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Teaching as a Mode of Friendship

This essay invites us to consider that we can live and practice teaching as a mode of friendship. This approach involves developing a caring relationship with students, searching for means and moments of speaking as equals, and encouraging shared responsibility for learning together. Educational friendship emphasizes positive and edifying communicative stances and relationships of teachers with individual students and toward classes as collectives. Even given this relationship, teachers and students face ongoing challenges in managing dialectical tensions, which make the sustained achievement of educational friendships a risky and fragile endeavor. These friendships are further limited by teachers' and students' subject positions, the structural inequality that historically and institutionally pervades educational contexts, and the risk of mystification that haunts offers of affection from persons in power positions to subordinates. Emphasizing good will, dialogue, respect for distance and differences among persons, and the equal validity of each student's life and learning experiences, teaching as friendship seeks to establish classes as judicious and caring political communities.

Some of the most important things I have learned in my life I have learned from and with friends, and some of my most treasured friends are former teachers and students of mine. There is something intrinsically life-affirming about the shared quest for learning and the cocreation of knowledge. Few things make me feel better than teaching well, and few things make me feel worse than teaching poorly. Why is that? Teaching is a thoroughly embodied and consequential activity that reaches searchingly or sometimes by rote into a person's past, actively engages or sometimes barely marks more than one person's vivid present, and extends thoughtfully or sometimes only leaves evaporating foam on the shores of somebody's future. Teaching is a physical, visceral, intellectual, and emotional activity. It is also inherently relational. It probably should be undertaken in as enjoyable and edifying a way as possible for all concerned—perhaps it should dream of *friendship*.

Over the past several years, my research concerning the communication of friends has been transformed reflexively through teaching *about* friendship into a stance and set of practices that seek to inform teaching

as friendship. In studying (and living) friendship, I have learned that, throughout life, friends must continually manage dialectical tensions in their communication with each other. In discussing these issues with students in various courses, it has become increasingly apparent to me that they could be considered critical tensions and resources in teaching, if we view and live teaching as a mode of friendship. In fact, writing this essay has itself been an educational activity for me, undertaken in a spirit of friendship with others. I contacted current and former students of mine and asked for their perceptions concerning the general notion of teaching as friendship. I also sought to understand their experienced truths of what I may or may not have accomplished as a teacher with them. I asked them if anything about how I have gone about being an educator in their lives approximates the ideals or feelings of friendship? If so, how so? If not, why not? The resulting dialogue has been an exciting, instructive, and deeply humanizing experience for me, and several of these co-learners' voices are woven into this essay. At various points, you will read students' reflections on their experiences of learning with me. I have provided minimal introductions or commentary about their statements because I want their words to speak for themselves and for you, the reader, to make your own connections.

What do I mean by teaching as a mode of friendship? I want to examine how the ideals and practices of friendship can provide an edifying ethic for the interactions and relationships of educators and students. To what extent do we or should we live the tensions of teaching and facilitating learning as the tensions of friendship? How might this living enhance learning? What are its risks and drawbacks?

Affection, equality, and mutuality are widely recognized facets of friendship in the Western tradition (Brain, 1976), but what do they have to do with teaching?

The first facet, affection, means caring about and for others, in this case, students. We can care deeply and significantly about our students without desiring an exclusive, intimate connection with them, either as a close friendship that might imply unwarranted favoritism, or as a sexual relationship that involves exploitation and abuse of power differences. Teachers who subscribe to the model of friendship premised on this classical notion of eros (Hutter, 1978) are especially vulnerable to self-inhibition or to criticism or suspicion by third parties and the public at large. Many teachers who consciously or unconsciously buy into this image of friendship run scared and are typically afraid to care for their students. The ones who seek to exploit the teacher-student relationship knowingly in the name of affection are reprehensible, and I do not have time here to critique fully the damage they do to students, as well as to the credibility of the calling known as teaching.

In contrast, we can talk about the affections of friendship in the classical tradition of *philia* and celebrate its stance of wishing the other well, being genuinely concerned that he or she prospers, trying to communicate good will, and pursuing the common good (Hutter, 1978). To wish good for another for his or her own sake is termed good will by Aristotle (1980). When good will is reciprocated, we can speak of friendship, especially when there is a mutual perception of reciprocated good will, which communication scholars following Bateson (1972) recognize as the shared communication of good will. I believe that creating a classroom and faculty office climate of good will may be one of our most significant challenges and responsibilities as educators. Good will can be contagious (as, it might be argued, can bad will, distrust, and bad faith). If good will is perceived and voluntarily reciprocated by our students, we are cocreating the moments and possibility of educational friendship.

Caring for our students does not mean diminished commitment to academic standards. When we care about students, our standards may be raised, including what we expect of ourselves in teaching them and evaluating their work. Friendship, however, also requires that the shared humanity of our enterprise dictates and regulates our standards, as well as the manner in which they are invoked.

Equality, the second facet, is a tougher, if not structurally impossible, feature of friendship to achieve and sustain with students. Presumably, teachers, as past and present students themselves, have earned the knowledge-based authority to preside over classrooms and assume the responsibility for facilitating and evaluating their students' learning. As Watt (1982) observes, "Authority is always associated with inequality of some kind, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the authority that goes with knowledge. In knowing *how* as well as in knowing *about*, some people know more than others" (p. 47, emphasis in original). This "learned authority" (Watt, p. 51) also gives teachers the "rightful authority" (p. 75) to coordinate participation, as well as to intervene and protect vulnerable individuals or groups in their classes (Nash, 1966).

Aside from knowledge differences, the structural character of the teacher-student relationship is patently unequal, with teachers having the right to convene classes and assign work, as well as to schedule, regulate, and evaluate students' participation. The teacher's trump card is the final say over how students' performances are described in institutional terms and records. In so doing, teachers can deeply affect students' future opportunities. Meanwhile, teacher-student relationships are embedded in larger social conditions of power and scrutiny. Their actions are monitored and judged by administrators, students' family members, laypersons, and other third parties.

These institutional exigencies and social constraints, however, need not destroy the possibilities of educational friendship. The stance and practices of friendship seek to transcend the tendency of power differences to distort (from both sides) perceptions of the equal validity and common humanity of all persons' experiences of their lives, regardless of present educational attainment. Further, it is vital to recognize the potential equality in each of our desires and motivations to learn. We stand or should stand as equals with students in the quest for knowledge, self-improvement, and edification. When judged by the standards of friendship, neglecting the ways and moments in which we may stand on equal footing as learners can poison students' and teachers' mutual experiences of the opportunity to learn together. Friendship in all its forms seeks to function as an existential leveler and demands that persons discover the areas of their relationship where they can respond and treat each other as equals.

Mutuality is a third facet of friendship. For moments of educational friendship to occur and persist, both teachers and students must practice this stance and thereby create an enterprise of co-learning in a spirit of friendship. Conveying good will and recognizing the equal validity of each other's personhood and desire to learn are efforts that teachers must make toward students and students must make toward teachers. Of course, often the teacher must take the initiative in valuing and communicating these qualities with students because of long-standing and widespread injunctions to enact the educational enterprise in hierarchical ways.

Dialectical Tensions of the Educational Friendship

A dialectical perspective directs attention to the contradictory, interpenetrating, and changing aspects of social situations, which are continually achieved through participants' praxis, their active choices shaping and responding to concrete conditions (Rawlins, 1983, 1989). Interaction in relationships generates and addresses multiple contradictions that emerge over time and in light of how they are positioned in enveloping social contexts. The existence of opposing demands means that certain tensions are common in relationships. These tensions constitute subtle and covert dilemmas that must be managed effectively through praxis for relationships to remain viable (Rawlins, 1989). At least four dialectical tensions characterize interaction between teachers and students in the mode of educational friendship: the dialectics of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent, affection and instrumentality, judgment and acceptance, and expressiveness and protectiveness (Rawlins, 1992).

The Dialectic of the Freedom to Be Independent and the Freedom to Be Dependent

Friendships involve ongoing tensions between the freedom to be independent of and the freedom to depend on each other (Rawlins, 1983, 1992). Tensions between independence and dependence permeate the educational friendship as well. How much freedom educators and students can exercise in the learning process is always a critical concern (Greene, 1988; Nash, 1966). Once a person has enrolled in a course or obligated him- or herself to teach it, being in the class is not voluntary. Friendship, however, is always a matter of choice; persons cannot be compelled to be friends with each other. Friendship as *philia* in the Western tradition honors freedom. Whereas philosophers see romantic love as promoting a freedom to merge or become one, friendship promotes the freedom to be two (Brain, 1976; Rake, 1970). Thus, the spirit of friendship celebrates the freedom of each person to choose independent or dependent action, neither requiring nor preventing one or the other choice.

Taken in this way, teaching as friendship involves cultivating a student's independence—in thought, action, and projects—while communicating availability when the student needs guidance or assistance. Of course, there is the vexing issue of readiness, that is, the question of when students have mastered the basics that make independent work fruitful and genuinely creative inquiry most likely. How is this moment identified—through one-sided appraisal by teachers, gutsy insistence or self-conscious requests for confirmation by students, friendly conversation, or some combination of these? As teachers, what images of readiness inform our regulation of others' possibilities? Being ready to become one's own person is arguably a tougher achievement than being ready to paint oneself using someone else's numbers. Is it, though, really true in every case? Doesn't it depend on the individuals involved? I am pleased to have worked with several students who could not but become who they are, and they changed me in their quests. Meanwhile, "allowing" a student to be his or her own person requires significant readiness on the part of a teacher. Can teachers handle freethinking, creative, and challenging students? If not, why not? What does it take to facilitate this kind of readiness in teachers or, more accurately, between teachers and their students? How do we, as teachers, give students guidance and direction without unduly restricting their choices? How vulnerable and flexible can a teacher become without risking the student's confidence in his or her grasp of the issues at stake?

The pinch here is that students should not be forced into independence if they are not ready, nor compelled or tacitly socialized into being overly dependent. I consider it unfriendly either to, as faculty at one

institution where I used to teach put it, “give them enough rope to hang themselves,” or subtly and comprehensively manipulate students into depending on faculty for all of their projects to the extent that their very identities are risked in bogus collaboration. Faculty who are too busy or above working with “mere” students, or who build their productivity around required student labor, violate the conjunctive freedoms of friendship as well.

Jim Disanza poignantly describes the tugs and pulls of these cross-cutting requirements in our relationship:

Whatever the cause, I still remember my first baby steps at independence occurred when I said no to something you suggested for the first time. You were counseling me about the final stages of my data collection for my dissertation one week prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. You had suggested collecting a final day of observational data the Friday after Thanksgiving. You correctly reasoned that I would be able to watch the tellers, newly socialized to their bank experiences, handling a difficult, stressful banking day during the start of the Christmas rush. I winced at the suggestion. Nancy and I were scheduled to visit family in Cleveland and I was looking forward to the trip. I had made many family sacrifices for the degree; I wasn't going to add this to the list. Despite the obvious logic of your argument, I said no. I disagreed with the plan. It didn't feel all that great because I had no logical reason for denying your proposal, only my emotional commitments. But it was a stand for my own independence.

Sadly, nine years after defending my dissertation, I still keep some distance between my work and you. Having established myself as an independent scholar, I now fear what you will say when you read my latest article or when you read my soon-to-be-published textbook. My experiences and life circumstances have taken my thoughts down a very different path than yours. The content of my thinking and the conclusions I draw are far different from what they were when we were in daily contact. I fear your reaction to my hard-bitten analysis of organizations. (Even writing this as I am in the context of our relationship, I suppose I am hoping it will soften the eventual blow you may feel.) Will you reject me as some alien offspring? I could not have thought the things I have thought without you. You taught me how to think. On the other hand, I could not have thought, done, or written the things I have if I had not established my independence. I needed you, then I needed to be away from you. (What a male trajectory this whole thing has taken.) This powerful swing from strong dependence to strong independence may be a result of the fact that ours was never a pure friendship, it was also a teacher-student relationship. Our relationship may resemble the parent-child relationship more closely than the ideal of friendship. In the end, I have to thank you both for allowing me to depend on you, and for granting my independence.

The Dialectic of Affection and Instrumentality

I have already implied the need to manage the tensions between affection and instrumentality. This translates into questions like these: How much is a teacher permitted by self and others to care for students? How

much can this caring occur as an end in itself versus as a means to the goals of education? Teachers are enjoined to care for each of their students, even if only through the generalized fellow feeling conveyed in a large lecture course. Caring becomes more particularized as we come to know students as individuals, and this is facilitated by smaller classes, repeated contact, or both, which frequently occur in graduate education. We may come to care especially about certain students for any number of reasons. I think this is a good thing, regardless of explicit educational payoffs. It is simply a good practice to enlarge the circle of caring in today's violent and distracted world; it is also a worthy practice to try to make students feel good about themselves. We are in their trust. Moreover, I believe that, at least for communication scholars, how we communicate with students cannot be separated from our educational goals because our pedagogical practices are reflexively connected to our subject matter (Rawlins, 1996).

These ends-in-themselves of caring for students are, thus, givens and potentially serve educational goals in vital ways. Meanwhile, sometimes we develop sparkles in our eyes for specific students and peevish feelings (or disaffection) for certain others for any number of reasons. Now what? Watch out for the compensatory two-step. Be careful of being too hard on students to compensate for the fact that you know you like them and don't want to show favoritism, but also watch out for being too easy on such students as well, giving them the benefit of the doubt when they deserve the doubt itself. Similarly, watch out for being too easy on students you don't like because you know you don't like them, and, of course, don't punish the students to whom you have seemingly not succeeded in extending good will or the hand of friendship. A robust ethic of educational friendship mandates respect for their freedom to be independent and their choice of indifference toward you.

There is a slippery slope of objectification and rank instrumentality in caring for students merely to facilitate learning, that is, to do one's job well. There are, however, worse sins that teachers commit. Overall, then, because I believe that the project of education is a hopeful and useful one, instrumental caring for students is better than none at all.

Lorin Basden Arnold writes eloquently of our tensions between affection and instrumentality:

In addition to how I teach, your manner of interacting with me and others has changed the way I deal with students individually. In the first course I had with you, I felt that you really knew I was there and were responding to me as an individual. While you weren't the first instructor to do this, you had a warmth about you that was not common. You really listened to the students. (You even listened to them when they weren't making much sense, throwing in a "point well taken" when there wasn't really anything else to say!) By the end of that course, I felt that we "could" have a friendship.

After you became my advisor, I believed that you were a friend to me. Our relationship embodied friendship for me in a variety of ways. For example, we talked a lot about the things that were important to us (children, music, movies, etc.) not simply those “academic” matters. I felt that I could tell you the exciting things that happened in my life (a pregnancy, a puppy, a house). In the academic realm, you treated my ideas with care and seriousness. You even allowed my thoughts to influence your work and that meant so much to me. Since that time, I feel that this situation has continued and I enjoy the times when I do see you and we talk.

While our relationship has/does embody a friendship in some ways, it does not in others. Perhaps part of this is because you extend the hand of friendship to all of your students and that means that there is a limited amount that can be given to each. This has caused me to notice a more instrumental nature to our relationship than I would typically expect/want in a friendship. While we talk about things other than academic things, it is always the pragmatic that is the origin of the conversation. If I see your name in an e-mail, I know that there is an instrumental goal to the message. And, I feel that calling you “just to chat” would be an intrusion on your time. Similarly, you have always offered help to me, but on many occasions do not actually have the time to provide it. I always surmise that this is because while the heart is infinite, the clock is not.

Once, in a friendship seminar, we discussed whether there was a maximum number of friends that a person could have. After much discussion, we concluded that, practically speaking, a person can only maintain a limited number of “friendships” at a time if friendship were presumed to involve not only liking/care, but a commitment to spending time and effort on the other. Perhaps this is where one of the difficulties in the intersection of teaching and friendship exists. As a teacher, you can offer friendship to all of your students; however, if they all take you up on it. . . . Does this point to the difference between “friend” and “friendly”?

The Dialectic of Judgment and Acceptance

Closely connected to the crosscuts of affection and instrumentality in the educational friendship are those of judgment and acceptance. How do we, as teachers, reconcile our attempts to communicate acceptance of students as people and developing scholars with our responsibilities to evaluate their work? In addressing this tension, I often try to clarify for students and carefully communicate the distinction between judging them as people and judging their work. I tell them that I try to be a positive and well-intentioned person, and that I tend to like students and want to have fun together in our classes. Even so, I warn them not to slip into a false sense of security with me as an evaluator. They shouldn’t think that because I act goofy and mention Tori Amos, Sublime, or Wu-Tang in class, I won’t expect the very best from them and bring rigorous standards to bear in evaluating their work. Even so, the accomplishment of my legitimacy as a person who likes, accepts, and enjoys students as people, but sometimes finds their essays wanting, is

an ongoing communicative challenge in trying to serve the requirements of educational friendship.

I also tell them the truism that teachers who care the most about them as students will spend the most time evaluating and commenting on their work. Unfortunately, and perhaps correctly, students do not always believe this, maybe because of the way some teachers make them feel through their comments about students' work, by the overall climate created in their classroom, and by their stance toward students. Some teachers convey a commitment to abstract standards, not to the students or to living learning. I believe that many persons' talk about standards in this context is primarily a flight from the responsibility of engaging substantive questions about the value of what and how they are teaching their students and about how the students' labors fit with the lives they are trying to live (and seeking to learn about). Caring can be conveyed by taking students' work seriously and expecting the most from them. However, it is not enough in the educational friendship to impose an abstract template of expectations or enforce standards. The caring of friendship must also be communicated and felt by students. Even so, the standards of the educational friendship are robust, not soft or sentimental, with regard to expectations for quality, astuteness, and humane performance in learning together.

Eric Fife's observations make me feel as though I have, at times, achieved some success in reconciling these contradictory responsibilities:

On the one hand, Bateson (and you) encouraged thinkers to be liberated, to think "outside the box," to challenge perceptions and assault the paper constructs of established scholars. Thus, the questions and contentions allowed a tremendous freedom of writing and thought, and my final paper was able to be both scholarly and whimsical. And yet, on the other hand, you let us know that you were a tough critic—and had high expectations for our work, and certain standards would need to be met. So there existed a certain freedom of thought and expression, but at high standards we were not free to violate.

The Dialectic of Expressiveness and Protectiveness

Finally, tensions recur between expressive and protective communication. Although openness and expressiveness in pursuing knowledge and self-improvement are crucial, it is equally vital to be respectful and discreet about matters that might hurt or offend others or make them feel threatened. There is considerable risk and vulnerability involved in learning at any level. There are also clear differences between feeling comfortable about feeling vulnerable versus feeling vulnerable about feeling vulnerable in an educational setting. It is important that teachers act and communicate in ways that help to establish trust in the classroom. It is important to recognize and model the types of statements that can and

should be openly expressed and those that probably should be withheld or rephrased out of respect for other persons' feelings and sensitivities. Would someone make the same statements to a friend, and would they phrase them in the same manner?

I know of persons who seem to take great pride in making students feel anxious and on edge, in short, vulnerable. Key moments in students' education are choreographed as "hoops of fire" by these inquisitors. It is always important to pursue and encourage rigorous questioning and incisive responses in the learning process. I wonder, though, how seriously such teachers consider the impact of their words on students' feelings and self-esteem or on the discursive atmosphere created in their classrooms.

I have acknowledged several tensions of friendship that take on distinctive salience in the teacher-student relationship. I now turn to some virtues associated with this way of learning together.

Virtues of the Educational Friendship

In my opinion, the virtues of teaching as friendship include (a) encouraging the practices and classroom climate of a judicious and caring political community, (b) connecting course-related learning to the lives we are living, (c) taking seriously the temporal registers of classroom discourse, (d) being sensitive to the narrative qualities of learners' lives, (e) pursuing dialogue in teaching and sharing knowledge, and (f) emphasizing the intrinsic importance of classroom interactions and conversations with students.

People who teach in this mode of educational friendship understand that a classroom is a public context for inquiring and thinking together and for performing their identities (Greene, 1988). As such, it is a political space with participants' self-conceptions, moral visions, and cultural ideologies always in play and subject to contention (Brookfield, 1995). However, as Beiner (1983) argues, there is a significant distinction between abstract, decontextualized, cognitive judgments and those performed and "informed by reciprocal involvement in situations held in common" (p. 79). The classroom is a situation "held in common" that through civic friendship wants to be a learning community.

A teacher fosters such a community by offering friendship and trying to model practices that establish the context for political friendship in a classroom. Does the teacher have to single out each and every student in proposing educational friendship? Does each and every student have to regard each other and the teacher as a friend? Though these questions are relevant, it is more a matter of the teacher assuming and communicating a stance toward the class as a whole, encouraging that stance on

the part of students toward each other, and extending this stance of good will and acknowledgment to each and every student when addressing and addressed by her or him.

Dana Cloud writes:

Since I received your note I have been thinking about how to respond. It is so hard to capture what your classes were like. Sort of like jazz improvisation, with you encouraging everyone to take a solo, whispering “come on” and “yeah, yeah” as we spoke, nodding your head to some inaudible beat. I remember the interpersonal class and the theory class vividly; now, as a teacher myself, I can’t believe that you taught systems theory and R. D. Laing to undergraduates! Light bulbs went off in my head—about my academic leanings and my personal life, given the nature of the material. I used to love it when you wrote “Wow” or “Zap!” or something like that after a powerful paragraph or sentence in my papers. As in class discussion, I always had the feeling of being encouraged and pushed forward, stimulated, and rewarded. Having a good friend is the same way—somehow folks negotiate the tricky balance among advising, criticizing, and supporting. We don’t want our friends or students to go wrong, but we have to put our points of view out there with empathy and humility. One has to enjoin the narrative of the other rather than arguing.

Once again, political or civic friendship is not the model of friendship that always implies or aspires to dyadic involvement or immediacy. It is a kind of friendship aimed at creating a political context of deliberation with the discursive space to acknowledge personal differences and identities. A classroom can be a friendly place, a place to speak respectfully as equals in the project of learning, while perhaps not as equals in other domains. As Arendt (1958) sagely observed, “What love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs. Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politike*, is a kind of “friendship” without intimacy and without closeness; it is regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us” (p. 243). Such friendship offers interactants the freedom to be someone else, the preservation and respect for differences within a concerned mode of relating that also strives for equality, mutuality, good will, and responsibility for self and other as members of this community at this moment in time. Beiner (1983) also celebrated “the space of friendship, the space of which, by enforcing the distinct identity of each, sustains the mutual integrity of the friends” (p. 121). *Teaching as a mode of friendship wants to encourage the practices and breathe the atmosphere of a judicious and caring political community.*

Alex Miranda relates:

I think atmosphere expresses things really well. My impression of our interactions is that you seem genuinely interested in what students have to say. Whereas I see a lot of

prefacing and qualifying going on in other contexts, people in your classes tend to just initiate their comments with a straight out “I think that....” There is not much of that “I might be wrong but....” kind of prefacing. I personally feel very comfortable about taking intellectual risks with you, because I feel that you do care, both in the sense of being interested, and in the sense of being careful about how you respond.

I am not sure where the atmosphere comes from, but I have a feeling it may be established by your own personal involvement with your teaching. I guess the wacky enthusiasm with which you approach teaching exposes the person behind the teacher, and it is a lot less threatening to interact with a person than with a social category.

I think you were right on when you mention judiciousness as well. The element of care makes judiciousness benevolent, rather than judgmental. It is hard to separate the two, because the element of care allows and demands hard thinking. In a sense, it is like saying, “Here’s the net, now ya gotta jump.” I remember making a correlation between Bakhtin and Laing in your office. To my horror, you asked, “How so?,” at which point I had to blunder around a thought I hadn’t finished baking yet. I think the combination of care and genuine interest made the whole thing less intimidating than it could have been, and I still feel free to toss out unbaked ideas for help.

Moreover, *teaching in this mode insists on connecting course-related learning to people’s lives as they live them*. It resists a heroic persona—the teacher as an abstract individual, a detached model of rationality who dispenses timeless facts and truths above the fray of everyday events. In contrast, teachers are encouraged to be persons interacting with other persons, telling stories that dramatize their relationship to the matters under consideration and linking the material to their own lives as a model for students to do the same. Of course, as in friendship, such tellings must honor the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness. One way teachers build trust is through carefully observing the balance between candor and discretion and respecting students’ cultural, political, and religious sensibilities in the stories they relate. Likewise, while valuing students’ viewpoints and stories, teachers should not compel their personal disclosure. As teachers, we should try not to let students jeopardize our own and their classmates’ good opinions of them through overly personal or self-incriminating revelations. We don’t step out of our lives when we step into our classrooms.

Nancy Legge describes her experiences of connecting lives and learning:

Your method for making ideas clear, concrete, and meaningful in class was to discuss them as they personally related to you. You turned me on to Gregory Bateson and R. D. Laing—two of the most influential writers in my thinking. But you also revealed yourself when discussing the ideas. When discussing the trajectory of friendships in the Interpersonal Communication class, we learned about Wedges of Cheese and Ed Shockley and your relationship to your advisor. We understood your connection to music and

some aspects of what it was like to have a father who's a doctor. The end result, I think, is that we "got to know" who you were in addition to understanding the theories you were explicating. Incidentally, I should add that I have adopted some of the same philosophy when I teach. Rather than "hiding" from my students, I disclose some of my interests, some of the issues that I'm working through, what it's like to be from a blue-collar family in Detroit, an enthymeme Alexis formed, or a cool/funny comment Jake made, etc. Whereas I know many educators who will not disclose their personal life at all, I teach to a small student body who is deferential to a fault. Creating more distance between them and myself makes it difficult to explain why the ideas matter. They need to see how they matter. For me, that means to disclose some personal information. That's something I learned from you.

Educational friendship takes seriously its life on the borders of the past, the present, and the future. The temporal orientation of the classroom conversation becomes a primary matter of concern, that is, does our discourse embody a pervasive temporal register? For example, there is authority associated with the past, established facts, and the way things have (always) been done. Accordingly, there is power derived from tradition in teaching. Although prior ways of speaking contextualize our present ways, we might ask, to what extent should a teacher's and his or her discipline's traditions dictate a student's future? Too much talk about an enduring present poses risks as well. It may be heard by students as apologies for the status quo. Repeated descriptions of what is can begin to sound like constraining conceptions of what should or ought to be. As Greene (1988) suggests:

Rather than being challenged to attend to the actualities of their lived lives, students are urged to attend to what is "given" in the outside world—whether in the form of "high technology" or the information presumably required for what is called "cultural literacy." (p. 7)

Typically, the educational emphasis here is on skills for fitting into pre-determined situations and normalized senses of what currently exists. A final temporal discourse addresses the future and possibilities yet to come. It is a language of making choices and changing one's personal and social contexts. Speaking in this way, the classroom becomes a place for praxis, for trying to talk about and go about our selves and our worlds differently than they currently are or have been in the past.

The teaching friendship wants to be sensitive to the narrative qualities of learners' lives. It wants to recount how languages, voices, and events of the past both constrain and enable the present. It wants to talk about their practical and moral legacies for the communities we care about. As in all friendships, it wants to listen to the particulars and details of the other person's story, to get a sense of its meaning for him

or her and the reasons for its telling. The educational friendship wants to explore the opportunities that different versions of the present afford for authoring, coauthoring, and multiauthoring our futures. In telling these stories to each other, we don't separate facts from values or living from learning together. We challenge static assumptions about the knowledge we are creating and celebrate the possibilities for *becoming* in our shared moments.

Although diverse forms of presentation may be useful for approaching different types of subject matter, *the intellectual heart of teaching and sharing knowledge as a mode of friendship is dialogue*. Teaching as friendship learns from Bakhtin (1981) that all language use is an open, generative, and contested project. Heteroglossia, the roiling diversity of languages, fundamentally conditions the meaning of utterances (Bakhtin, 1981). All utterances are sites of struggle between centripetal forces that seek to restrict and unify verbal and ideological diversity, and centrifugal forces that work to decentralize and enliven language. In this inevitable clash of languages, meanings, and perspectives, Bakhtin warns against the deadening pretenses of authoritative discourse, with its power-laden insistence on having the correct vision and the last word. Students should feel comfortable questioning their teachers' conclusions, methods, and evaluation practices.

Learning interactions involve give-and-take, to-and-fro—persons in conversation with one another about issues that matter to them, asking questions leading to more questions, mocking certainties, generating choices, taking chances, risking roads not taken, responding to each other in the fullest flush of the moment's possibilities and fallibilities, transcending what is given, and growing older together. The power of embodied, dialogically achieved knowledge about communication in particular is that it includes the conditions of its coproduction as part of what is learned. A love of conversation animates the practices of this educational outlook.

Teaching as a mode of friendship emphasizes what is happening during our classes and conversations with students, not merely after or as a consequence of them. Echoing Bakhtin's (1993) insistence on the ethical import of "once-occurrence," every moment of teaching is conceived as a rich and unique opportunity to live in learning and friendship with students and to validate them as persons. It is the time and the place to listen to students and to meet them where they are. It is here and now that our attention to detail matters. How am I addressing this student? Am I in a hurry? How carefully am I listening to what is being said (or reading what is written)? What does my posture and tone of voice say about my regard for him or her? What is occurring on the identity level of our discourse? Who are we allowing ourselves to be in our words with each other?

Educational friends respond benevolently to each other's possibilities, even when they are judging each other. They respond to who the other can be as well as who he or she is right now. This stance of friendship (taken either personally or politically) does not involve static images of each other's possibilities. Rather, the educational friendship milks the moment of learning for its potential for gladness and improvement, while striving to recognize the situatedness of what we are about, our shared and individual pasts and futures. It also continually wonders about the larger stories that our time together shapes and reflects. In reaching its understandings, the truths of such friendship are not static accomplishments; they are provisional living truths, ecstatic and unfolding, and continually shaped by other stories, change, and temporality.

Terri Malek-Madani's narrative probingly depicts her experiences in a course with me that aspired to the virtues of educational friendship:

I remember well my semester spent immersed in dialogue. In fact, receiving your email immediately brought back the intense emotions that were awoken, expressed, and somehow nurtured and protected during that time of my life. I spent that semester on a high wire, precariously trying to keep my balance with my heart in one hand and my mind in the other. I'm still here, so I guess the balance worked. You were right the first day of that seminar—your class would change my life. It changed my personal life, but even more, it changed my academic life. I'll try to share a bit of that with you.

I have many walls built around me to protect me from harm. Unfortunately, those same walls also keep many people away. Some of those walls were lowered in your class. I have never exposed myself so publicly before as I did more than once in your class. (I think that calling it "your class" is a bit awkward. But just the same, you allowed the class to be what it was. In that sense, I call it "Your class.") For some reason, I felt relatively safe in that environment. I am trying to understand why, so that my ramblings may be somewhat useful to your project.

First and foremost, you expose yourself professionally and emotionally. You struggled along with us as we brought to life the ideas and ideals of the scholars whose material we read. Although you had read all of those texts before and have probably had countless discussions about them, it was as if you were discovering the texts for the first time with us. You didn't diagram, chart, review, summarize, provide an overview...you simply opened up the texts and our minds and said, "What do you think, gang?" In that way, I see you as very child-like—and that is a huge compliment from my perspective. You seem to be so open to dialogue with the texts, with the students, with the world, with music, etc., that each time you pick up those books it is as if you are discovering something new. In that mode, you are one of us students. You put yourself on equal ground and throw out ideas that at times you even might say, "Why did I say that?" You expose yourself as a learner, one who is excited about and celebrates not having all of the answers.

You also, though, led the class. This part I am having a difficult time grasping. How did you do that? I guess you were always the one who said, "So what do you think,

gang?” In the beginning of the semester, I know that I waited to see what an appropriate response would be to that question. I learned rather quickly that you just really wanted to know what we thought! You kept the discussions going, you pointed to interesting passages that we might have glossed over, you told us that this was exciting stuff! Your energy and enthusiasm “led” the class. At some point in the class I felt somewhat safe. When we began to discuss Laing and Bateson, that stuff was living inside of me.

I grew tremendously that semester. Personally, I worked through some messy stuff that had been ignored for too long. But academically, I learned that learning in “school” can be just as valuable as learning in “life.” In fact, the two can be one in the same. It may sound silly, but that has not been the case for most other classes/seminars I have taken. We have book knowledge (on which we are tested, quizzed, drilled, etc.) and we have life. They are too often too far apart. I believe that we are all pretty good at distinguishing between the “academic lectures” and the truly enriching dialogues. Friends talk, they converse, they share, they question, they learn, they explore together. “Professors” lecture, they tell, they summarize, they correct.

I think the texts that I enjoy reading take me on a journey similar to what we experienced in your class. The authors don’t begin with a set of ideas which they already know to be “true” and just pass that convoluted monologue to the readers. The authors I like seem to take me on a journey of discovery—one that they are still on themselves as they share their ideas. Sentences, chapters, and books that are “closed,” that say, “we KNOW this,” turn me off. Where is there room for me in that text? If there is no room for me, then there can be no dialogue.

Now, how to write a dialogic text is the trick—one that I don’t know yet. I hope that this helps you in some small way. This text began with my rambling, first response to receiving your email. It has ended with what I have discovered in living with these questions this week. I enjoy people and texts who invite me to participate—who are open the idea that I may be able to contribute to the dialogue. Thanks for being one of those people, Bill.

Limitations of the Educational Friendship

Despite its virtues, this way of teaching involves reasons to take pause. As in all political circumstances, the participating teachers’ and students’ personal attributes, identities, and cultural backgrounds affect the concrete accomplishment of educational friendship. Relative ages, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and social and professional statuses can markedly influence the opportunities for and perceptions of this way of teaching. I do not mean to speak here as categorically as it may sound. I strongly believe and hope that each and every person has a choice and a say in how she or he will address others in the moments they share of being alive. Personal and community prejudices, however, can affect our choices knowingly or in spite of our efforts to get beyond them. Moreover, *the contingent and relational qualities of our subject positions can simultaneously allow and disallow teachers and students*

to speak with each other in certain ways. There are gender, cultural, and subcultural variations in how students perceive friendliness by teachers, with these perceptions differing as well according to the teacher's gender. Further, in specific historical moments and locations, symmetry or asymmetry in perceived age, race, sexual orientation, or social status can strongly affect perceptions of friendliness by teachers and students, not to mention their very rights to be teachers or students. Even so, all educational approaches are susceptible to such constraining and enabling social constructions. The approach offered here, being especially mindful of the contingency of our subject positions, wants to name their effects and to celebrate the possibility of surpassing their limitations in given cases.

Still, *it may be argued that fundamental, structural inequality inimical to friendship between teachers and students persists.* Under these conditions, friendship with students can involve mystification. Real differences may be obscured, with the teacher pretending to feel affection for students and to act in their best interests from a power position, when, in fact, he or she is pursuing self-serving goals. At least traditional teachers own their superior positions, this critique might further argue, and students know where they stand. These are valid concerns, and in response, I would say a few things. First, the approach to teaching and learning I am discussing is not for everybody; not everyone may be willing or able to adopt this stance in good faith. Many teachers, as well as students, may feel more secure and effective in traditional roles. Closely related, it is imperative for all teachers to reflect continually and critically on their stances and actions toward students undertaken in the name of education (Brookfield, 1995). As a classically asymmetrical situation, there is always the potential for bad faith and exploitation, but I do not believe that these are inherent faults. Finally, it may be that in most cases teaching achieves only intermittent moments of real friendship, like the fleeting accomplishment of authentic dialogue in other structurally encumbered relationships, such as parenting and therapy (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Even if these moments are transitory, I still believe the stance and political climate of educational friendship are worth attempting in fostering a learning community.

Joy Cypher reflects incisively on this limitation:

I see why you are so drawn by the idea of teaching as a mode of friendship, Bill; and yet, there are some areas and ideas that keep me from wholeheartedly taking that perspective. First, and I think most compelling, is the undeniable power differential. Although a teacher might well (as you did) take the perspective that the learning is done together, it is not outside of a strict organizational framework where only I am truly evaluated for my learning. (One might argue that teacher evaluations serve the same function, but at least in the case of your classes, the questions I was asked didn't always

deal directly with the areas I would want to evaluate, but, rather, areas that you as my teacher wanted my feedback on. Moreover, the consequences of my evaluations of any teacher are FAR less in possible severity than my teacher's evaluation of me.) Regardless of the framing, I never felt that any of my teachers were as vulnerable as their students in the teaching relationship. Yes, as far as personal growth, there is a potential, but reputationally and organizationally, the power never evens out until you are gone. Does that mean that outside of the classroom I could not feel like a friend? No. But I regularly felt a difference in role and position as I stepped into the classroom.

Communicating as educational friends is a risky undertaking. Teachers become vulnerable when they speak more openly about and encourage students to question the reasons for pedagogical decisions and the connection of course material to their lives. As a teacher or as a student, if I behave in a friendly way toward you and you are cold or indifferent to me, it may hurt my feelings or make me wonder if I have done something inappropriate or offensive to you, which would not have concerned me otherwise. What if a student becomes "too chummy" with me or fellow classmates, making presumptuous remarks that "strike a nerve" or make someone feel self-conscious? Some may see speaking like friends as an invitation into others' personal lives, which can lead to unwanted overtures. The ambiguity of cultural scripts for friendship can make it difficult to draw clear boundaries for actions and discourse.

In short, this approach may impose unexpected emotional labor on both teachers and students. The injunction for teachers to care about and respect their students and for students to regard the teacher and fellow learners likewise (or act as if they do) becomes an additional responsibility of class membership. Meanwhile, it is difficult for teachers and students to know for certain how the other is experiencing his or her side of the friendship. Prior experiences with power differences can make students reluctant to say what they are really thinking about matters perceptibly close to their or the teacher's heart. They've been fooled before by teachers who seemed "like one of them" and then lowered the boom at test or grading time. Teachers have had students who seemed to benefit and played along with alternative approaches to classroom organization, content, and interpersonal dynamics, only to turn around and burn them on course evaluations for not fulfilling their expectations for conventional educational practices, or for not being easy graders. Cultivating and sustaining the mutual trust necessary for educational friendship in the face of such historical baits and switches is a delicate, comprehensive, and ongoing challenge.

Neither authority grounded in knowledge nor institutional power differences disappear when a teacher tries to offer a stance of friendship to class members or to speak with them as equals in the project of learning.

Moreover, teachers cannot escape the paradoxical demand that they exercise their authority to coordinate a learning experience aimed at transcending their authority, but these exigencies in themselves are matters to be noticed, named, and discussed. It is hoped that respect for and clarity about persons' misgivings, genuine concern about the chance to learn together, and readily apparent good will can validate and alleviate all parties' anxieties in an ongoing manner. In these ways, the paradox of the situation becomes a source of creative energy and a basis for ongoing self-recognizing and self-questioning dialogue on the part of all the members of a learning community.

Reflecting on Teaching and Friendship

I have proposed here that we can live and practice teaching as a mode of friendship, as a caring relationship with students that searches for means and moments of speaking as equals and encourages shared responsibility for our time of learning together. Celebrating educational friendship emphasizes positive and edifying communicative stances and relationships of teachers with individual students and toward classes as collectives. I consider the classroom as part of social life; the pain, insecurity, invisibility, inaudibility, and alienation felt in society at large live in classrooms as well. Even so, I do not buy into the adversarial, consumerist, or blandly administrative images and realities of higher education today threatening to sully our hallowed charge to cultivate and share knowledge—to speak with care to the future. I believe that classrooms are places where teachers can intervene and make a difference to students and where students can make a difference with each other and to their teachers. As Buber (1965) once observed, “What is otherwise found only as grace, inlaid in the folds of life—the influencing of the lives of others with one’s own life—becomes here a function and a law” (pp. 99–100).

Teaching, pursued as a mode of friendship, must address dialectical tensions associated with the interaction of educational friends. Considered in this essay were the dialectics of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent, affection and instrumentality, judgment and acceptance, and expressiveness and protectiveness. Teachers and students face ongoing challenges in managing these tensions, which makes the sustained achievement of educational friendships a risky and fragile endeavor. These friendships are further limited by the subject positions teachers and students assume or have foisted on themselves in regard to each other, the structural inequality that historically and institutionally pervades relationships between teachers and students, and the risk of mystification and second-guessing of motives that haunts offers of affection from persons in power positions to subordinates.

Emphasizing good will, respect for distance and differences among persons, and the equal validity of each student's life and learning experiences, teachers seeking to promote educational friendship want to engage classes as judicious and caring political communities. They want to emphasize to all students that their presence in the class matters and that what they say will be heard and valued. This mode of learning together also emphasizes building meaningful connections between course content and the lives of the people who are investigating it together right now. It wants to attend to the temporal unfolding of social life and our knowledge claims about it—noticing the authority of traditional claims, the “should be's” implied by descriptions of what is, and the possibilities for change announced by discourse about the future. Assuming a stance of friendship, teachers emphasize how all learners are positioned in time and the value-laden consequences of their choices. Like caring friends, they want fellow learners to appreciate a good story and to scrutinize its potential for being their own. A dialogical spirit animates discourse in this learning community; no question is too large or too small. We are deeply concerned with how we treat and regard one another, as well as the subject matter, during the actual moments we spend together, not merely with what happens as a result. Time shared learning in friendship is always precious.

In the end, a bittersweet irony describes the relationships among teachers, students, and subject matter. A primary goal is to cocreate with students the tools and awareness to surpass their need for the teacher, to render obsolete the teacher's superiority in knowledge, and to escape from the hierarchical setting of the educational system. The melancholy twist of teaching is that sharing such knowledge often results in the relationship between the teacher and students coming to a close. Ironically, sometimes the issues taught (as frequently occurs in communication courses) have everything to do with relationship, connection, and community. The finitude of life is often enacted in the “brief candle” of educational friendship. Teaching is both a moral and mortal project. As years of teaching blaze by, now and then I ask myself if I am going to wake up one day and wonder if I have made the most of the chance I had to be a college professor.

The student-teacher relationship is an issue at the heart of academic disappointment and renewal. In dealing with the ways we care for and relate to students, I have addressed here the emotional component of teaching that can be an ongoing source of renewal, but, unfortunately, is too often a source of cynicism in the academy. I have offered an image of teaching as friendship that I find intellectually and existentially demanding and gratifying. In my opinion, educators who believe they have teach-

ing down pat or in their hip pocket are either kidding themselves or losing touch with the eternal challenges of teaching. Meanwhile, one of the hidden drains of faculty life may involve trying to finally “get it right” in the classroom. Recognizing the dialectical tensions discussed here reveals that there is never a point of sustained peace where there is no tension in the teaching-learning process, especially if you care about students as friends. Perhaps if faculty learn to embrace and celebrate such tensions, the academy will seem less frustrating and tiring.

For me, the dialogue with current and former students occasioned by this project has been invigorating and humanizing. Their words have named, called forth, and cross-examined the worlds of teaching I want to live in and address. Their penetrating and instructive perceptions have resonated the quandaries I am trying to understand. Hearing their voices evokes moments we have shared learning together even as we begin anew, and they are teaching me about teaching. In the caring and watchful presence of their words, I feel fresh dignity and meaning concerning how I have tried to live as a professor, but I also hear pronounced challenges. Writing this essay has itself made me all the more answerable for what I think is virtuous in teaching. I am more mindful of living up to these images of teaching in my conduct of classes and in my interaction with students and colleagues. Committing to paper the more edifying aspects of our profession can create the exigency in our own lives to see them through.

The aspirations of teaching as a mode of friendship described here are not bromides. This is not a method or a handy solution. Rather, it is a risky and potentially ambiguous stance toward facilitating learning. It involves conscientious and disciplined practices, persistent orientations and sensitivities, and lived convictions. The rewards of these activities are their ongoing accomplishment, enriched relationships with fellow learners, and, it is hoped, enhanced humanity and education.

With these thoughts in mind, teachers reading this essay might consider your stances toward teaching and students. How much do you value detached appraisal versus engaged judgment, vulnerability versus the security of position and control over how knowledge is defined, the grade book versus the life story? Reflect on the teachers who have made a difference in your life. How would you characterize them? Would the terms “caring” or “a friend to me” come up sooner or later? How did it feel to be in their classrooms? Were you a friend to any of these teachers? How so? Why not? How would you describe your favorite and most gratifying relationships with students and with given classes? Have you lived teaching and learning as a mode of educational friendship?

Author

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