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Natalie Davey

Humber College's School Within a College Program, [Natalie.Davey@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Natalie.Davey@tdsb.on.ca)

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# The Good Enough Teacher

Natalie Davey

**Abstract:** *This paper puts forward a pedagogical model of care for K-12 educators that is specifically focused on alternative classroom educators. In conversation with educational theorists and psychologists, a model of care that is translatable to both teachers and students in non-traditional classrooms is presented. Looking first at Arlie Hochschild's "emotion work" in the context of alternative classroom teaching, a link is made to Nel Noddings's "ethics of care" as a pedagogical starting point. The author then riffs on psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's notion of the "good enough mother," the one who "manages a difficult task: initiating the infant into a world in which he or she will feel both cared for and ready to deal with life's endless frustrations" (Alpert). Connecting Alpert's mobilizing of Winnicott to aspects of Noddings's "caring relation" builds a theoretical bridge that supports and scaffolds the construction of what the author calls the "good enough teacher." The author also suggests that this pedagogical model of care might also be replicable by students who need to take care of themselves. Throughout the paper examples are drawn from the author's experiences as a teacher and learner in a variety of alternative education classrooms.*

There has always been a place-based duality to my classroom assignments. With a career spanning twenty years in K-12 classrooms, I have worn many hats, sometimes all at once. The truth is that no teacher has ever played a singular role in her capacity as an educator. In whatever classroom iteration one teaches, there are competing forces at play: student needs, parental pressure, and the never ending top-down emphasis placed upon the facilitation of key outcomes regarding student skills.<sup>1</sup> Without negating the importance of skill building, and keeping in mind the multifaceted roles played by teachers, I believe more attention should be placed on the emotional space that exists between curriculum delivery and skill development. In that in-between space where teaching and learning occurs, educators are performing ongoing emotional work rendered invisible by the expectation that K-12 teachers simply know how to care for all of their students. Emotions must be considered *work* in order to obtain a fuller picture of what transpires between teachers and learners in the realm of public education, and a disservice is done to both parties when this labour is glossed over as obvious or natural. Without a pedagogy that is supported by an ethics of care, I believe that an educator's emotional labour risks not only going unseen but also untaught, leaving teachers without the explicit supports to

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1. Different understandings are politically and philosophically embedded in loaded terms like "skills" and "outcomes." For the purpose of this paper I write from the stance that skills-based training and anticipated student outcomes are important base notes for public education but are by no means all-encompassing. Teaching the "whole student" means looking beyond the explicit curriculum to bigger pedagogical questions of that which is educational in education. For more on this topic see Davey, "Becoming."

make the care they show to and for their students as well as themselves enough.

To understand my own roots of caretaking and caregiving in the context of education, I look back to where I started my career: a prison. At 22 I did not yet have the language to define my educational practice or praxis-to-be. I had been given no opportunity to do any research about what sort of space I was walking into on my first day of class; I was hired on a weekend and started teaching on the Monday, naively assuming that I was “ready” for whomever I was to meet in what was then Toronto’s central booking facility for youth awaiting trial. I learned quickly, from detention staff and the students themselves, that I was out of my depth. I had only taught for one full year prior to my youth detention centre assignment and had made assumptions about my ability as a teacher based on limited mainstream classroom experiences. I had never read anything by prison activists and scholars like Angela Davis or Ruth Wilson Gilmore. I had only just been introduced to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a title mentioned in teacher’s college (that one day I hoped to read). Looking back, I recognize that what sustained me through those challenging years was the care shown to me by my students who must have seen in me, in spite of all my inexperience, an authentic care for them.

Outside of the jail I felt alone. My teaching experiences in the detention centre were not translatable to friends or family, let alone to myself, which made for an isolating reality. Though I had two teacher colleagues at the detention centre whom I clumsily attempted to connect with outside the walls of our basement classrooms, the reality was that our sole commonality, our one point of connection, was located inside a space that we all desired to leave. We were teachers at different stages in our careers. I was a new teacher with no knowledge of alternative teaching in general, let alone teaching in prison, while my colleagues had taught for years in various alternative settings and felt jaded by the detention centre’s limited educational resources. In two years at York Detention Centre no senior schoolboard administrator ever visited our prison classrooms, and so the message delivered through their absence was that we were on our own. Without school-based institutional supports, I worked to care for my students while they took care of me. They asked how I was feeling at the start of a day just as I checked in with them. In what was an emotionally charged environment, when moments of stress occurred in our classroom, students would work to protect me from violent words and actions even as I worked to create a safe learning environment for them.

Retrospectively, I can see that the student-to-teacher caregiving I received in the prison setting was located in an educational grey zone that today gives me some pause. The hesitation I feel is not because there is anything wrong with young people showing care for their teachers. Empathy building is in fact a soft skill to be celebrated (Stanbury, Bruce, Jain and Stellern). Instead, I question the narrative that suggests teachers should not need such care. This false narrative creates the myth that “good” educators have it all together with (or more often without) support and is damaging for teacher-candidates who feel the need to be “experts” when they have barely graduated from teacher’s college (Allen). It is also damaging to young students who feel betrayed when unsupported teachers inevitably fail them. What if, in those early days of my career, I had been given the language to describe the care I needed to help sustain the difficult work of teaching in isolation? How would I have approached my students differently? How would I have approached a care of myself as an alternative educator?

Former Halifax Poet Laureate and activist El Jones writes of her prison activist work, saying, “We can’t pretend this work doesn’t take a toll.” Jones’ words resonate deeply with my memory of the prison classroom and of alternative classrooms in general, for inherent in the teacher’s role is the emotional toll of working in these environments. I imagine the weight of this emotional burden to be heavier for those who work with and advocate for underserved students in alternative classrooms (see Corcoran). On the Toronto District School Board’s website a sunny description defines an “alternative” classroom as, “schools where students need a new way—to find their way” (“Alternative Schools”). I find this spin doctoring of language deceiving in the face of what I have experienced and what other alternative educators have shared with me. Our stories fit with Richard Ashcroft’s statement, “Teachers who work in institutional or alternative community settings typically receive no special training intended to equip them to serve their often difficult-to-teach students” (82). My experience of being hired without training for the detention centre position is a case in point.

If “alternative” is understood by what it is not—mainstream—then who is it that populates those alternative classrooms? How is an alternative student different from their counterpart in the mainstream classroom? Adam Jordan describes alternative schools as “popular interventions for marginalized students” (263). These spaces exist to facilitate schooling experiences for students who are living on the margins, set up in places such as children’s hospitals, detention facilities, psychiatric out patient facilities and group homes. Citing work by Foley and Pang and Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke, Jordan goes on to note that “little research has focused on professionals in these settings... [even though] close to 11,000 public alternative schools or programs are believed to exist in the United States education system ... and as many as one million students are currently attending alternative learning programs [throughout the country]” (263). In the face of such large numbers, how are teachers able to sustain the emotional work inherent to the success of their marginalized students in these outlying educational spaces when, as educators, their own formal and informal structures of care are so limited—or were never there in the first place? Research around teacher attrition rates in the first five years of the profession suggests a stark truth<sup>2</sup>: Teachers are not receiving enough care to sustain a long career.

### **Building the Framework: Hochschild, Noddings, and Winnicott**

In her interview with the *L.A. Review of Books* (LARb) about her recent work *Carceral Capitalism*, activist Jackie Wang says that she does not want to “glorify the informal structures of care that [end up] emerg[ing] in the crucible of a capitalist system that would grind us all to a pulp if it weren’t for our friends” (Buna). With no systemic support available, Wang derives emotional support for her activist efforts from “informal structures of care.” Similarly, under the present government in Ontario, governmental cuts to education highlight a systemic will to withdraw support from students and teachers who need it most (see “Education Funding Changes”). From this context I frame a

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2. The attrition rate in Canada can be as high as 30 percent in the first five years of service (Karsenti & Collin).

theoretically-grounded pedagogical model of teacher and student care that goes beyond reliance on the “informal.”

I begin with a reading of Arlie Hochschild’s “emotion work,” connecting the concept to the specific lived experience of an alternative education teacher working without mainstream supports. Then I look to Nel Noddings and her “ethics of care” as a pedagogical starting point for a model to do emotion work differently. Finally, I riff on how, in his Op-Ed for *The New York Times*, Avram Alpert has taken up psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott’s notion of the “good enough mother.” Alpert describes her as one who “manages a difficult task: initiating the infant into a world in which he or she will feel both cared for and ready to deal with life’s endless frustrations.” Each of these thinkers helps to flesh out what I am calling the “good enough” teacher. Linking Alpert’s Winnicottian translation to aspects of caring relation, I sketch out my version of the “good enough teacher” to be a model of teaching and learning that supports all teachers, but most specifically alternative educators, in the balanced and sustainable practice of what it means to be “good enough.” I write from the stance of one who wants to be a better teacher than her 22 year-old self was. I want to be a “good enough teacher” with the experiences and nuanced vocabulary to better show care for others and for myself. I also consider the possibility of the “good enough teacher” as being a pedagogical model to teach students better care of themselves.

In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Arlie Hochschild describes “feeling rules” concerning the “emotion work” that is owed from one to another in a wide range of social interactions (49, 52). She explains acts of “emotion management” as determining the appropriate responses due to that range of interpersonal exchange (60). As observed in her study of public-contact workers, Hochschild notes the complex feeling rules and “gift of exchange” centered in the work of those for whom interpersonal connection defines the job, for example the classroom teacher (78). Andy Hargreaves’ work on the emotional geographies of teachers in relationship with both students and colleagues further highlights the complexity of that exchange. In his study of 53 teachers in a variety of elementary and secondary schools, Hargreaves’ interviews draw on “methodological procedures used by Hochschild” with the end goal being to highlight how “teachers draw upon [personal and past] emotional understanding...to interpret the emotional experiences and responses of others” (507-508). Megan Watkins refers to Hargreaves’ work in her investigation of teachers’ tears in the affective geography of the classroom. Watkins says it is “important to consider the particular spatiality of classrooms and how they function as affectively charged sites ... contained spaces with a specific interiority where teachers and students are grouped together, interacting for sustained periods of time” (138). In the affectively charged site of the alternative education classroom, enhanced feeling rules dominate that very particular educational space, not unlike the cramped airplane space of Hochschild’s airline workers. These rules warrant attention and require unpacking.

Even as these and other studies have taken up Hochschild’s emotion work in their classroom research, there are others who would disagree about using her concept in regards to teaching. In a literature review analyzing 19 different educational articles focused on how Hochschild’s concept does or does not fit within the realm of teaching, Kwok Tsang highlights the complexity inherent in Hochschild’s term in the context

of the classroom and boils the confusion down to interpretation of vocabulary, specifically looking at the difference between emotional labour and emotion work. According to Tsang's study, educational researchers commonly agree that teaching involves emotional labor "because teachers' emotional activities are governed by the emotional rules of teaching" (1314). For the purpose of this paper, I use the term "emotion work" to look more generally at how the practice of emotion management is key to a sustained career in teaching for alternative educators. I see that work of emotion management as an even greater quandary for educators whose classrooms fall outside of the traditional school-based support systems.

Current research<sup>3</sup> that looks to the benefits of supporting teachers in their professional learning makes a direct connection to mentorship. Mentoring relationships are not easily formed, for the emotion work and feeling rules at play are loaded with and layered by the complex relationships that exist within the school community. The student population requires ongoing care, collegial competition can rear its head in the form of workplace lateral violence (Davey, "Breaking Out" 232), and administrative hierarchies further complicate the already emotionally-laden school environment. Finding a healthy mentoring relationship outside of a traditional school in an alternative classroom comes with even more place-based challenges. For example, within the partnership-driven world of post-secondary education (PSE), my current alternative classroom situates me on a college campus teaching parallel to but not directly with colleagues who are kept separate because of institutional divisions. I have seen these divisions make the feeling rules harder to decipher and have experienced the way they breed feelings of isolation and resentment in teachers. As Hochschild suggests, we can become estranged from the very emotion work performed to mitigate work stresses, resulting in the loss of feelings that connect us to others (91). In the educational realm, emotional estrangement negatively affects the student/teacher relationship, especially those students most systemically underserved. As previously stated, many of those students are learning in alternative programs and classrooms (Bullough 25). A "good" teacher will try to care for her students with all she has to give, but what is the end result for her and her students if she loses herself along the way? I believe that the "good enough" teacher will, instead, find a way to strike a balance between the work of emotion and care for both others and herself through a pedagogy of care.

Carol Gilligan writes, "the ideal of care is ... an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone" (62). Noddings builds upon Gilligan's work and fleshes out a full-fledged "ethics of care" from the stance that, "One who attempts to ignore or to climb above the human affect at the heart of ethicality may well be guilty of romantic rationalism" (*A Relational Approach* 3). Noddings further explains,

[Care ethics are] interested in maintaining and enhancing caring relations—attending to those we encounter, listening to their expressed needs, and responding positively if possible. But even when we must deny the need expressed, we try to do so in a way that will preserve the caring relation. (*A Relational Approach* xvi)

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3. See Campbell, Clinton, Fullan, Hargreaves, James, and Longboat.

Similar to Hochschild's emotion work that is embedded in the very act of teaching, Noddings's "caring relations" are intrinsic to classroom dynamics. The goal of teachers is to respond to the learning needs of their students, and to do so may require engaging with, listening to, and responding to those needs that the student names. The emphasis is placed on listening in the teacher/student relation, for "the teacher as carer is interested in the *expressed* needs of the cared-for, not simply the needs assumed by the school as an institution" (Noddings, "Caring Relation in Teaching" 772). Working in alternative classroom settings with students of extremely diverse learning needs makes honing an ability to respond with care all the more necessary. Without school-based institutional supports like guidance counselors and social workers, the caring relation is dependent solely on the teacher.

Noddings's premise for the "caring relation" that "we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence" (*A Relational Approach* 4) provides pedagogical potential for alternative educators. She expands by stating that, "Caring is a relationship that contains another, the cared-for ... [for] the world is not divided into carers and cared-fors as separate and permanent classes" (xxi). For Noddings studying conditions that make it possible for caring relations to flourish should occur from a relational perspective. In my consideration of the alternative classroom, I especially focus on her contribution of the cared-for in the relation. Noddings uses examples of contributions made by the infant to the parent-child relation, the patient to the physician-patient relation and, in the educational space, the student to the teacher-student relation. In the context of my own alternative classroom teaching, I have found the interchanging nature of carer and cared-for to be strikingly impermanent. The role of teacher or student in a classroom depends on shifting factors in the lives of those who enter the educational space. Mitigating the aforementioned "grey zone" of student-to-teacher care requires explicit guidance, for example asking students for help when maneuvering the physical space of the classroom or sharing with students small classroom-based administrative responsibilities. Sharing aspects of classroom work, be it arranging tables for a group discussion or asking a student to write the class agenda on the white board, makes more transparent the many micro-tasks that need to happen to make a school day run smoothly.

For students to take on roles as carers, Noddings believes that young people need "to develop as caring persons, ... [so they] must have supervised practice in caring" (*A Relational Approach* xviii). Noddings goes on to write,

The caring attitude, that attitude which expresses our earliest memories of both caring and being cared for is universally accessible...[and thus] we must nurture that ideal in all of our educational encounters...The primary aim of all education must be nurturance of the ethical ideal. (6)

In this paper, I push toward a pedagogical model of care that extends the same need for a nurturance of care ethics to support teachers in training and educators in general. Such a model requires that caring and caregiving not be equated. Andrea Lobb writes of Noddings's complex unpacking of care-giving as she works to dissect the concept of

empathy through a critical feminist lens.<sup>4</sup> She makes the point that empathy, like caregiving, is not implicitly selfless and points out that a recognition of what is received in the giving of empathetic care has the potential to benefit both parties. She leans on Noddings to make this point. Therefore, caregiving is an important element in care ethics, but technically, as a set of activities or occupation, it can be done with or without caring. Teaching, for example, can be done with or without caring. It is only with awareness and acknowledgement of the difference between the two that the need for care support in education can be unpacked. It is at this juncture where I see a bridge to be built connecting Noddings to Winnicott.

For Noddings there is an important distinction to be made between *caring about* and *caring for*. The former expresses concern but without the guarantee of a response to one who needs care. The latter is characterized by direct attention and response, requiring the “establishment of a caring relation [and] person-to-person contact of some sort” (*A Relational Approach* xiv). Such a distinction is important when considering the function of institutions and large organizations in supporting caring. A traditional school, for example, or in the case of my alternative education focus, an off-site classroom, cannot necessarily care for everyone directly—or can it? Noddings would suggest that it can work toward “establishing an environment in which caring-for can flourish” (xv) but cautions that “a primary message of *Caring* is that we cannot justify ourselves as carers by claiming ‘we care.’ If the recipients of our care insist that ‘nobody cares,’ caring relations do not exist.” When considering how we “develop communities that will support, not destroy, caring relations” (xxiii), I turn to Alpert’s reading of Winnicott’s “good enough mother” when he writes, “To fully become good enough is to grow up into a world that is itself good enough, that is as full of care and love as it is suffering and frustration.” Alpert’s summation of Winnicott’s important concept extends, in *locus parentis*, to a teacher’s desire for her students.

The turn to a psychologist for pedagogical guidance speaks to the interdisciplinary impact of a thinker whose ideas have shaped and stretched processes of meaning-making across various fields. Steven Tuber writes, “Winnicott evokes a parallel process in which reading his work resonates on multiple levels” (7). Tuber begins his primer of Winnicott’s extensive body of work by reminding the reader that Winnicott was first trained as a pediatrician before moving into psychoanalytical care. In Helen Stein’s review of Tuber’s book, she describes the author’s reading of the psychoanalyst to hinge upon Winnicottian paradoxes that “are sub-varieties of a central one, the capacity to be alone and the need for [human] relatedness” (2). One such paradox is “the impossibility of teaching mothers what is natural about mothering along with the need to help them when things go wrong” (2). To engage with such an impossibility, Tuber writes of Winnicott’s certainty that “there was a psychology of babyhood, and that the baby was an inherently psychological being” (18). According to Tuber, an explanation of this infant psychology is unpacked in Winnicott’s paper “Primitive Emotional Development,” where he describes what he calls the baby’s “instinctual urges and predatory ideas” of their mother’s breast. Tuber’s reading of Winnicott values the doctor’s refer-

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4. In Lobb’s essay she highlights a connection to Winnicott in a footnote with a reference to “the maternal variety [of care] famously theorized by DW Winnicott (1958).”



ence to “urges” as “keeping true to his psychoanalytic training” but believes the addition of “predatory ideas” to be ground-breaking psychoanalytic language, for Winnicott “gives the baby a mind and a motivational force distinct from his urges. Being predatory, moreover, implies being related and relationship-seeking” (19). Winnicott’s careful and deliberate word choice helps to unpack what is a nuanced explanation of the paradoxical interrelatedness of the infant and the mother. The one needs and at the same time must learn to be without the other.

It is from that paradoxical stance, in an effort to understand how the “good enough mother” is released from the unreasonable burden of perfection, that I find clarity in the words of Martha Nussbaum who writes that for Winnicott the central cultural and personal problem “is how to bear the exposure of being imperfectly human” (388). Nussbaum suggests that Winnicott’s understanding of the relatedness inherent in the mother/infant dyad has “a distinctively ethical heart...for only through developing the capacity to imagine its mother’s feelings does the child become capable of generous and reparative acts” (389). Thus, according to both Tuber and Nussbaum’s readings of Winnicott, what makes the notion of the “good enough mother” and the mother/infant dyad a useful cross-disciplinary metaphor is its relatability – we are all imperfect and we all need care.

From an educator’s perspective the ethical heart of Winnicott’s dyad forms a natural link to Noddings’s care ethic. I am by no means the first to work with the concept of the “good enough mother” in the teaching environment, nor to connect Noddings and Winnicott in educational research. Isca Salzberger, Giana Henry, and Elsie Osborne look to Winnicott’s mother figure in their study of senior teaching staff who are interviewed in a counseling and education professional development course. Going into their sessions with the teachers, Salzberger, Henry, and Osborne wonder if teachers tend “to overrate or underrate the part they play in the development of their pupils” (3). What emerges from their conversations with the teachers is an awareness in the interviewees of the shared human experience of anxiety that impacts both those teaching and those taught. That anxiety does not stop in childhood but continues to exist at some level throughout life is a surprise to some of the teachers. A psychoanalytic understanding of that anxiety is introduced to them via the teachings of Winnicott as he “drew attention to the need of an infant to be held both physically and emotionally by the mother” (3). Within the counseling course the important role of the teacher is tied to Winnicott’s “mother” as the educator-participants come to see that “if painful emotions can be received by another [i.e. a teacher] and understood, it allows for growth and development” in students (3).

Guy Allen also interprets Winnicott in his own educational research as he incorporates the notion of a “good-enough mother” with what he calls a “good-enough teacher” into his pedagogical effort to change a university introductory writing course from the inside out. A professor of literature and writing, Allen sees his practice as a “good enough” teacher in the highly competitive university environment as “creat[ing] an environment where students can make meaning or discover for themselves” (150). The “facilitating environment” that he can provide for his writing students depends on the “potential space” that is created for play, where “the ‘work’ of childhood” occurs (151). Allen’s educational mobilizing of Winnicott, specifically regarding the physical

and psychic space of the classroom as well as the course structure, “depends on the ‘good enough’ caregiver making and maintaining that space” of both independent and creative play (151). To ensure that their writing course is not simply “a space without potential” (170), Allen says that a teacher becomes a “good-enough other who offers the good-enough environment,” thus “setting the minimal conditions for the subject’s development of capacities for both autonomy and connection” (173). The way that Allen utilizes and applies the “good-enough” label to a teacher is pedagogically valuable in the writing classroom, and I pick up on some of his ideas in my own work with Winnicott’s language. I take up the term “good-enough” in relation to alternative educators to shift exclusive focus away from the role of the teacher, as my turn to an ethics of care explicitly includes the student as being “good-enough” and, in fact, necessary to the care that needs to be lived out in the alternative classroom.

Sandra Chang-Kredl makes a direct connection between Winnicott and Noddings in her discussion of “portrait segments” of early-year teacher experiences, framed by Noddings’s discussion of care in connection with Winnicott’s notion of transitional spaces. Chang-Kredl writes, “We all struggle with the demand of an unsettled subjective and social existence. According to Winnicott . . . , ‘relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience’” (155). That illusory space of relief, what Winnicott calls the “resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated” (qtd. in Chang-Kredl 155) is an intermediate area of experience that I believe, for the “good enough teacher,” is situated in the classroom. Likewise, Jodi MacQuarrie theorizes Noddings and Winnicott in tandem when the author calls into question the “progressive approaches of education that encourage teachers to analyze and interpret as a means to an end of coming to know students well” (40). She works with what she calls Winnicott’s “use of an object” and investigates teacher-student relationships through the lens of Noddings and other educational philosophers, suggesting that the “progressive” teacher’s eye has been analyzing students instead of turning the gaze inwards where she believes it belongs. At the end of her article she conceptually marries aspects of both Winnicott and Noddings, telling a story of her own classroom where she cares for a student who, through his relational response to her care, chooses to care for her and himself in the process. She writes, “Our challenge as teachers, then, is to strive to always first be in relation with our students so that they may transform and flourish” (49). Both MacQuarrie and Chang-Kredl focus on social interaction and interrelation as inherent to the teacher’s experience, and both gesture to care as the necessary centre of what they analyze to be healthy educational relationships.

The interrelated and relation-based roles of Winnicott’s dyad are important to the development of my pedagogy of care. To connect the mother/child dyad with Noddings’s “ethics of care” and Hochschild’s emotion work, I use Winnicott’s “good enough mother” to ground the development of a pedagogical model for teaching in the alternative classroom. Three quotations from Winnicott drive the pedagogical model’s development. The first is taken from his paper “Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development.” In what is essentially a free-verse poem, Winnicott writes,

When I look I am seen, so I exist.

I can now afford to look and see.

I now look creatively and what I apperceive I also perceive. (217)

The second quotation comes from his paper “Group Influences and the Maladjusted Child” where he writes,

I suggest that this I AM moment is a raw moment; the new individual feels infinitely exposed. Only if someone has her arms round the infant at this time can the I AM moment be endured, or perhaps risked. (48)

The third quotation comes from his paper “Mind and Its Relation to the Psyche-Soma.” In it he writes, “What releases the mother from her need to be near-perfect is the infant’s understanding” (204).

Winnicott’s mother/infant dyad is defined by their interrelation: by seeing themselves through the eyes of the mother, the new one therefore sees themselves, that is to say, recognizes their own existence. Not only does the infant recognize that they exist in her eyes, they can “now afford to look and see.” According to Winnicott that seeing means the infant can rest in the knowledge of their mother’s care and, therefore, take the risk to look beyond her face to “perceive” the world that they are now a part of. The infant’s perception of the world directly links to their apperception of their own existence by virtue of their mother’s care. The infant can then start to “creatively” make a place for themselves in the world where they will not simply exist in it as a created thing but as a creator themselves. All of this self-perception and awareness is connected to the care given to the infant by their “good enough” mother. She is the one who enables the “I AM moment[s]” to be “endured, or perhaps risked” by her child as they create space for themselves in the world, confident that her arms are always within reach. And the “good enough” mother is released from “her need to be near-perfect” because of the infant’s “understanding” of her care. The “I AM” moments of isolation, lived by both mother and child, keep them simultaneously together and separate, creating a healthy balance of care given and received.

The pivot from psychoanalysis to pedagogy is educationally intuitive for one who learns and teaches in a non-traditional classroom. The ethics of care that Noddings has developed hinges on her notion of the “caring relation” and that relation, like Winnicott’s mother/infant dyad, is interpersonal. She writes, “The one-caring and cared-for are reciprocally dependent... we are all inevitably cared-for at many times and, ideally, most of us are carers” (*A Relational Approach* xxi). In a mainstream highschool with a large staff and an administration team, teachers have the opportunity to be cared for by students but also by various colleagues and educational management. The caring relation manifests differently in the alternative setting where only one or two teachers work with limited direction from offsite administrators who are not physically present to provide support. The reciprocal dependence that exists between teacher and learner in the alternative environment is the foundation upon which the pedagogy of the “good enough” teacher is built.

### **Key Tenets: A Pedagogical Model of Care**

The key tenets of this tri-part pedagogical model are:

1. The teacher and student acknowledge their co-dependence for educational progress to be made in the classroom, what I call the “student/teacher binary”(see Davey, “Student/Teacher Binary”).
2. The teacher strives for a balance of both student care and self-care.
3. The teacher facilitates space for students to creatively engage the educational process.

These three tenets can be lived out by any “good enough” teacher—and I believe *should* be lived out for an alternative educator to do more than simply survive her classroom life. I suggest that it is all the more important for alternative educators to have this pedagogical foundation upon which to build a thriving teaching practice. If we want teachers to last beyond the first five years while performing the profession’s intense emotion work, external and internal systems need to be put into place to make it possible for them to thrive in the long run.

To help explain how this pedagogy might play out in the real time alternative classroom in 2019, I find inspiration in the words of Katherine McKittrick. In her exploration of colour and hue, inspired by singer Nina Simone’s *Pastel Blues* album, she writes, “We must live with seeing and knowing something (blue) that we cannot accurately chronicle or express. Put otherwise, the unexplained, the undescribed, unfold into a kind of promising inaccuracy” (2). McKittrick’s description of knowing something that “we cannot accurately chronicle” speaks to my educational journey. I take solace in the “promising inaccuracy” of a pedagogical practice that strives for balance and self-care, brought about through both teacher facilitation and student engagement. A pedagogy of care holds within its very description a sort of impossibility, for certainly, like teaching itself, a balanced provision of care for self and others will be a very individualized practice as it plays out in the classroom. And yet, the definitive naming of such a pedagogical approach obligates a discursive awareness of the emotion work that occurs in alternative educative spaces. That awareness has the potential to facilitate a working through of the three tenets to be lived out by “good enough” teachers for whom, if an ongoing balance is achieved, may feel released from the pressure of doing educational emotion work in isolation. That release may then, in turn, create space for pedagogical growth in both teachers and their students.

### *Tenet One*

The first tenet speaks to the need for the teacher and student to acknowledge their co-dependence for educational progress to be made in the classroom. The “teacher/student binary” can be described as a gift that must be given and also received (Davey, “Teacher/Student Binary” 75). The importance of this gift is bound up in the interrelational nature of the teacher and student as needing the other to exist. There is no teacher without the student and no student without the teacher. The emotion work that comes with teaching in the alternative classroom can feel all the more difficult because of the isolation inherent to the job. But if teachers can see their students as partnering with them in the task of teaching and learning, their sense of isolation may be mitigated.

An example of this tenet is found in the alternative classroom in which I have taught and learned for the last four years. My student cohorts are made up of youth aged 18

to 20 years old, all who are completing different high school credits that were failed at one point or another on their individual academic journeys. Some have failed by a mere percent or two, while others have a long way to go to pass. I am an English Literature teacher and a Sociology teacher, not a teacher of math or science. Therefore I cannot be a subject matter expert for most of what these students need to learn. But in my role as a credit recovery teacher, I am to provide the students with the necessary material for them to succeed in all courses. The gift of the partnership that is necessitated with this paradoxical set-up is that both teacher and student must work together. Students must work with me to guide me towards their prior knowledge in a specific course that needs recovering, direct me to resources they found effective, and steer me away from those they did not like. Areas of subject specific interest must be explicitly named by the student so that she might be engaged as we co-create new assignments for the credit to finally be recovered.

Acknowledging this teacher/student partnership reduces the pressure to be all things for my class – teacher, guidance counselor, social worker, lawyer. The student's role is key here to create a cascade effect. Said another way, the credit recovery educator might ask herself, "If we are developing assignments as a team, what else can I count on in terms of my students' abilities?" By transparently naming the need for student expertise and lived experience to make the credit recovery process function, the paradigm shifts away from a deficit mindset, so often connected to "at-risk" students, towards one that is strengths-based.

### *Tenet Two*

The second tenet that is built into a pedagogy of care necessitates that the teacher establish and practice a consistent balance of both student care and self-care. Current academic research and educational blogs speak to the need for teachers to practice self-care so that they can be the best teachers for students. Jennifer Gunn emphasises the importance for teachers to work on "self-preservation mindsets" and "building a strong peer network," both of which are good suggestions for all educators. For alternative educators who may not have the possibility of a school-based peer network, self-preservation mindsets are necessary but, I would suggest, are too focused on the "I" of the teacher without acknowledging the potentially positive impact of the student on the teacher. In the prison, working with youth who were deemed by the education and legal systems to be a hard-to-serve population, students proved to be carers of me and of each other. For example, students would support each other in literacy skill building at one table, while I worked to quell any number of emotional crises in another corner of the room. The general understanding was that in our classroom there would be no fights, and throughout my two years in the prison there was only ever one. I look back to that time and see that, even in my naïve state as a new teacher, the trust I had instilled in my students had helped to set us all up for success. We relied on each other and were, therefore, a community of sorts. The second tenet of a pedagogy of care points to the "good enough" teacher's balancing of emotion work that, as Noddings says, "develop[s] communities that will support, not destroy, caring relations" (xxiii). The balance of living in a world

that is itself good enough, that is as full of care and love as it is suffering and frustration, is connected to an emphasis on community.

### *Tenet Three*

Finally, community building is also inherent to the third tenet that requires the teacher to facilitate space for students to creatively engage with the educational process. Winnicott's use of the word "create" gives power to the infant who is connected to and also isolated from the "good enough" mother. To create means having agency. For agency to play out in the lives of small alternative classrooms, teachers must release control over the care given and received by those students to each other and themselves. The students will become active participants in creating a class culture, for good or bad. From the stance of one practicing a pedagogy of care in her own alternative classroom, community-building means de-emphasizing the "I" of the traditionally teacher-focused classroom by centering the "we" of teacher and students creating community together. An example of such community creating is examined by Paul Pedota when he explores how teacher support of student academic success and positive self-image also benefits teacher retention. That pedagogical perspective aligns with what I am suggesting regarding the good enough teacher's partnership with her students in the alternative classroom. Pedota writes, "It would do well to remember that we must look at the whole individual when planning how to support success so that the effort, energy, and persistence of an activity, for both students and teachers, will increase their performance and satisfaction" (61). He provides ten strategies that I agree with in principal, ranging from establishing a supportive classroom climate to deemphasizing grades so as to promote learning "that has meaning to students" (59). My focus on the student/teacher partnership falls within those quotation marks. In the case of my present day credit recovery classroom, if we are to get the job done—that job being credit accumulation with the long game being high school graduation—for us to succeed as a teacher/student team, we must emphasize "that [which] has meaning to [my] students" and learn from each other. As the students guide me towards their prior knowledge in the subject, teaching me about what units or components of the course they did not complete in their first attempt, we then build assignments from scratch that hit on those missing pieces. What we put together is essentially a course-based puzzle that simply needs to be completed. For there to be true buy-in from the student who has struggled academically in school, they must feel heard in this process. To summarize, the student needs the guidance of the teacher and, equally important, the teacher needs the expertise of the student.

### *Barriers*

One of the barriers to such a care-driven pedagogical mindset is that though school-aged students are no longer infants, as in the Winnicottian mother/infant dyad, educational systems can and do infantilize their student bodies. Infantilizing occurs in the teacher-centered negation of students and the potential of their creative power within the educational space. Once students enter their secondary school years where teachers are pushed to deliver content to satisfy top-down pressures from educational authorities, experiential opportunities for students to engage with their own learning disap-

pear. The embedded play that exists, for example, in Ontario's 2016 kindergarten curriculum is essentially removed by the time students have reached secondary school (see "The Ontario Curriculum"). That removal means students lose creative agency in their schools and classrooms. Recently proposed changes to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma will require all students to take four e-learning courses to graduate (see Farhadi). When only 12 of the 30 credits required to graduate are electives, the significant number of online courses being added to the compulsory diploma requirements is a decision that is rife with inequities. Beyond the socioeconomic realities that will affect access for some students, because of the imposed obligation to fill their timetable with these online compulsory courses, all students will end up with less choice regarding elective courses, often specialized and connected to the arts. With a care-based pedagogy in mind, this example points to a systemic devaluing of student agency and an overall infantilization of them in public schools.

### **An Anticipated Future of Educational Care**

With some hope I return to Jackie Wang's interview with M. Buna where she describes an "interdisciplinary...approach to unpacking issues related to the carceral state [as a way] to attack a set of problems on multiple levels of analysis." While Wang is working to dismantle the prison system, I am looking to present a pedagogical approach for isolated alternative educators, but perhaps the two ideas are not so far apart. Each one requires that systemic changes be made from the inside out. In the case of a pedagogy of care where a shift occurs within an alternative teacher's own praxis, Wang's desire rings true: the need for community and reaching out so as to "spark conversations and organizing efforts." This paper's conceptual conversations with Hochschild, Noddings and Winnicott work together to add "multiple levels of analysis" needed in the realm of education for changes to occur. For alternative educators to practice a pedagogy of care, they need to look for support from unlikely allies. Such allies can take many forms such as interdisciplinary works of literature, community resources, mainstream school colleagues with access to educational supports and—most importantly—the students themselves. These allies can help attack the problem of isolated emotion work with the "promising inaccuracy" (McKittrick) of a pedagogical practice that strives for balance, self-care, teacher facilitation and student agency in the alternative classroom.

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