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## Friendship, Education, and Justice Teaching: The Professional Development of Two Teacher-Friends

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*This paper discusses the distinct nature of friendship between teachers. Using literature on both the philosophical study of friendship and that of professional development, I present data from a qualitative study with two elementary school teachers in New York City in order to explore how the benefits of friendship might deepen an understanding of one's work with students. While literature on professional development tends to focus on effectively designed and structured activity, this article highlights the importance of teacher amity in (a) staving off negative judgments about teacher work, (b) harnessing the freedom to create and err, and (c) cultivating the necessary trust to be vulnerable and seek counsel. Given the complexities of contemporary classrooms and the current spectacle of crisis in American education, I hope to offer a unique alternative to discussions on teacher identity and professional growth by seeing friendship as a vital form of education itself. In doing so, I argue for a re-centralization of teachers in educational discourse, recognizing the personal and private ways that teachers create and think of in-school relationships and how such relationships play influentially and uniquely in their lives as both human beings and professionals.*

*Keywords:* professional development, friendship, care, elementary teaching, urban teachers

Friendships are a vital element in the life of a teacher and should not be “taken-for-granted.” In a profession infamous for isolation, teachers sift through the minutes of the day largely on their own. They engage a room full of young people through immeasurable points of encounter and on some occasions the work is tremendously uplifting. On other days, confidence wanes, fights ensue, and misunderstandings occur. These are times when teachers ache to be in the presence of a trusted friend, when they yearn for that feeling of “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” (Lewis, 1971, p. 64). Without the fears of discipline and the consequences of uncertainty, teacher-friendships may be the only mean by which teachers admit their vulnerabilities, rise above institutional demand, and attend to their longings and limitations.

In schools, teacher collegiality is oftentimes rendered a utilitarian function with student achievement as its only prerogative. In this vein, professional development activities have become increasingly directed by external consultants bereft of teacher experience and expertise. In a field dominated by the learning sciences (Taubman, 2009), subjective relationships that speak to the poetry of emotion and circumstance are oftentimes pushed aside as insignificant, even taboo. Yet, teacher-friendships abound. They are incredible reserves that offer teachers a sense of freedom and for some like Tina and Nadine, two teacher-friends working in a public elementary/middle school in Harlem, NY, they sit at the centerpiece of pedagogical growth and the perennial search for meaning.

For Tina and Nadine, the heart of their work is derived from the relationship they have forged with each other. Their intimate friendship enables them to salvage dignity and stave off public scrutiny. It allows them to be imperfect human beings with the freedom necessary to assume risk, to create, to err. Their reciprocal counsel creates glimmers of clarity during clouded moments of pedagogical ambiguity or despair. If learning is about situated encounters where radically different individuals work the edges of idiosyncratic perspective, then in essence friendship is an act of learning. At its fundamental core, it is a form of education.

In what follows, I present a discussion of the work that has been done to explore a relationship that, for many, sits at the heart of human existence. Because friendship is largely under-investigated in educational scholarship, I dissect the subject of friendship, as it has been deconstructed by philosophers since the day of Aristotle (335BC/1991). Philosophical treatment of friendship has a long history of deconstructed typologies—from virtue to utility to pleasure—and has been analyzed for its relationship to individual prosperity, moral goodness, and civic obligation. Yet despite its presence in the field of philosophy, friendship is rarely discussed in literature on teacher communities and professional development.

Teacher friendship, distinct in its own right, provides Tina and Nadine with three vital offerings: resiliency, freedom, and counsel. Each of these benefits, gleaned from a series of semi-structured interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and casual conversations with both teachers, suggest the need for educators to create spaces in which to enact various forms of care: a care-of-self, a care-for-the-other, and a care-of-the-profession. Of course, relationships such as these are rarely planned or predicted prior to their fortunate happenstance. For this reason, the intention is not to provide or promote strategies on how to foster similar engagements, but rather to use the example of Tina and Nadine to illumine ways in which teachers think of their own relationships within schools and to use a deconstruction of teacher-friendship to reflect upon professional development as it is more commonly structured and conceived.

### **Absolutes and Absences in the Literature on Friendship and Professional Development**

The meaning of friendship to human life has long since been discussed among classical philosophers and more recently revived in the early 1970s (Badhwar, 1993). Debates around friendship are so widely divergent that even the entirety of friendship has come under blatant scrutiny. While Cicero (44BC/1991) urged his listeners to put friendship ahead of all human concerns, “for there is nothing so suited to man’s nature, nothing that can mean so much to him, whether in good times or in bad” (p. 80). William Fulbeck (as cited in Goodrich, 2003) proposed a full abdication of friendship, fearing that its allure, temptation, and pleasure would inevitably threaten the existence of multiplicity and difference.

Beyond the question of friendship as an absolute necessity, there has been further debate on the characteristics that define a true friendship, the required dispositions of true friends, and fervent discussion on its fruitful benefits and functions (Bacon, 1610-1625/1991; Branden, 1993; Derrida, 1994; Kant, 1775-1780/1991; Kierkegaard, 1846-1847/1991; Seneca, 63-65/1991; Telfer, 1970/1991). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, oftentimes referred as the seminal text on the subject, Aristotle (335BC/1991) dedicates two full sections of his ten-volume work to the dissection of “true” friendship as an ethical ideal. In his explanation, Aristotle (335BC/1991) states that when there is true friendship, there would be no need to discuss justice as justice would already be promised by the virtue of the relationship itself, so strong and essential that it could “hold entire cities together” (p. 30). True friendships, also termed character (Sherman, 1993) or disposition friendships (Kant, 1775-1780/1991) are then not only instruments to achieve the highest human goals of happiness, but simultaneously, intrinsic parts of happiness, as the form and mode of life itself. However, in contrast to its philosophical counterpart, the subject of friendship is rarely broached in the field of professional development and teacher education.

With incredible variance, professional development activities can run the gamut from faculty participation in school-level decision-making, to informational sessions on district policies, to opportunities for curriculum development and student case study research, intellectual discussion on critical issues and educational frameworks, or occasional gatherings for celebration and socializing (de Lima, 2001). Despite Michael Fullan’s (1991) description of professional development as “the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one’s career” (p. 326), professional development is typically conceived of as administratively-facilitated activities where teacher attendance is highly suggested and external consultants parlay the pedagogical skills and knowledge expected to make teaching more effective (Achinstein, 2002; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Lieberman

& Miller, 1990; Little, 2003; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Westheimer, 1999). When asked to describe professional development at her school, Tina responded,

From my experience, in most cases PD was directly assigned to us by what our administration thought as a school we needed. In many instances, the PD that we were receiving was not appropriate to where we were in our own development as teachers. It would have been nice, if we were asked, "What do you need PD in? What areas do your students need the most help in?" (personal communication, February 26, 2013)

There has been some scholarly attention to the role of professional relationships within internal organization and school environments (Blase, 1987; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 2003; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; Westheimer, 1999; Wood, 2007). More recent models that speak of friendship in professional arenas include the concept of critical friend groups (CFGs), a site-based professional development model that unites teachers at all levels of expertise with external evaluators or pedagogical consultants. As a project of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, CFGs work to improve student performance by capitalizing on teacher relationships (Franzak, 2002). However, critics argue that such groups may not establish any of the tenets common to friendship (i.e., reciprocity, affirmation, visibility, care, counsel, voluntary fidelity), and behind the rhetoric, CFGs may serve to be no less a friend than the common passerby (de Lima, 2001).

Some in the field of organization and leadership have attempted to characterize and categorize the deeply felt ways that teacher-friendships are unique and necessary. This has led to various classification schemes that measure frequency, strength, duration, and the impact made from interdependence between teachers during shared activities (Kelley et al., 1983). Other scholars have employed survey studies to generate a classification for closeness in friendships which include items such as self-disclosure, support, shared interest, trust, and confirmation (Parks & Floyd, 1996). While interpersonal relationships have been empirically explored through micropolitical theory (Achinstein, 2002), organizational theory, socio-cultural, and social capital theories and practices (Blase, 1987; Penuel et al., 2009), the unique and intimate relationship between teacher-friends is often not recognized as a means by which educators become more reflective and aware human beings (Schuck & Russell, 2005), and seldom are case studies of real friendships used as supporting data.

In opposition to friendship in the workplace, scholars such as Jorge Avila de Lima (2001) argue that camaraderie is not conducive to the institution, particularly as strong human ties tend to breed exclusion, loyalty, and decreased organizational malleability. Additionally, he argues that lowering the level of intimacy amongst teachers could serve to widen the pool from which ideas and resources may be drawn. Debate and diversity could be balanced without a loss to care and cohesion. In sum, relatively little research examines the specific interactions and dynamics by which camaraderie constitutes a resource for teacher learning and even less focus on teacher development within ordinary daily work.

Given this body of literature, the story of Tina and Nadine puts a curious perspectival spin on more traditional notions of professional development, teacher community, and classroom practice. It contributes to an area of scholarship that either neglects the array of private, personal, and even solitary forms of teacher work, or subsumes individual experience into popular models of "collaboration" and "community." Hence a focus on teacher-friendship meets two scholarly ends: A direct focus on teacher perspective and its immediate connection to their daily work in schools. When asked about the role of friendship in the profession, Nadine explains,

I know that most teachers get burned out, they end up leaving in three years and I feel like if I didn't have friends here, like a strong support system, I don't think I'd be teaching. And I still don't have those teacher-friends like Tina, you know, there's just certain people that I can kinda talk to but it's not the same.

Friendships of this kind cannot be reduced to universal theory or expected to follow ideals and directions (Blum, 1993). Therefore attention must be given to how friendships manifest in actual relations between friends, set within vivid particulars, and embedded within conditions of space and time (Kant, 1775-1780/1991). The friendship between Tina and Nadine enables a certain kind of mindfulness about work in classrooms. It is a type of teacher education that depends not on presumptions of capability or manners of intervention but a relationship where the perpetual practicing of care serves to transform moments of discomfort into transformative sites through which both members learn and grow.

### **Foregrounded Backgrounds**

Tina and Nadine are two fifth and sixth grade teacher-friends who not only honor the singularity of the other, but also share an unabashed commitment to matters of urban multicultural education. Distinct from the other, Tina is an Azerbaijani-American who grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey. She speaks both Russian and English, and graduated from a teacher education master's program at a prestigious institution in New York City. Nadine, a Black woman who spent her childhood years in South Central and Oakland, California once pursued finance before teaching math in Washington, DC and now teaches fifth grade in Harlem. She graduated one year prior from the same teacher education program as Tina. During Nadine's first year of graduate school, Tina was working in the corporate world, unsatisfied and eager to make a deliberate change in her professional life. The same dissatisfaction was felt by Nadine before she entered the teaching profession.

Tina and Nadine found each other shortly after Tina's first year of teaching while both were habitually preparing in their respective classrooms. From many evening conversations together, after all the students and most of the school faculty had left for the day, they began to develop a trust in the shared political and professional commitment of the other. As educators in a low-income community both enriched by cultural heritage and deflated by socioeconomic challenge, Tina and Nadine know they must exhibit heightened sensitivity to the lived experiences of their students. They exercise a kind of compassionate advocacy that develops through their passing time as friends in a shared professional space. But sometimes the limits of knowing present epistemic barriers to the human faculty for empathy and Tina calls upon her friend Nadine for clarity during times of complicated moral calling. Trust becomes foundational to her admittance of vulnerability and her willingness to receive counsel.

Consider the role of teacher-friendship when Tina is forced to confront her reservations and address a spontaneous eruption between two students. In this situation, there is a public school classroom with all the colorful frills of bulletin boards and posted student work. The desks are bunched together into five separate groups that sit at the edge of a bright center rug called the meeting area. The charts on the walls remind students of the strategies for generating ideas when writing historical fiction or having whole group discussions and book talks. On one end, there is a list of classroom jobs with their corresponding student workers. On the other is a reading area with books stacked into genre bins and cubby holes that compensate the lack of desk space for personal items.

It is independent writing time and in the midst of a literacy lesson, the students have their heads bowed over their notebooks, responding to a prompt written on the SMART Board in the front of the room. Suddenly, the elongated silence is interrupted by the clamor escalating between two students; one female and one male. Immediately, Tina recalls a past conversation with Nadine who spoke at length about the long tenuous history between these two students and the multiple discussions on race and self-love that they had to engage in throughout the year.

Tina is not unfamiliar with racial tension, not only in her own positionality as a White woman in a predominantly Black and African neighborhood, but also in her observation of students who at times use skin color as instruments of belittlement and injury. She has on multiple occasions been witness to racial conflicts arising between certain racial and ethnic groups in her class: American-born Black and African students, lighter and darker-complexioned students, and Black against Latino students. So when Tina turns her attention to the two students exchanging disjointed words, spoken with gestures and

expressions of anger and aggression, she intuitively knows that she must now intervene, although she remains uncertain exactly how. Fearing escalation, Tina follows her initial reaction and takes the girl into the hallway before the dispute becomes uncontrollable. She asks the student to explain.

“Well, he’s been calling me a monkey,” the little girl expounds, “and so I called him a big ape or something.” After a few moments of listening and consoling, Tina decidedly pulls the boy into the hallway for a similar talk. The boy had little to say on the matter and she decides to schedule a meeting between this little boy and Nadine, knowing that the subject of race has been fruitfully broached between them several times in the past year.

In her heart, Tina knows that the implications of calling a member of the Black community a “monkey” run deeper than its literal meaning. Knowing that the word extends beyond simple ridicule into a social commentary on race relations writ large, she searches for a response to elucidate its extent, but she is unsure of her credentials and stammers. In a written survey, she remarks,

When one of my students called the other “monkey” (both students were African American). I didn’t feel comfortable handling the issue by myself, because I am White and I knew that I couldn’t relate or fully fathom what the student was saying as someone that was black. (personal communication, March 5, 2011)

Tina is critically honest about her lack of experience with racial victimization and she refuses to feign an understanding of its emotional toll. She could have simply ignored the comment. She could have instituted some classroom policy to avoid further disruptions of the kind. She could have reprimanded the two children without explanation or opportunity. Her authority in the room allows her to make all such choices. Instead, she extends her uncertainty to her colleague and friend, Nadine, who not only counsels the child from her own intimate standpoint as a Black woman, but consequently engages Tina in a conversation about the Black community and her concern over their loss of self-love. “These cannot be one-time conversations, Tina, you better get used to it. You have to always be reminding them of these things,” she counsels.

The beauty and bane of the educational enterprise is its never ending dynamism. Classroom episodes of moral magnitude persistently test the evolution of self and others within the context of the world and although aspects of education are inseparable from its moral embodiment, this is oftentimes ignored as part of the discussion on classroom teaching and professional development (Hansen, 1998; Oser, 1994). Because of the social aspect of schooling, issues of power and privilege are inherently built into classroom spaces and teachers, as well as their students, are obliged to reflect upon how social, emotional, and academic worlds come into contact with one another (Tom, 1984). The specificities of human nature make this knowledge impossible to capture in print and it is through a sense of care that teachers are able to learn about themselves and thus able to teach others (Noddings, 1984). As Tina struggles to provide pedagogical guidance to her students, she does not turn to handbooks or protocols, but rather to her friend Nadine with whom she has established a deep sense of fidelity and trust.

For philosopher Elizabeth Telfer (1970/1991), friendship is not simply desirable but essentially life-enhancing, as it makes a person live life more abundantly. About this, she claims, “Friendship can enlarge our knowledge throughout the whole gamut of human experience, by enabling us in some measure to adopt the viewpoint of another person through our sympathetic identification with him” (p. 266). In this vein, self-knowledge and awareness can be argued to involve contrasting oneself to another, whereby through the reflective gaze of a friend one is able to examine actions and traits from a more detached yet representative point of view (Sherman, 1993). Here the possibility for new knowledge rests on the defense of social difference where new ways of seeing the world are opened and unraveled through friendship. Tina and Nadine know that consensus of thought would have extinguished the educative moment and with their distinct standpoint, each privy to a unique lens, they confirm the limitations of their own consciousness and find through their friendship a place for education to occur.

### Method

I first heard the name-calling story over a warm bowl of soup at a restaurant just next door from Tina's quaint studio apartment. Tina and I had met almost three years before in the same Elementary Education Program and for unexpected reasons became friends both in and out of the school setting. I had been a doctoral student field supervisor assigned to several schools in the Harlem area and Tina, enrolled in the certification master's program, was coincidentally assigned in a progressive and academically rigorous elementary/middle school as my student-teacher. At around the same time, Nadine had been hired as a clinical faculty member at the same university, and quickly gained a robust reputation as a solid teacher/mentor and staunch advocate for her students. She sat across from me at a long wooden table during a monthly faculty meeting, but it would be Tina who brought us together at a karaoke bar for Nadine's 30th birthday.

As stories tend to do, one leads to another and in no time, Tina and I were whiling away the evening reminiscing about the virtues and complications of friendship, its role in the sustenance of vision, and the inability to persist within the institution. I had never considered teacher-friendship as an academic subject but its role in the lives of anyone who has taught in the classroom warranted deeper empirical investigation. Thus, this qualitative study on teacher-friendship emerged. Working within the genre of phenomenology where focus is placed on the lived experience of just a few, this study was designed to use an in-depth interview strategy, supplemented by email and in-person conversations as well as one brief questionnaire (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A preliminary questionnaire was distributed separately to both participants in the spring of 2011 in order to gain an independent but general sense of friendship. In addition to email exchanges and occasional outings, two formal interviews were held during the 2011-2012 academic year: both in a classroom on the elementary/middle school campus and both attended by Tina, Nadine, and me. Semi-structured interview protocols were based upon previously acquired data and became increasingly more narrowed and focused, leading to descriptions of specific moments and examples that supported broader conceptualizations around teacher-friendships, education, and each other as individuals. All audio tapes were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for initial themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This allowed for the data to inform the analysis and for teacher voice to take precedent over *a priori* categories. Themes were checked by both Tina and Nadine who read drafts of the paper at various stages of its development.

### Teacher-Friends in a Time of Public Scrutiny

According to Peter Taubman (2009), a manufactured crisis of failing teachers and failing schools has over the course of two decades contributed to the formation of an audit culture. This transformation has capitalized on blame and fear in order to facilitate the corporatization of public education by turning educational discourses and practices into systems of standards and accountabilities. In this current state of American schooling, attack and isolation are commonly heard sentiments amongst teachers, and rigid notions of success, effectiveness, and professionalism have concomitantly seduced them into colluding with the very forces that undermine their work. Both Tina and Nadine admit that growing difficulties in the profession add even more reason for the necessity of teacher-friends. When asked about the work of teaching in the current context, Nadine commented,

Teaching can be very isolating because when you close your door, you're doing whatever you need to do. You kind of feel like you're alone. Or you can't talk to somebody because they're going to judge you. I feel like with *Waiting for Superman* and the whole charter school movement, there's been a lot of teacher bashing, and maybe there was always teacher bashing and I just didn't know about it, but I feel like more recently, especially with the whole union and the first one in, last one out . . . In that fight, it's been teacher bashing, and it's making us pit each other against each other. It's rougher. (personal communication, April 29, 2011)

When asked what makes friendship different from other kinds of in-school support, she added:

Like if you are going to a coach or to uh, colleague or team member, there's sometimes a sense like it's a competition or you're gonna be told on or something like that. With Tina I've never felt like that. You don't have to watch what you're saying and watch what you're doing. I think it goes back to feeling safe in what you are talking about. (personal communication, April 29, 2011)

Teachers are the first to understand the harmful effect of negative public scrutiny. Films such as *Waiting for Superman* (Guggenheim, 2010), purposefully emphasize the failures of American public schools and place sole responsibility on the mediocrity of its teachers. Animated clips within the film show lousy teachers being shuffled and rotated from school to school, a belittling game they call the "Dance of the Lemons." In this caricature, the largest culprit is the union and its system of tenure and the only effective solution is the replacement of public schools with a network of charter schools, partly controlled by private enterprise. Although central to the plot, teacher voice is suspiciously absent and the viewer is left empathizing with the tender stories of children for whom the public school has supposedly failed.

Stoked by negative judgment and a sense of entrapment, educators find themselves striving for professional status which, in and of itself, concretizes participation within a system of mandates, regulations, quantifiable data, and universal best practices. At the expense of freedom, ethics, and a sense of worth, teachers are seduced, sometimes punitively forced, into such normalizing tendencies which jeopardize their care-of-self as knowledgeable and worthy human beings. Many are left beaten and compliant. It is for this reason that the presence of a friend may enable one to disentangle from the disciplinary processes that function to silence alternatives and justify a state of subjugation.

Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault and his notion of care-of-self, Michael Gunzenhauser (2008) discusses how certain interactive engagements serve as nourishment for those working within normalizing institutions. For Foucault, the self does not sit at the core of identity, nor is it an assertion of veritable truths to be uncovered or revealed. Rather, it is continually remade through critical reflection and intersubjective engagement. In this way, the self is an actor, endlessly reconstituted through exercises of power (within inescapable relations of power) and thus always provided the opportunity to resist domination (located in the day-to-day interactions one has with others). Said differently, we become ourselves when we stay vigilant of the ways we are being subjugated and this occurs through the practice of certain kinds of relationships.

This type of care is not self-pampering or luxuriating. It is more akin to the actualization of freedom that is birthed from the human capacity to intimately communicate and connect with the other. The fundamental reason to engage in interactive engagements, such as the friendship of Tina and Nadine, is to enhance one's own awareness and understanding of agency. Living life to its fullest thus requires a self-perception of these possibilities and it is a friend, as a sort of "mirror," through which an individual gains in self-knowledge and activity.

In part to resist isolation and surveillance, teachers like Tina and Nadine make distinct friendships unlike those forged outside the profession, and because of this, are able to resist the effects of teacher insult and under-appreciation. It is through recognition of themselves in each other that they continue to engage the complex and difficult work of classroom teaching. When asked what makes teacher-friends distinct from other friends, Tina replied,

When I first started teaching, there was one set of friends that didn't understand what I was doing and why. A friend yesterday was like, "I don't get it; you're still at work. Doesn't it get easier after the first couple years?" They just don't get it. I get so tired trying to justify why I stay late. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)



Nadine concurred,

There's a lot of stressors that my regular friends, even my closest dearest friends don't understand. Like all I have to do in my job and all the hats I have to wear. So it's difficult sometimes talkin' with them. They look at it like babysitting, or childcare, instead of teaching and there's a lot that goes with that. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

Perhaps this is the greatest gift of friendship, posits Nathaniel Branden (1993), the sight and self-recognition of happiness, achievement, and fulfillment in and from another human consciousness. This responsive phenomenon is what Branden terms "psychological visibility" through which each friend is able to *see* themselves by being *seen*, affirming their thoughts, values, and goals, therefore enabling the emergence of a better self. Therefore teacher-friendships are not only desirable, but actually critical to an educator's preservation of self as well as to the practice of self-reflexivity (Goodrich, 2003). Surely, teachers forge relationships with administrators, staff, parents, students, and the outlying community, yet it may be their friendships with each other that allow them to persevere through negative judgment and sustain a visionary sense of purpose, passion, and appreciation. Perhaps it is through friendship, as alluded to by Nadine that the affordances of failure are met with counsel and support rather than disappointment and discipline.

This may suggest heightened awareness as to how and why such intersubjective engagements are necessary in resisting the debilitating effects of institutional life and the invaluable place of trust in fostering different ways of thinking and feeling. As seen here, friendship becomes a necessary element in the care-of-self and it is through this relationship that Tina and Nadine temper the sometimes volatile and harsh world of teaching: A kind of support they find lacking from the institution. While school administration and professional development may serve well in providing strategies for student or program evaluation, teachers may be better able to withstand professional fatigue if provided greater protection during a time when reproachful stereotypes are fueling a distorted public image of their incompetence and inadequacy (Kumashiro, 2012).

### **Freed To Be Vulnerable, Perhaps Even Mistaken**

The maturation of a friendship is a careful and risky cultivation that requires patience and observation. There are no teleological aims that make friendship a function of outcome (Stocker, 1993) and the gifts resultant from friendship cannot be predicted or assumed. What is valued in a friendship is not only the character of each member, which does not imply perfection (Sherman, 1993), but rather a mirrored affirmation or theory of similars, where both are bound to some degree by semblance and reciprocity (Goodrich, 2003). Such amity signifies more than a mere testing of character. More importantly, it is the confirmation of the other as a contributing and worthy speaker. While the term fidelity is typically used to discuss loyalty to the condition of something such as friendship, Nel Noddings (2002) reminds us that fidelity should not be to a principle or even to an attribute of a person, but rather guided by an ethic of care for the other. Fidelity is not owed by law or morality, but rather continues in a dyadic, non-obligatory fashion that is refined through a deep consideration for a friend as a vulnerable human being. This attentiveness makes teacher-friendships altogether distinct from conventional professional development approaches where teachers are treated as subjects of intervention rather than individuals with knowledge in their field.

Under the pressures of benchmarks and performance measures, professional development activities are increasingly pre-arranged to present teachers with the pedagogical skills and content knowledge they have yet to acquire (Biesta, 2010). Traditionally, district-appointed consultants enter with externally-driven goals and strategies targeted to improve student achievement, students about whom they have little to no understanding. Teacher ambivalence in these cases is unsurprising. Many professional development activities that are described as "collaborative" conceive of collaboration in

limited ways (Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 2003; Wood, 2007) and increasingly teachers are evaluated for their compliance to ideals brought in from the outer reaches of the educational bureaucracy rather than provided a space in which to engage the creative practices of others.

When asked about the impact of professional development on classroom teaching, Tina remarked,

I felt that there was this underlying assumption that whatever we learned in PD would be easily transferable into our practice. It was just assumed, that what we learned through a one day workshop would automatically be implemented in our classrooms. At times, I felt that I was almost being set up to fail. I couldn't achieve this. (personal communication, February 26, 2013)

It is assumed that teachers will follow the curricular decisions made by their administrators. It is assumed that what is taught in professional development meetings will improve the performance of students. It is assumed that the tools used to assess them will be authentic and accurate and that the data derived from these measures are valid and complete. It is assumed that the strategies of professional development can be seamlessly applied into the classroom without complication or nuance. The underlying premise of this approach is that teachers are unable to learn on their own accord and thus are in need of intervention (Edwards, Biesta, & Thorpe, 2009). It requires teachers to first publicly admit their deficiencies and to then assume a receiving position in the institutional hierarchy. In this vein, teachers are functions and tools used to fulfill a greater outcome of student achievement. The top-down logic overrides them completely.

As explained by Tina and Nadine, their friendship did not begin with *a priori* evaluation of the other as deficient or in need, but rather through an enduring care for idiosyncrasy amid political idealism. In due time, their work as self-proclaimed social justice educators became the bread from which materialized after years of frequent encounters. Here, Tina describes the beginning of her friendship with Nadine and the foundational understanding they labored to establish:

Our relationship formed on the basis that we both have similar teaching philosophies and practices. I saw the way Nadine interacted with her students and I respected that. When dealing with the normal stress that comes along with teaching, such as classroom structures and routines, management, and lesson planning, I also saw how passionate she was about teaching and doing all she could for the kids. I had a similar approach with my class, and I think we both saw that. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

In response, Nadine commented:

I liked Tina as a person in general but the only way you're gonna get over to a teacher-friend is if I know that you love those kids. She'll look out for them. She could be stern with them but bottom line, those are her kids and she's got very high expectations. I feel like for some teachers, not from this culture or race or different in socioeconomics, their expectations can be lowered. And I think that has a terrible impact. I don't feel like Tina was ever like that. That was very important for me to see. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

Teacher-friendships such as these do not arrive instantly, nor should they be expected to. The specificities of their exchange (i.e., past, present, and those yet-to-come) cannot be fully identified or targeted as end goals or measures of success. There are no fixed positions of expert and novice; no structured hierarchies of command and subordination. The inescapable relation of power

(and knowledge) between the two are exercised upon the actions of the other with great care. They are not faceless bureaucrats of the institution but rather partners engaged in an exchange that flows within and between so as to deepen their mutual understanding of themselves and each other.

Fidelity to persons, through attentiveness and care, is a reciprocal quality and satisfaction that could serve meaningfully as a central aspect in educational work (Noddings, 2002). Individuals who have forged relations of care do not ask whether an offering is an act of fidelity, but simply do so because they care for the other. This does not imply severing relations with an institution in order to focus wholly on the pursuit of another's happiness, for this would not serve any purpose, but instead to take balanced consideration for the kinds of care that promote the growth of those we care about, to speak openly of a care for others above a care for the institution itself. This dis-individualism (Gunzenhauser, 2008) becomes particularly relevant during times of heightened bureaucracy when the institution is seen as an impenetrable force unassailable to human interjection and even furthermore, during a time when the fervor of objective scientism forces talk of intimacy into the dark forbidden corners of educational discourse (Taubman, 2009).

Tested through moments of disarray and uncertainty, the friendship of Tina and Nadine is undoubtedly underpinned by a confirmation of the other as an ethical and intellectual being. In describing the strength of such camaraderie, Nadine remarks,

I respect what Tina says, so I'll listen to that. But speaking for myself, I don't think that if someone else said that, I would take it the same way. Even if it was the same great advice or the same reason behind it, it's not the same, like you're looking out for me. I know that when Tina says it, I know that it's from a place of respect. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

This attribute of care extends beyond mere acceptance. At the center of this friendship is the freedom to exhibit vulnerability, to fail, to rise, to surrender, and to cry. In this encounter, one willingly invites the other as something outside, exterior, and infinitely distinct, as someone through which they may become something different (Todd, 2002; 2003). This common metaphor of "another self" (Zalloua, 2002) presents limitless possibilities for how the self may break out of itself to courageously confront inner flaws and inadequacies. Friendship may be the only imaginable case in which an individual would voluntarily relinquish certain liberties and commit to this state of servitude (Montaigne, 1572-1576/1991). The willingness of each individual to return to the other is a care sustained through such receptivity.

The opening vignette in which Tina yields to Nadine for advisement attends to how a friend's presence can settle the discontents of the heart and free one from the burdens of uncertainty. It is Tina's confidence in the goodwill of Nadine that creates a condition where risk is overcome by the ability to stumble without fear. Here she knows that unknowingness will be met by guidance rather than ridicule and abandonment. With trust in Nadine's ethical judgment, Tina opens herself up to the offering that this momentous classroom event has presented. She seizes it as a means through which she may broaden her social and professional horizons and in an active exercise, she involves her friend and continues on in her development as a teacher who is not only concerned with the academic success of her students, but also their critical and compassionate regard for themselves.

It is without doubt that trust in the ethical and professional capability of teachers needs desperate restoration. Perhaps, an implication drawn from the example of Tina and Nadine is the need for a language that speaks to the tender side of teaching (Noddings, 2002), an unabashed expression of the emotional capacity to care about others even within the rigidity of institutional life, not only in private hidden quarters or behind closed doors, but as an open exploration of how the tenets of friendship can offer an alternate sensibility to educational work. Friendship enables one to brave the risk of unknowing, to open the self to an alternative picture, and to embrace a different way of understanding and thus engaging the world.

### To Be Counseled in Matters of Teaching

Moral dilemmas are oftentimes entrenched in risk and because of this risk they are also momentous events that open up possibilities for new relations and practices. According to Richard Rorty (1999), events of the moral nature begin when controversy arises, when a natural inclination to do something no longer serves as an appropriate response. At the moment when classroom indecision paralyzes one to act, teacher-friends extend their guidance upon each other, seeking aid in the conscious deliberation of what to do next. Morality, Rorty claims, is not self-interested prudence, but relational and thus dependent on the human capability to be concerned for others. It is a matter of re-constituting oneself so as to enlarge the variety of relationships that influence that constitution; to extend a concern and care for others that is so wide that it envelops the suffering of any human being. Such things are not simple adjustments to behavior. They are not courses of action or skills to be acquired, replicated, or rationally invented. This form of education is about one's essential humanity.

The relationship between morality and education is typically seen as a political one. Teachers who lean more on the liberal left assume responsibility to unravel societal oppression and free students from the conventional truths that hold them captive. Those on the political right tend to assume that freedom arises from an education based on self-evident truths and a refinement of the faculties of reason. From the perspective of care (Nodding, 2002), the development of the whole person is of central concern and while current talk may frame an emotional social justice teacher against the backdrop of cold neoliberal conservatism (Sonu, 2012), Noddings (2002) asserts that counter-reform will not revolutionize education. Instead, we need a language of relation that emphasizes care for the individual over political warfare.

If teaching is in part about a constant search for understanding the subjective aspects of experience, then the self, both teacher and student, must be seen in a relationship with others. This type of pedagogy, as told by Noddings (2002), is concerned with care. It is realized as one based on a socialization of interdependence. Lawrence Blum (1993) argues that friendship, in this way, relies on a deep kind of attentiveness, one that meets the needs and wants of another without a sense of sacrifice, self-interest, or individual gain. Thus, a shift is made from individual character to interrelated intentions, aims, trusts, and actions. Friendship, as well as education, moves away from fixed cultural difference towards a reciprocal interaction where each member learns and grows.

If the care amongst friends does indeed foster a sense of freedom to be vulnerable, perhaps even mistaken, a friend then becomes a vehicle through which the liberty to confide and grow can be exercised. As said by Kant (1775-1780/1991), human beings are indeed creatures in need of disclosure, of communicating ideas and opinions; the duty of a friend then is to call the other's attention to these faults, for this is in the friend's best interests, and thus becomes a duty of love. These are not illuminated for the good of the institution but rather from the care of a friend. As will be seen, Tina and Nadine speak openly about their responsibility to illuminate the flaws and failures of the other when the circumstances jeopardize the ability to care in their work. When teachers are concerned with their own self-consciousness, they are also in turn engaging with the consciousness of their students.

Consider the following excerpt as Tina admits to cultural misunderstanding while Nadine accepts the position and counsels, not with judgment but as a relation of education that serves to further tighten the seams of their interwoven fidelity to each other as caring teachers. In an interview with them both, Tina shared,

There was a shooting in the neighborhood and my kids were all riled up about it. There were kids who were there and saw it, so I asked them, "Well if you saw it then is no one going to the cops?" And they were like, "Oh no, you can't go to the cops. You don't snitch." They gave me this whole tutorial on snitching and what would happen to them. It's interesting because the whole community and their parents saw it but no one's going to call the cops, you know. Then they came out like well you're in a gang to some of my kids who aren't in a real gang but associated with people in the neighborhood who are

in gangs. When I think of a gang I think the worst thing ever. I think it's a cultural thing, like me growing up definitely not really knowing.

Nadine,

She basically freaked out thinking they were going to die or end up in jail and I was just explaining that these people are people in their neighborhood. People join gangs for different reasons but also that these are peoples' cousins, like their family members, people they grew up with. I feel like that came from me just knowing a little bit more, from growing up in South Central and seeing gangs and having cousins . . . that could be my cousin. Coming from that point, I feel like Tina will get that. This doesn't mean that automatically when you join a gang they're gonna hand you a gun and you gonna go shoot up everybody.

Tina,

Like at least for the future, I think I can now have a conversation about it. I'll know how to react to it.

Curricular standards will always be a defining element of classroom teaching. But when an urgent incident such as this occurs, Tina understands their precedent and takes pause. Yielding authority to those under her gaze, she begins a dialogue and exhibits her care through the act of listening. Quite viscerally the pressures of "best practices" and "academic excellence" weigh heavily upon the minds of teachers at her school, yet in this moment, Tina puts forward the concerns of her students. In the midst of their story, she attempts to advise but her geographical, and thus social and political positioning disables her from providing a plausible response. Her students quickly notify her of this.

Pedagogical instability is a promise and of the hundreds of decisions teachers make daily, they usually make them in solitude and without counsel. On these many occasions, teachers answer moral callings largely on their own with few structured school spaces to discuss explosive classroom occasions. Even with mentorship programs and professional development sessions, teachers prefer informal exchange over traditional school hierarchy (Lortie, 1975). Perhaps the risk is too grand, the admittance of unknowing too shameful. While the friendship between Tina and Nadine attends to both care-of-self and care-for-each-other, their friendship also contributes to moral character and therefore their work with children.

Tina and Nadine show us that teachers design their own professional development opportunities accordingly and establish relationships that meet their emotional and pedagogical needs. They know shouldering obvious weaknesses can be met with unfavorable consequence and they gauge their exposure accordingly. Oftentimes they turn towards their friendships when institutional conditions appear unsupportive or irrelevant. This may imply that greater attention must be placed on how environments sustain feelings of safety, trust, and moral restitution. Trust in the ethical and pedagogical judgment of teachers may be one means to begin understanding the act of learning as essentially a relational experience where the character of the relationship takes precedence over the content of the curriculum. Within this intimacy, all participating members must place care as a vital centerpiece, with forgiveness, freedom, failure, and fidelity as foundational qualities.

Such characteristics may seem foreign given the current trend to apply linear business models into the field of education. Historically, such institutions have been pinned down by a history of patriarchy that denies the emotional and personal nature of the educational world. This does not imply a maternal, sacrificial proposition, but the recognition that professional growth requires practice, counsel, reflective agency, and patience for the unpredictable nuance of human development. The teacher-friendship described here was forged at the discretion of Tina and Nadine who gauged the fruitful

benefits of their newfound camaraderie, and in doing so constructed not only new knowledge but newfound ways of being, albeit differently. The strength of their relationship takes life within these transformative shifts, assurances of a genuine level of care, and reminders of how friendship plays into their lives.

### **The Place of Friendship: Implications**

Currently, the entire educational enterprise orbits around student achievement and performance. This measure has become so heavily weighted that the fate of entire institutions, no matter their historicity or significance, hinges on the production of achievement numbers. With such a narrow vision of teaching and learning, education has been reduced to a function deployed by the teacher and devoid of complication. Teachers in this equation are dehumanized and rendered instrumental, serving as cogs in a machine whose sole responsibility it is to effectively raise student test scores.

Those who have taught in public school classrooms know that the teaching day is anything but predictable. Instead, it is rich with mystery and surprise, with revelation and difficulty. When things do go perfectly as planned, the teacher perks up in surprise for these moments are rare to never. In essence, teaching is learning. It is an experience that reaches into one's sense of knowing and spins it into an alternative standpoint and for each individual, learning will have a different meaning. Today's educational system asks teachers to take this irreducible and wild thing called learning and squeeze it into an impossible form without any allowances for spillage or accident. Therefore the task is not only to revitalize teacher work, but to simultaneously reconceptualize teaching by placing unknowing, vulnerability, and acceptance at its central core. The portrait of teacher-friendship between Tina and Nadine opens the door to subjective experiences in school. It touches on the more compassionate side of education where we must forgive the occasional mistake, mitigate the fears of risk, and pick others up when they fall.

An implication drawn from the examination of teacher-friendship is that the spirit of the teacher needs to be renewed and restored, protected, trusted, and felt capable. Their pedagogical knowledge needs to spill out of their classrooms and into public spaces. They need to be honored in their professional development and showcased at community events, in the public media, and amongst each other as colleagues. Parker Palmer (1998/1999) articulates spirit quite eloquently when he describes education as "a human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos—with our own souls, with one another, with worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive" (p. 6). This connectedness comes in multiple shapes and forms. Nadine calls upon Tina for security in matters of engagement, to be protected from isolation, and in her appeal for trust within the institution. Tina calls upon Nadine during times of classroom dilemma. She finds within herself the freedom to be vulnerable in Nadine's company. Both friends, albeit differently, find a quality of light that cherishes their essence. It is a friendship by which their source of power rises into possibilities for honest exploration and a reclaimed sense of strength.

For Jacques Derrida (1994), friendship takes on the metaphor of a horizon. It has limits and is limitlessness. It is inherently entrenched in risk, instability, and vulnerability. It carries both positive and negative features. Some induce competition and conflict. Some are unfettered joy and festival. As in any friendship, Tina and Nadine undergo their own distinctive obstacles, all of which test the strength of their relationship. A perfect friendship is not the intended aim. But what is undeniable is that much of what has been described and expressed by Tina and Nadine returns us to the crux of what it means to care for another. The three offerings provided by their friendship (i.e., resiliency, freedom, counsel) all allow for a kind of disposition that is requisite to the worthy reconstitution of the human self. Confirmed in both voice and agency, Tina and Nadine find great need for their teacher-friendship, particularly as they face accusation and insult from the public sphere.

Therefore, examining teacher-friendship makes visible that which gives teachers meaning in their daily classroom lives and broadens recognition of the various kinds of engagements that become made within school cultures. In educational discourse, the teacher as an emotional human, moved most

deeply and directly by courage and curiosity, must be reclaimed as part of the educational core. The quantifiable achievement of a student is not and will never be the entirety of the teaching profession. This paper leaves no implications as to what schools should do to foster a greater sense of care, but rather argues for a revisitation and acknowledgement of friendship as a form of education by which vulnerability, trust, and freedom are made beautiful and necessary. With unrelenting joy in their work as elementary/middle school teachers, Tina and Nadine teach us that it is their care for each other that enables them to learn to love and in return love to learn.

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