is always changing in light of new knowledge and circumstances. And perhaps each of us may come to an increased appreciation for the unfinishedness of the topic's becoming—its future possibilities not yet known.

Gadamerian hermeneutics resists methodical procedure; however, while there is no method, there is a way. While coming to an understanding with another eludes mastery, it requires perpetual practice in order

to gain tactfulness, to keep things in question, to gain an attunement. In being and becoming experienced in the art of venturing, one accrues wisdom, one becomes "more sensitive to the happenstances that new experiences might bring" (Jardine, Friesen and Clifford 2006, xxv). Thus, we seek to inspire for ourselves and our students to continually foster a stance in the world that lovingly embraces the otherness of the other as an opportunity to render the familiar unfamiliar. What we are advocating for is not new, nor is it completely absent in classrooms. Rather, COVID-19 accentuates the need for social studies educators to make space for dialogic encounters. Following Westheimer (2015), "democratic societies require more than citizens who are fact-full. They require citizens who can think and act in ethically thoughtful ways" (p 23). In order to "to live well with and for others in just institutions" (Ricouer 1992, as cited in Moules et al 2015, 190), we need to recognize hermeneutic dialogue in/as pedagogy.

Context and Rationale

In current society, the culture of school is always already imbued in language, culture, economies and ideologies. In turn, educators are confronted with pervasive understandings about school, curriculum, teachers and subject disciplines. In what follows we outline the way these discourses may reject, resist and occlude hermeneutic dialogue in/as pedagogy. Before suggesting the way, we feel it is important to recognize what might get in the way of it.

Neoliberal Interference

> This age supports notions of individual responsibility that tear up social solidarities in devastating ways.
>
> —Giroux 2020

Neoliberalism is the reigning ideology of our time. Neoliberalism relies on the market as the "organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions" (Giroux 2005, 2). The pedagogy that emerges naturalizes competitiveness, individualism and hedonism, and discourages ethical considerations; "within this pedagogy, compassion is a weakness, and moral responsibility is scorned because it places human needs over market considerations" (Giroux 2010, 185). By constructing human beings as capital, neoliberalism encourages individualism and competition, eliminates notions of the public good and erodes the citizenry of a moral or ethical life. As such, neoliberalism forecloses hermeneutic dialogue in as/pedagogy; however, it also exposes the need for such dialogue.

An infection of competition and individualism existed prior to the pandemic. COVID-19 has exposed the resulting breaks in our society; "the great revealer has arrived in the form of a virus, its economic fallout showing almost perfectly the divides between those who are vulnerable and those who are not" (Corak 2020). This virus reveals the way our political and economic systems reinforce this divide, and how neoliberalism rationalizes and encourages leaving people vulnerable. Neoliberalism prevents people from recognizing the way private troubles are connected to broader systemic issues (Giroux 2020). As such, this requires a pedagogic fight "to convince the public to move beyond the culture of privatization and atomization that propels a consumer society and reinforces a politics of single issues detached from broader considerations" (Giroux, 2020, para 30). If not, Brown (2015) warns, "neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity" (p 44).

As a means to confront the reign of individualism, the erosion of community, and the growing political chasm in society, we need to encourage students to see/hear one another, to see their connections to one another and to see their responsibilities to one another. This requires a dialogic encounter.

Modernist Weights

> Against a numbing indifference, despair or withdrawal into the private orbits of the isolated self, there is a need to support educational institutions that enable students to exhibit civic courage, foster the capacity to listen to others, sustain complex thoughts and engage social problems.
>
> —Giroux 2019

While dialogue might unsettle the primacy of neoliberalism, other elements within schools hinder the practice of hermeneutic dialogue. There remain tensions in the field of social studies between subject- and issues-centered curricula, cultural transmission and critical thinking, and centralization and grassroots development (Ross 2006). While there is no unified vision of social studies, provincial curricula across Canada share familiar elements. Many of the provincial curricula promote deeper understandings through discussion, negotiation and debate. For example, the curriculum in our own province calls for

students in K–12 classrooms to engage in "discussion and debate concerning ethical or existential questions to … make learning more personally meaningful" (Government of Manitoba 2003, 6). Social studies invites challenging, complex—even messy—ethical discussions. Although the official curriculum documents recognize and invite emergent, contingent and fluid contexts and understandings, we repeatedly encounter demands for prescriptive approaches to teaching. As social studies educators, our worth is often reduced to the amount of ready-to-use materials that we can offer teacher candidates. This follows Pinar's (2006) observation that teachers are too focused on managing the technical delivery of content:

> If only we can find the right technique, the right modification of classroom organization (small groups, collaborative learning) or teach in the right way, if only we teach according to 'best practices,' if only we have students self-reflect or if only we develop 'standards' or develop 'scientific research', then students will learn what we teach them. (p 109)

This fixation on management, organization and "best practices" results from the pervasive cultural myth that everything depends on the teacher, and that the teacher is the expert (Britzman 2003). Further, the demand for particular methods reflects the pervasive modernist discourses in education that praise rationality, reason and knowledge (Popkewitz 1997). Within these modernist constraints, knowledge is understood as a thing already made, and products are considered artifacts *of* learning (Ellsworth 2005). Such discourses overwhelm the possibilities for education and for teachers. We raise this here to recognize that there are modernist barriers to engaging hermeneutic dialogue in the classroom. Dialogue, without end or artifact, is often not recognizable to students as education.

In our experience as educators, theoretical and philosophical discussions can be met with impatience or perceived as a waste of time. The predominant narratives in education often conceive of time as something to be calculated and managed for optimum efficiency, doled out in fragmented and discordant bits. This manifests in continual frenetic countdowns: "we are running out of time," "we are out of time," "time on task" and the inevitability of the unwelcome intrusion of the sound of a bell that states beyond refute, "time's up." Alternately, dialogic encounters require space to welcome and arrest time, permitting time to tarry, where it is brought to a standstill because it is the topic that needs our love and devotion.

The Discipline of Social Studies

Beyond the modernist weights on education, each discipline also carries expectation. In social studies, it is anticipated that teacher candidates will learn and employ historical thinking, geographic thinking, critical thinking and inquiry. Education's predominant orientation accentuates a technical rational framework. Within such a framework, teaching and learning is often focused on teaching *about* the disciplines.

While there is potential in approaching a discipline, like history, through the practices of a historian, the historical thinking benchmarks could be seen to promote a distanced, practiced, rigorous exploration of history that risks dismissing, even silencing, students' emotional responses, the consequence of which is a "dehumanized form of consciousness" (Davey 2006, 22). Truth cannot be achieved from a detached distance or in an objective way (Gadamer 2004). Moreover, as den Heyer (2011) points out, historical thinking also lacks reflection about the biases (unconscious or otherwise) of the historians who have created the procedures, the political and social context in which "reasoned judgements" are made, and the way particular historical narratives are centred and others marginalized. Methods carry with them a deep historical prejudice against other ways of knowing and understanding: "Will to method is not about method as such, but a manifestation of a deep, taken for granted historical prejudice (Gadamer 1969/1989) against other ways of knowing and understanding" (Moules et al 2015, 56). For this reason, Cutrara (2018) has challenged the primacy of historical thinking in social studies, as it privileges Euro-Canadian knowledge systems and places a settler grammar on the study of history. Davey (2006) refers to this as the "colonizing tendency" of method. What, Gadamer asks, "does the method neglect? Ignore? Suppress? Prevent altogether?" (Moules et al 2015, 56). Any single method or set of criteria is no more desirable than a single narrative of history (Marsh, cited in den Heyer 2011).

Inquiry-based learning is also a celebrated pedagogical approach in social studies. The literature on inquiry-based learning suggests that it recognizes and legitimizes students' interests (Fielding 2012), encourages and develops critical thinking skills (Duran and Dökme 2016; Selwyn 2014), enhances understanding (Scardamalia 2002) and leads to greater student

achievement and motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000). Although inquiry lacks a common procedural approach, often students choose topics of interest and present their findings in varied mediums. In this way, inquiry has the potential to unsettle dominant narratives and recognize diverse modes of expression; however, the promotion of individual student interests risks eroding the community. When individual interests are centred, opportunities for collaborative problem solving lessen, complex community conversations on a shared topic decrease and the relational bonds of learning are ignored. Now, in particular, we need to recognize our interconnectedness, to hear one another and to confront our own prejudices. The individual does not exist outside of the community, and we cannot learn in ways that discourage collective experiences.

Our purpose in outlining the current context of social studies education is not to wholeheartedly dismiss any of these methods, but rather to question the disciplinary elements of method, the perpetuation and mobilization of particular knowledge and ideologies, and the overall cultural consequences. Where, we ask, is the practice of conversation, deliberation and discussion in social studies? Where is the time to tarry? In what follows we consider the potential of hermeneutic dialogue to respond to haphazardness, to foster attunement, to reimagine concepts, to encourage relational thinking and to re-emerge.

The Imposition and Ignorance of Methods

> The first COVID-19-related death in Canada has been recorded in B.C.
>
> —Larsen 2020

Gadamer (2004) states that "Understanding begins when something addresses us." COVID-19 has addressed us. The virus, like a question, "presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion" (Gadamer 2004, 375). The virus is not something we planned for or fully understand; it is where our understanding begins. Much as there is no vaccine or cure, there is no teaching method that could have responded to this moment. Any existing pedagogical strategy ignores the haphazardness of the moment. Methods (understood as technocratic or orthodox empiricism and rationalism) foreclose the play of the topic. Instead, pedagogy should encourage a constant undoing—play without an end in mind (Ellsworth 2005). If one is to avoid becoming an "overly-dogmatic playmate" (Ellsworth 2005), one requires tact, what Gadamer (2004) describes as "a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice" (p 16). Method, in its strictest sense is "tact-less," as it often projects "universally applicable" strategies. Tact involves both sense and feeling, but also a kind of knowing: of how to orient ourselves in a situation, which resources to draw upon to make sense of what we encounter, which questions to ask next, when to probe and when to let the silence hang. Following Gadamer (2004), "there is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable" (p 375). Instead, one needs to learn to be attuned to the moment. Tact cannot be acquired in the abstract; it can be learned only in and through experience—that is, by being practised from encounter to encounter, from case to case, from a series of "intentionally frustrated expectations" (Caputo 1987, cited in Moules et al 2015, 60). Each experience is distinctive; however, each interaction helps one gain an attunement and a willingness to dwell, to linger. Shor and Freire (1987) refer to this as the artistry required of teachers. Yet, the practice of conversation is assumed or ignored within many faculties of education, and subsequently in many K–12 classrooms.

One needs to foster a community of discussion and deliberation; the practice is not automatic. In the same way that teachers would not expect the skills of historical or critical thinking to be inherent, neither are those of discussion and deliberation. We cannot expect teacher candidates to foster complex, difficult, messy conversations, filled with long silences and awkwardness, if they are not practised at participating in them: "Becoming experienced calls for teachers to embark on an existential quest with fellow travellers. This journey requires the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that embraces the otherness of the other" (Skuce 2013, ii). The practice of participating in conversations will encourage teacher candidates to confront their prejudices, recognize varied perspectives and possibly become otherwise. In turn, they will recognize the pedagogic potential of dialogue for their own classroom environments. We use the subsequent sections to elucidate the necessity and potential of hermeneutic dialogue: to negotiate understandings of concepts, like citizenship, in this moment; to confront our own historicity and prejudices; to recognize the other in relation to our own opinion.

Well, Meaning.

> A global, novel virus that keeps us contained in our homes—maybe for months—is already reorienting our relationship to government, to the outside world, even to each other.
>
> —*Politico* 2020

Citizenship is a core concept in the provincial social studies curriculum. The curriculum documents offer various interpretations of citizenship, recognizing that it is a fluid, contested concept. We draw again on an example from our own provincial documents: "Citizenship is a fluid concept that changes overtime: its meaning is often contested, and it is subject to interpretation and continuing debate" (Government of Manitoba 2003, 9). The documents impose no fixed, static meaning. Instead, they recognize that citizenship evades ontic certainty—its understandings and enactments must be repeatedly negotiated and renegotiated. The COVID-19 virus has challenged us to reimagine our role as citizens. In order to curb the spread of COVID-19, we are all asked to wear masks and to physically distance to protect the community. Current events demonstrate that there is vocal opposition to government regulation of perceived individual rights. While the concept of citizenship is familiar, the current regulations make it strange; "it is the detailed familiarity of the cases that strikes us; it is the detailed strangeness of the case that surprises us; it is the unfathomable mystery of the case that intrigues us" (Moules et al 2015, 64). Masks in public, once strange, shamed and contested, now familiar. Restrictions on movement, once unfathomable, now the new normal. Low-wage workers risking their lives, once incomprehensible, now essential. Health care workers shrouded in expectations of sacrifice, once ludicrous, now applauded. Economic calculations about the value of particular lives, once deplorable, now mainstream. The emergence of these opinions is evidence of the varied, ever-evolving understandings of citizenship. Although hermeneutic dialogue does not offer a prescriptive method for constructing *a* definition, it requires placing the individual who wants to reopen the economy in conversation with the health care worker who will bear the brunt.

The 3 Rs: Responsive, Relational and Responsible

> Please stay home for us. We'll stay here for you.
>
> —Slugoski 2020

By now, many people have seen the photos of healthcare workers standing in the path of antilockdown protestors (McClaran 2020). Wearing scrubs and masks, these health care professionals stand silently in the path of honking vehicles. These images symbolize the demands of hermeneutic dialogue: you must see me in relation to your opinion. Ethics demands attunement toward the demand of the other. In the case of the antilockdown protestors, this requires attentiveness to the health care workers, their experiences and the limits of one's own understanding. This creates an opportunity to act justly as we garner insight into the "multifariousness of voices," and come to recognize circumstances that extend beyond our experiences. In hermeneutics,

> the ability to encounter the other, in dialogue, requires modesty and humility, in that we know that our knowledge is limited and in need of revision. It requires courtesy, in that we acknowledge our indebtedness to others, and welcome their capacity to teach us something new. (Moules et al 2015, 59)

The protestors, in their quest for individual freedom, must consider how their actions will impact the other and the collective. As Parker (2005) reminds us, there is no individual separate from the public; "privacy and individual autonomy are entirely dependent on the community" (p 344–45). Any focus on individual responsibility ignores the ways that our lives are deeply interconnected (Giroux 2020). It is not enough to preserve your own position and interests if the society around you is unsafe and unhealthy.

The photo symbolizes another ill in our society: the inability to participate in dialogue at all, never mind with humility and courtesy. Instead, it has become common practice to shout our positions (out the window of trucks, behind protest signs or in 140 characters) and then close our ears to the response. In hermeneutic dialogue, it is not enough to advocate your position; you must recognize how your position impacts the other. This does not entail one to simply acquiesce, but to earnestly hear the voice of the other. The other, through their experiences, has something to say that is true about the subject matter. In this way, understanding "is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we are" (Gadamer 2004, 379).

Confronting Ourselves

> An anti-lockdown march in downtown Vancouver nearly spiralled out of control when dozens of protesters surrounded a hospital entrance and began berating frontline healthcare workers.
>
> —*PressProgress* 2020

Through hermeneutic dialogue, teachers and students might unconceal unquestioned prejudices of everyday life. It is not possible to distance ourselves to obtain a place of pure seeing. To seek to escape from our situatedness through our faith in reason and method is a chimera. There is no Archimedean point outside of culture and language, as we are always enmeshed in the ways of the world. However, prejudices, or pre-judgments, do not wall us off as if we are entrapped "behind insurmountable barriers" (Gadamer 2004, xxiii); rather, our prejudices make new understanding possible. To do this, teachers and students must put their pre-understandings at risk, to make them vulnerable to our partners in dialogue. Part of listening to the other, and seeing ourselves in relation, requires that we confront our own prejudices, our own historicity, our own situatedness. This requires that we nurture a moral bond to hear the voice of the other—especially when their thoughts are contrary to our own.

In the case of the antilockdown protestors, the authors recognize our own prejudices. We viewed the US antilockdown protest photo as Canadians, who are privileged to have universal healthcare. We viewed the photo with arrogance, thinking that Canadians would not protest the advice of scientists; as the quote that anchors this section reveals, this arrogance was uninformed and unwarranted. We viewed the photo with empathy for the health care worker who lacks personal protective equipment and consequently faces risks of infection in performing their essential work. We may be inclined to dismiss the acts of the antilockdown protestors as selfish, as idiocy or ignorance. And yet, if we listen to the experiences of these protesters, we may hear about economic insecurity, loss and/or fear that complicates our initial feelings. We may consider the systemic inequities that compel their actions; if these protestors had a strong social safety net, would they feel as desperate to "open the economy"?

Hermeneutic dialogue asks that one experience the weight of the other's opinion, to bring out the real strength of their understanding. Thus, it is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one), but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). Dialogic encounters call forth the need for the art of strengthening, a conviviality that lovingly embraces the voice of the other, which may render the familiar strange. This does not render one simply passive, simply surrendering one's prejudices; on the contrary, it is to put one's prejudices at risk, to foster an openness, a readiness, that what the other has to say may dis-position us from our well-travelled paths. To become experienced (*erfahren*) in the art of conversation is to be thrust into an alien position—from the familiarity of an unbroken stream of tradition—our expectations thwarted.

Conclusion

> We don't know if infection with the novel coronavirus confers long-lasting immunity.
>
> —Lessler 2020

In the same way that our knowledge about COVID-19 is incomplete, so is knowledge within hermeneutic dialogue. The practice of hermeneutic dialogue reflects the infinitude of COVID-19. While we continue to research ways to prevent, treat and cure the virus, even when the virus is stopped, the political, social and economic consequences will continue to reverberate. The lives lost, the fears ignited, the social practices gained and lost, the generation born, the virus will continue to impact long after the cure. Just as there is the ongoing eventfulness of their arrival, the conversations we begin in our classrooms do not end. Hermeneutic dialogue recognizes the unfinishedness of pedagogy.

Although there are no definitive pedagogical methods that will ensure our capacity to hear our fellow interlocutors, to permit their presence to interrupt our quotidian lives, there is a practice, a stance, a way of being that provides an opportunity for fractures to surface in our familiar narratives, enlarging understandings. Thus, being and becoming an experienced teacher is not merely stilling the flux of the lifeworld by being able to predict and control the vicissitudes of classroom life; rather, it is being ever more susceptible and vulnerable to the incoming of someone or something other. This calls for an unrelenting effort to foster an attentiveness and thoughtfulness that embraces the ineradicable flow of our life amid unknown and unknowable others.

The global pandemic abounds with personal stories that confront our previous constructs. The narratives that have come to govern our lives are put into

question. Nightly newscasts convey sounds and images of our collective existence being torn asunder as we witness deceased bodies being trollied out to refrigerated trucks set up as makeshift morgues, or harrowing images from Hart Island that reveal mass-grave burials of those whose families could not be located or who could not afford a private funeral. During such times, families cannot gather and partake in rituals and ceremonies to celebrate the living of a life. In order to consider how best to proceed, we will invariably engage in conversation with our fellow citizens as a means to provide opportunities for new possibilities to shine through, to illuminate novel adaptations to a world we once knew. And, perhaps, through dialogic encounters we may come under the influence of new or varied truths, and become bound in solidarity with one another in new communities.

Notes

1. We are using the term *social studies educators* to encapsulate our work as teacher educators in the field of social studies. Until recently, the authors also taught social studies in the K–12 context. While this current piece focuses on teacher education, the plea extends to the social studies context more broadly.

2. The authors recognize the irony of this title, as "Gadamer's treatment of truth recognizes that it cannot be captured within a theoretical framework" (Lawn 2006, 61).

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